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Doctoral Dissertation:

Surrealist Critical Play: Implementing Surrealist Philosophy in Secondary English Language Arts

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Abstract

This thesis explores possibilities for fostering critical engagement within English Language Arts (ELA) education, using influences from the Surrealism movement. My work was inspired by observations from my personal practice as a Secondary ELA teacher. While the Quebec Education Program (QEP) for ELA highlights the development and articulation of multiple perspectives, the document also implies "correct" ways of reading. It is possible that this implied emphasis on correct answers leads to disengaged learners. Conversely, Surrealism involves pursuing unhindered thought, by critiquing reality and the status quo. Surrealist philosophy, within ELA, invites students to question their conditioned positions as readers of text and the world. I argue that such a stance increases engagement and relevance. Critical Pedagogy is a philosophy of education that borrows from critical theory and attempts to awaken a critical consciousness in students. Critical Pedagogy questions the effects of status quo educational systems that promote select forms of knowledge (Giroux, 1988). Neoliberalism is a philosophy based on individualized economic potential (Harvey, 2007). Critical Pedagogy thus critiques Neoliberalism's effects on education, while Surrealism problematizes politically-controlled artistic viewership; thus, the former provides theoretical glue in connecting Surrealism and ELA. Through qualitative research, I draw upon narrative inquiry, as well as self-study and memory work. During a sixth-month period observational study of my "problematized" ELA class, I introduced Surrealist philosophy to the existing curriculum, using critical dialogue to interrogate norms. Jot notes, personal interviews with students, and a self-study using personal photographs comprised my data strands. I present these strands in a narrative account, which aims to represent a multidimensional, shared experience of teaching, learning and experimenting with ELA. My research holds value in addressing gaps between the theory and practice of

educational programs such as the QEP. With transferability and societal preparation being goals of the QEP, my Surrealist-inspired focus on norms and human-centered themes could illuminate societal relevance in students' classroom learning. This study also offers significant contributions to the domains of teacher self-study and professional development. Ultimately, this work aims to reconceptualize the ELA classroom as a democratized laboratory for critical experimentation and the development of expressive skills, as well as a societal microcosm for the world outside the classroom.

Resumé

Cette thèse explore les possibilités d'encourager l'esprit critique dans l'enseignement de la matière “English Language Arts” (ELA), en utilisant les influences du mouvement du surréalisme. Mon travail a été inspiré par des observations tirées de ma pratique personnelle en tant qu'enseignante d’ELA au secondaire. Alors que le Programme de Formation de l’Ecole Québécoise pour l'enseignement de l’ELA met l'accent sur le développement et l'expression de perspectives multiples, le document implique également des façons «correctes» de lire. J'imagine que mettre l’accent sur les réponses correctes amènera les étudiants à se désengager. Cette approche limitée pourrait refléter le contexte sociétal qui façonne le Programme de formation de l’école québécoise. Au contraire, le surréalisme implique la poursuite d'une pensée libre, en critiquant la réalité et le statu quo. La philosophie surréaliste, dans le cadre de l'ELA, invite les élèves à remettre en question leurs positions conditionnées en tant que lecteurs de textes et du monde. Je soutiens qu'une telle position accroît l'engagement et la pertinence. La pédagogie critique est une philosophie qui conçoit la salle de classe comme un lieu de recherche critique. La pédagogie critique remet en question les effets du statu quo des systèmes éducatifs qui promeuvent des formes sélectionnées de connaissance (Giroux, 1988). Le néolibéralisme est une philosophie fondée sur le potentiel économique individuel (Harvey, 2007). La pédagogie critique met en question les effets du néolibéralisme sur l'éducation, tandis que le surréalisme problématise le contrôle politique sur la consommation des œuvres d’art; ainsi, le premier fournit un lien théorique entre le surréalisme et l'ELA. Dans le cadre d'une recherche qualitative, je m'appuie sur les méthodes suivantes: l’enquête narrative, l'auto-apprentissage et la recherche sur le travail de la mémoire. Au cours d'une étude d'observation d'une durée de six mois de mon groupe sujet, j'ai introduit la philosophie surréaliste dans le programme existant, en utilisant le

dialogue critique pour interroger les normes. Mes données sont constituées de notes, d'entretiens personnels avec les élèves et d'un auto-apprentissage utilisant des photographies personnelles. Je présente ces données dans un récit narratif, qui vise à représenter une expérience d'enseignement et d'apprentissage multidimensionnel de l'ELA. Mes recherches sont importantes pour combler les lacunes entre la théorie et la pratique des programmes éducatifs tels que le Programme de formation de l'école québécoise. La transférabilité et la préparation sociétale étant des objectifs du Programme de formation de l'école québécoise, ma focalisation sur les normes et les thèmes centrés sur l'humain, inspirée du surréalisme, pourrait mettre en lumière la pertinence sociétale de l'apprentissage des élèves en classe. Cette étude apporte également des contributions significatives aux domaines de l'auto-apprentissage et du développement professionnel des enseignants. Ultimement, ce travail vise à reconceptualiser la classe d'ELA comme un laboratoire démocratisé pour l'expérimentation critique et le développement de compétences de l'habileté langagière, en plus de créer un microcosme sociétal pour la vie à l'extérieur de la classe.

Acknowledgements

I was a very different person when I began my Doctoral journey nearly six years ago. I started my PhD with a firm conviction in where I felt I should land. I also embarked upon my studies with a tunnel-vision focus on "getting it done", "moving on" and "moving out". For one reason or another, I was fixated on a life away from my present circumstances, and could not imagine that there was work to be done here. The "here" in question was and still is *my* Montreal, and what I could never have envisioned at the beginning of my thesis journey, would be the strong ties I developed with this place. While people and titles have come and gone from my life, and milestones have been reached, and at times dissolved, Montreal has remained a constant backdrop for my studies of education and self. In fact, while the self-study portion forms a chapter of my thesis, I feel my engagement and discovery of personal identity has permeated all steps of this process, and has subsequently helped me find my home. My exploration has also taught me that my sense of self is in flux, and has been infused with the people, places and experiences of my life. I would like to thank those very people, places and experiences for helping me build this piece of Doctoral work, but more importantly, for helping me write my story beyond the page.

Firstly, I would like to thank McGill for serving as the site of my experimentation, musing, and creation. I still recall swiftly completing my Masters assignments and watching World Cup football with my best friend, Dalton, then trucking our way up the hill to attend afternoon classes. It was all done in one breath, all within walking distance, and we felt pretty untouchable. Those days made me hungry for further discovery, and brought me to this new adventure.

It is also during my early McGill days that I met my fabulous advisory committee. Dr. Boyd White has been a strong, solid support throughout this journey. He has offered a steady voice of reason, while always nudging my imaginative potential. I feel very fortunate to have Boyd on my team. My fabulous co-supervisor is Dr. Claudia Mitchell. I recall exploring the misunderstood nature of Ms. Shields from *A Christmas Story* during one of Claudia's ELA methods classes. Claudia responded to this exploration with infectious enthusiasm, encouraging me to keep asking big questions. Dr. Naomi Nichols, my third advisory committee member, has offered me honest feedback, alongside a compassionate ear. I would like to thank her for staying on to support me, despite pursuing her new and exciting adventures.

Next, I would like to thank the whole community of St. George's School of Montreal. I entered the school during my second Masters internship, knowing little about its history beyond a connection to my favourite brand of exercise clothing. When sitting on the red couches for the first time, awaiting the arrival of Donna, my co-operating teacher, I knew I was a part of something special. To my colleagues, you are an exceptional group of people, and I feel very fortunate to work with close friends. To the students I have had the privilege of knowing over the years, thank you for believing in me, challenging me, and helping me grow and learn alongside you.

I would also like to thank my two favourite people, my mother and father, Teresa and Konhee Ho. You are my best friends, and I feel extremely lucky to be your daughter. I know I have not always offered you the easiest of rides, but I hope to have made you proud.

This story would not have been possible without the fabulous characters who accompanied me along the way. With friends such as Alex and Margaux being a classroom away, and Alex and Dalton supporting via distance, I have never felt alone during this personal

project. I feel the biggest discovery of my study perhaps lies in my recognition that a supportive team can make a superhero of a regular teacher protagonist. Carrie Bradshaw once said, “Louise of St. Louis, you brought me back to life.” Here, in our fabulous Montreal, you have all been my Louise.

Chapter 1: Setting the Stage for Surrealist Pedagogical Inquiries

Context of the Study

This study investigates possible connections between the domains of Neoliberalism, Critical Pedagogy and Surrealism, to form an alternate theoretical approach to teaching Secondary English Language Arts (ELA) education. To justify attention to those connections, I will first introduce some context.

My institution[1] is a non-denominational private school located in Montreal, Quebec. The school is an Anglophone institution, which I note because Quebec is a Francophone province and institutions such as mine are therefore in the minority. However, Montreal is an ethnically diverse city and the majority of Anglophone institutions and schools are concentrated in the area. Educational restrictions do exist with regards to access to English-speaking institutions. For this reason, the demographic of my school also represents a select portion of the population on the basis of financial means[2] and legal status[3]. The nature of being an Anglophone school within a Francophone province also adds a unique level of complexity when negotiating the politics of English and French language tensions[4]. The school is recognized for its positions on

[1] In this thesis, I will not be naming my institution. I made this choice not only to preserve the anonymity of my participants but also because I do not feel specifying the name of the institution adds anything to the interpretation of my research. I will refer to the location of my study as "my institution".

[2] The issue of financial means is a factor worth noting, as my institution, as other private or semi-private Anglophone schools, receives far less government funding than Francophone private schools. This means that tuition fees at my institution are among the highest in Montreal, thus limiting many families from being able to enroll in the school.

[3] The issue of legal status is important, due to the stipulations of Bill 101 (Government of Quebec, 2023). This law requires children who attend Anglophone schools to provide a certificate proving their parents were also educated in English institutions in Canada. This law therefore restricts access to certain populations such as immigrants, but also allows students who are travelling on student visas or parental diplomat visas to access private Anglophone schools. It could be suggested that within Quebec, due to the nature of protective measures to preserve the French language, accessing English schooling is often a matter of privilege and/or family history.

[4] In Quebec, Anglophone schools are in the minority. While my institution operates with the official language of instruction being in English, it exists within a Francophone context. This means that tensions can exist anywhere from the translation of official documents transmission of history (and whose perspectives are being presented and prioritized). This tension between English and French dates back to the original European colonizers' arrival on

differentiation (adaptations to lessons and teaching techniques based on diverse learner potentials and needs), student-centred learning, small class sizes and the fostering of individual learning potential. This can be witnessed in the close relationships between teachers and students, as well as the absence of uniforms and school bells. For all intents and purposes, my institution could appear relatively "alternative" in its approach to education. I have taught at the Secondary campus for over six years, and have worked closely with and within the merged ELA and Ethics and Religious Cultures (ERC) curriculum. The fusion of ELA and ERC[5] is presented holistically, with ERC being woven into the program of ELA. I was excited to discover the nature of this blended program upon entering my institution. The Ministère de L'Éducation et de l'Enseignement Supérieur (MEES) Quebec Education Program (QEP) for Secondary ELA cites objectives of "prepar[ing] students to make intellectual and aesthetic judgements, raise questions, articulate their thoughts and respect the ideas of others" (MEES 2019). Similarly, MEES (2020) cites an objective of ERC to include "describ[ing] a situation and…put[ting] it into context in order to identify an ethical question in light of points of view that may provoke tensions or conflicting values" (MEES, 2020, p. 476). The Ethics portion of the ERC curriculum describes a focus on "[r]epresentations of the world and of human beings" (MEES 2020), which mirrors the exploration of human-centered themes in ELA. I therefore felt the philosophical, critical questions intrinsic to ERC could benefit the competencies of reading, writing and speaking in

Canadian (Indigenous) territory. With the French originally arriving, the British later claimed the colonial territory (Campeau et al., 2018). The French language eventually found itself in the minority as Canadian history progressed, thus rendering Quebec, the original site of European settlement and the only Francophone province, a place of unique tension; especially, when it comes to teaching and "being" in English.

[5] At the time of revising this thesis (December, 2021), the Quebec ERC program began a period of reform. The ERC model to which I referred in this thesis, and the program with which my institution creates a fused ELA and ERC model, is slated to become a program of Quebec Citizenship and Culture. I include this note, as it will be interesting to discover the implications this change may have on ELA teaching and learning. It is also interesting to consider how this reform could present a select (dominant) narrative in terms of culture. I discuss this specific concept when moving into the Neoliberal section of this thesis.

ELA, while aligning with the overarching goals of the QEP. A question I have been contemplating throughout my time at the school is whether or not this curricular decision (of fusion) was made in an effort to decompartmentalize the academic subjects and render both ERC and ELA more contextually relevant for students; or was it a more practical decision based on combining subjects in the interest of time, space and logistical constraints? I inquired with my department, and it appears the decision behind the curricular fusion promoted subject relevance, but was in fact motivated by scheduling requirements. In any case, it became apparent early on that the students were confused about where ELA would begin and ERC would end (and vice versa).

For example, I recall reading aloud to my class of sixteen- to seventeen-year-old Secondary Five students, a passage from Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* several years ago. My teaching partner and I had chosen this text to serve as the basis for students' literary analysis papers. Despite being a canonical non-contemporary work, we felt the complicated relationships within the story lent well to an exploration of human interactions and ethics. During my read-aloud, I paid close attention to the moment where the protagonist, Maggie, confessed to her husband, Brick, that she had had an extramarital affair with his best friend. Maggie's desperate attempt to elicit any form of response from her emotionally removed husband, was rendered even more pitiful when she noted how the exchange "didn't work". I repeated these two words several times, emphasizing their importance and even gesturing with air quotations. I asked the students, "What do we feel is happening here?" To me, the strained marriage being depicted begged readers to respond, whether that would involve cringing, sadly commiserating alongside Maggie, or empathizing with her simple desire to be loved. The class,

however, remained silent, with one individual raising their[6] hand to say, "Ms. Ho, could you just give us the answer?" I was thrown by this response to what I believed was a relatable illustration of the ethical complications (including the raising of critical questions and a contemplation of personal values) of romantic relationships. I figured that the unsuccessful attempt at having sexual relations would spark at least a bit of excitement in my adolescent learners, who, from my experience, seem to take a great interest, even boasting familiarity and experience, in the domain of sex. I do recall, however, having former groups passively skip past this portion of the text as well, prompting me to stop and consider the teaching and learning at play. It is possible these past experiences caused me to (consciously or unconsciously) scaffold this passage with my current group, hoping they would offer more emotive reactions. Perhaps the students' perceived lack of responses reflected embarrassment at a frank display of illicit sexual content and an unwillingness to discuss it with their teacher. Regardless of their reasons for staying silent, the pin-drop silence made me feel, in the moment, that students were not engaged in my lesson. The one student's response (tell us the answer) also suggested a belief that ELA involved finding definitive answers.

Here, I introduce briefly a key part of my argument in this thesis. I argue that this orientation towards "correct answers" coincides with the tenets of Neoliberalism, an approach to education (and society) that centers on individualism coupled with a globalist mentality oriented towards competition for economic success. That is, the market may be world-wide, but the goals (for education and society) are localized to address individual (usually corporate or political) interests. While the emphasis on individualism suggests freedom (to do as one sees fit), such freedom is illusory, as choices are set by the major economic players (big business) who rely on

[6] I use "their" to refer to the student as I do not recall who made this comment, much less if it was from a boy or girl. The element that struck me from the interaction was the comment and its implications with ELA.

established societal understandings and narratives (ways of seeing and being) in the pursuit of Neoliberal's so-called freedom (Harvey, 2007; Shahsavari-Googhari, 2017). The wholesale reliance on standardization (and its parallel reliance on single right answers) is an exemplification of education's adoption of the Neoliberal model. It could therefore be argued that I have been asking my students to develop critical understandings of citizenship and humanity within a context that is reinforcing the dominant narratives of Neoliberal (economic) potential. I will expand on Neoliberal theory later in this thesis.

To return to my story, I wondered whether or not students' lack of engagement was an inevitability; after all, even sex could not entice them into some critical discussion. I have also since considered that while the students appeared to be disengaged in response to ELA content, their minimal responses could have reflected an inability to express reactions as opposed to a lack of involvement (or engagement). I wondered if students actually lack (within ELA) the vocabulary to construct meaning and articulate feelings, thus presenting the erroneous image that they do not feel anything at all. In addition to lacking the vocabulary to express themselves, the perceived ambivalence (or possible abdication) I witnessed, could involve apprehension with regards to forming opinions. In her text, *The Reader, The Text, The Poem,* Louise Rosenblatt (1978/1994) articulated aesthetic experiences involve 'two-way, "transactional" relationship[s] with the text' (Rosenblatt, 1994, ix) and a reader. A reader's context, experiences, values and biases (ways of seeing and being) inform the creation of a response to a textual stimulus. Rosenblatt (1994) also highlighted how interacting with texts (Rosenblatt, 1994) in a personal, meaningful manner is a complex task, not to mention, the goal of ELA. Students' perceived disengagement could therefore indicate feelings such as discomfort or a lack of interest in response to the subject matter and its demands. I expected a fusion of Ethics and English would

bring about a level of criticality, namely in the form of "rais[ing] questions, articulat[ing] thoughts and respect[ing] the ideas of others" (MEES, 2020, p. 1). I was therefore surprised when this criticality was not always demonstrated in my classes. Especially with my students being at the Secondary Five level, the potential of ELA to expand students' critical horizons often seemed less important than attending to linear Ministry exam preparation[7]. The result, from my observations, has involved skills-oriented mentalities applied to ELA learning. As the ERC component did not feature a final exam, both students and teachers gave it far less attention, addressing the two subjects in isolation rather than parts of a whole. I argue that the critical components of ERC, which could otherwise bolster engagement with texts in ELA, have been treated as a separate appendage. Thus, despite the fact our school has made the effort to address these subjects in conjunction, perhaps the "minority" status of ERC (fewer periods and no Ministry exam), has diminished its importance and perceived relevance, within the context of ELA and otherwise.

This situation appears to involve a lack of engagement and connection building on the part of students, but also a lack of contextualization regarding the relevance of course content, on the part of teachers. At the same time, while I envisioned the perceived value and relevance of sex in my above example, I wonder if I did not adequately support students in developing the building blocks for reacting to this content. These building blocks, including the aforementioned description of language skills, also require an environment where students feel safe to engage with and express their feelings. Students' lack of reactions could therefore speak to a lack of

[7] In Quebec, students write a Ministry-mandated ELA exam at the end of Secondary Five. Within the province of Quebec, Secondary school starts from the Secondary One level, and students graduate at the Secondary Five level. This means that Secondary Five is the equivalent of Grade 11 in other provinces of Canada and most of North America. The Secondary Five ELA evaluation focuses on the components of reading response (a task to which they have been exposed since the beginning of Secondary school) and article.

learning, as well as a lack of teaching. At the same time, trust and vulnerability could once again be a factor. If students fear judgment in response to their opinions, it is likely they would refrain from exposing themselves to the group. Building community and trust is therefore a longer-term project and necessary goal within ELA criticality construction. I argue that the potential of ELA involves getting students to think critically and become aware of the contexts expressed through literature. I also argue that literature and literary exploration moves beyond traditional paper texts, and an engagement with other art forms such as paintings, sculpture and films, could also constitute ELA reading and meaning-making. These various modes could invite considerations of how a reader's personal context[8] affects the meaning rendered from a text. Essentially, my observation of students' minimal engagement served as a launchpad for my inquiry; but I do not interpret engagement to simply involve feelings. A student could feel emotion in response to Maggie's outburst, but the factors that elicited this response are of particular interest to me in my exploration of our ELA experience. I argue that if a student knows about the context[9] of a text (involving both its creation and viewership), engagement in an aesthetic experience will be facilitated (Rosenblatt, 1994). A reader's context, experiences, values and biases (ways of seeing and being) could inform the creation of a response to a textual stimulus in a "transactional" manner (Rosenblatt, 1994). In a sense, I suggest that an emphasis on context

[8] When referring to readers' personal contexts and their relationship with meaning making, I recognize that these contexts do not simply suggest external, logistical factors (ex: SES level, race, neighbourhood, etc.). Meaning is also infused with the personal reactions of readers, which are inherently affective. These reactions may not be as explicit as overt emotions, but readers' inevitable feelings and reactions in response to a text illuminate inherent biases and values. These reactions therefore form the basis for critical reflection and questioning to take place.

[9] While there is indeed the context of a text to consider when setting up the space for aesthetic textual experiences, the personal contexts of learners also need to be considered in ELA. For example, younger readers likely have more clear-cut understandings of values and what is happening within a text. As readers get older and presumably gain more life experiences, they are likely to develop more understandings of nuance and the fluidity of textual considerations. This being said, despite my learners being at the Secondary Five level, they are nonetheless still developing their identities and values, and their existing perspectives may reflect more rigidity than nuance. I wonder if *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* can therefore serve in helping students recognize and articulate their own ethical positions, possibly paving the way for a deeper understanding of characters' motivations.

could battle against compartmentalized approaches to ELA, allowing the content to become more relatable and thus, engaging.

Forming an Artistic Connection

While emphasizing the relevance of artistic production to increase engagement and criticality in ELA, I was reminded of the Surrealism movement and its aims to use art as a critical statement on life. The movement's goals—to critique societal and political structures that aimed to structure people's perceptions and understandings of the world—mirror the objectives of Critical Pedagogy for the education domain. The philosophies of Surrealism and Critical Pedagogy align not only in their aims towards achieving uncensored thought, but also their attention towards fostering criticality as a means of accessing a freedom unfettered by the constraints of Neoliberalism. I will continue to expand on Critical Pedagogy throughout this thesis but especially in Chapter 2.

I first became acquainted with Surrealism while studying in Paris. I remember being drawn to how art appeared to play an integral role in people's everyday lives (i.e.: people's "ways of being and seeing" their worlds, including the historical backstories of the spaces and faces around them), rather than being treated as a matter of luxury or artifice. When taking history and architecture courses, I remarked how the approach to material culture invited (required) students to become implicated in content, which differed from my North American experiences, which did not include art education studies. Paul Duncum (2021), within the domain of art education, discussed the concept of "professional produced mass culture" (Duncum, 2021, p. 3), its shifts and evolutions, and its complex relationship with politics. Duncum (2021) also expanded upon Storey's (2003) argument that the "[t]he political right

condemns popular imagery for undermining traditional values, and the political left condemns it for maintaining an oppressive, inequitable social structure" (Duncum, 2021, p. 3). An exploration of art's relationship with everyday life therefore holds a place within literature, but the ease of access to these conversations and the fact that they took place outside of (specific) academic circles, was a new experience for me. Perhaps it was also a question of geographical relevance and the fact that many cultural, political and artistic movements originated in France in the early years of the twentieth century, so, while in France, I felt far less conceptual distance from my learning. Apparent connections between social, political and cultural spheres, through an art lens, helped in humanizing these spheres. It was at this time that I also took a course on the age of the Avant-Garde. Somehow, the tenets of Surrealist philosophy seemed to make sense to me when experienced within the milieu of artistic appreciation and politically charged discourse that was Sciences Po (The Paris Institute of Political Sciences), and by extension, Paris. My studies in Paris exposed me to new thinking, which departed from my previous considerations of art as simply pleasure and beauty, or equally, elitist exclusivity. I realized that art is political. So too is education that utilizes art as source of meaning making. While my institution may be considered progressive in many respects, in others it adopts the status quo of the MEES guidelines. Within ELA, those guidelines prioritize efferent reading (Rosenblatt, 1994) and correct answers as opposed to criticality and attention to personal context in the construction of meaning. Thus, I argue that the philosophy at the core of Quebec's ELA program is restrictive. Treating the arts as a domain inherently implicated in our everyday practices (Dewey, 2005) invites a consideration of ethics and our conditioned ways of seeing and experiencing the world. This humanization and conceptual relevance of the arts aligns with the (lacking) ERC component of my existing ELA practice.

In summary, in this dissertation, I explore and describe the ELA experience that I shared with my students, identifying situations as they were experienced, both from the positions of my learners, and from my role as an English teacher. I argue that the emancipatory and revolutionary Surrealist philosophy, which appears to me to connect to the needs of ELA, could form a valuable tool in engaging students within the discipline and eliciting higher order critical thinking. However, my approach to this study is an exercise of inquiry rather than a solutions-based experiment.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

This is a teacher-researcher study based on an exploratory classroom laboratory project (Dewey, 1988). I focus on my positioning as both a researcher and object of study, but also on the roles students play in constructing our specific narrative of teaching and learning. I explore the artistic (and aesthetic) possibilities for ELA classrooms. As Rezvan Shahsavari-Googhari (2017) and others highlight, this study ultimately forms an investigation of experience, and my use of narrative inquiry facilitates an analysis and representation of this story.

I am interested in exploring the linkages, that might be found between Surrealism and Critical Pedagogy, which could be used to oppose Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism prioritizes economic prosperity and individual responsibility. The creation of Neoliberal societal systems is based on collective control. This control commonly comes from large businesses, which hold significant economic influence, and thus impact the education domain, which forms the base of societal ideologies. It could be argued that Neoliberal theory simplifies the education process, as students' shared ways of seeing (Berger, 2008) and being, render teaching linear. Critical Pedagogy, as Giroux (1988) and Hill and Kumar (2009) highlight, counters the Neoliberal

mindset. Surrealism, as previously noted, holds aims similar to those of Critical Pedagogy, espousing freedom of thought in the art domain (a microcosm for society). My research asks: How (or not) could theories of Neoliberalism, Critical Pedagogy and Surrealism (with their implied ethical stances) be placed in conversation to form a relevant pedagogical framework for contemplating ELA education while contesting the tenets of Neoliberalism?

I will elaborate upon these three components, along with other theoretical strands, throughout this dissertation, in hopes of gaining a deeper understanding on my personal and shared ELA domain. I have chosen to highlight Neoliberalism as the (presumably problematic) societal context that houses our education system and thus, our ELA and ERC teaching and learning. Within this dominant context, it could be argued that Neoliberal philosophy is the factor that promotes a mentality of "correct" answers in education[10]. This observation becomes complicated when considering the aforementioned aims of fostering criticality and subjective human ethics in both ELA and ERC. My focus on Neoliberalism involves an attempt to contextualize my contemporary ELA education concerns, and illuminate new possibilities for increasing engagement, criticality and creativity within the discipline. Critical Pedagogy (Giroux, 1988; Hill & Kumar, 2009) provides a theoretical critique of educational systems existing within models such as Neoliberalism, as Surrealist philosophy critiques political and societal systems that restrict individuals' abilities to access unrestricted thought and employ criticality in their decision (and meaning) making.

Overview of Thesis

[10] Arguably, if Neoliberalism houses the education system and forms the dominant societal ideology, the goals of teaching and learning would reflect this context. My suggestion of "single answers" stems from an idea that the Neoliberal norm would guide students' educational experiences towards established understandings, as opposed to having experimentation form the ultimate objective.

My teacher-researcher study was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of a two-term, in-class observation period that took place from September 2019 to March 2020. During the phase one observation time, I produced jot-note accounts following each lesson, paying close attention to students' responses to my teaching and to one another. I aimed to capture a multidimensional description of our class, with hopes of describing the nuances of character, context and relationships that go into constructing a learning environment. In March 2020, following my observations, I conducted interviews with volunteer participants. The second phase consisted of a self-study that was conducted after the observations from phase one. I will expand on this self-study Chapter 5 of this thesis. Alongside the in-class observation, I engaged in a study of memory work as an orientation to self-study. I used photographs taken using my personal mobile phone during the two-term field observation period drawing in particular on the work of Mitchell and Weber (1999) and Strong-Wilson (2008). My goal was to examine how my personal life could impact my pedagogical decisions and vice versa, as my study was based upon a belief that the "professional" practice of a teacher is an intrinsically personal affair. I therefore engaged in a self-study to examine my role as a pedagogical guide, while also using narrative inquiry to explore my students' shared experiences of ELA. The QEP emphasizes the role of teachers, noting them to "have a direct influence…on the values students associate with literacy…[and] their understanding of how literacy constructs meaning(s)" (MEES, 2019, p. 7). This self-study constitutes a deep exploration of my ELA discipline, including its construction and the manner in which students learn within it. I also examined the human characters (the students and myself) that shaped the subjective interpretations and experiences of this academic subject. Essentially, I aimed to create a portrait of my (shared) ELA experience, starting from the questions that were sparked while teaching. In order to

pursue my initial inquiries, I explored different conceptual threads (colours) that weave into my portrait. These threads include the QEP, my personal practice and classroom teaching experience, the frustrations that arise in the teaching process, student engagement, and the contributions of Surrealism to my teaching practice. I examined these threads independently and in conjunction, analyzing how they connect and diverge from one another in terms of their relationship with my educational experience. I also recognized that while I established a set of strands of inquiry, more would likely arise as I began analyzing the phenomenon of my practice.

Organization of Thesis

In this first chapter of this thesis, I described the research context of my teacher-researcher study, highlighting observations from my ELA practice, while illuminating possibilities for change. I connect the perceived challenges from my practice to the artistic aims of Surrealist philosophy. I then illustrate my research goals and questions, illustrating my theoretical rationale of associating ELA education with Surrealism, Neoliberalism, and Critical Pedagogy.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I establish the theoretical strands that will support my teacher-researcher study, while forming connections between these concepts. I will describe challenges that I have observed within my ELA teaching practice, while highlighting the value of transactional, aesthetic engagement (Rosenblatt, 1994). I will also explore the tenets of Surrealism, while simultaneously identifying the relevance of aesthetics within the historic movement, and also connecting its goals to my own ELA pedagogical needs. I will then describe the Neoliberal societal context that houses my ELA practice, and perceivably affects its construction. Finally, I will describe Critical Pedagogy, which specifically addresses the

challenges linked to Neoliberal systems of education. This pedagogy mirrors Surrealism in its activist goals and emancipatory push for (free) expression.

Chapter 3 forms the methodological foundations of my study. I will describe some examples of Surrealist implementations in education before further expanding upon aesthetics from a methodological perspective. I will then describe the strand of narrative inquiry, as I will express my research data in the form of a narrative account. I will locate my approach to deepening an understanding of the potential for Surrealism in the ELA classroom in the area of self-study in teaching. My specific focus of self-study in Secondary education dates back to the 1990s, where "the idea of studying the "self" of teaching" became a reflective focus of teacher practices[11] (Mitchell et al., 2005, p. 2). Tom Russell (2002) highlighted the importance of prioritizing teachers' everyday classroom interactions and decision making, as opposed to solely relying on academic research, when examining the teaching domain. Russell (2002) noted, "students can read every teaching move we make for an implicit message about how to teach" (Russell, 2002, p. 3). Essentially, teachers' negotiations of curricula and the classroom society could be understood as reflections of their personal values on education; and by extension, their

[11] In *Just who do we think we are: methodologies for autobiography and self-study in teaching*, Mitchell et al. (2005) noted that the high-school self-study work of the 1990s that forms the focus of their text (and my current research), is also "reflected in a Special Interest Group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association" (Mitchell et al., 2005, p. 2). Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2020), in Kitchen et al. (2019) *2nd International Handbook of Self-Study of Teacher and Teacher Education* noted that "[s]ince [the 1990s], the field of self-study research and the self-study research community have continued to evolve and grow" (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020, p. 4). The authors also noted that "[s]elf-study researchers employ diverse, often multiple methods", (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020, p. 4), therefore reflecting the flexible, non-prescriptive nature of the research. Essentially, the methods chosen are dependent upon the questions of the teacher (self). Martin and Russell (2019), in Kitchen et al. (2019) *2nd International Handbook of Self-Study of Teacher and Teacher Education* emphasized the "theory-practice divide" (Martin & Russell, 2019, p. 8) that exists between university teacher education and the lived experiences of a classroom, but is not always addressed; hence, the importance of self-study work. In my own work, the "theory-practice-personal" divide was of particular interest to me in exploring my actions in the classroom. For this reason, my chosen method of collecting personal pictures prescribed to Loughran's (2004) notion, as cited by Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2020), that "there is no one way, or correct way of doing self-study. Rather, how a self-study might be 'done' depends on what is sought to be better understood" (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020, p. 4).

unique teacher "self" identities. Finally, I will characterize my arts-informed research, while distinguishing my study from the domain of arts-based research.

In Chapter 4, I describe the methods of collecting and analyzing student data within my in-class teacher-researcher study. This study took place during the 2019-20 school year and involved an experimental engagement with Surrealist-inspired pedagogical approaches in ELA. I begin by highlighting my recruitment procedures, before discussing the specific methods I used to record jot note observations of my students' engagements with course material. I then describe my procedures for reading, analysing and processing my extensive jot notes. Next, I describe my process of conducting student interviews based on our shared ELA teaching and learning experience, while also discussing my methods for analyzing these data elements.

In Chapter 5, I describe the second portion of my ELA experiment, highlighting the procedures for conducting a personal self-study on my teacher identity. I start by highlighting my collection process of gathering personal pictures, forming curated collections, and analyzing the significance of these samples.

Chapter 6 forms the narrative account of my teacher-researcher study. This account takes the form of vignette-style stories, which were comprised using my research data and together, express my specific shared experience of experimenting with ELA alongside my students.

In Chapter 7 I describe my comparison of these three data strands (jot notes, interviews, photograph self-study) using a data analysis software called AtlasTI. Following my data analysis, I present some philosophical ruminations surrounding my artefacts in Chapters 4 and 5. I use my theoretical strands of Neoliberalism, Surrealism and Critical Pedagogy to approach my data artefacts.

Finally, Chapter 8 highlights some contributions and future considerations for my approach to Surrealist-inspired pedagogies in ELA. I describe the value of my research for teachers and students, illuminating possible areas for continued experimentation with ELA and Surrealist philosophy.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Inquiries: The English Language Arts and the Arts of the English Language

In this chapter, I will establish a theoretical context within which to situate my teacher-researcher study. I will establish my curricular goals by describing the study context and pedagogical needs that connect to my chosen theoretical strands. I will start by briefly exploring aesthetic experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994) in order to forge a connection to Surrealist tenets of artistic expression and engagement. I will then expand upon Surrealist philosophy and justify its purpose within the space of the contemporary ELA classroom. My discussion of Neoliberalism will shed light on the societal context that houses my ELA practice, which thus illuminates challenges and ideas for Surrealist interventions. I will then describe Critical Pedagogy as a form of theoretical glue to connect the conceptually distant theoretical spaces of historical Surrealism and ELA education. As Critical Pedagogy addresses educational concerns caused within Neoliberal systems, Surrealism promotes similar values of free thought, criticality, and expression within the arts domain; hence, the perceived value of implementing this philosophy into the English Language *Arts*.

Defining Curricular Context and Aims

The QEP program for Secondary ELA cites Paulo Freire's (Freire, et al., 2018) conceptualization of language, which describes the expression of "feelings, ideas, values, beliefs and knowledge" (MEES, 2019/2022, p. 1). These are all necessary elements for enacting societal interactions and building culture, and this description recognizes the contextual relevance of the ELA program. This perspective of language as an empowering mode of creative expression also mirrors the Surrealism movement's quest for free thought (Breton et al., 1972).

André Breton (1972) and the Surrealists argued that language is a significant vessel for interpreting, understanding, and interacting with (and within) one's world. I will expand on the Surrealists' relationship with free thought and expression later in this chapter. In parallel with the Surrealists, the QEP illuminates engagement and the construction of meaning, rather than solely focusing on grammar and technical components of English. Language serves as a tool for contemplating one's world and concretizing one's experiences. This approach to ELA acknowledges the artistic component of building meaning with language. As visual artists would use media such as paints and pastels to express experience, the ELA meaning-maker uses words. Recognition of this artistic component of ELA involves broadening one's perspectives of the functions and implications of the discipline.

The aesthetic, interactional aims of ELA and the QEP's presumed impetus to foster opinions and identities departs from linear, single-answer interpretations of ELA teaching and learning. With a focus on the individual's place within society, the ELA curriculum and world outside the classroom can be viewed as intertwined. This being said, there appears to be a gap between the QEP's reference to aesthetics and its goals for personal and societal meaning-making. Rosenblatt (1994) is cited in the QEP program for Secondary ELA. This suggests that the program's use of the term, "aesthetics" could involve goals for fostering transactional experiences in response to texts (Rosenblatt, 1994). At the same time, as Richard Shusterman (2006) observes "the concept of the aesthetic has proven so very vague, variable and contested" (Shusterman, 2006, p. 217). Shusterman (2006) discussed the ambiguity of the term when considering its associations with feelings, and commonly, beauty and pleasure. Shusterman (2006) critiqued ideas of aesthetic experience that solely involve pleasure, noting "disturbing [feelings of] shock, horror, protest, or even revulsion" (p. 219) to also constitute personal,

transactional responses to text. These responses too, could form the base for meaning-making. Shusterman's inclusion of negative and positive emotions in a consideration of aesthetics therefore connects with the ELA domain and its relationship with contemplating and constructing experiences.

The QEP's use of the term, "judgment", however, suggests a more limited conception of aesthetics than that of Shusterman (2006). Returning to Shusterman's examination of the place of ambiguity within the context of aesthetics, the term "aesthetics" also influences the QEP program. When noting that something or someone is "aesthetically pleasing", a focus is often placed on how the subject looks, rather than how it makes the viewer feel. The emotion linked with beauty is, as Shusterman (2006) noted, most often associated with pleasure rather than as a broader experience. The use of "judgment" in the QEP's program, could therefore suggest an appraisal component connected to levels of pleasure. Within ELA, the idea of judging a text involves referencing legitimized understandings of value. In other words, it could be argued that the QEP's reference to aesthetics, alongside its discussion of judgment, could involve an affirmation of the status quo. The goal of the ELA experience thus shifts from personal engagement to culture-bound ranking, based upon established, societal understandings. Different people engage in different kinds of judgement, but this appraisal perspective suggests that there is only one form of it. This understanding raises critical questions of whose judgment is being reflected in the program, and whose perspectives are being removed or silenced. I argue that a Surrealist approach could facilitate a contemplation of these questions.

My ELA concerns are therefore multidimensional. My observations of students' lack of critical engagement involve the ways in which the ELA curriculum is built and performed[12].

[12] I use the term "performed" in reference to my earlier article entitled Performing society: Pursuing creativity and criticality in secondary ELA (Ho, 2020). The concept of performance encompasses the subjective, experiential

This requires asking questions of the QEP and my own teaching practice. However, as education does not exist in a vacuum, examining the ELA domain also constitutes a political concern, as the curriculum has been constructed and mandated by the Quebec government. Therefore, the policies that surround the education domain must also be considered and critiqued when analyzing educational experiences. ELA, as previously noted, focuses on human-centered themes, or in other words, "life". My exploration of the domain therefore, also necessitates an exploration of society. The contexts within which students construct meaning and form understandings and norms with which to connect to course content, constitute their lived (societal) experiences. For my study I have chosen to focus on Neoliberalism, the presumed political system shaping students' North American contexts. I will expand upon the relationship between the Neoliberal context and students' engagement in ELA later in this chapter. I will also explore how Surrealism could provide an avenue for critique of the Neoliberal directions of current educational practice.

Despite holding "arts" its name, ELA[13] can sometimes be approached as a technical science, or a standardized system of tasks and techniques. An examination of ELA therefore also involves an exploration of art. While I am interested in the connections between the visual arts and ELA, the QEP (MEES, 2019/2022) does not require students to pursue this link. For the purposes of my investigation, however, I have borrowed some components of visual art language as a means of approaching ELA teaching and learning. Within the ELA classroom, students

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complexities of education; which, in turn, pave the way for students' aesthetic experiences. I argue that teachers are performers, who bring their own biases, passions and experiences to a curriculum. Therefore, despite the fact a program may be ministry mandated, I am particularly interested in the human dimension of this standardization.

[13] The QEP states that the Secondary ELA program "is first and foremost a literacy program…[which] provide[s] opportunities for students to experience the power of language as a way of making sense of their experience and of breaking down the barriers that separate individuals" (MEES, 2022, p. 1). This process of "making sense" involves an engagement with aesthetic experiences; hence, the "arts" component of ELA. The use of literacy and the QEP competencies of reading, writing and speaking involves a use of language to articulate and construct these aesthetic interactions with art.

engage with various forms of literature in order to discover pertinent themes about humanity; that is to say, society and themselves. This examination involves reflection, critique, and the imagining of new possibilities for the world. It could be argued that students' participation within the ELA classroom should constitute transactional aesthetic experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994). By that, I mean that an absence of this exchange and a presentation of "correct" ways of contemplating the world via text, could suggest a lack of an artistic component in ELA; and in turn, the presentation of single-story doctrines, which once again poses a political and ideological concern. As an alternative to traditional systems of education where a teacher presents established ideas and material, John Dewey (1998) argued for experiential education. This process encourages students to engage with material, and conceptualize course content as relevant to their own worlds. Rather than learning concepts as abstract theories, students contemplate concepts as nuggets of life, whilst paying close attention to the process of doing so; in other words, an experiential and experimental approach to education could aid students in rendering personal meaning, as learning can be picked apart, manipulated and transferred. I recognize that contemporary teachers, especially within my context, cannot be linearly labelled as traditional and devoid of engagement. However, our methods are informed by tradition, including the established power-dynamics of students and teachers, and the "appropriate" content to be included or excluded from a curriculum; in other words, the "norms" of the teaching profession. Our practices, therefore, could benefit from increased attention to curricular relevance and personal meaning making. Returning to my earlier discussion about politics, a lack of art in ELA speaks to the ways in which the curriculum has been shaped. Addressing this lack of art requires an examination of the contextual complex within which ELA teaching and learning exists.

Surrealism, as a historic movement and philosophy, mirrors the perspectives of Dewey (2005) in its recognition of the multifaceted nature of artistic "problems" and the challenges that can arise from approaching art in isolation[14]. Dewey (2005) discussed conceptually separating artistic works from the contexts in which they were formed, noting that this tendency "renders almost opaque [the works'] general significance" (Dewey, 2005, p. 204). Dewey (2005) furthered his argument for continuity between the arts and everyday life by noting that "art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing…that makes an experience to be an experience" (Dewey, 2005, p. 208). Therefore, to treat an artistic product separate from its origins, would be to sever the communication between art and its context. Similar to the ideas proposed by Dewey (2005), Surrealism acknowledges how the creation and appreciation of artistic works holds a purpose far beyond casual enjoyment. Rather, an artistic work represents a system of thoughts and experiences, all of which speak to the circumstances of its construction. Recognizing the complicated, ideologically driven power of artistic creation and viewership, alongside Surrealist motives for defending the integrity and power of the art domain, paved the way for my own exploration of new possibilities for ELA, which, aptly holds the "arts" in its name.

Aesthetics and Art in the English Language (Arts)

I will expand upon aesthetics as a methodological strand that shaped my research study of Surrealist possibilities in ELA in the Methodology chapter of this thesis. For now, however, I

[14] I use the term isolation to connote the concept of divorce. I argue that divorcing the arts from everyday life removes any serious implications the works could have on its viewers (and the world). I also argue, in line with Breton and the Surrealists (1972), that this isolation illuminates choices made within the societal, political and cultural contexts surrounding an artistic domain. In short, isolating one's viewership of art suggests the existence of societal structures that aim to restrict (or control) the marriage of art and life.

feel it necessary to briefly explore the tenets of aesthetics, as I have endeavoured to form a connection between aesthetic experiences of reading and the Surrealist principles of freely experiencing artistic works. Surrealism addresses freedom of thought, expression and experience in the art domain, rather than addressing singular forms of artistic production. This attention to "reading" and interpreting the world via art connects solidly to my ELA domain. In addition, Surrealism's prioritization of personal experience when engaging with art democratizes the artistic experience and brings power to the reader/viewer. This emphasis embodies aesthetic experiences, which are valuable in bolstering meaning-making in ELA, but can also be hindered by normative "ways of seeing" (Berger, 2008). For this reason, ideologies such as those of Neoliberalism should be considered when pursuing transactional (Rosenblatt, 1994) reading/viewing experiences. I will continue to build a connection between Surrealism, aesthetics, and Neoliberal ideologies throughout this chapter.

As previously noted, the term, "aesthetic", has also been used in the QEP description of the ELA curriculum. For this reason, I explore aesthetics in this chapter, as a theoretical concept, in hopes of discovering (or recovering) new possibilities for critical thinking in ELA. I also intend to illuminate promises and possible shortcomings within our ministry mandated program. Rosenblatt (1994) argued that the reading of literature can illuminate human experience. More recently, Tim Gauthier (2015) discussed how fiction can aid readers in developing an awareness of the world through the fostering of empathy. Gauthier (2015), when focusing on narratives created in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City, noted that "novels afford us the means of examining the complex dynamics involved in any exhibition of fellow-feeling for the other, and the ever-present potential failure of that engagement" (Gauthier, 2015, p. 2). In other words, Gauthier (2015) argued that by interacting with the characters within a fictional

space, the reader can generalize, or as Gauthier (2015) noted, “cosmopolitanize”, these connections within one’s own context of lived experiences. This understanding would suggest that didactic methods of teaching literature stifle the possibilities of aesthetic, transactional reading. It could be argued that any dominant societal narrative that promotes single-answer responses contains elements of didacticism in its approaches. I feel an understanding of aesthetics and the transactional experience of engaging with artistic works, including literature in ELA, necessitates an exploration of our Neoliberal umbrella that, I argue, promotes choice within a selected scope. I will expand upon Neoliberalism later in this chapter.

Rosenblatt (2005) also describes the difference between interactional aesthetic and efferent experiences in reading. The former experience involves “reading…with attention…to what we are…thinking…and feeling *during* the reading process” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 35), and the latter is geared towards attaining information. Rosenblatt (2005) referred to efferent reading “from the Latin for “carry away” [as a] nonliterary kind of reading” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 35). While I recognize that both forms are necessary within ELA (efferent reading can facilitate the understanding of context in a story, while aesthetic reading can aid in analysis through interpretation, personal reflection and meaning making), the aesthetic component is not always optimized within our practices. It could also be argued that a prioritization of efferent approaches in ELA, involving “the learning of facts and the acquisition of skills deemed to be important” (Swanger, 1990, p. 74) by dominant (Neoliberal) discourses, could release students from their responsibility to critically interact with their world. References to criticality are found on numerous occasions within the QEP curriculum for ELA, such as its reference to forming “critical members of society” (MEES, 2019/2022, p. 1) and the frequent mention of “critical judgment” (MEES, 2019/2022, p. 4). Despite this acknowledgement of criticality, however, the

QEP does not actually offer a definition to illustrate what criticality resembles within its program. The document also promotes a citizen-oriented building impetus, with "students work[ing] collaboratively in "real world" conditions" (MEES, 2022, p. 4). It is this world that is not defined within the program, and the subjective, experience-driven components have been left unexplored. I recognize that the QEP serves as a blueprint for teachers, however, its societal-preparation narrative renders the program biased. The use of important terms such as "critical" and "aesthetic" (MEES, 2022, p. 1) without detailed definitions or explanatory instructions offer teachers a vision and overall ethos to shape, but also personalize their teaching practices. This being said, the QEP's emphasis on skills necessary for society outside the classroom imply that the philosophy of the program is not entirely geared towards openness and experimentation. This narrative also becomes problematic when the document also promotes creativity within the curriculum. Within ELA, creativity allows for the building of stories through the imagination of possibilities, as well as the engagement with stories, through the ability to explore divergent modes of thought. Narrative texts are described within the QEP as "the oldest forms…of making sense of human experience, as well as articulating the world of imagination" (MEES, 2022, p. 9). This description suggests an engagement with texts to involve a reflective examination of readers and their societies. Creativity counters stock ways of thinking, which is why the QEP's goal of encouraging criticality and creativity is essential for ELA, but contradictory to its presentation of an established societal reality. The curriculum is intended to mirror students' lived realities and the society in which they are soon to enter as adults. Would then, this criticality impetus not also suggest critiquing the context that created the educational system? Whether it be due to a lack of engagement, criticality or an ambiguous ministry curriculum, I have often witnessed students prioritizing the efferent approach to reading. The reader, or the interpreter of text, is in this case

the ELA student. This student is accompanied by past and ongoing life experiences including places of residence or travel, important milestones and achievements, and relationships that have come (and perhaps gone). The student brings to a text a specific angle from which to read and interpret. The engagement between a text and the unique reader (with a distinct body of knowledge) forms a new experience and thus, creates meaning. For this reason, I propose that a bolstering of the aesthetic component of the ELA curriculum could serve in illuminating the artistic meaning-making opportunities supported by the QEP and Surrealist philosophy.

Surrealism

The Surrealism movement's aim—to subvert traditional ways of thinking—corresponds with my own educational goals. Surrealism subverts taken-for-granted perspectives and jars people into broadening their curiosity and criticality; essentially, Surrealism involves expanding one's understanding of context, which is precisely my interest for ELA education. Surrealism and its tenets of "unlock[ing]…[thoughts and expression] unknown to our consciousness" (Breton et al., 1972, p. 30) resonated with me early on. The Surrealism movement, led by André Breton, centered on an interest in Sigmund Freud's exploration of dreams, while prioritizing and empowering the imagination for both philosophical and political purposes (Breton et al., 1972). Breton (1972) argued Surrealism was "based on [what he considered to be] the superior reality[15] of certain forms of previously neglected associations…in the disinterested play of thought" (Breton et al., 1972, p. 26). In addition to focusing upon the power of thought and the role of imagination in being able to conceptualize new realities, Breton also noted that "[l]anguage has

[15] I recognize the biased (and somewhat ironic) nature of Breton (1972) deeming Surrealism to be superior to other schools of thought. I will explore the problematic nature of Surrealism being an ideology that promotes freedom from "restrictive" ideologies further in my research.

been given to man so that he may make Surrealist use of it" (Breton et al., 1972, p. 33). Surrealist philosophy could therefore be interpreted as aiming towards emancipating the mind and accessing the imagination, with language serving as the vehicle for expressing these newly accessed understandings. Surrealism could offer interesting possibilities for ELA in its characteristic approach to unfettered thought. While it remains a philosophical, political and artistic stance, and one could argue it to not be unbiased in its approach, the position of expanded modes of thinking and the power allotted to a purveyor of art (and life), resonates with me and my ELA concerns. I would further argue that if one were to consider the lack of engagement and criticality within ELA to stem, even in part, from the Neoliberal mindset that frames day-to-day educational practices, a Surrealist ideology of emancipation could help counter the arguably restrictive approach of this model.

The perspective that art is not considered to be an innocent enterprise, divorced from any "real world" implications, but is instead a product of, and statement on, the context that formed it, displays some exciting possibilities for my own art-infused orientation to ELA. I use the term "real world" with reference to the QEP's emphasis on literacy in ELA and its echoing of Freire's (2018) idea of "read[ing] the word and the world" (MEES, 2019, p. 1). As previously suggested within my discussion of aesthetic judgment, I recognize the problematic nature of assuming any universalizable "world" exists. This understanding assumes a legitimized version of this world to be worthy of the term "real". The QEP emphasizes the importance of connection building in ELA through the goal of "understanding the connection between a text and its social function, i.e. how it is used in school, in the workplace, or in society" (MEES, 2019, p. 2). While I recognize the QEP's attention to contextual relevance in the process of analyzing literacy and meaning making, I argue, as previously discussed, that the basis upon which the QEP articulates

its goals has great potential for critical contemplation. I am interested in how these assumptions suggest a lack of variance with regards to experience, as it is my ELA experience that is my phenomenon of exploration. Margaret Louise Dobson (2013) noted that "real is not a concept and only concepts "about" reality can be taught" (Dobson, 2013, p. 255). This perspective aligns with my own reservations about designating any one person's reality to be "real". Our methods of personal meaning making in ELA are often built on an established baseline of reality. This baseline forms the dominant societal norm, which often forms a default manner in which to interpret texts. Rather than engaging with texts in an open and personal manner, certain voices, perspectives and ways of reading become prioritized. This argument is also reflected in the Surrealists' questioning of reality as a construct, which I will expand upon below. Therefore, throughout the rest of this thesis, I will refer to the "real world" in quotation marks, with a recognition of the loaded nature of the term. With these considerations in mind, I came to wonder how Surrealism could potentially affect the ways in which students (and teachers) experience ELA.

Why Surrealism?

Throughout my research process, professors and fellow students have continually asked me the question, "Why Surrealism?" Especially when my linkage of ELA and Surrealism remained a hunch, rather than a developed exploration of research, some professors wondered why I might not have chosen another artistic movement to fulfill my aesthetic needs. Others wondered if Surrealism could truly have any kind of place in the ELA classroom, if I were not to focus on artistic methods of production. To answer these inquiries, I noted that my perceived needs within the ELA curriculum address its lack of criticality and its limitations for connection

building and, therefore, meaning making. These limitations can be addressed through attention to imagination. Dewey (2005) noted that "all conscious experience[s]…[involve] some degree of imaginative quality" (Dewey, 2005, p. 272). Dewey (2005) further argued that aesthetic experience is inherently imaginative (Dewey, 2005, p. 272). He noted that aesthetic experiences involve "experience freed from the forces that impede and confuse its development as experience" (Dewey, 2005, p. 274). These "forces" could involve societal conditioning and established ways of engaging with art. Accepted and established norms validate select perspectives and do not encourage imaginative engagement with other ways of seeing. Dewey's claim might have been a mantra for the Surrealists as well, as Breton (1972) frequently cautioned against the prioritization of logic and absolute rationalism in the name of civilization (Breton et al., 1972, p. 9). Dewey's conceptualization suggests aesthetic experiences[16] require contexts that allow a reader or purveyor to experience a work of art with freedom of thought and expression. While context provides a framework and springboard for experience to foster, it also constrains the parameters, and thus, does not allow for unrestricted freedom. Similar to Dewey, Susan Sontag (1966) illuminated the problematic nature of "content" in artistic experiences, suggesting people have diverged away from "innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself" (Sontag, 1966, p. 96). Sontag (1966) noted that in the "interpretation" process of artistic experiences, people have alienated themselves from the art itself. Our ability to freely engage with the art has thus been overshadowed by our compulsion to approach it through a particular

[16] Aesthetic experiences can essentially develop from anything. The spontaneous, instinctive and affective components of these experiences connect to Surrealism's departure from restricted modes of thinking (conformity, status quo doctrines and ideas of normality, etc.). I argue that by introducing Surrealism's philosophical stance of freeing the mind from societal restraints, the mind can be better equipped to experiment. This aesthetic engagement can precede critical reflection on the experiences and interactions involved within them. Critical Pedagogy can then help in illuminating the possible limits that affect free experimentation of the mind through an interrogation of dominant societal narratives (ex: hierarchies of professions, normalized life trajectories of studying and entering the workforce, gendered professions, accepted/expected life decisions such as marriage and children, etc.)

ideological lens. This perspective aligns with that of Nelson Goodman (1976) who cited Ernst Gombrich's (1969) notion that "there is no innocent eye" (Goodman, 1976, p. 7). This perspective suggests, aligning with Dewey's (2005) notions of experience and John Berger's (2008) ways of seeing, that experience originates from of a viewer's entangled circumstantial (life) complex. With the affective nature of Dewey's (2005) conceptualization of aesthetic experiences, the human participant (who brings unique views, values and a position in the world) holds power to shape experiences. This process of rendering personal meaning in response to the world is evidently not reduced to the stimuli of artistic works. This broadened understanding of the art domain speaks to the presence and relevance of art "in" life; which, by extension, mirrors the historic Surrealists' goals of using art to consider and critique the outside world. Restrictions to free thought in education could include the aforementioned (Neoliberal) curricular goals that focus on "correct" answers rather than idea generation and experimentation. As previously noted, a curriculum based on promoting a singular way of thinking about the world could limit students' abilities to engage in critical thinking. Therefore, a goal of my work has involved eliciting the imagination. I suggest that one way to do that is to adopt some Surrealist strategies.

While Surrealism's focus on the imagination indeed forms a valuable connection to the artistic needs of ELA and creative possibilities for students, I have chosen to use Dewey's (2005) conceptualization of the "imagination". Dewey (2005) noted that "experience is rendered conscious by means of that fusion of old meanings and new situations that transfigures both…[in] a transformation that defines imagination" (Dewey, 2005, p. 275). Dewey's (2005) focus on the imagination emphasizes a personal, emancipating component of engaging with art and constructing experiences. This perspective offers a tangible understanding of what I aim to

elicit within my discipline, and how that imaginative work can move beyond the experimental to become political.

A Surrealist Lens for ELA

The term "surreal" suggests a movement beyond our understandings of what constitutes reality. Surrealism implies that our current circumstances require critical contemplation, and that we are not accessing our full potential in terms of experience. The "surreal" could therefore be understood as a state of seeing and being within the world in a more open-ended manner than we are accustomed to experiencing it. Breton (1972) argued that "[t]he Surrealists maintain that reality is by definition ugly, beauty exists only in that which is not real. It is man who has introduced beauty in the world." (Breton et al., 1972, p. 121). I recognize that his claim that all reality as "ugly" is bold and possibly reductionist with regards to my ELA goals. While I acknowledge the political and cultural circumstances that fueled his arguably aggressive position on reality, my contemporary context does not reflect the same concerns. Breton's (1972) concept of pure reality involves alternate forms of reality and a state of thinking and being that has not been influenced by political doctrines or ideological models[17]. Breton (1972) appears to critique the effects of man's[18] relationship with conformist societal norms. We are essentially, Breton might argue, our own worst enemies when it comes to our limited conditions, as we have constructed societies and restrictions within them. I align with Breton's (1972) interest in

[17] This alternative to reality does not connote purity or a completely unaffected state of seeing and being. The Surrealists argue political doctrines to be problematic in their shaping of people's perspectives on the world. However, implying experiences can be completely free should also be questioned. While the Surrealists aim to push back on status quo ways of being and seeing that have been established and perpetuated by those in power, citizens nonetheless bring imbedded value sets to their experiences. The focus of the Surrealist critique appears, therefore, to offer freedom from the restraints of dominant doctrines, as opposed to complete and unconditional freedom of experience.

[18] Here, I use the term "man", as this is the language of Breton. However, I recognize that both Breton and I use this term to refer to people, or "humankind", in isolating a problematic reliance on societal norms.

expanding one's understanding of the context surrounding one's everyday life through an interrogation of the status quo. This questioning of societal practices and a careful analysis of the way we behave and think once again invites possibilities for the ERC component of my merged curriculum. Similarly, as Breton and the Surrealists aimed to question the ideological organization of society (specifically pertaining to the effects on art production and viewership), I have aimed, within my study, to critically explore Neoliberalism's structuring of Canadian society and the impact this focus on economic potential and individualized success have on our education system.

I am also interested in Surrealism's strong relationship with aesthetics. This philosophy aims to foster freedom of thought, a process that can fuel engagement and aesthetic experiences. What also sparks my interest within this conversation, is the movement's isolation of societal constructions (gender roles, sexuality, masculinity and femininity, marriage, "proper" education and jobs, etc.) and their association with the term "reality". Surrealist philosophy aims to achieve a state of "Surreality" where people are freed from conventional thinking and are able to access "less" restricted thought and expression; this goal centers on an understanding, as previously noted, that similarly uncritical ways of being, thinking and seeing are inherently problematic. When connecting Surrealism to ELA needs, Critical Pedagogy could serve in encouraging students to build connections between themes in literature and their own lived contexts. Paul Alexander Stewart (2021), in *Art, Critical Pedagogy and Capitalism*, highlighted the politics of art production, by deconstructing the power relationships involved in creating and viewing art. The historic Surrealists (Breton et al., 1972) attempted to critique these exact structures, advocating for freedom of thought and expression, and a democratized art domain. Stewart (2021) imagined a new approach to art production by using Critical Pedagogy, aligning

with its questioning of Neoliberalism and its structuring of knowledge. While Stewart (2021) perceived value in borrowing from the domain of education to revisit problematic injustices in art production, I have ventured to do the reverse, in using the artistic philosophy of Surrealism to address my educational concerns; in both cases, however, Stewart (2021) and I have utilized the questioning nature of Critical Pedagogy to deconstruct the artistic status quo. I intend to help foster criticality and by extension, creative and divergent thinking in ELA, by exploring the societal implications of our classroom discoveries. While I aim to encourage free thought in ELA in a Surrealist manner, this same philosophy could facilitate a critical analysis of Neoliberal structures. However, it should be noted that the Surrealists' goals for achieving freedom involved eliciting new and unexpected ways of experiencing the world (my goal for ELA). This critical and creative pursuit consisted of working within existing constraints (societal norms, politics, policies, etc.) rather than abandoning them. For this reason, the Surrealists could be interpreted to have had a specific agenda, which may also appear contradictory when discussing freedom. I will expand on this idea of freedom later in this chapter, but I argue that the biased nature of the Surrealists' pursuits and their targeted critique of the status quo mirror my own objectives for ELA (and my critique of Neoliberalism). I also argue that the (biased) Surrealist and Neoliberal orientations that I have outlined are necessary to illuminate the problematic societal structures that hinder criticality in the first place.

I purport that the problematic "reality" that Surrealist philosophy counters, parallels ELA's restricted ideological presentation of the world, and its relationship with status quo representations of normality[19]. Breton's use of the term "reality" suggests a similar

[19] I do not argue that teachers should abolish traditions (and in the case of ELA, the canon) in favour of progression and advancement in education (Hirsch, 1987). E.D. Hirsch has argued that "teaching children national mainstream culture doesn't mean forcing them to accept its values uncritically" (Hirsch, 1987, p. 24). Hirsch (1987) has spoken of the unprogressive nature of abolishing tradition, which is an argument that I echo in this thesis. I mirror Hirsch's

conceptualization to Berger's (2008) ways of seeing. This involves one's conditioned ways of perceiving the world, interpreting these messages, and thus living one's life in accordance to said messages. I recognize that this term can become complicated when attempting to forge a connection with a tangible, contemporary context such as my ELA domain. While the Surrealists used the term "reality" to connote one's conditioned ways of thinking, interpreting and interacting within the world, the term also adopts an existential stance when it comes to the Surrealist focus on dreams and mental states of consciousness. Where I depart from Breton and Surrealist philosophy would be the historic movement's strong rebellion against all established forms of reality. For the purposes of my connection, I have chosen to focus on the Surrealism movement's political use of the term reality, and the way in which it aimed to emancipate the human mind in the face of threats posed by contextual influences.

Surrealist philosophy ultimately critiques normalized, taken for granted ways of living, seeing and being, using art to form a statement on life. The concept of norms and established ways of experiencing the world form an integral part of the ELA classroom. To a certain degree, these norms form the base level of shared understandings upon which to confirm or push back against themes presented in literature and art. An example of norms would be established understandings of gender identity and roles, which would determine societally accepted notions of male and female binaries. These binaries would also dictate the jobs, behaviours, and lifestyles these individuals would (could) assume. Societal norms, which impact students' experiences with ELA could also include sexual orientation, class and race. A Surrealist pedagogue might recognize the accepted traditions surfacing in students' interpretations of a text

(1987) arguments for cultural literacy and the need to provide students with context (historical, geographical, etc.) in order to understand and evaluate their current circumstances. I will also argue, later in this chapter, against the banishing of canonical literature in ELA, as tradition can be used to critically engage with human-centered themes.

and attempt to broaden their ways of experiencing it in new, unexpected ways. Meanwhile, the traditional pedagogue might deem societal norms to be exactly what is encompassed by the term, "normal," and as such, not worth interrogating. This latter pedagogue might feel established traditions form culture that is in some ways legitimized by having stood the test of time, or being authorized by particular guardians of the art (and real) world (Rose & Kincheloe, 2003). In turn, this instructor's practice would adopt a decidedly different approach to text than that of the Surrealist colleague. Adopting traditions and established norms to form the basis of understandings connotes a form of hierarchy of accepted patterns. These patterns of social behaviour form the norms that validate the (constructed) existence of the status quo. Reading and interpreting text, whilst recognizing certain human behaviours and themes to be "normal", inherently confirms the existence of the status quo, whether it be a political, social or cultural enterprise. It could be argued that a student within this system is being encouraged to learn certain ways in which human beings are expected or permitted to behave in society. This system also suggests that, ultimately, as previously noted, there can exist a "correct" way of reading a text and consequently, incorrect ways of experiencing it. Once again, this is where I have interpreted a possible connection between my current ELA needs and Surrealist philosophy. I am interested in Surrealism as an option for interrogating traditional ways of seeing, thinking and being within ELA teaching and learning. That is, the existing art component of my ELA class is inherently problematic by virtue of its perpetuation of status quo narratives.

Surrealist "Reality" and Societal Conventions

As previously noted, the term "reality", in the Surrealist sense, appears too broad and could risk lacking focus in my observations and interactions with students. For this reason, my

use of the Surrealists' political critique of the status quo forms a more concrete channel to introduce and connect Surrealist philosophy to our (conceptually distant) contemporary space. Linking a contemporary critique of status quo ways of teaching and learning ELA, while it does form a theoretical justification for connecting Surrealist motivations to our own, does not concretize any form of agenda or direction for ELA. In other words, I linked these spaces and developed some critical questions surrounding my discipline, but the drastically different context of the Surrealist movement nonetheless provides little direction on where my ELA class could proceed in our quest for deconstructing and questioning the status quo. For this reason, I chose to channel Surrealism's focus on the concept of reality, focusing on a critique of traditional ways of experiencing ELA education, while aiming to make tangible the concept of the status quo, which still remains elusive. I argue that by using the term "societal conventions," the concept of the status quo could be applied to a variety of relatable examples within students' lived existences. The use of the term "societal conventions" maintains the integrity of the Surrealists' dissatisfaction with established ways of producing and experiencing art and life, but allows my contemporary learners a gateway into the thought processes of the philosophy rather than focusing on the specific historical intricacies that birthed the movement. This term also allows freedom to explore a variety of different human-centered themes that affect students in their everyday lives, such as norms surrounding sexuality, gender roles, and social practices and established forms of etiquette, all of which could illuminate issues of privilege, as well as evolving and possibly problematic ways of thinking and being.

Moving back to my own Surrealist-inspired desire to critique the societal context surrounding my ELA program, I recognize that my use of the philosophy is layered. On the top layer, the "reality" I am attempting to question is students' lack of engagement in our discipline

and their approaches to literature that lack critical contemplation and depth. My focus on societal conventions aims to foster critical thinking, but still borrows from Surrealist philosophy. At the same time, I am engaging in a double-fold critique, as I am also questioning the Neoliberal agenda that has enfolded education (Giroux, 1988; Hill & Kumar, 2009) under its political umbrella. For our (micro) purposes within the classroom, my ELA goals did not require students to focus on the umbrella, but instead examine its ribs, or the societal conventions that exist within their lives and could possibly be linked back to our Neoliberal reality. Once again, I recognize that my inquiries are based on my personal questions and feelings surrounding Neoliberalism and its effects on my students' engagement and criticality. My suspicions fueled my questions and research pursuits. However, as previously suggested, I argue that my (targeted) goal of critically analyzing Neoliberal influences on ELA is not at odds with the Surrealists' freedom (of thought) agenda. While I have questioned whether or not Neoliberalism has had a role to play in my students' ELA experiences[20], I argue that pursuing this initial avenue of inquiry was necessary in order to invite more open and free thinking in my students; or at least freedom in the way the Surrealists enacted the term in practice, which is more a freedom from political and social constraints as opposed to completely untainted and unaffected thought. Breton (1972) and the Surrealists aimed to foster activism and societal engagement via free thought and criticality. However, the means in which to excite these capacities was an active critique on societal structures. This question of freedom, if anything, forms a possible discrepancy between the Surrealists' theoretical and practical iterations of the term. The

[20] A specific example of Neoliberal policies impacting students' learning experiences would involve societal norms. These norms structure the parameters within which students pursue meaning in ELA. However, these norms also impact students' relationships with artistic engagement. There is, according to the Neoliberal status quo, a specific place for the arts in society, and by extension, a specific set of opportunities (jobs) and circumstances (leisure, museums, etc.) allotted to the domain. This allotment would represent the Neoliberal designation of limited choice.

Surrealists did strive for ultimate freedom of thought, or what Breton (1972) termed an "emancipation of the mind" (Breton et al., 1972, p. 241), but they remained targeted in their goals for illuminating why (specific societal structures) people should become critical.

For the (macro) purpose of this study, I therefore engaged in an interrogation of Neoliberalism's presumed impacts on education. Interestingly, Neoliberalism holds the term "liberal" in its name, as freedom serves as a constant within its rationale. Similar to Surrealism's collective aim to pursue freedom of thought and expression, a response triggered by political, governmental control of the artistic enterprise (Rubin, 1968), Neoliberalism seeks empowerment in the individual's control within the economic market (Harvey, 2007). Both ideologies therefore center on a liberation from a presumably problematic control of individual rights. The difference in the pursuit of freedom of Neoliberalism and Surrealism therefore forms much of my theoretical inquiry.

My initial exploration of Neoliberalism remained largely theoretical, as I did not believe my perceived problems (my students' lack of engagement and criticality) necessitated a journey back to its possible political roots. ELA, in my experience, often has the tendency to appear lofty and out of touch with lived experiences. Therefore, an academic immersion in a theory of Neoliberalism was not the goal I set out for my students. Rather, I aimed to discover if their engagement with a critique of societal conventions could spark their curiosity. My early critique of Neoliberalism during the time of my Candidacy exam, lacked substance, as I had targeted a very limited aspect of the philosophy that I argued could be linked to my perceived concerns within ELA. I decided that rather than taking into account the whole Neoliberal umbrella, which would involve an exploration of its complex economic, social, cultural and political branches and implications (Harvey, 2007), I chose to focus on a single aspect: choice, and Neoliberalism's

perceived systematization of it. My decision to focus on Neoliberalism's treatment of choice was linked to my interest in fostering critical and creative thinking in ELA. I adopted a Surrealist-style critique on how the Neoliberalism system does not constitute an environment for unrestricted imaginative play. With our students entering a Neoliberal societal context upon graduation, I wondered if the school place did not reflect the same philosophy of "experimentation within boundaries". These boundaries would therefore structure students' textual ruminations to arrive at accepted understandings of human behaviour and interactions; consequently, anything else could be deemed as "abnormal" or deviant. For example, the "whiteness" of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, was not seen as out of the ordinary during our in-class reading of the novel (Lund & Carr, 2015). This could be attributed to the students' exposure to canonical stories that contain predominantly (if not exclusively) Caucasian characters. It could also be due to the students' own lack of ethnic diversity within the classroom, and their engagements within what remains to be a Eurocentric Montreal society. My students' aforementioned instrumentalized notions of ELA and their focus on singular or select "correct" answers led me to question the scope within which they formulate meaning in response to texts. In other words, I was interested in examining the factors that determined what was, or was not, considered "normal" to my students. It appeared to me that students were not interpreting the ELA classroom as a space for musing and experimentation. Despite attending a school that promotes inclusivity and differentiation, these students' baseline understanding of ELA involved arriving at an established answer, as opposed to open possibilities. The ELA classroom offered an illusion of freedom, but instead, by virtue of its Neoliberal societal context, provided restricted norms from which to construct understandings. This conflict between theory (including the goals of the QEP and the potential of ELA) and practice (the Neoliberal reality),

prompted me to explore the specific toolbox of norms that was affecting my students' reading of the world.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberal Liberty and Surrealist Thought

Neoliberalism constitutes an individualized approach to economic prosperity, with the notion that individuals can positively benefit when freed from the constraints of societal, collectivized control. The concept of Neoliberalism contains within it a notion of (and promise for) freedom. This promise and the basis upon which it operates, is what prompted my concerns and desire to further investigate this system. Shahsavari-Googhari (2017) highlighted the problematic nature of Neoliberal influences on education, calling for a more democratic approach (in the form of Critical Pedagogy). Shahsavari-Googhari (2017) argued that people within societies operating under Neoliberal systems lack critical judgement. Shahsavari-Googhari (2017) also cited Giroux's term of "social amnesia" (Giroux, 2014) in noting how people fail to recognize the link between their individual interests and the communal efforts required to create democracy. David Harvey (2007) noted, when referring to Neoliberal theory, that "individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade" (Harvey 2007, p. 7). The link between financial prosperity and freedom is the area that initially caught my attention, as I attempted to critique an economic model that has inherent benefits for some,[21] and has paved the way for my own personal privilege. I subsequently shifted my focus from

[21] I recognize that my personal context and circumstances (SES level, education, the neighbourhood in which I grew up, my command of the English language, etc.) allow me to benefit from Neoliberalism (at least in part). The concept of globalization and economic advancement is essentially a game that I have been positioned to play. I argue that those who do not have contexts of privilege such as mine, could become more and more marginalized from the restrictive tenets of Neoliberal values (individualism, privatized and centralized power allotted to those with economic capital).

questioning freedom reliant upon financial prosperity, to the promise of freedom that is not as free as it may appear. The Neoliberal focus on the individual, while it is rooted in "ideals of human dignity and individual freedom" (Harvey, 2007, p. 5) indeed recognizes the power of choice. However, the issue I aim to address with Neoliberalism is the concept of choices not being full and open. Harvey (2007) noted that the allure of freedom has been rhetorically appropriated, serving as "a button that the elites can press to open the door to the masses to justify almost anything" (Harvey, 2007, 39). This conceptualization of Neoliberal freedom suggests that the system does not in fact offer unlimited freedom and choice, but rather, the array of choices that have been deemed "safe" (Swanger, 1990, p. 16) by those in power. Gert Biesta (2009) noted the irony in standardized, data-based analyses of education, in "that accountability is often limited to choice from a set menu…[that] lacks a real democratic dimension" (Biesta, 2009, p. 34). Biesta (2009) critiqued the exact limitations that I have been interested in exploring with regards to Neoliberal models of education. Biesta (2009) also discussed how limited choice can be connected to accessibility to "good"[22] education. This "reality" places blame on underprivileged parties as opposed to acknowledging the possibly problematic nature of structural factors (SES level, government allocations, differences between private vs. public resources, etc.) surrounding these standardized outcomes. The historic Surrealists forged their movement on the concept of liberation from political systems that aimed to structure, police and control the production and viewership of art (Breton et al., 1972; Rose & Kincheloe, 2003; Rubin, 1968). As previously noted, Surrealist philosophy centers on the concept of completely

[22] Biesta (2009) argued that a main problem with current educational approaches involves a focus on effective teaching methods, including results and outcomes, as opposed to "good education", which involves a combination of qualification, socialization, and subjectification. This latter approach emphasizes purpose in education. I argue that Biesta's (2009) positioning offers an interesting connection to my arguments on limited Neoliberal choice in education, as well as the disconnect between classroom experiences and students' lived experiences; thus, a perpetuation of a given status quo doctrine.

free thought, as being able to think in an unrestricted manner offers unlimited choices [23]for how to live a life. Despite how Neoliberalism originates from a similar impetus (Harvey, 2007), these ideologies are not compatible.

Neoliberalism, which Harvey (2007) described to involve the construction of commonsense narratives of freedom and consent, arguably stands in contrast to the Surrealist emancipation of the mind; and, for that matter, the ELA quest for personal meaning-making. In addition, the Neoliberal concept of individualized freedom departs from Breton's historical call to action (Breton et al., 1972) and Dewey's ideas of democratic education (Dewey, 2018). Breton's (1972) collective call to action does suggest a movement away from dominant societal ideologies. This being said, the Surrealist call towards consciousness is in and of itself an individual one. This means that while the historic movement and ongoing philosophy are dependent upon collectivized action, a focus on the mind and one's individualized potential to control it, once again connects to Neoliberalism more than it may initially seem. Essentially, the Surrealists aimed to illuminate how people were not free within traditional, status quo societal systems, arguing that artists should ban together and reclaim their artistic liberty for free expression, but by extension, all citizens could adopt this artistic impetus to attain liberty and push back against presumed corrupt dominance[24] (Breton et al., 1972). Neoliberal theory, on the

[23] I recognize the ethical complexity of offering unlimited choice in education; not simply as it pertains to the ERC curriculum. If it is argued that open possibilities constitute freedom in education, this same openness could result in students choosing to be evil. I argue that the Neoliberal system is presenting a set of established options for life, and that this limitation moves against Surrealist freedom. However, prioritizing full freedom (without Neoliberal selection) could also have negative consequences on students' educational experiences and lives. It seems that this question of morality could be mitigated by presenting Surrealist freedom alongside the Surrealist philosophies of critique, artistic expression, and the power of the collective. This would of course form a less neutral (or authentically Surrealist) approach, albeit a more ethical one.

[24] I argue that a connection can be made between Critical Pedagogy and the emancipatory aims of Surrealist theory. Critical Pedagogy critiques Neoliberal influences on education, while Surrealist theory counters the arguably corrupt political manipulation of the arts (and people's abilities to think). While I suggest a parallel between the needs of my ELA classroom and the artistic context within which historic Surrealists forged their movement, I am not suggesting that my current Quebec context is corrupt. Political corruption is a reality in some countries that I do not wish to diminish. My inclusion of the term echoes the positions of Breton (1972) and Harvey (2007), who I

other hand, argues that freedom comes from moving outside of the crowd and taking individual ownership of one's (economic) potential, with the understanding that the collective is limiting and can become inherently corrupt (Harvey, 2007, p. 5). It could be interpreted that the restrictive establishers of the status quo that the Surrealists critiqued consist of individuals such as Neoliberal elites. It could also be argued that the exact limited freedom that Surrealist theory battles against is the Neoliberal reality of presenting a selection of choices, while promoting the ideal of freedom and maintaining the dominant narrative (and doctrine) of Neoliberal theory. Biesta (2009) argued that "it is in the interest of those who benefit from the status quo to keep things as they are and not open up a discussion about what education might be" (Biesta, 2009, p. 37). Stagnancy and a lack of critical thinking in (ELA) education could therefore suggest a connection to the larger societal structures that determine the approach (commonsense narrative) of teaching and learning (Biesta, 2009, p. 36). My goal in establishing Neoliberalism as an area of exploration within my study does not aim to denigrate this Neoliberal theory, and I remain cautious about not having all inquiries and concerns lead to the same "answer" of presumed Neoliberal injustice. The individualized model of Neoliberalism may have positive outcomes for free-trade, if goals involve economic (financial) prosperity. However, this same individualized approach becomes complicated within the domain of education, when learners are expected to adopt a "learnification" approach (Biesta, 2009) and assume full responsibility of their educational successes (or failures). Issues of the Neoliberal mindset towards individualism as freedom but also my own observations of learner needs and structures of support for building independence have been areas that have fueled my study. My interest in Neoliberalism presents an interesting opportunity to question the amount of choice we are offered in our everyday lives,

acknowledge are biased in their conceptualizations of corruption. For my purposes, the term "corrupt" suggests a lack of justice within the limited context of (Western) culture and education.

to what degree we subconsciously repeat or fuel dominant, status quo narratives, and how often we become cognizant of the actual critical power we could hone were we to actually contemplate our contextual circumstances. This emphasis on a select aspect of Neoliberal choice has shifted my research focus from an act of unmasking perceived acts of injustice to an exploration of liberty and the ways in which we can attempt to foster and access experimental and experiential thought in the ELA classroom and beyond.

ELA Within a Neoliberal Context

While I argue that my specific educational context maintains the dominant Neoliberal status quo, the discipline of English is particularly complicit within this model (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hall & Eggington, 2000). Joan Kelly Hall and William Eggington (2000) noted that English, including second language and language arts instruction, is based upon connections to both established forms of history and to popular culture. This means that English as a tool is responsible for supporting legitimized ideas of normality, which is especially problematic when considering the aforementioned Surrealist notions of freedom and reality, as well as the ELA impetus of exploring human-centered themes. The Neoliberal ELA teacher is essentially responsible for spreading the status symbol of the English language (Hall & Eggington, 2000, p. 10). While Neoliberal theory involves establishing dominant ideas of normality, English has established itself as a symbol of that imperial dominance. With English as the language of instruction, ELA teachers become responsible for "selling" the language of ideology building. Our "real-world" connections are often built from positions that place Eurocentric ideals as the benchmark of (relatively unquestioned) "reality". The idea that any one culture can be prioritized as the dominant norm within a supposedly multicultural, inclusive context is

problematic; especially, when our society at large functions upon notions of freedom (Government of Canada, 2021). Furthermore, this perspective of high-status English complicates the notion of the ELA classroom as a site of shared voices and the communal construction of meaning (MEES, 2019/2022).

When considering the previously discussed societal-preparation orientation of the QEP, it could be argued that English operates as currency within the Neoliberal model of market exchange. Despite existing as a minority institution within a Francophone province, the aforementioned privileged status of my students could also offer them opportunities beyond Quebec. As well, with English existing among the most significant languages of commerce, our ELA classroom cannot be divorced from its global significance (and politics). Consequently, the degree to which students and citizens master this "skill" directly impacts their ability to adhere to the dominant norms and gain societal and economic potential (Hall & Eggington, 2000, p. 10). It is not an accident that the universal language of commerce[25] is English, but that does not mean that culture, which David Trend (1992) referred to as the everyday lived experiences that shape us as much as we shape them, cannot or does not exist outside of this language (Trend, 1992). I argue that this hegemonic identity of English has fused well with Neoliberal ideologies, forming an effective vessel to transmit a system of dominant societal norms. Inevitably, however, there are issues of access, and this understanding of the English language would suggest that those who stand outside of it are not privy to the economic, social and cultural benefits that accompany

[25] I recognize that the economic, market-exchange aspects of Neoliberalism do not form my area of focus for this study. I chose to raise this perspective about commerce, however, in order to form links between the perspectives of Hall and Eggington (2000), which relate to the hegemonic nature of English, and the society (workforce)-oriented narrative of the QEP. I argue that considering the status of the English language and its relationship to economics is nonetheless worthy of mention within my current conversation, as both the QEP and the surrounding Neoliberal society could be considered to promote specific notions of success. This is relevant through the ELA domain and its (somewhat contradictory) responsibilities to foster personal and communal meaning making while also preparing students for the norms of society outside the classroom. We, as an arts-oriented domain within a Neoliberal system, promote openness and freedom, while constantly returning to legitimized notions of reality.

it as a commodity. English encompasses a history of cultural hegemony and colonial dominance, thereby taxing ELA teachers with the complicated sociopolitical weight of it. An attempt to create more democratic teaching and learning experiences in English therefore necessitates a critical interrogation of the subject itself.

Critical Pedagogy

For my purposes, Critical Pedagogy has provided an exciting possibility for this investigation, while operating as the Surrealist glue to subversively question our (art) discipline. In *Knowledge and Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction*, Joe Kincheloe (2008) noted how the term critical theory, "is often evoked and frequently misunderstood" (p. 59). Kincheloe (2008) noted that theorists from the Frankfurt School, are often recognized in developing critical theory. Kincheloe (2008) also aimed to explore other cultural influences that operated in shaping critical theory and Critical Pedagogy, beyond Western origins. Within the European tradition, however, Kincheloe (2008) noted critical theory to have started when "Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse initiated a conversation the German tradition of philosophical thought, especially that of Karl Marx, Immanual Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, and Max Weber" (p. 60). These theorists, faced with the economic, social and political aftermath of World War I, illuminated how "the world was in urgent need of reinterpretation" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 60). Interestingly, these critical theorists' identification of societal injustices and their pursuit of new possibilities, connects to the historic Surrealists' subversive reimagining of reality. Kincheloe (2008) further noted how critical theory is based in critiquing the notion that Western nations and societies are "unproblematically democratic and free" (p. 61). This questioning of dominant political norms, along with an interrogation of the narratives established by powerful elites also constitutes an act

of Surrealist emancipation. In terms of critical theory influencing pedagogy, Kincheloe (2008) conceptualized the school place as a "hidden locale where knowledge operates" (p. 4). Knowledge is intrinsically political in its production and transmission. The narratives housing knowledge reflect the goals and desires of those controlling it. Likewise, access to knowledge is a calculated political affair, as it can be simultaneously empowering for some and damaging for others. Political contexts shape the face of education, as the classroom forms an introduction to society. Therefore, the chosen narrative of the dominant political norm will determine whether or not a classroom is a place of exploration or acceptance. The former classroom fosters criticality and questioning. The latter system, or what Kincheloe (2008) referred to as "regressive schools", are based on didactic approaches that counter the Surrealist practice of imagining new possibilities for the world (p. 4). As previously noted, I have chosen to highlight Neoliberalism as the societal context that houses my areas of inquiry within the domain of ELA (and ERC). Kincheloe (2008) noted that within the Neoliberal free market, "the purpose of school…is to *train*…well-regulated and passive students to accept *what is*" (p. 4). Essentially, education within Neoliberal contexts can be understood as a tool to reinforce and reproduce dominant societal understandings, by targeting young audiences.

A key element of my research has involved forging a connection between Surrealist philosophy and my observed needs within ELA education. However, I recognize this association contains a considerable amount of contextual disconnect. My interest in Surrealist philosophy lies in its focus on democratized thought and expression, as well an active interrogation of societal norms. My teaching experiences have illuminated possibilities for growth within the ELA domain. I argue that change could come from adopting a philosophical stance such as Surrealism. This being said, I recognize that my contemporary North American ELA classroom

does not directly mirror the artistic domain of the historic Surrealists. I have attempted to justify the need to conceptualize ELA from an aesthetic standpoint, which allows for engagement and meaning making as opposed to targeted, single-answer readings. This justification of the artistic concerns of ELA allows for a contextual understanding of Surrealist philosophy's presumed possibilities. Surrealist philosophy indeed critiques the societal structures that shape the domain of art, and I have argued for a connection to be made between the Neoliberal societal context and the domain of ELA education. This is to say, I argue that the disconnect between the QEP's aforementioned reference to Rosenblatt's (1994) aesthetics and its simultaneous discussion of judgment, could be explained by exploring our ELA program's Neoliberal context. However, I recognize that a further bridge is required to solidify this argument. Therefore, I suggest Critical Pedagogy could aid in making the revolutionary, subversive impetus of Surrealism relevant for our lived experiences within ELA teaching and learning.

Activism and an Interrogation of Norms

Similar to how Surrealist theory questions societal structures that restrict freedom of thought and expression in the art world, Critical Pedagogy focuses on conditional liberty and choice in education. Henry Giroux (1988) was among the first to problematize the lack of criticality in education, and his observations are still highly relevant today. Giroux (1988) noted that traditional schooling models involve passive knowledge consumption, with schools serving as the exchange sites for cultural capital and legitimized knowledge. This approach, Giroux (1988) argued, favours skills development as opposed to personal engagement and meaning making. This economically oriented model recognizes the school place to be a site intended to prepare students for the work force (Biesta, 2009), thereby imparting upon them values that are

intrinsic to the dominant societal narrative. Giroux (1988) cautioned that the reproduction of dominant, status quo knowledges, through the context of education, is problematic in its lack of neutrality. Giroux (1988) also argued that dominant school culture, which paves the way for dominant societal culture, renders learners powerless in its single-story presentation of ideologies. This involves a lack of diversity and representation imbedded in the curriculum that could otherwise foster activism and criticality. Giroux (1988) noted that teachers have the pivotal responsibility to empower students, shed light on the sociopolitical structures that shape the conditions within which they live and construct their ways of understanding the world (context), and promote activism and criticality rather than compliance to the dominant doctrine. While I recognize that Giroux does not constitute the only voice advocating Critical Pedagogy, I have chosen to focus on his arguments, as they, in conjunction with the positions of Trend (1992), Karel Rose and Joe Kincheloe (2003) and Freire (2018), form a joint conversation that mirrors my artistic, educational ELA and ERC context, as well as the activist tone of Breton (1972) and the Surrealists.

Trend (1992) supported Giroux's (1988) notion of teachers being "transformative intellectuals", recognizing the need for diversified pedagogical models that promote the basis for more egalitarian societies. Trend (1992) described how education and culture are often treated as separate conversations, when in fact, the former serves as a necessary vessel for the ideals of the latter. In turn, education can and has become deeply politicized, as it operates as a valuable tool for the introduction of select forms of knowledge and conditioning young people to enter society from a particular angle. Giroux's and Trend's calls to action for educators, illuminating their potential as radical changemakers, reflect Freire's (2018) theories of oppression (Freire et al., 2018). Freire (2018) illuminated how teachers can inflict oppression on students and future

generations through the repetition of dominant ideologies. Instead, the teacher has the potential to rise above perceived oppression and promote inclusive forms of pedagogy that support the generation of questions and the creation of autonomy. This form of education, according to Freire (2018), is what could help in dismantling hegemonic societal structures that systematically disenfranchise citizens within their own existences. Essentially, Critical Pedagogy aims to call into question assumed norms that the authors argue strip citizens of their abilities to think and act in a free and unrestricted manner. This involves an ethical (ERC) engagement and an analysis of an individual's rights to experience the world. The individual, through models of Critical Pedagogy, is encouraged to cultivate individuality,[26] but these freedoms and rights are gained only through the joint efforts of the collective. This perspective mirrors the historic Surrealist impetus to have artists ban together and reclaim their creative freedom in opposition to those in power who aimed to appropriate and control the art domain (Breton et al., 1972; Rose & Kincheloe, 2003; Rubin, 1968). It also suggests that change will come from the collective enlightenment of individuals and the recognition of their shared subordination. Critical Pedagogy therefore offers a similar call to action specifically targeting hegemonic injustice within the education domain, as Surrealism targets the creation and viewership of art. However, Surrealism's goals of free thought and expression resonate beyond the fine arts. As I have isolated engagement and a lack of criticality to be areas of concern within ELA, I argue that a fusion of the Critical Pedagogy impetus alongside Surrealist revolutionary inspiration could offer a valuable option in approaching ELA education.

[26] This perspective counters Biesta's (2009) cautionary position on learning, and how a "learnification" approach that focuses on outcomes as opposed to purpose, renders learning an individualistic concept rather than a co-constructed, collaborative experience. Biesta (2009) also argued, however, that qualification, the concept of equipping students with knowledge and skills for the workforce, is often allotted more attention than socialization and subjectification. Programs such as the QEP reflect this observation, despite the fact that Biesta (2009) argued for these elements to be considered in combination. Students' learning cannot be treated in vacuums without considering their surrounding contexts (socialization and subjectification).

Critical Pedagogy and Secondary ELA

Within my Secondary ELA practice, I have the responsibility to present students with a window onto their world. The frame in which I set that window could confirm the method of market-oriented societal preparation, or conversely, critically-engaged social activism. In a sense, ELA is about storytelling, as we simultaneously deconstruct works of literature and the stories of society. The power of ELA lies, as illustrated in the QEP's mandate, in representing societal values within the school and recognizing their role in shaping our actions as individuals (MEES, 2019). However, I have observed inconsistencies between the theory and practice of the QEP's intended goals. I argue that approaching ELA from a standpoint of Critical Pedagogy can help us engage with (and possibly interrogate) the storytelling[27] we have been doing. Trend's (1992) perspective on knowledge as static currency speaks to our closed nature of storytelling. Essentially, this narrative involves a single story with a single way of telling it. Culture, and the messages transmitted through stories, are stripped of their transactional value, and presented in a singular way that supports a dominant discourse. What I argue to be missing alongside creativity and criticality in the ELA classroom, is not a recognition of this single-answer system, but rather, a meaningful interrogation (and subversion) of it. Disempowered ELA teachers could therefore reignite imaginative fire in their classes by forging an honest dialogue about the oppression that comprises our societal institutions and everyday practices (Freire et al., 2018; Rose & Kincheloe, 2003; Trend, 1992). In *Diversity and Decolonization in French Studies: New Approaches to Teaching*, Bouamer and Bourdeau (2022) display a similar collective impetus to "shake up and

[27] I refer to the narratives presented within the ELA classroom, which extend far beyond the specific texts that are examined. A thread of inquiry included in my data analysis procedures (see Chapter 4) is storytelling. The ELA teacher and students, I would argue, engage in a constant examination of human experiences through an analysis of stories. Therefore, stories could form fictional accounts and representations of reality, but also one's personal accounts and perspectives of the "real world".

reshape [the] discipline" of French language instruction (Bouamer and Bourdeau, 2022, p. 26). This text acknowledges the hegemonic and colonialist norms that have shaped French language education, much as I have discussed the loaded, political significance of teaching English. Similarly, in *Revisiting the Great White North?: Reframing Whiteness, Privilege and Identity in Education,* Lund and Carr (2015) present stories of problematizing the hegemonic whiteness of education within our Canadian context and beyond. These stories involve questioning normative constructs in education, which have aided in perpetuating societal inequalities by virtue of their lasting, systemic value. Forming a critical discourse around human experiences would not only involve a subversion of our artistic disenfranchisement in a highly Surrealist manner (Breton et al., 1972), but also allow our ELA storytelling to come to life. Asking questions and interrogating common-sense narratives could encourage students to fulfill the aims of the QEP, by examining societal values in relation to identity and the self. This discourse could also illuminate the stories that have been disregarded by the canonical framework of "proper" education (Rose & Kincheloe, 2003; Trend, 1992).

Critically Reading the Canon

It should be noted that in terms of canonical forms of knowledge, Surrealist theory does not promote the violent destruction of forms of knowledge that it opposes. William Rubin (1968) noted that the anarchy synonymous with the Dada movement's opposition to the bourgeois world was replaced by the Surrealists' "constructive, collective action" (Rubin, 1968, p. 15). This distinction is important when considering an application of Surrealist theory to contemporary ELA classrooms. When discussing arguably hegemonic structures and policies of education, along with the problematic nature of single-sided storytelling, the ELA canonical

book room is often a location of (anarchic) attack. When discussing book rooms, I am referring to a school's collection of class sets of novels. Due to the cost involved in purchasing a large number of novels, book room titles are often classical choices that are intended to stand the test of time. From my experience, there is often little turnover, or even audits, of a book room. The novels on display are often weathered (a testament to their intergenerational usage), and perhaps because of the cost (financial and mental) involved in replacing them, certain stories have impeded others from entering the conversation. The lacklustre state of an English book room, could once again be interpreted to reflect a Neoliberal illusion of choice; or, more recently, a deliberate attempt to limit choice (Pen America, 2023). While a variety of titles indeed exist, they have been legitimized and accepted into the book room over time. The lack of evolution and representation of books is often an issue of funding. David Swanger (1990) noted that the minimal financial resources allotted towards arts programs "tell us something about the status of arts in schools" (Swanger, 1990, p. 3). With certain political agendas prioritizing privatized, commercial interests, the traditional public school book room may not often find itself able to consistently renew its resources. Arguably, the book room offers a visual representation of the position education, particularly arts education, holds within society, what with its collection of often incomplete, highly weathered class sets of outdated novels. However, within Neoliberal contexts, the high school book room can face another challenge. In my first year at my current (private) institution, I was surprised that our book room resembled that of my previous workplace, an underfunded public school within an inner-city catchment zone. The book room of my new school housed many of the same authors such as Fitzgerald, Orwell and Williams, however within this new context, titles that were previously labelled as "outdated" were now considered "canonized". This observation illuminated another phenomenon of the Neoliberal

ELA: the idea that irrespective of economic context, we cannot seem to escape the discourse, which is "control[led] by the dominant class" (Shahsavari-Googhari, 2017, p. 16).

Returning to Surrealism's constructive aims, I argue that we should not address the canon from a position of violence. In other words, I do not suggest that abolishing the Secondary ELA book list in an underfunded public institution, or a privileged private one, is either realistic or beneficial for learners. It can be argued that canonized literature could oppressively promote hegemonic ideas of normality (Rose & Kincheloe, 2003) in a manner that neglects possible ideological evolution within contemporary social practices. It could also be argued that our contemporary ELA readers would feel disconnected from literary milieus in which they are not represented. The predominantly white, heteronormative, patriarchal structures depicted within novels such as my own aforementioned selections, *The Great Gatsby* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* do not account for alternative representations of gender roles, sexuality, race, or contemporary world views. These stories also fail to represent an authentic ethnic scope of characters, indicative of their present-day ELA readers. In *Shifting the Ground of Canadian Literature Studies*, Smaro Kamboureli and Robert Zacharias (2012) note the increased interest in "foregrounding of the situational and material conditions that influence the production of Canadian literary texts" within Canadian literature scholarship (Kamboureli & Zacharias, 2012, p. 1). The authors signalled the movement towards highlighting minority voices, in terms of authors and characters. This shift forms a critical subversion of the status quo literary canon, by virtue of legitimizing (and highlighting) the stories of those previously disregarded (or silenced). For example, Indigenous peoples have often been disregarded within the "networks of power relations and economies that make the nation-state" and consequently, the construction of [Canadian] culture (Kamboureli & Zacharias, 2012, p. 1). While I do not suggest throwing

Eurocentric literature into the garbage will constitute the critical shift of which the authors discussed, I do support a (Surrealist) disruption of ELA canonical representation.

Freire (2018) has cautioned that the oppressed, including progressive ELA teachers, must not become oppressors themselves, in the search for freedom (Freire et al., 2018, p. 44). If, for example, we were to adopt the previously stated anarchic position towards *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, arguing that its lack of relevant contemporary representation deems it an illegitimate choice for our ELA curriculum, we would be moving against Swanger's (1990) notion of empathetic knowledge. Such a perspective would essentially state that any individual not adhering to cisgender[28] positioning, heterosexual orientation, or Caucasian race, could not empathize with the characters of the novel. The belief that because Williams' characters have been canonized means they are somehow not able to inform us on universal human complexities is reductionist and oppressive. I personally share experiences that greatly mirror the romantic struggles and desire for love that Maggie displays within the novel. The complicity I have forged with a canonized, 1950s housewife, despite being a contemporary Doctoral student of Asian heritage, confirms the power of ELA. If, as previously noted, we aim to promote connection-building mindsets in students, abolishing the canon and the stories represented within it would counter this objective. The fact that our students exist within Neoliberal societies is a reality we cannot deny. A practice of book (room) burning would anarchically communicate that the answer to hegemony and inequality within society is to destroy, or be fearful and hide from problems. I argue that vilifying Neoliberal contexts (and the ideologies they represent) does not serve our students in a progressive manner. Instead, I suggest that criticality will greatly benefit students as they enter society.

[28] Cisgender positioning refers to individuals whose personal identities and genders correspond with their birth sex.

Returning to my study of novels, if we were to pay no attention to the "outdated" structures represented within the novel, we would be confirming our Neoliberal dominant (and restrictive) discourse of reality and normality. Also, if we chose to abandon the canon all together, without addressing the ""emergence" [of representation and voice] that is responsive to the thresholds Canadian literary studies have crossed in the first decade of the new millennium" (Kamboureli & Zacharias, 2012, p. 5), we would not be presenting an accurate mirror of the outside world. Therefore, I suggest that through critically addressing themes such as the whiteness of Williams' characters and the patriarchy of his depicted marriages, we would no longer be hiding from reality (Lund & Carr, 2015). A critical engagement with the "outdated" content could help students interrogate real, possibly lasting human tendencies. Berger (2008) suggested that we ought to question who benefits from restricting our access to certain forms of history (Berger, 2008, p. 4). In this case, acknowledging the Eurocentric agenda of limited representation is the first step. A censorship of these voices would form rulers of the contemporary oppressed. A final consideration regarding the book room debate, involves the possibility of joint voices. A number of canonized titles within Secondary book rooms have been housed on the status of legitimacy. Titles have even been removed (or also added) from book room shelves in the name of maintaining a specific set of accepted ideologies. The Surrealist method of construction and collective activism would involve making space on the shelves for new voices to coexist with the canon. Rose and Kincheloe (2003) illuminated the need to pair popular forms of art with canonical counterparts, in order to interrogate high and low stratifications of culture. Ideally, the critical, Surrealist educator would view these book rooms as places of possibility as opposed to restriction. Kamboureli and Zacharias (2012) cite Donald E. Pease's reference to the "field-imaginary", a "fundamental syntax—its tacit

assumptions, convictions, primal words, and the charged relations binding them together" (Kamboureli & Zacharias, 2012, p. 8). Here, the authors refer to the status quo, baseline hegemonic culture that is represented in the canon, calling into the question the need for contemporary revision. If the titles of a book room are not representing our lived realities, teachers should create learning opportunities for students to join this critical discussion and contemplate possibilities for change.

Statement of Inquiry

Necessity of Research within an ELA Context

According to my personal teaching experiences, there exist minimal building blocks for teachers to construct cultures of criticality. I have found that while the word is used somewhat freely within our discipline and even illustrated in the QEP (MEES, 2019/2022), students often struggle to conceptualize what criticality looks and feels like, and by extension, what constitutes its implications for the world outside the school. While the ministry advocates progressive goals for our students' learning, I have noticed criticality to exist in a constant battle of usefulness and empowerment versus the far less cognitively draining act of accepting dominant narratives. Criticality conflicts with the status quo, and especially within our reality of ever-changing news and trends, I would argue that my students' habitual practices (within and outside the classroom) do not always foster deep contemplation. I wonder, however, if our lack of effort in deconstructing and exploring criticality has caused it to become an elusive buzz word, and students' lack of engagement in ELA could possibly not reflect ambivalence, alongside missed opportunities to elicit criticality, on the part of the teacher. I also wonder if our invitations to become critically engaged have fallen short due to a lack of context within which to exercise this

form of thinking. I often notice my students compartmentalizing their ELA learning into tasks and skills, where each assignment becomes divorced from the other, and tasks fail to form any sort of big picture narrative from which to render personal meaning. As teachers, we often view the lack of engagement to be a conversation in and of itself, as there are many factors that could contribute to this reality, including screen time, exposure to fast-paced media, and more. I do not debate that these factors have a role to play in our students' perceived lack of engagement in ELA, and thus, their lack of criticality and creativity. However, it is possible that students have also not been offered authentic models or guidance for fostering their critical potentials in a way that feels significant to their own contemporary realities.

Surrealism: An Alternate Pedagogical Position

By infusing my teaching practice with Surrealist philosophy, I have attempted to create an environment for critical experimentation and the generation of creative potential. I aimed to shed light on the constructed nature of students' lives, including the social structures they have come to consider norms. By casting a critical glance on the world "as is," in an effort to consider how it came to be, I wondered if students could possibly generate more implicated, thoughtful discussion when it comes to contemplating literature and themes. As previously noted, I embarked on an act of inquiry and exploration rather than assuming that Surrealist philosophy could form a solution to the presumed problems of my ELA class. As the problems of my practice stemmed from personal observations, my act of implementing Surrealist-oriented pedagogies aimed to foster activism, interest, and connections within students' lived realities. The material we explored within the class also involved real-time observations in the field.

Ultimately, I aimed to observe my ELA discipline and examine a shared experience of teaching and learning a curriculum infused with a criticality-oriented artistic philosophy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the theoretical context that housed my Surrealism-inspired teacher-researcher study. I highlighted curricular needs and possibilities within my ELA teaching context, while forming theoretical links with the goals of historic Surrealism. I also connected Surrealism to Critical Pedagogy on the basis of shared emancipatory goals. This linkage counters the goals and outcomes of Neoliberalism, which I address as the societal context of my study. Within this conversation, I also address certain norms such as canonized literary works, and areas for imagining new (Surrealist) realities for ELA. In the next chapter, I will highlight the methodological foundations of my in-class experimentation with Surrealism-inspired pedagogies.

Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations: Surrealist Philosophy and the (ELA) Classroom

Within this chapter, I will describe the methodological strands of my teacher-researcher study. I start by describing some examples of Surrealist-inspired pedagogical approaches to teaching. I then revisit aesthetics as a methodological strand, as the goal of transactional (Rosenblatt, 1994) engagements with texts formed an experimental focus within my Secondary ELA classroom. I then describe narrative inquiry, as my qualitative research data will be expressed in the form of a narrative account in Chapter 6. Finally, I will describe self-study, as my observations of and my engagement with the students of my class only formed part of my inquiry. I am particularly interested in how my (teacher)-self determined the decisions made within my classroom.

Introduction of Surrealism Pedagogies and Establishing my Stance

From September 2019 to June 2020, I collected observational data on my Secondary Five combined ELA and ERC class, at my institution, a Montreal private school. I would see students seven times out of a ten-day cycle, and would produce jot-note-style write-ups promptly following each class, to record a consistent and continuous flow of events. These notes, along with my other data artefacts, would eventually be used to form a narrative account in Chapter 6 of this thesis. I attempted, through this narrative, to represent the specific experience of ELA teaching and learning that we constructed together.

I decided to implement Surrealism into the ELA curriculum, not as a stand-alone unit, but rather, an overarching philosophy. I was interested in whether or not this philosophy of divergence, creativity and openness could have an impact on the ELA curriculum and our aims

to engage with real-world issues. I investigated how Surrealist-inspired pedagogies could form a laboratory of experimentation where students could play with concepts of critique and dialogue in an effort to imagine new opportunities for their world. While Surrealist pedagogical strategies in ELA remains a relatively unexplored domain, a niche of educators have begun experimenting with the philosophy in their practices, as described below.

Eva-Lynn Powell (1971) developed an English Literature course within the Dade County Public School Board in Miami, Florida, centered on "expos[ing] the absurdity of conventional social and literary modes" (Powell, 1971) in a subversive, Surrealist manner. While the specific level at which her course was taught was not specified on her course plan, Powell's (1971) introduction to abstract concepts such as absurdism, as well as notable literary and human-centered tropes, suggests an older Secondary audience. Within her curriculum, Powell began by exposing her students to visual representations of absurdity through Dada and Surrealist art work (Powell, 1971, p. 8). Through dialogue, students within this course had the opportunity to dissect issues of faulty communication, societal hypocrisy, and illusions and self-protection in relation to human nature. Students could also experiment with language, exploring the concept of nonsensical expression and conversely, concepts of logic and reason. Powell's critique of social conventions and her efforts to render established (oppressive) reality "absurd" echo my aims to problematize narrow ways of seeing, while creating dialogues surrounding our existence.

Judith Heyman (2002) also experimented with Surrealist notions of absurdity and nonsense in her Secondary Language Arts lesson plan. Essentially, this conscious choice to view reality as something other than finite and unquestionable, destabilizes the norms and potentially oppressive power dynamics that structure society (Neoliberal or otherwise). Heyman used *Alice in Wonderland* as a basis to explore concepts of dreams, experience, and consequently, reality.

Through an engagement with the text and Surrealist artwork, Heyman invited students to consider concepts of society and culture and question how these constructions influence our understandings of normality (and deviance). This process of critically analyzing what we know to be "normal" is the direction I took in guiding students' understandings within my study.

Other Surrealist-inspired applications include Janka Balogh's (2015) use of the Surrealist movement's tenets of creativity and discomfort to elicit more spontaneous creation in dance classes. Balogh (2015) highlighted the workshops she conducted for young adults, aged 15-18 in Budapest, Hungary. She used Surrealist art works such as pictures and objects to stimulate inspiration and allow students to move out of their self or societally-imposed limitations. Balogh highlighted the Surrealism movement's focus on fantasy and psychic realities to evoke emotions within her students and encourage spontaneous creative movements. Balogh also discussed the highly reflective nature of Surrealism, aiming to channel the movement's connection between mind and body, indicative of Surrealist automatic writing (Breton et al., 1972). Within my study, I echo Balogh's interest in deconstructing limits of the mind and exploring new expressions of artistic production, through my Surrealist-style subversion of societal norms (see Chapter 4).

Olivia Gude (2010) offered another application of Surrealist pedagogies, specifically geared towards eliciting creativity in Secondary art classes. Gude, through her curriculum, identified the need for more fearless creative play in the creation of art. Gude noted that experimentation and "[s]urrender[ing]…[to an artistic pursuit will allow students to] find [themselves] outside of the comforting constraints of conformity." (Gude, 2010, p. 32) Gude highlighted relevant observations of anxiety and resistance to new and unknown concepts such as abstract imagery or themes. This level of discomfort mirrored my own students' heavy reliance on single, "correct" answers when analyzing texts. For this reason, much as Gude

attempted to work through the fear of her students to foster creativity, I attempted to defamiliarize my students' established norms and invite them to explore new ways of reading texts (and the world). Gude's opportunity to engage in artistic creative play could have value within the ELA classroom. Within my study, I also invited students to engage in the physical act of creative art making, through an introductory collage activity (see Chapter 4). I aimed to have students reflect upon the spontaneous art-making process, as a means of expressing personal perspectives on universal big ideas.

Finally, Donald Kunze (n.d.) developed an example of Surrealist Gardens as a pedagogical model for experiencing the Surrealist notion of the uncanny within landscape architecture education at the university level (Kunze & Benham, n.d., p. 1). The gardens provided a pedagogical experimental space where students were able to perform their learning in an experiential manner. By questioning traditional logic when creating designs, Kunze, like Gude, invited students to embrace a Surrealist level of strangeness and discomfort within the creative process. This concept of constructing experiences through active learning mirrors my creation of a Surrealist experimental laboratory.

While the link between Surrealism and education has been the subject of several experimental projects, I argue that there is still significant space to develop this relationship. I aimed, within my study, to enhance criticality and engagement within ELA. I isolated these areas when considering possible needs for Surrealist-style intervention. Also, while many of these projects focus upon creativity, which I indeed explored, my research was guided by an interest in everyday life and constructed norms. My specific interpretation of Surrealist education therefore involved using the movement's philosophy to contemplate the constructed

nature of our world. These considerations thereby invited students to form critical perspectives, and possibly imagine new possibilities for society.

Methodological Strands of Exploration

Within this study, I aimed to form Surrealist-style associations between the strands of Neoliberalism, Critical Pedagogy and Surrealism. Here, I refer to the Surrealist practice of deconstructing societal (and conceptual) barriers and forming connections between often disassociated entities (Breton et al., 1972). Surrealist philosophy prioritizes the quest for thought unhindered by convention, which forms a gateway to fully free expression. Therefore, in dismantling the "limiting" barriers that structure our lives, Surrealist philosophy seeks to form connectedness; or, associations that build understandings. This effort to create a joint conversation between several seemingly disjunctive strands of thought mirrors David Corbet's (2016) creation of an "imaginary museum" (Corbet, 2016). In his publication, Corbet juxtaposed a variety of artistic works from differing time periods and contexts, thus creating a curated collection of voices. These voices reflected "historical polarizations" (Corbet, 2016, p. 8), which could otherwise fuel binaries of thought. In other words, the cultural and societal commentaries embodied in the works could cause viewers to interpret their messages in isolation from one another. However, Corbet questioned these binaries and formed connections to "create a better society" (Corbet, 2016, p. 8). Similarly, I forged theoretical associations to discover new possibilities for the ELA domain. I suggest that my goals reflect ambitions of activism, similar to Corbet's critical subversion of limits of perception when approaching artistic works; and, by extension, the rendering of meaning. My activist goals stem from my personal challenges within the ELA domain, and borrow from the Surrealists' defense of art's relationship with life. Within

this exploration, I have also chosen to examine the concept of aesthetic experiences. This concept has formed a base of inquiry into developing my methodological framework for this study. In addition, I have examined the domains of self-study and narrative inquiry, as these concepts have informed the goals and structure of my research.

Aesthetics

David Swanger, (1990) in his discussion on aesthetics, noted that "the role of art and the artist is not to provide the grease but the squeak" (Swanger, 1990, p. 19). Swanger (1990) further suggested that education offers the grounds for activism, with art and aesthetic instructors stimulating social change. Swanger's (1990) aesthetic educator is conceptualized as an individual who pays close attention to the production and viewership of art, while also bringing into conversation the role that art plays in education (and life) (Swanger, 1990, p. 21). Through discussing the relationship between art and the world we live in, as well as the role of the imagination in creating and fueling aesthetic experiences, Swanger (1990) brought to light the personal, and what Rosenblatt (1994) would refer to as transactional quality of interacting with art. Swanger (1990) noted that within aesthetic experiences, "[t]he reader should be carried forward…by the pleasurable activity of the mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself" (Swanger, 1990, p. 33). This conceptualization suggests that aesthetic experiences involve creation and contemplation and invite readers or purveyors to become active in their encounters with art as opposed to passively learning an established, legitimized way of seeing. Rosenblatt (1994) noted that, as opposed to efferent reading, where readers are primarily concerned with information gathering, aesthetic reading experiences involve "what happens during the actual reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 24). As Rosenblatt (1994) observed, efferent and aesthetic

reading do not exist in conflict with one another, and I do not advocate favouring one particular method over the other. I recognize that efferent reading holds a place within (ELA) education and life, which is reflected in Biesta's (2009) notion of qualification. I argue, however, that students and teachers often approach ELA in a manner that constitutes information acquisition, (i.e., efferent reading) almost exclusively. An introduction of experiential aesthetics could possibly offer opportunities for engagement and the rendering of personal significance from texts. Rosenblatt's (1994) notion of evoking a poem (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 49) suggests, once again, the power of the reader and artistic purveyor in creating a shared aesthetic experience. This active engagement involves different readers using their own sets of understandings and stories to move and transform a reading experience. This also reflects the Surrealist fascination with the powers of the mind and the possibilities that can result from rendering it free to play (Breton et al., 1972). Rosenblatt's (1994) exploration of the role of the reader has been especially pertinent to my own ELA reality, as she shed light on the reader, who is, in my case, the learner. Her theoretical articulation of the textual experience helped me contextualize some of my own observations and inquiries within the classroom. And it is consequently this conceptualization of aesthetics as an experience rather than "traditional" education (Giroux, 1988) that brought me closer to Surrealist philosophy and a goal of exploring ELA as integrated into students' lives (rather than standing outside of them).

Narrative Inquiry

As I aimed to foster aesthetic experiences within my ELA classroom, I needed a method that captured our process of play, while also allowing for subsequent pedagogical analysis. Susan E. Chase, (2005) noted that "[a] narrative tells a…story about something significant" (in

Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 62). I therefore chose to present my research data, which constituted a co-constructed experience, in the form of a narrative (Pickard, 2017). Lynn Butler Kisber (2010) noted that the historical roots of narrative inquiry involved recognizing that "it is impossible for numbers to portray the complexity of human experience" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 64). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Clandinin (2007) discussed the transactional quality of experience, and how it results from the "continuous interaction with all aspects of the environment" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also stated that narrative inquiry involves "collaboration between researcher and participants", which suggests that the researcher is both the subject and object of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). In my situation as an ELA teacher, this "reflexive" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 65) understanding could help in acknowledging my own positionality, including the conditioning, past experiences and biases that I bring to my classroom (Ingersoll, 2012). Recognizing the collaborative nature of narrative inquiry also illuminates how my position as the researcher involves both observations on and with my participants. These individuals bring their own experiences (stories) to our shared space, thus holding the power to shape and shift our shared account. I interpret narrative inquiry to offer the possibility of presenting a shared experience of ELA teaching, which in and of itself contains "multiple versions of [the] experience" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 67). This methodology is appropriate for my research interests, as it suggests education to be an intrinsically human enterprise that is made up of individual subjects all coming together and interacting within a communal environment. Learning and the experience of education can therefore not be treated as a generalizable affair, due to the human variables that students bring to the classroom. In addition, despite the existence of standardized teaching procedures, materials and mandates, a narrative inquiry approach to education also recognizes the

multiplicity of perspectives on any given phenomenon. As noted by Jerome Bruner (2002), quoted by Butler-Kisber (2010), "depending on the author/creator, virtually the same experience can produce different narrative accounts and all stories are always partial and perspectival" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 66). My colleagues and I have recognized how students react to our teaching in different ways. We have often reduced this observation to issues of "personality", rather than connecting that aspect of personality to the role of the teacher-as-person. Even when teaching with the same tools, deadlines and ministry-mandated regulations, my teaching reality and thus, my students' experiences of being members of my classroom community, differ substantially from those of my colleagues. Likewise, the experiences of my students can vary from one group to the next, depending on the individuals in a particular class, or even my own temperament on that particular day (or time of day). Dobson (2013) described the duality of personas a teacher assumes within everyday life. Through a personal example, Dobson (2013) illustrated how she arrived to her classroom one day, following an argument with her partner, and promptly entered a different mental space; or in other words, a different role. Dobson (2013) noted that previously, she had reconciled her dual personas, including her everyday self (reality) and her amplified teacher performance. However, her specific moment of creating a particularly meaningful learning experience with her students caused Dobson (2013) to call into question her separated selves. Essentially, rather than reducing her private self to her "reality" and her teacher self to a construction, Dobson (2013) recognized both selves contributed to her identity. I will expand on the impact of exploring teacher identities in the Self-Study portion of this chapter.

Returning to Dobson's revelation, I particularly connected to her own narrative account of a teaching event. While later regretting that she had been at the same time present (physically,

as her teacher self) and absent (as her preoccupied private self) from the moment, Dobson (2013) noted that "all [of her students] were as aware as [she] was that something truly extraordinary was occurring between [them]" (Dobson, 2013, p. 253). In Dobson's (2013) case, her experience consisted of an oral French lesson that involved her students enthusiastically constructing meaning through drills. The lesson, in its vibrancy, created a "lyrical rhythm of ebb and flow" (Dobson, 2013, p. 253) that was powerful enough to remove Dobson (2013) from her previous worried state (self). Therefore, to examine an educational experience such as this with purely quantitative methods would be to negate all of the human intricacies that created the event, separate from the teaching materials and curriculum. I argue that these materials, including lesson plans and assignments, are merely tools that, without the unpredictable, subjective ingredient of human learners and teachers (and criticality and the imagination), cannot constitute education.

Ethical Considerations: Crafting a "Reality" Narrative

The act of representing reality in narrative form illuminates not only a Surrealist dilemma of subjective representations, but also the notion of power imbalance. Narrative accounts are stories, and as Tom Barone stated, "not all stories are innocent." (Barone, 2001, p. 155). Barone (2001) argued that stories could represent propagandistic aims that support a particular cultural script; in other words, a particular version of reality. Berger (2008) furthered Barone's assertion, purporting that all ways of seeing the world reflect stories that communicate specific calculated messages (Berger, 2008). In this regard, the power struggles surrounding the transmission of stories cannot be ignored when attempting to pursue an act of narrative inquiry within my anti-oppressive (Freire et al., 2018) educational framework. I will expand on the ethical complexities

of my storyteller position as well as the process I took in creating my narrative account in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Nonetheless, I argue that a preliminary consideration on the power dynamics involved in narrative writing is necessary to contextualize the methodological orientation of my study.

The notion of power became contentious on two levels within my research. The first involved my position as a researcher telling my story; the second was the collective aim of our classroom community to interrogate dominant societal narratives. In terms of the former concern regarding my role as the sole storyteller of our classroom narrative, I attempted to make transparent, as much as possible, my positioning as a privileged researcher. I contextualized my privileged position (within the final narrative account and my interactions with students) within the context of the Western academy while also describing the power I yield as an educator within my classroom. While I attempted to adopt a Surrealist, anti-oppressive emancipatory lens when presenting my narrative, I nonetheless recognize the inherent personal bias behind my telling of the tale. Barone (2001) acknowledged that when comprising narrative accounts, he has often filled in gaps to create narrative flow, whilst retaining central themes (Barone, 2001, p. 169). Inevitably, being the storyteller, my narrative was transmitted through my own memory of experiences, and my interpretation of how events unfolded. This highly interpretive engagement involved my attempt to construct a representation of thematic and causal meaning surrounding our classroom experience (Andrews et al., 2013). I therefore questioned my own reliability as a storyteller to ensure I did not repeat dominant discourses by virtue of my limited, societally constructed lens (Barone, 2001, p. 170). I aimed to address this power struggle by amassing plurality of voice through my interactions with students. Through transparency of my

positioning, I presented my findings as a version of our reality rather than a claim of generalizable truth.

The second issue of power and stories could be used as a catalyst for emancipatory action. Public narratives, including what constitutes "normal" education and "proper" trajectories of societal success often fail to address the implicit human realities involved in the creation of culture (Andrews et al., 2013, p. 3). These implicit, often unquestioned narratives, in our case involving (Neoliberal) societal norms, therefore enable policy makers to offer the illusion of objective normality rather than a calculated set of social codes (Andrews et al., 2013; McEwan & Egan, 1995). Our goal, therefore, when creating a narrative surrounding our classroom experience, involved recognizing the lack of innocence in the stories that surround us. In doing so, our act of Surrealist experimentation involved seeking out new possible realities for education and life. We constantly challenged the dominant story of "normal" and my students and I engaged in a co-construction of our communal experience. For example, rather than presenting big ideas such as sexuality or love through a specific narrative lens, my students and I would open a conversation. We would ask questions and attempt to make relevant the abstract, complicated content of our class. By engaging in dialogue and asking questions, the students and I experimented with possibilities surrounding these human-centered themes, in hopes of rendering personal meaning from them.

Narrative accounts "carry traces of human lives that [researchers] want to understand" (Andrews et al., 2013). In my particular context, I aimed to use students' engagement and behaviour within our classroom society to contemplate my ELA domain. I aimed, with our narrative, to raise questions surrounding teaching and learning that may be glossed over by societal norms (Barone, 2001, p. 154). I endeavoured to tell a story of not only how to address a

lack of criticality through the implementation of a new philosophical stance, but examine the human interactions that constitute an (rather than "the") ELA experience. In a sense, our active pursuit of richer, more critical ELA educational possibilities presented my students as characters within our shared story rather than subjects of research (Clandinin, 2007). This research dynamic reflected the complex interdependence of self and other involved in creating my narrative, and by extension, a new, emancipatory classroom culture.

Self-Study

I notice that my students' moods and engagement differ depending on whether I see them during the sleepy hours of first period, or the painfully starving hours of third period just before lunch. While these common factors are often accounted for when discussing teachers and learners, analyzing the "variables" that each member of the community brings to a class could help to not only provide a multidimensional narrative account that more authentically represents our lived experience, but also confirm that a class is comprised of unique individuals. I envision this concept to involve each student bringing a metaphorical backpack to every class. The contents of the backpack, and the materials with which a student is equipped could vary depending on personal circumstances. One day the student may have a full bag, brimming with inspirational items, allowing for full engagement and involvement in our course content. Another day, the student may carry some rocks from others, which require transport. The rocks could weigh down the student and cause fatigue, stress and even sadness. I was inspired by Peggy McIntosh's (2020) invisible backpack analogy which she uses to conceptualize racial privilege, as, like a privilege backpack, a student's stories-backpack is invisible. Discovering what students bring in their backpacks has become a natural (and necessary) part of forming

relational bonds and attempting to understand my students' learning journeys. However, recognizing that students carry a backpack and that the contents vary constantly, is a valuable first step. Even fluctuations in a teacher's life can have a significant impact on students. I also carry a backpack to class, and the contents that are currently contained within it are as important as the items I held well in advance of becoming a teacher; especially when engaging in an exploration of our educational experience.

Lewis Carroll's caterpillar repeatedly asked, "Who are you?" a question that Alice likely never contemplated prior to entering Wonderland (Carroll, 1992). The power and uneasiness of Wonderland came in its (Surrealist) subversion of Alice's established ideas of reality. Within my self-study, I asked myself this same question in an effort to deconstruct my own reality and critically explore my identity as a teacher (and person). Dobson (2013) noted that "[i]f we do not know who we are, how on earth can we know what we are doing?" (Dobson, 2013, p. 254). Through a focus on the teacher identity, Dobson (2013) reconceptualized the "reality" of the teacher persona. Dobson (2013) illuminated the problematic nature of the private-professional teacher identity dichotomy, by recognizing the shared origins of these selves. Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber (1999) articulated how teachers' past experiences have a profound impact on the ways they approach their practices. Reflections upon these experiences can help teachers better understand their present circumstances and the pedagogical choices they make (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 6). Mitchell and Weber (1999) presented different strategies for doing memory work in the process of engaging in self-study. One of these strategies included the examination of photographs, which in the case of the authors, consisted of school themed pictures (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 74). The authors noted that "[p]hotographs are something we just take for granted, they get taken, we look at them, we hide them away, or we display them" (Mitchell &

Weber, 1999, p. 74). This observation illuminates the degree to which capturing moments is a natural part of our lives, but also how we often do not contemplate how these moments can be placed together to form a continuing story. Teresa Strong-Wilson (2008) described the process of memory work in self-study to constitute an excavation of artefacts from our personal pasts (Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 22). The process of remembering the events of one's past also involves re-experiencing these memories anew, "such that remembering becomes an event" (Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 78). Therefore, in the process of digging into our pasts and amassing artefacts that can speak to our present circumstances, the act of analyzing these artefacts and remembering the circumstances within which they were created, constitutes a (possibly transformative) experience unto itself. Brian Benoit (2006), in addition to using a curated collection of photographs to inform his memory work and self-study for his Doctoral thesis, also utilized a popular television series to raise questions about his personal identity and the imbedded narratives he brought to his teaching practice (Benoit, 2016). Benoit's (2016) approach recognized that the individual cannot be considered in isolation, and that an effort to analyze the "self" necessitates an attention to context. Allan Feldmann et al. (2004) as cited in Clare Kosnik (2006) noted that self-study involves focusing upon the self, whilst rendering it problematic (Kosnik, 2006, p. 38). I do not interpret this statement to infer that teachers conducting self-studies should consider their practices to be problematic; rather, it should involve casting critical glances upon their personal selves in an effort to make sense of their teaching professions. I argue that self-study involves an attempt to understand the identities that often get checked at the classroom door when we put on our "teacher" hats. This recognition that the divide between professional and private is erroneous ultimately suggests how all teaching and learning is a matter of personal experience. Keeping in mind this relationship between the private and public

teacher, I chose to examine my own collection of personal photographs, similar to Benoit's (2016) process. These photographs, pulled from my life outside the classroom, provide evidence of my private self, which, at the same time, is constantly heading to or from the school place. Bringing personal artefacts into my exploratory conversation of teaching and my own teacher identity has offered insight into my personal pedagogical decisions. I will describe the details of my photographic self-study in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Arts Informed vs. Arts Based

When pursuing Surrealist possibilities in education alongside my students, I initially believed my research would follow an arts-based methodological approach. Upon closer consideration, however, I recognized that the tenets of arts-based research did not entirely align with my context of ELA education and my method of data presentation and analysis. Donald Blumenfield-Jones, as cited in Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2018) purported that arts-based research "begins in making art and, along the way, is inevitably "political."" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 48) This political impetus entirely reflects the need for critical engagement that has fueled my inquiry. However, within the methodological umbrella of arts-based research, there also lies the intrinsic factor of representation, itself forming a categoric break from traditional methods of expression. As the "output" I aimed to have my students produce within my Surrealist laboratory did not change from existing curricular components of reading response and article writing, alternative representation was not a factor in our exploration. However, the emancipatory impetus and goals of arts-based alternative research were thoroughly applicable when considering our desire to achieve critical engagement and challenging dominant discourses. I have conceptualized arts-based methodologies to consist of

two main components: art-making and emancipatory philosophy. These elements are intrinsically linked, but for my own research purposes, I focused more on the goals of arts-based research, borrowing from its philosophies of action rather than its tenets of visual representation. As such, my methodology constitutes an arts-informed approach rather than an exclusively arts-based methodology.

Art Making

The art making component of arts-based research emphasizes scholars' desires to break with traditional, institutional ideas of research and representation (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018). This break from statistics, charts and academic write-ups could invite possibilities for more complete representations of (human) complexity, while inviting reflection upon relevant societal issues. When expressing data findings, "scholartists…rearrang[e] semiotic symbols and signs…seek[ing] a visceral encounter with raw materiality." (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 5). This experiential, aesthetic method of data recording also constitutes data making, as arts-based researchers construct methods of expression to pose questions, in lieu of where traditional research methods would present results. Tom Barone and Eliot Eisner (2012) emphasized how arts-based research methods allow scholars "to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable" (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Arts-based research puts a heavy emphasis on representational forms, and the tools with which we construct our expressions of meaning. Within my field research, I indeed had students produce collages during my introduction to Surrealism pedagogies, in an effort to communicate their personal feelings on big ideas (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Students used this visual medium to encapsulate feelings and

messages, later using these resources as inspiration for the creation of opinion articles. In terms of data representation, I also explored Atlas TI (see Chapter 4) and illustrated relationships between my theoretical strands of inquiry through a visual mind map. Therefore, while I indeed included a small component of art-making within my research, I ultimately presented my findings in a written (rather than multimodal) narrative account. While Barone & Eisner (2012) noted that "[a]nything well made, employing skill and sensitivity to form and not prized only for its practical utility but for the quality of experience that it generates [constitutes]…an art form" (p. 7), the narrative form is somewhat complicated in status. Undeniably, narratives constitute literary art forms, but even within my practice, I have noted a marked distinction between my domain of the ELA and the department of Fine Arts. Fine Arts disciplines involve the creation of forms such as sculptures, paintings and drawings, along with performance pieces such as theatre, song and dance. If we are to understand the art-making component of arts-based research to constitute a methodological break from conventional forms, writing a story about my classroom experience could still constitute art making. However, there is also the important element of using alternate methods to achieve what words cannot capture, which would mean my artistic use of narratives constitutes more "English" than "Fine".

Emancipatory Aims

Underlying the art-making representations of arts-based research, lies the emancipatory aims that mirror my Surrealist impetus. Blumenfeld-Jones (2017), as cited in Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund (2018) articulated the artist's journey to be an emancipatory exploration of power in human experiences (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 48). Liberty essentially comes through arts-based research's questioning of conventional narratives and "critiqu[e] [of]

the politically conventional and the socially orthodox" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 49). This interrogation of the status quo is reflected in the Critical Pedagogy framework that grounded my Surrealist aims to problematize (Neoliberal) norms. In addition, Surrealist philosophy is centered on combatting dominant narratives, societal norms, and rationality that restrict free thought (Breton et al., 1972). Blumenfeld-Jones (2017) invoked Kelley (2002), who connected aims of emancipatory thought to historic Surrealist philosophy. Blumenfeld-Jones (2017) furthered this established connection, which has been rather validating for my particular research goals, by articulating a concept of the wild imagination. This concept displays the drive of arts-based research, as it aims to embrace the imagination and subvert the ordinary, mundane and taken-for-granted elements of everyday life. This pre-logic approach to free thought creates an environment for play and the ability to deconstruct societal, cultural, and politcal walls of understanding and being (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 55). While Blumenfeld-Jones (2017) reiterated that making art is an important component of arts-based research, he has also noted that the methodology involves questioning our existence and "becom[ing] skeptical of ourselves" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 64). This process of having students recognize their conditional societal freedom, while offering a space (the classroom) to experiment with new possibilities and desires through dialogue and engagement, once again reflects the arts-informed nature of my research framework.

Conclusion

Within this chapter, I described the methodological context of my teacher-researcher study, starting with some existing examples of Surrealism-inspired pedagogical inspiration. I then described aesthetics as a methodological strand, which informed my goals of increasing

engagement and personal meaning making with texts. I then described narrative inquiry, as I used a narrative account to express my qualitative study data. My discussion of self-study highlighted my simultaneous exploration of my students and my personal identity, in attempting to discover new areas of exploration within our shared ELA domain.

Chapter 4: The ELA Experiment Part 1: Collecting Student Data

In this chapter, I describe the methods and procedures for collecting the student data of my teacher-researcher study. I discuss the recruitment of my specific research participants, along with my data collection procedures. My first element of data included jot notes, in which I recorded my observations of in-class interactions. My second data element included interviews, which were conducted with volunteer participants. For each of these strands, I include my analysis procedures for processing my data. I also describe the methods I used for inviting my students to engage with my Surrealism-inspired approach to ELA. These included an introductory discussion on the movement, as well as an art-making activity that utilized Surrealist found-art principles to inspire the writing process in ELA.

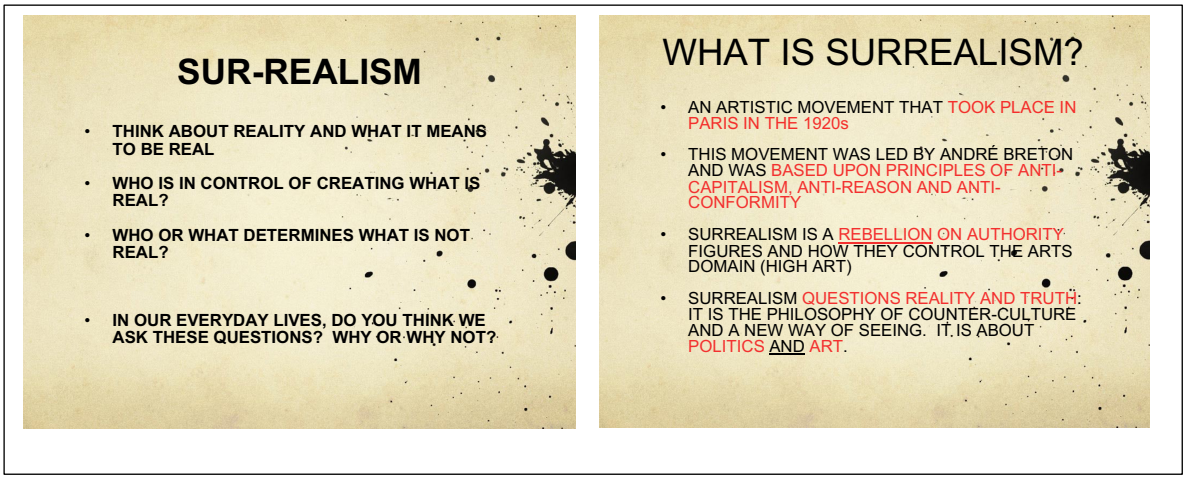
Recruitment and Integration of Surrealist Impetus

My participants consisted of fifteen Secondary Five ELA and ERC students. At the beginning of the year, along with discussing the goals for our curriculum, which largely involved preparation for the ministry examination, I described my Surrealist impetus and research project. I introduced students to the concept of my Doctoral work, and the notion that teachers are also learners. I hoped to create transparency with students regarding my intentions, displaying my curiosity and my gaps in knowledge. I aimed to build an environment of inquiry and experimentation that departs from the (traditional) notion of a teacher as the sole bearer of knowledge (Freire et al., 2018; Giroux, 1988). My Surrealist interests would therefore form part of our pedagogical philosophy, as I worked to create a culture of openness and criticality. I also spoke about English and my passion for the subject, sharing my observations about ELA teaching and learning, and how it could often become mechanical and lack excitement. I

intended to show the students that my goal lay in discovering possibilities and optimizing what I argued to be the potential of ELA education—the development of critical understandings of humanity and the creation of connections between course content and students' lived experiences. The reason for shaping my research goals in this way was to help my students better understand (and ideally relate to) my objectives. I ensured my language and motivations remained approachable and appropriate to my learners, as I relied on their participation and understandings to co-construct my teaching and learning experience.

Methods and Procedures

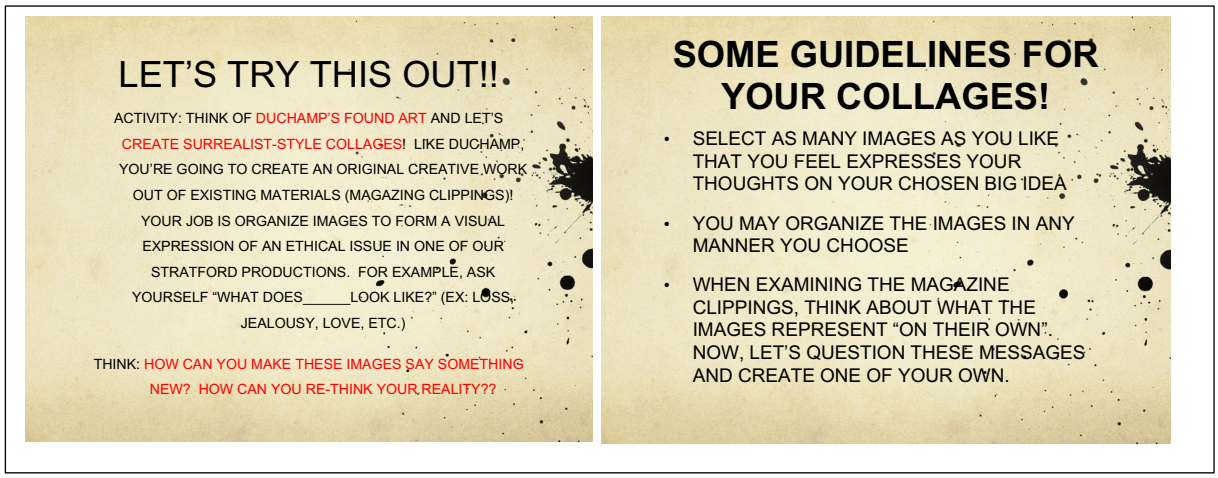
Rather than frontloading an exploration of the Surrealist movement and art history, I offered a brief introduction to the origins of the movement and aimed to show the contextual value its philosophy could hold within contemporary contexts (see references in Appendix 1).



I started with a discussion of reality, inviting students to consider what (or whom) dictates what can be considered "real". I then moved into a discussion about the historic Surrealism movement, illustrating the traditions against which it rebelled. I spoke about some key Surrealist

artists before summing up some main tenets of Surrealist art (form, content, and the works' relationship with (and subversion against) "normal" art).

Finally, I introduced Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* which constitutes a form of Surrealist found art. Students then engaged in a collage-making exercise in the Surrealist tradition of making something new out of existing items (Rubin, 1968).



The framework I set in place was intended to establish a base for the deconstruction of traditional power structures within the classroom (teacher vs. learner) and the creation of a laboratory, reflective of Dewey's (1940) Laboratory School, for experimentation with ideas. Especially with my students being focused on the ministry exam, the curriculum could appear restrictive in terms of creative opportunities. Even when teachers deliberately avoid "teaching to the test", students' lack of engagement with new, exciting opportunities could reflect a conditioned, survival-method prioritization of what they "need" to know. Therefore, aside from an introductory glimpse into the Surrealist movement and my established focus on the philosophy of the movement rather than the specific artistic works, the only Surrealist-exclusive activity that students engaged in was our found-art collages (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Students, upon returning from the Stratford Theatre Festival, isolated an ethical issue present in one of the productions. I then asked the students to use old magazines to visually represent this idea (see samples below).

Sample 1: Collage Representation of "Is it okay to excuse a bad guy who shows you love?"

Sample 2: Collage Representation of "Is it still selfishness if we have nothing?"

In addition to performing an act of "found art" (Rubin, 1968), the activity was intended to have students engage with ideas, spark their inspiration, and make unexpected associations. I aimed for this activity to build the foundation for an article-writing task. Here are the instructions I offered the students:

Collage to Article: Craft and Express an Opinion

Now that you have successfully created visual collages, let's use them as inspiration for our upcoming opinion articles. Your collages have been created based upon an ethical issue of your choice, which was present in one of our Stratford productions.

1. In groups of two, you are going to present your collages to a peer. This activity is intended to get your creative juices flowing and help transfer your visual messages into words.
2. When your peer is discussing, use our Zwiers discussion functions (add, contradict/disagree, focus, analyze, opinion, evidence) to help them create as rich an opinion as possible.
3. As well, help guide your partner to ensure the ethical issue is being examined from as many angles as possible.
4. Finally, engage in a discussion with your partner about the images he/she/they used. Ask why he/she/they chose these specific images, and discuss the personal significance/understandings behind them (ex: if I use an image of Starbucks coffee, what does it mean to me, why did I use it, what is my personal understanding of what Starbucks represents)
5. Following your discussion and peer feedback, **record the top five salient (important) points that were raised through your personal collage presentation**. These points will help you construct an outline and eventually a set of arguments that will make up your opinion article.

Students were previously presented with Zwiers' (2014) conversational building methods. These methods systematize critical discussion, by establishing different components for constructing meaningful conversations. These methods include adding a point, contradicting or disagreeing to a point that has been raised, asserting an opinion, establishing a clearer focus on a point of discussion, analyzing arguments that have been raised, and providing evidence to support assertions (Zwiers, 2014). I felt these conversation starters could help students structure their conversations, while their Surrealist found-art collages served as the basis for their reflections. The goal for this activity lay in having students critically reflect upon their artistic productions, which aimed to visually express their perspectives on an ethical issue; or, in other words, a complicated human-centered ELA theme. By using discussion to deconstruct, justify and reflect

upon the artistic processes, I hoped for students to develop and concretize their understandings of their chosen ethical issues. Even if students chose certain collage images on instinct, without conscious regard, I invited them to make sense of these choices through discussion. This process could help in illuminating the personal values surrounding students' chosen ethical issues, by virtue of the images they chose as forms of expression. These understandings of personal values could then bolster students' eventual writing processes.

I used the theme of "societal conventions" to anchor our exploration, while avoiding extensive terminology linked to Surrealism. This term would later adopt a Surrealist stance, as students would refer to this concept when dissecting literature and exploring human themes. Ultimately, I aimed to discuss the "human" motivations behind the Surrealists' rebellion against the control of the art world by the government and elites. This led to a discussion on art creation and production. I felt the similarly misconstrued subject of Visual Arts has the potential to foster identity and expression, and connect to the objectives and possibilities of ELA. However, I have observed students to treat these subjects as decidedly distinct, with the former being reduced to luxury and purely visual compilations of colours and materials, and the latter being a question of technical grammar and language rules[29]. It appears, according to my observations, that despite holding an important place in academic conversations (Carpenter II et al., 2021), meaning making, voice and rights have been slower to forge a place in Visual Arts or ELA classrooms.

[29] While I recognize that I do not have a formal background in the visual arts, my limited experiences as a student in Secondary art classes as well as my observations in the field have fueled this perspective. A former colleague of mine frequently blurred the lines of her Visual Arts discipline and incorporated aspects of history, philosophy and English into her curriculum. This holistic presentation of the arts highlighted human experiences and an expression of them through art. I observed this colleague's classes during my first year of teaching, on the basis of personal interest. Despite my colleague's human-centered focus, the students appeared to be disoriented by the mindlessness (freedom) of the artistic process, as opposed to being fueled by it. Consequently, the students prioritized the technical execution of artistic productions rather than the motivations behind their creation. I wondered whether or not this reliance on technique could be connected to a (societal) need for answers and measurable, concrete production. Perhaps the technical, single-answer elements of art also more closely aligned with the students' perceptions of education.

Despite how the Visual Arts domain asserts its power and impetus to make "real world" connections, these possibilities have not appeared, in my experience, to be shared with other arts subjects (ELA and ERC). My introductory discussion on the Surrealist movement simply aimed to expose students to the historical context of the movement (Paris in the 1920s), some examples of Surrealist techniques (uncanny content matter, unexpected/illogical forms, rejection of the "real", etc.) and their departure from traditional methods (Rubin, 1968). I also aimed to emphasize the movement's interest in calling into question the structures around us that have been taken for granted (norms). I then isolated several strands of (philosophical) exploration for the year: an identification and questioning of the "norms" that surround us, a critical interrogation of how these norms came to be considered "normal," and an experimental engagement with the imagination in an effort to envision new possibilities for our world (Greene, 2011).

Data Collection: Observational Jot Notes

Casey Burkholder and Jennifer Thompson (2020) noted that "[f]]ieldnotes aid in documenting observation, description, and interpretation" (p. 1), which made the method valuable for capturing my teaching and learning experience. During the first two terms of the year, I engaged in in-class observations, following a notetaking approach similar to that of Catherine Vanner (2020), as cited in in Burkholder and Thompson (2020). As Vanner (2020) observed students' reactions in response to her use of a fieldnotes notebook, I quickly recognized that in-time jot notes had a jarring effect on students' participation. As they possibly felt they were being "watched", I adopted a system similar to Vanner (2020), who kept mental notes when observing the students, later recording thoughts on paper when they were working or out of

sight. Since I did not use any form of video or audio recording devices, I had to rely solely on memory when recounting the events of each class (after they had taken place). Students would often raise particularly interesting points, or would engage in conversations that may not have had any apparent connection to our course content but nevertheless reflected our class dynamic. When students worked independently or talked in discussion groups, I would sometimes write keywords in my agenda to jog my memory for later elaboration. Vanner (2020) referred to these small keyword notes, using Bernard's (2011) term, jottings, or "reference points that were helpful to later jog my memory when I typed my notes in more detai[l]" (Burkholder & Thompson, 2020, p. 19). My notes could be as simple as "backpack" (a running joke we had throughout the year), or "societal norms and parental age gap" (a student's pertinent personal example of societal norms). After each class Vanner (2020) would follow up with detailed journal entries based on her memory and jottings. Similarly, I wrote extensive bullet points on everything I remembered from the class. The events would run chronologically and start from the preliminary conversations I would have before class, with the students who often arrived before others. Subsequent events could center on the classroom to which we were assigned (this group had four different room assignments), and of course discussions that occurred during class. In addition to recording as full a picture as possible of the in-class events, I would sometimes record "supporting" events that padded our class instruction. These included situations such as an assembly that occurred right before class and caused students to all filter in late and frustrated, or a conversation I had with my colleague about course planning that would eventually merge into considerations of lunch options. My goal was to paint as many details and rich description (White & Lemieux, 2017) as possible, with which I could later render some form of meaning. Vanner (2020) described the "stream-of-consciousness approach…[where she] avoided editing

as [she] wrote" (Burkholder & Thompson, 2020, p. 25). Therefore, despite the fact that my study was geared towards our ELA experience, I included as many events as possible with an understanding that the teaching and learning experience involves the creation of a communal culture, and that course content is not the only element or indicator of (effective) education.

Ethical Concerns: Single Story Narration

Despite the fact that I was intent on recording as broad an array of events as possible (It felt a little bit like a communal journal), I recognize the inherent bias of me being the sole recorder of students' stories. The jot notes took on a tone of a third-person narrator that I attempted to make as neutral as possible. However, it is evident that the events (or voices) that stood out to me would be the ones that I would recall. I chose, after a couple jot note write-ups, to reconcile this biased nature of my data collection with an understanding that the narrative could illuminate unexpected elements of my own teaching practice. I would, however, read back my write-ups about once a week, to gain a general sense of where the "story" was going at that time. These accounts would sometimes illuminate, in real time, realizations that could not wait for the analysis portion of my study and required immediate attention. For example, if I noticed that I had been speaking for a very long time, I may have written a comment such as "Note: I am talking a lot" in red, to alert my focus for later. As well, I may have noticed that certain students would not be making their way into my accounts, and I would attempt to engage them in later meetings. Nonetheless, to return to the issue of bias, I feel that recording a series of events in a given teaching experience will necessarily involve bias, and absolute neutrality is not possible when attempting to deconstruct the human intricacies of our shared event. I do feel, however, that acknowledging my bias and positionality within the classroom (and life), is important when

beginning data analysis and compiling my final account. For this reason, my jot notes cannot be taken as the sole artefact in creating my story. When constructing my narrative account, I borrowed from the approach of Marcea Ingersoll (2012), who depicted a personal narrative with interspersed theoretical considerations. The addition of real-time musings, inspired by scholarly voices, was intended to offer insight in response to my observations and open up the possibilities for a critical contemplation of our shared educational experience.

Data Analysis: Reading "Jot" Memories

I first approached my jot notes using Mitchell and Weber's (1999) process of reading drafts. This system involved reading the chronological account, leaving it as raw data, before later asking questions of it. When reading my 103 pages of observational jot notes for the first time, I approached the untouched data after having spent over a year away from it. I therefore used my first read as an opportunity to become reacquainted with these experiences, with which I had felt an intimate bond during the time of my study. I noticed the style of my jot notes were quite enjoyable to read, likely because they read as my personal voice-over of events. There was a scriptwriting style to my notes, with the students and me operating as characters constructing the "events" of our classes. The dramatic factor of my tone and format allowed my notes (and by extension, my memories of the classes) to flow like a story. Perhaps this is due to my personal ways of expressing meaning in narrative format (Butler-Kisber, 2010) and making sense of the world by treating experiences as events. I also noticed, through my scriptwriting format, that my personal self-study was extremely fitting as an ELA task of character analysis. Essentially, my recall of events displayed my ELA methods of attempting to analyze myself as a character within my own narrative (the ELA experience). The memories were encapsulated in a

vivid manner within my notes, as I could almost hear students' voices when reading the dialogue. The authentic "language" of students that was captured in my notes speaks to my personal method of trying to most accurately channel "what happened" within these moments. The implicit narrative imbedded within the raw notes was therefore channeled through my personal perspective, but moved through the voices of those around me. The size and font of my accounts at times varied, as did the typed formatting. I realized that this lack of consistency was the result of sometimes creating entries on the bus ride home or to McGill, directly following class. I would use the notes function of my mobile phone, and copy and paste these observations into my jot notes document when I had access to a computer. I noticed some typos when addressing the raw notes, which spoke to my haste in producing them following each class. I was sometimes rushing to leave class to catch a bus or a taxi, as I was also teaching a class at McGill with a twenty-minute cushion space. I knew, however, that I needed to record my entries immediately after our classes, so as to not lose my memories through transitioning into a new space. It was extremely difficult to leave the data "raw" during my first read and not correct the technical errors. It was also tempting to interrogate the data during my first read, and challenging to read the narrative from "cover to cover" without extensive reflection and interruption in between. Perhaps it was the "I" within the notes that called out to my current "me", begging for a reaction. However, as the goal of my first read was to gather a cohesive understanding of the experience, I attempted to read as a neutral "me", or rather, a curious pedagogue.

After having read through the series of raw data once, I isolated common themes and threads of inquiry amongst the notes. This method I used mirrored Vanner's (2020) use of Kathy Charmaz's (2014) Constructivist Grounded Theory, where she engaged in theoretical sampling,

using a portion of her observational data to determine emergent themes (Burkolder & Thompson, 2020, p. 18). As my observation period took place over six months, my theoretical sample consisted of two classes from the beginning of the study, two from the middle and two from the end. I chose September 23 and 25 to mark the beginning of the study, November 1 and 4 to mark the middle of the study, and February 4 and 10 to mark the end. From this sample, I isolated six emergent themes: storytelling, connections, authority, norms, the "real world", and humour. These themes often overlapped and converged within my account. I isolated "storytelling" as a theme in response to the frequent anecdotes and discussions that occurred within the accounts, both before, after and during instruction. It appears that stories (narratives) are not only my personal method of rendering meaning from experience (Butler-Kisber, 2010), but also evidence of sharing and connection building. The stories displayed in my account constituted not only personal asides used to enhance and contextualize learning material, but also contributions from students. As my ultimate goal lay in creating a narrative of our shared ELA experience, I figured it was apt that the sharing of stories comprised a large part of our day-to-day exchanges. I felt that these stories, both my personal anecdotes and those of students, spoke to the humanity and reality of our specific experience, rendering the participants of my study fleshed-out characters of a narrative.

Connections, another emergent theme, were displayed through the frequent exchange of stories. This theme also addressed the interactions, exchanges and relationships between members of the class as well as those that occurred between the students and me. By conceptualizing my students as characters, their connectedness also became more apparent in my account. I argue that this connectedness directly shaped students' perceptions of their learning and thus, the communal experience we created.

Another theme that I isolated was authority, which I feel connected to the themes of norms and humour. While norms were raised frequently in reference to the curricular exploration of societal norms, I also noticed a number of examples of my personal actions, where my sense of authority either confirmed or departed from the norms of "traditional" teaching. I noticed that I would sprinkle doses of humour within situations that might regularly have demanded a heavier hand of authoritarianism. I wondered if that might be a matter of communication style, as there was also a considerable amount of humour in my transmission of stories and the delivery of course content. I also wondered, however, if my humour could speak to an assertion of authority and the establishment of a classroom management style that felt personal to me.

Finally, I isolated the theme of the "real world" not only due to our frequent referencing of society within our discussion of norms, but also our regular movement in and out of course content. I feel that in my teacher training, I was always nervous to move off-track when tasked to complete a specific goal. This, I argue, is a concern shared by many teachers, ELA or otherwise. However, within this account, I noticed a frequent, fluid movement in and out of the real world via students' exchanges and references to their own experiences and stories. I would like to think this movement could suggest a meaningful engagement with course content and a transfer of material to students' lived experiences (MEES 2019/2022). However, the fact that students felt free to move in and out of our targeted agenda spoke to a possible level of trust and ultimately, the desire to create experiences alongside others. This concept of trust was a valuable component of my study, which involved navigating the unfamiliar topic of Surrealism, alongside my personal questions and goals for education. Trust was expressed within a number of my emergent themes such as connections, storytelling, and humour.

After having isolated emergent themes within my raw data, I approached my observations with questions and comments. This process involved a critical interrogation of the "self", as Mitchell engaged in when reading back (Kosnik, 2006, p. 126) a personal account written in response to a photo trigger (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). As Burkholder and Thompson (2020) noted how fieldnotes can "provoke critical processes for facilitating reflexivity and situating researcher positionality and subjectivity" (Burkholder & Thompson, 2020, p. 1), my process of analyzing my notes included critically questioning the events of my class as well as my place within them. I created a second copy of my observation notes and wrote my interrogations directly on the document, using the "comments" function. Through this process, I aimed to engage in a conversation with my data, and by extension, myself. I also created a legend and colour-coded the different emergent themes that I dissected from my theoretical sampling. I then highlighted key areas where my emergent themes were evidenced in my notes, using the respective colour codes. The resulting coded document therefore consisted of my observational jot notes with inserted comments and colour coded emergent themes. The comments took the form of Anthony Bourdain's (2013) reflections on the Insider's Edition of *Kitchen Confidential*. There, Bourdain revisited his memoir years after its publication, hand-writing thoughts, reflections and questions directly on his work (Bourdain, 2013). The Insider's Edition thus formed a dialogue between Bourdain and his former self, an effect I aimed to create through my coding. The colours and interrogations would later be put in conversation with my other processed data for the preparation of my narrative account.

When approaching my data with the intention of coding, new observations became apparent from my notes. I appeared to talk to myself in my notes, offering clues and explanations to a future "me", the presumed reader. I would also attempt to speak through

confusion, a tendency shared with my personal self. I am someone who needs to work though problems and render meaning from situations through words. I realized as well, upon re-reading my observation notes, that when I sensed confusion in my students, my impulse would be to talk through the issue in an attempt to establish clarity. I would even stop the entire class, at times, when I sensed confusion in a single student, in order to realign our understandings and reiterate the concepts in question. As well, I opened many daily accounts with an explanation of the narrative context, describing the classroom setting and surrounding circumstances that established the tone for our events. As this specific group changed classrooms four times in a ten-day cycle, shifting and re-establishing a semblance of normalcy was common throughout our experience. I also noticed an attempt at numeric representations of data, perhaps in an attempt to render my research scientific and legitimate. For example, I would note the number of contributions students made and the number of students who responded to a Google Classroom prompt. Upon approaching my data afresh, I do feel these representations offered some evidence of our time in the ELA class, and thus, our experience, but I recognize their limitations. I recall being evaluated in my first year at my current institution, with the Assistant Head of School conducting a formal assessment of my lesson. I recall her assessment on engagement (fittingly, a focal point of my current study), and her belief that my students were lacking in it. While I somewhat agreed with this statement, the indicators I used were students' confused faces, their regular glances at the clock to check when lunchtime would come, and their incessant fidgeting. The Assistant Head, however, based her assessment on the number of hands raised during the class period in response to my questions and prompts. Therefore, while our takeaways seemed to be aligned when assessing my class, the Assistant Head and I had very different methods of measuring engagement. In terms of my current research purposes, this earlier question of

engagement resurfaced when I developed questions from the field. I argue that my introduction of a Surrealist philosophical perspective in ELA has indeed allowed for increased engagement within my practice. I will expand on these findings later in this chapter, as well as in the Analysis and Conclusions chapter of this thesis. Returning to my emphasis on context, I have since, in my teaching experiences, become cautious of using single-method indicators. While they may sometimes yield the same results, numbers cannot always tell us what a student is feeling in the classroom (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

As previously noted, my data reads as a story, with students operating as unique, engaging characters for the audience (in this case, me, the reader). The running jokes that were recurrent throughout the study spoke to the shared space and ownership students took in showing themselves to their peers and me. I was reminded of *The Magic School Bus* (Cole & Degen, 1994) and how Ms. Frizzle would always lead her (oddly small) class of student characters on educational adventures. While I aligned with Ms. Frizzle's commitment to exciting outfits and her somewhat Surrealist stance on traditional educational norms, I also noted similarities in how Frizzle's students were all well-defined (Cole & Degen, 1994). Despite embodying fictional tropes, the relationships and familiarity of the students in Frizzle's class felt oddly relatable when considering my own class. One of my student's comments mirrored the frequent, comical reservation of Frizzle's Arnold, through his systematic commitment to grades and deadlines. I also noticed that I would grab onto moments of promise in my account, and unfortunately focus on certain characters of the class more than others. Comparing myself to a fictional redhead eccentric character may seem misaligned and slightly concerning, but upon reading my notes, I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of energy I appeared to exude. I also noticed an element of performance in my lessons, as I attempted to entertain students through curricular content. At

the same time, my professional teacher "self" who was always aware of evaluations and assessments, sometimes paused the events of my story. The exchanges displayed in my account do not necessarily suggest traditional methods. If anything, I found myself thinking "they do not teach you this in teaching school" when examining my notes. We are taught to maintain professional (and conceptual) distance from our students, to stay on track and guide through the course content, and to project ourselves as arbiters of our craft. This directly contrasted with the frequent discussions about clothing and makeup I shared with my students, and my teasing about romantic relationships that were potentially forming in the class. However, when considering the account as an entire experience, I see strong evidence of relationships, trust, respect, and engagement. These elements were once again expressed through several of my emergent themes such as connections, storytelling, humour and "the real world." While students were not always speaking about the curriculum, the heavy amount of dialogue in the account shows that significant communication occurred. The openness of the students also spoke to our bonds, and while our teacher training may have dictated that makeup and relationships have no place in the ELA classroom, I argue that they do, when treated as building blocks for understanding, and consequently, learning. My account does suggest that I have challenged my students and established a space for critical inquiry. However, counting the number of hands raised in a given class could not speak to this experience; indeed, many of my students abandoned raising hands on a number of occasions.[30] For this reason, I have attempted to establish different methods for assessing the value and richness of an educational experience.

[30] The act of students speaking out without raising their hands suggest a certain level of comfort and trust, which once again reflects the connection-building and engagement I attempted to foster. I also recognize that the "calling out" of certain individuals, while it departed from the structured, formulaic codes and conventions of the school place (a Surrealist departure from norms), could also have upset the egalitarian possibility of having all voices be heard. This concept relates my previously discussed ethical issue of single-story narratives (see page 6).

Data Collection: Interviews: Student Voices and a Contemplation of ELA

My jot notes express my voice exclusively, even when recounting the stories of others. I am aware of the fact that interpretation plays a great role in remembering these events, as the occurrences have all been filtered through my memory. The interview portion of my data collection therefore formed an attempt to express students' voices in a more direct manner. Originally, I had prepared interview questions that targeted Surrealism and our specific class goals. However, upon reflection, I revised my questions to focus upon students' general interest levels in ELA (see questions below). With open-ended questions, I encouraged students to think about their experiences within ELA, their understandings of the subject and its perceived possibilities, and their personal relationships with the subject.

Interview Questions

1. Think about what you feel is the "point" of ELA class. Below, check all the categories that you feel apply to the "point" of ELA:

___learning grammatical efficacy in writing, reading and speaking
___learning informal and public speaking skills for the workplace
___developing one's identity
___experimenting with the imagination
___becoming fluent and comfortable expressing oneself in English
___analyzing texts and recognizing themes
___developing a professional and polished writing style
___engaging with criticality within text and the world
___building connections between textual themes and one's lived existence

On a scale from one to five (one being not at all, five being fully fulfilled), to what degree do you feel that your experiences within English class have fulfilled the "point" of ELA?

2. Education is often known to involve preparing students for the "real world". To what degree, on a scale of one to five (one being not at all, five being completely) do you feel your experiences in English work to establish a connection with the real world as you know it?

Follow-up: what themes are explored within English and who do they involve?

3.The Surrealists aimed to question the aspects of our lives that we take for granted and consider normal. In class, we have talked about the idea of 'normal constructs' through a variety of examples. Think about our discussions on what constitutes "normal" masculinity and femininity. Think as well about what we consider to be normal in terms of dating practices, gender roles, and age gaps in relationships. In terms of your own life, what is something normal that you have rarely questioned in terms of its existence and how it works AND THAT YOU ARE NOW QUESTIONING?

4. Throughout the year, we have engaged in a Surrealist style exploration of societal constructions and norms, both in the school place and in the real world. To what degree (one being not at all, five being completely) do you feel that you have personally benefited from the existence of societal norms within your own life?

5. The Surrealists aimed to upset the "regular", unquestioned flow of our everyday lives. To what degree (one being not likely at all, five being highly likely) do you feel you would stand up for/question something you feel is not normal?

Follow up: when you consider something to not be normal in your everyday life, who are the people who are directly impacted by this concept?

6. Criticality means (check the definition(s) that apply):

___expressing oneself when we feel someone or something is wrong
___showing someone that they have problematic views/practices/behaviour
___questioning information that one is presented
___being skeptical of information that one is presented
___being judgmental of others' views/practices/behaviour
___establishing the strength/value of a work of literature/art/music

Follow up: In your own life, which definition do you tend to use when it comes to criticality?

7. Creativity means (check the definition(s) that apply):

___using the imagination to produce artistic works
___problem solving
___using the imagination to help understand the world
___saying something new
___using new perspectives to think about one's life
___using artistic thinking in the real world

Follow up: On a scale from one to five (one being not critical and creative at all, five being very critical and creative) how would you rank the level of criticality and creativity that we exercise in our everyday lives.

8. In English, we focus a lot on storytelling. What do you feel is the story I was

attempting to tell this year?

Follow-up: do you think it is the teacher's role to speak about how students think and see the world? Why or why not?

Conducting Interviews: Ethical Concerns and Shifts in Methods (Covid-19)

My interviews were originally slated to take place at school, following the submission of Term Two report card grades. It was important to me that the interviews be conducted on a volunteer basis after the submission of grades, as I recognized notions of bias that could arise with students feeling pressured into participating to better their grades. I emphasized that this portion of data collection, like all other portions, was purely inquiry based and that I was interested in learning alongside the students. Following the March break, which marked the end of the second term and would have originally been the beginning of my interview period, the Covid-19 pandemic began. I therefore shifted my entire interview process to our online Zoom platform (with REB approval). Students were presented with the opportunity to take part in interviews, and I managed to conduct four sessions, interviewing a total of seven students from the class of fifteen. Participants included three boys and four girls, with five out of the seven being close childhood friends. The two remaining participants were International students who also participated in enriched language support classes with me outside of the regular ELA stream. Some students opted to run interviews in pairs, while one chose to be interviewed individually. After receiving consent from parents and assent from students to participate in the interviews, I requested revised consent to use our recorded Zoom conversations as backup data to accompany my written interview notes. During the interviews, which took place during scheduled sessions outside of regular distance learning course hours, I asked students eight

interview questions. I listed the questions in a Google Doc and created a separate copy for each interview group. I then shared my Zoom screen so that the questions were visible as I read them aloud. For questions with a variety of available choices, I entered the options students chose onto their respective documents. Students then verbally expanded on their selections of specific options. Their expanded answers were captured both via video and my personal, handwritten interview notes. My decision to offer a variety of options for certain questions was intended to offer students range in their chosen responses (especially important when it came to defining terms), while also targeting students' answers towards specific research interests that I developed. Keeping in mind the Zoom platform, I felt that expansion and critical contemplation were necessary for my interviews, as was specificity and focus. By offering students some options with which to build their responses, my hope was to make transparent what I was asking them, but also fuel their critical thinking in those directions. The sessions lasted between thirty minutes to an hour, and were conducted in a casual manner that was designed to encourage critical contemplation and
sharing.

Data Analysis: Interview Notes and Student Interview Google Docs

When approaching my interview notes and the Google Docs with students' recorded choices for answers, I employed an adapted version of Carl Rhodes' ghostwriting strategy (Rhodes, 2000). I watched the recorded Zoom interviews and analyzed them alongside my written interview notes and my participants' respective interview Google Docs. Rhodes (2000) noted that when creating his autobiographical-style account of a subject, he produced his text shortly after his interview. In my case, I had a year of temporal distance between conducting the

interviews and creating my ghostwritten accounts. For this reason, it was important for me to view my video recordings and experience the interviews for a second time. I then, as with my observation notes, extracted common themes and threads of inquiry and developed a narrative structure for the content. Rhodes (2000) discussed determining salient points that resonated from the interview, and forming a narrative stemming from those points. When viewing my interview recordings, I took observational notes before producing mini narrative accounts. Rhodes (2000) noted that "a key part of the ghostwriting practice [is] to "regenre" the story from that of an interview conversation to that of a conventional written narrative" (Rhodes, 2000, p. 517). As a number of casual thoughts and musings were raised in my interviews in response to my prompts on ELA, I aimed to restructure the flow of these interviews to form interactions between my participants. My aim was to render myself a Rhodes (2000) ghost and remove my physical presence from the interactions. I realize that my presence indeed impacted the interactions, but in the interest of expressing the participants' contributions, I chose to decentralize my own conceptual importance (voice). As three sets of interviews took place in pairs, I chose to (re)construct exchanges between the participants based on the thoughts they expressed to me. The only exception was my third interview, which took place individually. For this narrative, I chose to assume the presence of the participant and my narrative constituted reflective, personal contemplation. Rhodes (2000) has articulated that a researcher should work mainly from memory when constructing a narrative account from interviews. The interview notes and Google Docs were therefore used to verify structure and content. My adaptation of the technique was intended to create succinct accounts of the interview interactions with which I could more easily work and form my larger narrative account following analysis. The ghostwriting approach shows how removing myself from the interview process could refocus the "voice" of the

perspectives expressed (Rhodes, 2000, p. 517). This was once again an exercise in subjective interpretation, as I gleaned from the interviews what I felt to be significant, thus rendering the raw interview data (Zoom recordings) into concise bodies of text. I created stories from the commentaries of my students, which contained logical flow and organization. The stories constituted fictional vignettes, as I recontextualized the conversations that took place within our interviews. I reimagined the settings in which these conversations would take place without my own presentation of interview prompts. The content included in the vignettes was extracted directly from my interview notes, coupled with moments from my in-class jot notes to create flow and stay intrinsic to the participants' personalities (characters). I would later work exclusively with these mini-write-ups as I moved forward with my data analysis.

Student Interviews:

The following four passages form my interview mini-write-ups. All of the students' names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

INTERVIEW 1:

"Jacques, what is the real world?" Braden had wondered why his English teacher had gone on and on for an entire year harping about the real world, using air quotations and pointing out the window when referencing "pertinent" material from the class. "Braden, the real world is not something that an English teacher needs to teach me about." Jacques decided to emphasize his point by placing a procedure mask on mid-conversation, perhaps to offer an air of emphasis to his philosophical stance. "In English class we talk about the real world," Jacques said, echoing Braden's personal thoughts, "but we don't learn about social skills. I just pick those up and I

don't need English class to teach me those." "Okay, then why are we here?" Braden hesitated before placing his suitcase-style backpack on the desk. "To start to become critical, I guess, and creative. That's what the teacher says at least. I don't know, I'm not really creative every day. Or critical." "What does that mean though?" Braden was hugging his backpack now, "Like showing someone they're wrong? I don't really think about that all the time." "Me neither," Jacques responded, "maybe I just don't put in the effort. I know I should, but I need to feel like the teacher cares too, you know? I didn't enjoy a lot of English classes because the teacher didn't care about getting to know us." "Like last year? Funny, I liked that class. I guess it depends on the person." Braden started to unpack his suitcase to get ready for class. "I'm still not sure what we're supposed to learn here though. We keep talking about things being normal and not normal, but why do I need to know that?" Jacques sighs and removes his mask. "I don't know, maybe that's the point. Maybe the point is to expand, not to be taught." "Oh." Braden said, looking out the window.

INTERVIEW 2:

"Scarlett, pay attention! You'll need this for the real world!" "But we're not in the real world yet, Vicky! That won't come till after university!" Scarlett was gazing out the window as Vicky frantically recorded notes. "Scarlett, we're going to be in the real world soon, like when we start working, we will need to *talk* professionally and not make mistakes with grammar! We'll be doing that our whole lives!" "But this is just a fun activity, Vicky, it's not like it's public speaking." "That doesn't matter, we can still learn something that will help us later." Scarlett resumed her daydreaming. "Vicky, when we're in the real world, we'll need to pay for our food, but what about people who can't pay? Food is just normal for us, but there are homeless people

who can't eat." Vicky stopped notetaking to consider her friend's reflection. "I guess that's their normal. It's horrible, but we are lucky, so I guess it's kind of normal to be lucky." "But it's not normal for anyone to not eat!" Scarlett's strong sense of sympathy had surfaced. "We're supposed to be preparing for the real world, even if we're not going to be in it for a long time, but when we do go there, it won't ever look like it does for those people. That's their real world and it's sad." "Yea, I don't know." Vicky paused, "I guess I take a lot of things for granted in my life, it just *is*." "I just don't really understand what I'm supposed to be doing." Scarlett expressed, slightly concerned. "For the assignment?" Vicky began handing over her detailed notes. "No." Scarlett shook her head, "When I get into the real world. I don't even know what that will look like. We all experience the world differently and my real world is going to be different than yours, so how do I prepare, here in English class?" Vicky had stopped typing. "I'm not sure. I guess we can just try to get something from all of this. At least we know that grammar is important in all real worlds so we can focus on that."

INTERVIEW 3:

Gregory sighed as he examined his schedule. "English. It's fine, it is what it is." It wasn't so much that Gregory disliked the subject, but he saw little utility in English class seeing as he was fluent in the language. "I'm not even planning on being a writer." He thought to himself. "Why will I need this in the future?" He scanned the board, pausing on the terms "analysis" and "connections". "Can't you do English without analysis and connection building?" He wondered, "It won't be as interesting, but it would still work." As the teacher spoke, Gregory felt a small wave of tension rise in his chest. He was reviewing the feedback on a recent submission. He knew that in resisting critique, he was limiting his own ability to be critical and by extension,

creative. It just wasn't easy to see his work littered with comments when he felt he had put forth a decent effort. It wasn't that hard, it was just writing, and he did it well. Isn't that the point? Gregory felt slightly disconnected from his submission, despite the teacher having stressed the relevance of its "human-centered" themes. "Where are the humans in this class?" Gregory thought to himself again. He wished English would focus more on how humans actually communicated and behaved. He concluded he could do that in Ethics class, but couldn't the system just do away with English then? Gregory felt his naturally skeptical nature caused him to take English class (and everything else) with a grain of salt. He then stopped upon one of the teacher's comments: "Great critical perspective!" "Was I being critical? I was just breaking apart what I saw. I didn't really say anything new; I just questioned what's already there. Maybe *that's* the real point. I'm still not sure."

INTERVIEW 4:

"Shawn, do you agree with what he just said?" Sookie's attention had been sparked by her classmate's thoughts on a particularly touching societal norm. "No, I don't." Shawn whispered, "But it's not really my place to say anything. We don't come from here, so maybe it's a question of culture." "Yes, but our own culture isn't normal either." Sookie whispered back, "At least not according to me. It's like we're living outside of both cultures. I don't even know what's supposed to be considered normal." Shawn stopped and contemplated the girls' shared dilemma. She had been doing a great deal of reflection recently, in the process of negotiating her new home and at the same time observing her familiar context from across the ocean. "I guess some groups of people can benefit from norms but the same norms can harm those who stand outside of them." Shawn stopped and continued to glance around her class, noticing the somewhat

monotonal cultural representation. "Doesn't that mean we will never be normal?" Sookie responded, somewhat concerned. "No," Shawn offered softly. "We are normal in some ways and not normal in others. It's not as simple as we learn about in books, real people don't look like that. I mean, that's part of it, but it's not the full story." Sookie sat silently. Shawn's reflections had spurred her own set of questions in her mind, as she began noticing the convergences and contradictions between her ideas of normality and her personal practices. She wondered if she lacked the words to express her questions to others, or the analytical skills to build and develop these questions; or, perhaps she required more cultural leverage to take a stand. Either way, she was beginning to think much of the "real world" around her was not normal, but she also recognized her own comfort in this abnormality. Perhaps it would be easier to just stay silent.

Interview Closing Considerations

These interviews offered a valuable window into our shared ELA experience. Despite the fact that a perceived lack of criticality and engagement sparked my initial research inquiries, the students' responses display an honest grappling with big questions, identity, and meaning-making. Perhaps the Covid-19 reality and our shift to an online space offered an unexpected level of intimacy and fueled the students' abilities and desires to reflect upon their current (and future) conditions. In any case, I noticed, through these interviews, that students were (perhaps unknowingly) fulfilling my personal goals of ELA, through their musing, their use of discussion, and their development of arguments. All of the interviews, possible due to the uncertain pandemic context, coupled with the fact the students were about to graduate from Secondary school, focused on questions of "Why are we here?" and "How will I survive when I'm there?"

While the "there" in question consistently focused on the elusive complex of "adult life", the "here" seemed to shift from the ELA learning space to the outside world. In the interviews, students would often catch themselves in a web of hypothetical uncertainties that constitute "real world" living. This fear and vulnerability would then bring students' conversations back to the seemingly safe and controlled, yet slightly "futile" ELA classroom. What was still required, was a collective "aha moment", or a clear connection between these frank, vulnerable conversations about the real-world, and students' current realities within ELA. It seems, however, especially judging from Interview 1, that the students were far more equipped for their "daunting" real-world realities than they may have known. I will expand upon the specific closing moment of Interview 1 within my novella, as those students arrived at an interesting understanding of how their current place in ELA could play into their future, unknown realities. Interestingly, the students' questions about the world outside the classroom, their contemplation about the utility of their current actions, and their fears about levels of readiness and resilience for their next chapters, reflect processes of self-study. Within my own self-study in Chapter 5, I ask myself similarly big questions, and engage in an act of critical meaning-making to discover the connectedness between my private and professional lives. In my Chapter 6 novella, I express this journey of meaning making, which was at times, an individual and daunting exploration of self, and at others, a collaborative construction of experience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which I conducted my teacher-researcher study and isolated student data. My data strands included jot notes from in-class observations and student interviews for examination. I continued by describing my collection and analysis

procedures, alongside the specific methods of presenting our experimental experience to students. These procedures included in-class discussions as well as several Surrealism-inspired engagements with ELA.

Chapter 5: The ELA Experiment Part 2: A Personal Self-Study with Photographs

Within this chapter, I describe my personal self-study, which constitutes my second phase of Surrealism-inspired ELA experimentation. This self-study displays my engagement with photographs to discover messages about my teaching practice. I open this chapter by discussing ethical considerations surrounding the performance of self-study in the classroom. I then discuss my data collection procedures, as well as my rationale for using artefacts from my recent past. I then discuss my sorting process with treating my data, as well as my methods of categorization and meaning-making with regards to my photograph collections.

Preliminary Discussion: Ethical Tensions of Self-Study with Others

In Strong-Wilson's (2021) *Ethical Self-Encounters with Counter-Stories in the Classroom*, the author examines teachers' uses of counter-stories to facilitate discussions on challenging societal, cultural and political topics. The author notes "[c]ounter-stories are by definition stories that, even as they tell a story, reflect on its inception, creation, form of representation, authorship and audience." (p. 109). Similar to my own perceived problem of restricted "ways of seeing" (Berger, 2008) in the ELA classroom (which I attributed in part to the Neoliberal societal context) Strong-Wilson has illuminated the concerns of the "bureaucratization of education" (Strong Wilson, 2021, p. 2). The author connected standardized educational methods and dominant societal norms, to the transmission of limited, legitimized stories. Her observation of classroom texts, drawn from the "canon of European White literature" (Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 2) mirrors my own engagements with stories in ELA. Therefore, the author's focus on counter-stories, which diverge from normative narratives, connects to my own self-study that examines the phenomenon of my limited ELA practice, while

attempting to bolster more critical and personal discussions about the world. My act of self-study involved examination of my personal teaching practice, which, in turn, involved inviting students to engage with counter-stories via the Surrealist subversion of societal norms. The self-study I produced constitutes an autobiographical counter-story of sorts, as I actively questioned myself, my teaching practice, and the complex web of contextual factors that affected its creation and continued evolution. Strong-Wilson noted the perspective of Ashcroft et al. (2002) that counter stories "talk back" to audiences and readers, thus inviting (or, requiring) responses (Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 109). In line with that assertion, my hope was that my personal character analysis could prompt, or even trigger students' own explorations of self. Within our ELA practice of exploring characters within texts, a study of protagonists (in my research context, I bear this title), cannot take place without considering the central characters' fellow figures. My "encounters" (Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 92) with these characters therefore cannot be overlooked. These interactions involved my own critical play with Surrealist-style associations of textual themes and and societal norms. My juxtapositions also involved calling into question the constructs that perceivably shaped my story of self. However, in an attempt to bring attention to the complicated intertwinings of the norms that shaped my own story, I might propose memories and realities that have affected and continue to colour the stories of my students.

My research aim involved engaging in an act of personal discovery, and I explicitly highlighted how this project was separate from students' own educational performances. Nonetheless, my explorations could and likely would have an impact on my students; even if those effects would not be immediately apparent. I am therefore aware, as a researcher of self (and the context of self), I must be alert to the need to protect the characters in my story. Strong-

Wilson articulated how encounters within the classroom can be linked to notions of personal trauma. My enthusiastic invitation to play, while rooted in objectives of imaginative exploration and emancipation, holds the risk of eliciting "involuntary memories" (Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 97) in students.

My self-study also raises questions of representation. I discussed the ethical tensions regarding my single-story narration in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Within the context of self-study, Strong-Wilson also illuminated how encounters could serve as "a site for misrepresentations and violence" (Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 98). Within my research, I do not aim to tell my students' stories, or construct self-studies/stories on their behalf. However, the ensemble of my engagements (encounters) with societal, cultural and political stimuli vis-à-vis the (teacher) self, along with my use of student interviews and the creation of a finalized narrative account, was ultimately represented through a (my) singular lens. I am therefore aware of the tensions of representation that come from creating a story of potentially shared experience. I have aimed, as best as possible, to uphold the integrity of ELA aims of experimentation and expression in terms of language. I have also stressed Strong-Wilson's argument for awareness of the loaded position a teacher-self holds when engaging in acts of personal research alongside impressionable, live learners. For this reason, I recognize the ongoing concern of teacher-research within the classroom, and acknowledge the importance of ethical accountability with regards to (self) investigators.

Data Collection: Photographic Inquiry and Self-Study of Practice

Collecting the World

Susan Sontag (2008) noted that "[t]o collect photographs is to collect the world" (Sontag, 2008, p. 1). To amass a collection of photos could therefore suggest one's "imaginary possession of [the] past" (Sontag, 2008, p. 6). By producing a photograph, an individual is transforming an experience into a tangible object. Sontag's (2008) collector, to whom she compared to a tourist, reacts to the stimuli of the world by committing it to film. These moments, now encapsulated in physical form, serve as evidence of past moments (Sontag, 2008, p. 6), but also evoke the collector's positioning within the world. Eric Freedman (2011) recalled Sontag's (2008) metaphor of the photographer as tourist, suggesting how an emphasis on "gaze" (Freedman, 2011, p. 2) could illuminate the specific sociopolitical context, as well as the personal motivations behind photographing an event. The author's focus on the photograph as an individual's engagement with (and creation of) experience, invites a contemplation of self. Therefore, within my self-study, I assumed the position of the collector tourist, whose own personal collection is the object of scrutiny. I chose to use photographs captured on my personal iPhone, as this device has been an instrumental tool in the collection process. Without even realizing it, collection has become a part of my everyday routine, as my access to this documenting, certifying technology has allowed (or caused) me to become a tourist in my own life. I wonder whether or not the intimate relationship I have with my mobile phone has allowed for the "image" of creating experiences (passive collecting), whilst enabling me to delay the reflection required to render these experiences personal. I frequently find myself exercising Sontag's conceptualization of tourism photography: "stop, take a photograph, and move on" (Sontag, 2008. p. 7).

Surrealist Connection

Freedman (2011) noted the importance of examining the commonplace practice of tourism photography, calling to attention the exotic nature of the familiar and the familiar nature of the strange (Sontag, 2008. p. 131). Essentially, my act of personal self-study harboured a Surrealist impetus of questioning the normal, status quo images reflected in my collection. Sontag (2008) noted that "Surrealism lies at the heart of the photographic enterprise in the very creation of a duplicate world" (Sontag, 2008, p. 40). To create a photograph, is to take hold of a specific moment in time and space, rendering the moment surreal by virtue of its tangible nature. My practice of recording jot notes of our in-class experience could also conform to the Surrealist enterprise in its creation of a duplicate world. As moments are fleeting and time is ephemeral, any other conception of time (or the tools that facilitate such non-linear movements) would suggest a testing of reality. By creating artefacts of the world, my act of tourism collection involved an attempt to capture and package reality (Sontag, 2008, p. 59). As Sontag (2008) described how photography invites a democratization of all subjects, itself a tenet of Surrealist philosophy, I aimed to question my own engagements with the "real" content of my collection. My collection could reveal my own tourist reactions to what is remarkable, be it beautiful or disturbing (Sontag, 2008, p. 7). However, this tourism practice of taking pictures has halted my reactions in their places. Through my self-study, I intended to engage in a series of aesthetic experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994), as I attempted to elicit the emotions, intentions and vulnerabilities behind my specific gaze.

Transience, Memory, and the Self

My self-study required my tourism status to adopt more permanence, as I stopped and reflected on the self behind my photographs. Freedman (2011) explored the concept of transience with regards to capturing images in photographic form. Freedman (2011) also spoke about technological tools that facilitate and impact the production of images, such as Polaroids. Sontag (2008) referred to these advances in photo capturing technologies as a "fast form of note taking…[where people amass] souvenirs of daily life" (Sontag, 2008). This attention to new technologies connects to my use of my iPhone photo application. The ease of use that comes with a personal mobile phone, and the ability to capture moments, as well as carefully curate and create images "calls for an understanding of how the self is situated within social relations" (Freedman, 2011, p. 4). In other words, as Freedman (2011) argued, personal photos can offer insight into the author of the images, who is, in my case, the (my) teacher-self. Freedman's (2011) exploration of the photo creation process via the artefacts captured proved to be useful when examining my own personal pictures.

While using photographs is a common method in self-study (Benoit, 2016; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Strong-Wilson, 2008), my exploration of transient images (and the self) slightly departed from the "norm"[31]. Strong-Wilson (2008) described the process of "bringing memory forward" (Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 6) and identifying cracks and areas of possibility within teacher practices. However, this focus on memory in self-study often involves an exploration of a far more distant past than my personal collection. Strong-Wilson (2008) used Robert Grumet's

[31] I recognize that an arsenal of traditional self-study methods does not exist, as the methodology is inherently personal and intuitive (Loughran, 2004). However, I use the term "norm" in reference to some established uses of photographs in self-study that have taken place within the domain of education; specifically, the time period of photos being used. I also use the term in reference to my Surrealist orientation and the significance the taken-for-granted, status quo has had on my practice. Essentially, to dig deep into one's (teacher) self is to interrogate the "norm".

(1981) term of "excavating" when describing the act of analysing one's past (Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 22). This image suggests dirt and dust, as a researcher uncovers long abandoned memories that have been stored away in the recesses of an attic, or, the mind. Benoit (2006) used photographs from schools he attended in the past, using the images of the buildings to build connections with his current teaching practice. Benoit (2006) also echoed Mitchell and Weber (1999), who argued that "the knowledge and images embedded in popular culture, especially movies and television, can sometimes…provide an entry point for teachers to reflect on their own practices" (Benoit, 2006, p. 45). Benoit (2006) used the television series, *Les Bougons*, to speak to the cultural, societal context that housed his past. His decision to choose this specific media source, an artefact from his childhood, once again suggests careful, arduous digging. Mitchell and Weber (1999) described using different forms of photographs in self-study exploration, including school pictures (class photos and student portraits). Again, the image of school pictures evokes carefully preserved (or possibly neglected) pictures that hold substantial memory load, despite their staged and arranged format. In both of these cases, the subject of the authors' self-studies involved travelling to a past that has been rendered unfamiliar, whereas my research consisted of examining my current tourism state. There stood very little temporal distance between the subjects of my photograph collection and my current self, especially when considering the elements that the former authors used to evoke the past. However, as photographing the world has become an accessible, naturalized and somewhat instinctual (albeit it not necessarily intentional) act[32], I argue that the subjects of yesterday's iPhone pictures could

[32] I use the term "passive" not to connote a lack of care or effort in capturing moments via an iPhone, but rather, the idea that the ease that comes with using these devices has contributed to photography as a social and cultural act. It has almost become a reflex to bring out one's phone and snap a photograph (Freedman, 2011), possibly before creating any kind of personal experience in the first place (ex: meals, tourist sites, etc.). I also use the term passive to suggest normalized, ordinary behaviours, which, in our case of photography, would previously have been far more difficult but possibly viewed as abnormal.

feel as distant as a photo album in storage. It appears that while the former authors chose specific criteria for their photographic explorations, such as school buildings or class pictures, I adopted a more open method. While I established my categories for searching (listed below), I argue that, as suggested by Freedman (2011), the actual content of my photographs was less important than the contexts in which they were captured. As we essentially live in a transient world, any remnants, or suggestions of fixity could speak to a (significant) past; which, by extension, makes my photographs a valuable site for considering my teacher self.

Restrictions, Possibilities, and a Single Experience of the Self

While Benoit (2016) and Mitchell and Weber (1999) limited their scopes of photograph collection to specific subjects, the parameters surrounding my study have involved time. My pre-established guiding themes served as open vessels into which I placed my personal photographs. This practice, on the surface, creates the image of openness and freedom. However, I argue that, especially when negotiating a collection of photographs that is constantly evolving (additions come as events are experienced, and possibly erased as a reaction to others), working with a limited corpus can provide its own challenges. I chose to select photographs within the exact time frame of in-class observations (September 2019-February 2020). When considering the tourism practice that I adopted when taking these photographs, this collection formed a microcosmic sample of my (macrocosmic) self. As well, directly following my in-class observation period, our school encountered the unprecedented events of Covid-19. I also experienced a number of life changes, including moving into my first house, and negotiating online learning; not to mention the struggles and successes of pandemic life. It was therefore extremely tempting to pull from other data that stood outside of my established boundaries, as

there were a number of images that could speak volumes about my personal and teacher self. In strictly adhering to my established time period when selecting photographs, I respected the curation process of self-study. There still lies subjectivity in the content I included within my designated themes; but I argue the same level of subjectivity exists in the previous authors' studies, via their choices of subject matter. The act of engaging in self-study involves a purposeful quest for discovery and engagement with the teacher self (Campbell, 2017; Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Strong-Wilson, 2008), so photographs, whether they come in a collection or individually, should be read as clues to the larger story. Benoit (2016) used photographs to trigger memories and recall the feelings, culture and context surrounding the specific relics in question. As such, I read my selection of iPhoto photographs as souvenirs from my daily life, and evidence of my specific self in a given moment that has now passed (Freedman, 2016; Sontag, 2008). I also used these photos to trigger my memories of events that existed within or outside of the frames. Sometimes the photos spoke of significant moments to come or ones that had recently passed, while others displayed a calculated (but not always conscious) exclusion of moments that I wished had never been.

Still Life of Moments: A Self-Study with iPhone

I divided my self-study process into two distinct phases: Preparing and Playing. The Preparing phase involved processing the wealth of data that contributed to my study, making it manageable to start my act of play. The Playing phase followed the initial preparation process where I developed an organized system to access and categorize my pictures. However, it is worth noting that I employed a certain level of play when initially viewing the data and categorizing it into sections. Similar to Bridget Campbell (2017), who was inspired by Anastasia

Sameras (2011), my phases of collection and analysis were at times fluid, as the physical collection (and preparation) of the data required reflective thought and experimentation (play) (Campbell, 2017). I will expand on these elements of play later on in this chapter, but will first focus on the Preparing phase of my exploration.

Data Collection and Analysis Phase One: Preparing

At the moment of writing this text, I have over 9000 photos stored on the Photos application of my mobile phone. It appears that while my personal photo taking habits have produced a number of souvenirs (Sontag, 2008), I have been somewhat of a packrat tourist (Freedman, 2011). I noticed that my souvenir collection displayed little rhyme or reason, and the sole organization markers were the date and location stamps from the phone application. I was reminded of more traditional practices of sifting through photographs; but rather than viewing neatly displayed albums, I was working with a cardboard box in which photos had been haphazardly tossed, with their contexts and sensibilities mixed to create a nebulous non-narrative. I decided that in order for me to begin any form of meaningful analysis, I would need to break down the wealth of data within my collection. Katie MacEntee (2019) also began with a large collection of over two hundred photographs before selecting twenty units for her photo-elicitation interviews with pre-service teachers (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019). I also noticed that while the mobile phone's casual ease of use makes "capturing" extremely efficient (Freedman, 2011), "processing" on the same device is rather challenging. My mobile phone accompanies me through all parts of my day, yet I experienced difficulties in manipulating the data using this compact "life" device. I equated this discomfort with attempting to re-organize photographs or documents that have already been placed within folders or albums. The messy

level of play that I intended to do required the photos to be pulled out of their folders and sprawled out on the kitchen table; for my purposes, the kitchen table was the Photos application on my computer.

I decided to create albums within the Photos application, which I dated according to the respective months of my study. I also noticed a technological handicap in that my 2018 MacBook Air, which has been loaned to me by my employer, does not contain a USB port. I therefore decided that rather than transferring photographs from my personal MacBook computer to my work device, I would need to Airdrop the data directly from my mobile phone. Upon beginning my Airdrop, however, I realized that there was a problem in my photograph sequence. On my mobile phone, the photographs from September 2019 were partially displayed before skipping directly to November 2019. I recalled that in November 2019 I purchased a new iPhone and it appeared that my iCloud storage had become saturated midway through September. For this reason, when setting up and synching my new device, only a portion of my old collection was restored. I consequently needed to switch methods and Airdrop from my personal MacBook to my work device. I noticed how my use of personal devices spoke to my habits and lifestyle movements and changes. I had initially started consolidating my professional and "personal" (which inherently also includes work) items onto one device during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. I previously used two computers, a practice that allowed me to avoid transporting a device back and forth from the office to home. However, when working from home, this practice no longer became applicable, and having divided technological lives in one physical space became challenging (rather than convenient). I chose to use my work device as opposed to my home device, as it already contained materials for teaching via distance, and also provided me a fresh start from elements my personal device still contained. I will expand on

these elements in the later in this chapter. Transferring (Airdropping) my photographs from mid-September 2019 and October 2019 to my work device was a strange experience, as I had not revisited these moments for a considerable time. With my other photographs easily accessible on my mobile phone, the moments, despite existing in the past, had always seemed familiar in some way. It is interesting, therefore, that the photographs from mid-September 2019 and October 2019 were the only moments from which I had real distance. Revisiting these pictures reminded me of the self-study practice of viewing memories from which one has had temporal and conceptual distance. It appears that even when working fully on a digital platform, external factors, be them the "Cloud", the vessel (device) or a global pandemic, can still shape the manner in which one accesses and experiences memories.

I acknowledge that, unlike some other self-study practitioners, my process did not involve leafing through paper photographs that may be stained, faded or creased. All of my photographs were taken in high definition and some of them, which is the case with Live photos, could actually move. However, I argue that transferring pictures from my mobile Camera Roll (Photos application) to the larger display of my computer's Photos application rendered them more "tangible". While, I could still not touch these moments as I would a creased and stained photograph, viewing them outside of my day-to-day context of the mobile phone, side-by-side on the flat tabletop of the computer screen, invited me to notice different forms of wear-and-tear. This involved the ways in which the pictures were structured, the content that was included and excluded, and the emotions behind the static frames; in other words, I aimed to explore the challenges and overall "life" that these souvenirs weathered.

I also noticed that despite having access to my photograph collection at all times via my mobile phone, there were certain pictures that I knew particularly well. These photographs, such

as those from my December 2019 family trip to New York, have been studied, examined, discussed and shared many times over. These memories elicit positive feelings and reflect a "self" that I have taken comfort in revisiting, possibly when I need reminders that she exists. At the same time, there are other pictures that may have existed alongside my New York family photographs in my mobile Camera Roll, which I have possibly never revisited. These "passing" moments form the content that I scroll past on a regular basis to access the "important" memories. For my self-study, I aimed to stop and pay attention to these passing, fleeting moments. Everything contained in my Camera Roll constituted something that I felt needed to be committed to film. As Sontag (2008) referred to photo-capturing as a practice of note-taking, these notes, as insignificant as they may have seemed, could have revealed something about myself. This self-study formed a move against my regular act of notetaking and passive scrolling. By being able to swipe past dozens of pictures at once, I have caused these fleeting moments to fleet faster and faster. I therefore aimed to stop the scrolling and the spinning, in order to bring these moments into focus. I attempted to approach these photographs with an open perspective, trying as hard as possible to move beyond my existing ideas of my personal self. I also noticed that my memory would at times deceive me when it came to the ordering of my memories. I found it interesting how the narrative I internalized of "what happened" sometimes stood in conflict with the reality of the date stamps and ordering of the Photos application.

Another notable element of my self-study process involved careful omissions. While I aimed, when performing the initial transfer (from one device to another) to process an authentic collection of moments, I did remove certain moments from my data set. I recognize that any omission from my collection could raise questions in terms of validity, as my set could

presumably not represent “reality”. However, I made the categoric choice to remove photos that contained inappropriate or compromising content. This resulted only in the omission of around ten photos over the duration of the entire study. For my current purposes, as those items have not been treated as data, I still asked myself the question about what this act of omission could reveal. Was I feeling shame or remorse with regards to the content of the pictures? Regardless, this act revealed, to me, the tenuous and subjective nature of constructing an image of self. Even on a quest for discovering an “authentic” idea of self, it appears I still felt compelled to doctor my ways of seeing.

After having placed my photographs in the folders that were categorized by month, I created a separate set of folders, or as the Photos application aptly names them, “albums”. I titled these new folders according to my themes of exploration: Significant Life Events, Failures, Sources of Inspiration, and Questioning. I developed these themes while engaging in the “preparing” phase of my photographic experience. Threads would arise as I encountered and sorted pictures, thus prompting me to establish clear areas for analytical exploration. As previously noted, my photographs were stored on my mobile phone with little attention to organization. My manipulation and movement of the pictures within the Photos application on my computer formed my attempt at creating some structure within this large collection, which would make it easier to treat and eventually contemplate. I used bolded headings for the four folders designated towards my themes of exploration in order to easily differentiate the folders from the others, which were sorted by date. When selecting pictures for the respective categories (themes), I would view the photographs from a specific month before moving onto another. In addition to viewing the photographs one month at a time, I also filtered through the months by addressing one theme at a time. This is to say that when addressing the September 2019

collection, I would filter through the photographs with the singular lens of "Significant Life Events". I would collect the photographs that applied to this category within the September 2019 folder, and drop them into the folder for this theme. I would then move on to a second observation of the September 2019 collection, with the observational lens of "Failures". I would continue this system for all of the categories of exploration, before moving on to the next month. I would repeat this system twice for the entire collection. This means that the photograph collection for each month of the study would have been viewed eight times, through the lens of four guiding themes. I noticed that my first round of viewing the pictures resembled the writing of first drafts (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). The process would be instinctual and rather quick, as I did not stop to reflect too strongly on how a photograph would correspond to a specific theme, but rather, collected pictures that stood out to me (within the context of a given observational lens). For my second viewing, I was more scrutinizing, and moved through the pictures with a closer, slower eye. I had already been exposed to the collection once, allowing me to form a working understanding of its collective messages. These understandings shaped the ways in which I viewed the collection for a second time, and I argue that while the first viewing was based on instinct, the second viewing was based on logic. I also noticed that certain themed folders were far easier to fill, such as Significant Life Events. Others, such as Failures, or Questioning, were more abstract and I found myself needing to "read into" the pictures and their contexts a little more when addressing these themes. These challenges and moments of contemplation speak, once again, to the fluid nature of my self-study process, and how even in the phase of "Preparing", I was engaging in some thoughtful play. Essentially, the categorization of pictures was a key component of my study, as placing a photo into a category meant it would be read as part of a specific collection. That collection would form a narrative based on the

messages it revealed about my personal self. Jon Prosser and Dona Schwartz (2003), as cited in Mitchell et al. (2019) noted that "researcher-generated photographs are subjective visual records of an event…[which] represent the photographer's individual viewpoint and what he or she considered of value to document" (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019). This observation suggests the careful decisions that lie behind the presentation of a photograph collection, as evidenced in the work of Mary Cullinan (2019), and how organization can form far more than a logistical task (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019).

Data Analysis: Phase Two: Exploring Personal Photographs (Playing)

My analysis of personal photographs constituted an act of photo elicitation (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019). MacEntee (2019), as cited in Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019), used photo elicitation methods when conducting interviews of preservice teachers involved in series of participatory, arts-based workshops called YAKP (youth as knowledge producers). As my research data included a selection of photographs from a larger collection, MacEntee (2019) also selected her sample from a bank of images taken during the YAKP workshop period. MacEntee (2019) "hoped the pictures would help jog [participants'] memories of events from several years earlier" (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019, p. 39). She used these photographs as prompts for memory elicitation and discussion, as Benoit (2016) used images as triggers for personal memories. As well, MacEntee's (2019) use of recent photographs, taken during the time period of a particular event mirrored my use of personal images taken concurrent with my classroom observations. MacEntee (2019) also noted that "[l]ooking at the photographs elicited a looking forward at consequences of participating in [the workshops] since the project had ended." (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019, p. 38). Similarly, D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly

(2000), as cited in Campbell (2017), noted, "bringing…memories forward…[involves] going backward, forward, inwards and outwards" (Campbell, 2017, p. 33), as the researcher attempts to examine moments within their narrative contexts and complexes. This means that while my chosen images spoke to specific spaces in time, their implications and constructions elicited discussions on the stories that surrounded them.

I divided my photograph analysis process into phases, as I did with the photograph collection process. My phases for analysis were Isolating, Meaning Making and Synthesis. The Isolating phase involved extracting thematic strands of inquiry from my collections, while the Meaning Making phase involved attempting to make meaning of these strands. The Synthesis Phase involved summing up the understandings that were established in the previous phases, in an attempt to unite the collections and form cohesive messages on my personal self. Campbell (2017), in her Doctoral thesis, frequently noted the questions she asked herself as she moved through the research process. These personal inquiries paved the way for further exploration and the formation of overarching research questions. Essentially, Campbell (2017) has made explicit the "hunches" and musings that guided her towards the tangible research goals she pursued in her study. As such, I shaped my photograph analysis phase around of series of personal questions, starting with a hunch and moving towards a research question, or goal, for my exploration of images. Before embarking on my exploration of photographs, I had the hunch that my Camera Roll was more personal than it appeared. I therefore asked myself the question, "how could my everyday photos say something about me?" This question prompted me to form photograph collections, upon which I performed a thematic analysis.

Isolating: What do I see "again and again" in this collection?

When addressing his own photograph collection for his personal self-study, Benoit (2016) categorized his photographs of former schools and residences according to emergent themes. Benoit's themes included emotional commonalities witnessed within the images, such as loneliness, reflective reactions such as his memories of wishing to "do better", and prominent recurrent figures such as teachers and supervisors (Benoit, 2016, p. 117). Similar to Benoit, I reviewed my four photograph collections and isolated thematic threads based on emotional responses, reflective understandings, and the people in my life. Unlike Benoit (2016), the content of my photographs did not follow an established structure[33]. Therefore, I also paid close attention to the content I chose to include, the circumstances in which it was included, and likewise, what was omitted from my images. I feel this close photographic analysis (Mitchell & Weber, 1999), involving an analysis of content as well as my aesthetic (Rosenblatt, 1994) engagement with it, has been conducive to a meaningful exploration of self. Benoit (2016) adopted a rather holistic approach when establishing thematic categories of memories, as he used his photographic images to trigger and recall moments from his past. Benoit later coalesced these experiences into reflective thematic accounts, where he referenced specific memory moments. I adopted Benoit's (2016) approach of holistic thematic analysis by isolating four recurrent themes in my collections: Food, Art and Beautiful Things, Prominent People, Festivity and Celebrations, and Triumphs. "Food, Art and Beautiful Things" was a theme I developed in response to my abundant images of food. Whether it be food produced by me, or something I ate

[33] Benoit (2016) included photographs of former schools and personal residences, whereas my content involved all images included on my personal mobile device. I did categorize my photograph collection into four threads of inquiry in the processing phase of my data collection, but for the most part, commonalities in content were the subject of my analysis phase, rather than a necessary step in the data collection phase, as was the case with Benoit (2016).

outside of the home, I evidently displayed a fascination with food in all of my collections. Food has been a constant passion of mine, and I have always been interested in the production and consumption of it. Whether it would involve going to restaurants or watching television cooking shows, food has always formed content that is calming, comforting and inherently associated with pleasure. For that reason, the careful presentation of food and the often-ritualistic enjoyment of it, allowed me an opportunity to explore my personal place of sanctuary within this domain, as well my personal methods of food consumption and how they may have been impacted by other "life" factors. "Prominent People" is a category that was inspired by Benoit's (2016) theme of Teachers and Supervisors. I noticed certain people that were recurrent in my images and others who came and left. I also charted the absence of certain figures and felt the presence of these "ghosts" (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 86) revealed some important aspects of my own personal self. "Festivity and Celebration" was a theme that was intended to address my love for celebration. I have never been a person who enjoys crowds or large gatherings, and have always preferred intimate spaces and moments. However, upon examining my photograph collections, my longstanding personal identification as an introvert became slightly complicated. I noticed that, as with food, celebration and festivity was an outlet I used to bond with others and create experiences. I felt that my impetus to celebrate big and small moments spoke to both my personal character and the experiences I have encountered. These experiences have simultaneously paved the way for traditions, but also carved out a space for physical and mental reclusiveness and rewards (during times of stress, or otherwise). Finally, the theme of "Triumphs" was born from my personal desire to celebrate my personal self. After having overcome a number of challenges in 2019, leading up to my period of observational study (I will expand on these events in my curatorial statements of my photograph collections), I decided that

establishing an event as a triumph need not always involve "official" recognitions. While I recognize my work within my professional life, including my Doctoral studies, has involved a series of measurable milestones, the work within these spaces and my personal (and interpersonal) life experiences has reshaped my vision of an accomplishment. I feel a number of small feats have been reflected in my photograph collections, all of which have had an important impact on my personal sense of self.

Meaning Making: How did these images come to be, and what do they say?

Upon reviewing all four collections and isolating these themes, I embarked on the Meaning Making phase of thematic analysis. I created a separate sheet of notepaper for each collection, where I noted the four recurrent themes in bold lettering on each sheet. I then revisited each collection through the lens of my isolated themes, and noted some prominent observations such as "photos of dinner in front of the television" or "jewelry: Hermes bangles and Gucci ring" on my charts. I aimed to have these observational notes serve as anchors for forming thematic jot notes inspired by Benoit's (2016) accounts. For each photograph collection, I produced a notetaking sheet with four thematic dimensions and the corresponding analysis produced via these analytical threads. Mitchell and Weber (1999) noted that "[p]hotographs are something we just take for granted; they get taken…[but] [h]ow often…do we look into them, or really consider them as either 'tangible images' of the past or as records of lost moments" (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 74). I used Mitchell and Weber's (1999) notions of photographs as artefacts of moments, aiming to discover how the content of my collections spoke to my own personal past (contained within and beyond the images), and the future to come (the continuation of the images). Mitchell and Weber (1999) called into question particular ways

of interacting with (and interrogating) photographs. The authors discussed the methods of Annette Kuhn (1995) in dealing with memory work, noting important steps in approaching photographs: considering the human subject, considering the picture's context, discussing the techniques and aesthetic circumstances of the photograph's production, and discussing the photograph's currency and viewership (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 99). The authors also illuminated processes of altering ways of seeing, through cropping and staging (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 98). I used these considerations when approaching my own photographs, paying close attention to the presentation of the content, the codes and conventions that went into presenting the content, and the personal decisions behind including or omitting content. To synthesize, I developed a personal set of analysis questions inspired by Mitchell and Weber's (1999) memory work. My questions are as follows: What or Who is the subject of the photograph? What is the context surrounding this moment? What are some artistic decisions included in the photograph (lighting, cropping, etc.)? Who were the viewers of this photograph? (Despite the fact that my photographs were all intended for personal use and viewership, I recognize that certain moments were captured with the intension of being shared. I feel these particular photographs speak to, even more so than the immortalization of a moment, my own validation of having participated in it). On my notetaking sheets, in addition to observational notes on anchor memories, I included notes in response to my analysis questions. I used these notes to form the curatorial statements (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019) for each collection, which I would later put in conversation with my other processed data (observational jot notes and interviews) to form my final narrative account.

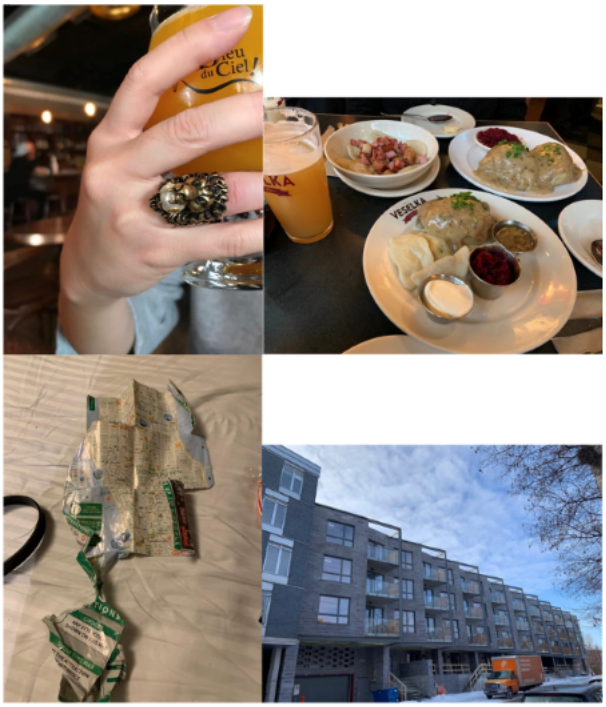
Synthesis: What do these collections tell me about me?

Paul O'Neill and Soren Andreasen (2007) connected the act of curating to Francois Truffaut's theory of the auteur, conceptualizing the "curator as a creator…rather than a facilitator or administrator of exhibitions" (O'Neill & Andreasen, 2007, p. 138). This perspective on curating provided inspiration for my treatment of photograph collections, as I aimed, from my compilation and interactions with the images, to create meaning and stories. For my curatorial statements, I aimed to produce a message, or set of messages, on my personal self. Within each statement, I discussed the context of the collection, recurrent themes, and the meaning rendered from the images. Patti Allison (2019) as cited in Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2019) created curatorial statements for her project on social justice photo albums. Allison (2019) noted that curatorial statements "help guide the way audiences perceive [an] exhibition…[and offer] a chance to communicate directly to viewers" (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019, p. 49). Interestingly, the sole viewer of my collection, up until the publication of my Doctoral thesis, has been myself. However, I found Allison's (2019) conceptualization of curatorial statements to be helpful in channeling a focus for my collections, and allowing me to step in and out of my position as the "self" subject of observation. My internal positioning allowed me to create personal messages, but treating the collections as exhibitions for analysis offered me a position from which to make "outsider" observations.

Curatorial Statements: Independent Photograph Collections

The following four passages form my self-study curatorial statements of photographs. These statements offer cohesion to the collections, while displaying my own reflective process in analyzing my memories.

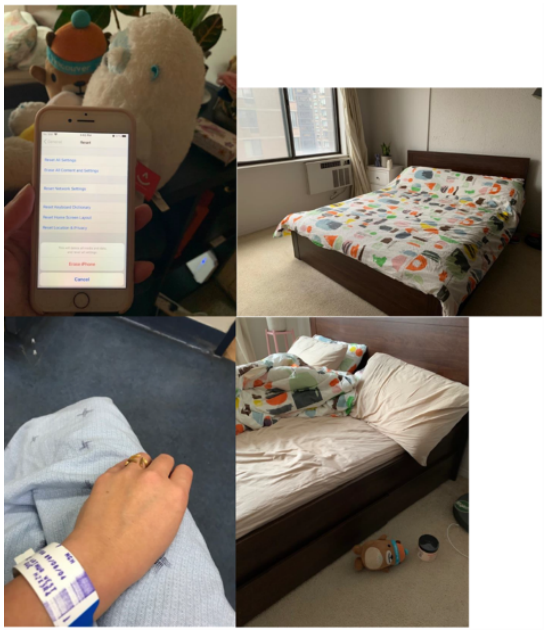
SIGNIFICANT LIFE EVENTS



This collection reflects feelings of picking up and moving on, but also pausing to reflect upon my journey. Ranging from a series of close-up shots of beautiful meals and shiny jewelry that suggest meticulous focus and attention to placement, to some casual snaps of my parents and (a new) partner (often taken prior to enjoying delicious food), there is an air of enjoyment, celebration and rewards in these pictures. This collection, which has notably been permeated by the ghost of my ex-husband, displays my constant effort to develop and discover my (new) personal self. From the images of my first home, to the weathered map of Manhattan that guided my family vacation, these images show a constant commitment to overcoming challenges, developing new skills (I have always been directionally challenged, so using a paper map was a triumph), and celebrating the self I have (and continue to) become. The recurrent images of food, from a homemade pumpkin pie (my first, largely successful attempt), to an iconic Eastern European perogy dinner at Veselka's, to a sunny lunch (date) at Ikea, display my slight

obsessiveness with not only food, but the victories (big or small) it accompanies. While my images of food often display the meal as a star subject, without human subjects eating it, these images channel the special moments that deserve celebration; notably, this food also reflects my personal recognition that I embody a "self" that is worth celebrating. From an impromptu beer tour in Vermont, to a solo brownie and fizzy water at my first course lecturer planning meeting, the food in these images has been a vessel for (and a partner to) significant life events.

FAILURES



The image of the home screen of my old mobile phone, prompting me to "Erase iPhone" sums up the feelings of this collection. This is a collection that has once again been permeated by the ghost of my ex-husband, but rather than sparking victories in meeting and overcoming challenges, these images reflect the loneliness that has become a notable part of my personal self. The ghost's presence is everywhere in this collection, eerily forcing me to witness a life that once consisted of beautiful things and love, which is now being sold on Facebook marketplace

by a newly single, lost self. I recall choosing the dark wood Ikea bed that stood in my former apartment, and how my ex-husband had travelled from our previous residence to spend the day constructing the frame. I also recall sitting on my couch, waiting for a total stranger to finish breaking apart the same frame that housed so many fond, warm memories. Finally, I recall returning "home" after spending the weekend away, only to find a massive, rectangular void in the carpet, and my ex-husband's presence all over the space. This collection has shown me my own experiences of coming to terms with erasing a life, and how seemingly quickly the "sacred" can turn to "omitted". The image of my hospital bracelet, along with remnants from a series of failed dates, reflect my constant fear of being alone, and my desire to once again be happy. I also feel that these images reflect a desperate spiraling and an unwillingness to accept the fact my former life had been erased. Lastly, images of my (stuffed) animals, Doris and Muk, falling on the ground, suggest my desire to capture my own personal failures on film. They too, had been abandoned, first by my sister and then by my ex-husband. They also formed, at least what I felt, to be my only companions in an extremely scary life. Meanwhile, my carelessness in letting these creatures fall violently, reflects a failure to control the chaos that had become my new norm.

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

This collection reflects a quest for art in life. Again, food assumes a central position in these images, but this collection pays specific attention to composition and the unexpected juxtaposition of food and beautiful things. However, in the image taken of my mother with a string of gnarly Brussel sprouts, the food is not particularly beautiful as it is eye catching. This reminded me of the images I took as a child and teenager of misplaced fruits that I would find in my everyday travels. I also, as a child, asked my mother to pose with a rotting orange that had been infested with ants on a window sill, showing that my fascination with displaced produce has been an ongoing source of inspiration. In two photographs from this collection, I placed an orange on another food item. In one instance, it was a cruller donut and, in another situation, it was a tub of coconut eggnog yogurt. Interestingly, at the time of writing this passage, I have taken to hiding oranges in plain sight. The unexpected nature of my compositions reflects my playful experimentation with the different elements I encounter on a daily basis, but also a Surrealist impetus to subvert the ordinary and breathe narratives into the "things" that surround

me. This is especially evident in the images of my (stuffed) animals, particularly the ones where Muk, the marmot, stares out of the window in a manner indicative of Friedrich's Wanderer. Evidently, for me, the innocent building blocks of my life hold great importance and inspiration, as they channel stories of their own. This collection also displays my interest in particular philosophies, notably the trend of vegan food, with which I have a fascination in its own practice of subverting expectations (a milkshake that contains no milk), and also Anthony Bourdain, a lost figure whom I feel has helped me embrace my divergence and curiosity. Finally, this collection displays an interest in novel ways of seeing and approaching the world. An image reflecting the use of fresh snow to cool beers and champagne displayed a resourceful, and somewhat whimsical way of being inspired by everyday life.

QUESTIONING

This collection reflects reservation, skepticism, and my unwillingness to trust the world at face value. While the recurrent theme of food surfaces in this collection, these images reflect subtle

questions of the "normal" world around me. From a lone BLT sandwich on a desk, left behind by a student who quickly fell ill upon entering the class, to boxes of Little Debbie Christmas tree-shaped snack cakes, this collection displays my curiosity and fascination with the strangeness of everyday life. Vegan food has once again appeared in my images, in the form of veggie ground meat(less) product, a fast-food burger, and a Beyond Meat sandwich. Once again, the concept of something presenting itself as a regular, accepted part of everyday life, when in fact it is foreign, raises (Surrealist) questions of reality, but also feelings of betrayal and lies. I wondered, to what extent the other elements of my life were imitations, and how it can become commonplace to sustain oneself on a life of inauthenticity. This concept was present in the images of Bar Boulud, a restaurant I had very much wanted to dislike. After Daniel Boulud took over the local high-end bistro, Feenie's, which had been a much-loved special occasion destination for my family, I questioned the chef's motivations. Especially seeing as he was a friend and mentor of the Feenie's chef, I became especially repelled by Boulud's seeming act of betrayal. However, when the Bar Boulud meal ended up becoming an occasion in and of itself, with a lobster potato salad serving as inspiration for my own attempt, I realized how my skepticism has operated in creating rigid narratives. This collection reflects my tendency to continually ask questions, sometimes to the point of personal frustration. I have always thought of myself as a proponent of justice, as I question what I believe to be superficial, hypocritical or inauthentic. In a way, my Chinatown Christmas dinner in New York, as well as the old postcard addressed to my parents' former apartment in Halifax, display my efforts to deconstruct and pursue reality, while crafting a better understanding of my personal self.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I describe my personal self-study, which highlights my engagement with photographs to discover messages about my personal teacher self. In the process of discovering more about who I am, ranging from my successes and points of pride to my failures and sources of vulnerability, I hoped to create a picture of my "ways of being" (Berger, 2008) during the time of my study. As well, my exploration of elements which inspired me, as well as questions I asked of the world, illuminated my "ways of seeing" (Berger, 2008) during this period of time. In turn, through this process, I aimed to gain a better understanding of the motivations underlying my decision making within my teaching practice. I gravitated towards Surrealism as a source of inspiration for the problems I perceived within my classroom, and forged a connection with Critical Pedagogy in an effort to demand more from my discipline. However, I wondered about the elements of my personal self, which caused me to see my practice in this way. Therefore, in order to understand the connections that I aimed to forge, and the experimentation within which I hoped to engage, I needed to discover why I felt compelled to pursue these directions. I detail the procedures I used to collect, categorize, eliminate and analyze my data. These photograph collections would eventually be placed alongside my other data artefacts, which is detailed in Chapter 7 of this thesis, to create a joint conversation on my teaching-researcher study. I then used the findings from this joint conversation of artefacts to construct the narrative account in Chapter 6, which expresses my shared story of ELA experimentation.

Chapter 6: Narrative Exploration: A (Sur)real Story of ELA

The following novella forms a synthesized account of the ELA teaching and learning experience that I shared with my Secondary Five students in 2020[34]. Using my observational jot notes, student interview notes with mini narrative write-ups, and my self-study of personal pictures, I attempted to tell a (our) story of English exploration. Originally intended to be a short, murder-mystery search for clues, the concept of my narrative instead took the form of Michel Tremblay-style vignettes. I recognized that while these moments contained traditional narrative principles of rising action, climax and falling action, linear plot development could not always represent our journey. Rather, nuggets of "life-action", and a fluid movement in and out of the personal, private, professional and philosophical fueled the development of this account. While students' identities were masked in this narrative, the moments were, for the most part, transferred word-for-word from the classroom to the page. When creating this account, I too, struggled with the question my students asked throughout the year: what is the point? I considered having a powerful "theme" and explicit messages imbedded in my narrative, but realized, upon starting my account, that the moments had already written themselves. I aimed, therefore, to manipulate the action as little as possible, instead selecting memories that would, when pieced together, speak to the "real" engagement that took place within my classroom of characters.

[34] I have yet to share my narrative account with my former students. These students, the characters of my ELA story, graduated nearly three years ago, but I feel their stories have offered a familiar closeness throughout my writing process. After finalizing my final thesis draft, I plan to share my narrative account with the full class, as all of my students maintain alumni email addresses.

Story as Life, "Real" Life as Story

Teaching, or Bus(t): Exploring (Sur)real-world Learning via the Frizzle Method

Another year, bringing with it another class, was slated to begin, and the teacher found herself demoralized already. She wondered why she had fallen in love with English literature in the past. There clearly must have been something that pushed her to pursue a life emersed in books, and a discussion of them. Whatever it was now seemed far away from her current position in the English class. She felt she was drowning in a subject of pomposity and elitism, which was simultaneously redundant and foreign. The teacher, despite entering her new classroom presumably summer-refreshed, felt a weight of frustration, indicative of year-end burn-out. She did not have time for the song and dance of art parading around as life within a subject that did not serve her, or anyone else for that matter. Her mind was being pulled to her all-encompassing "real life" problems. She then wondered if the spaciness (whether it involved dreaming to far-off mind-places or sitting in a glazed-over sense of incomprehension) of her students could be evidence of a shared experience of English. The teacher then asked herself, "If the world outside is powerful enough to permeate the classroom, why does our subject feel so disassociated from it?"

The teacher took a desperate swig of (courage) coffee and trekked towards the small and smelly Mathematics room that was one of four spaces assigned to her class for the year. It was a nice reminder that her class had no home. "Where's the teacher?" she heard the crowd wail in what she already perceived to be fatigued indifference. She wondered when she had become "the teacher", lacking in capitalized punctuation and personality. She thought about other "the teachers" she had encountered in her travels. What repeatedly struck her was how representations of "the teacher" seemed to reflect her current state of frustration, fatigue and

most unfortunately, failure. The beloved (and despised) Ms. Shields from *A Christmas Story*, the teacher's personal idea of canonical literature, formed a distant authority figure who appeared to speak English as a foreign language. In Ralphie's daydream following his proud completion of an English composition, Shields was depicted in Victorian garb, using a posh British accent, despite living in Indiana. The teacher's mind then drifted to Paul Giamatti's character in *Sideways*, whose name she could not recall. Giamatti played a failed writer, who pursued the vocation of English teaching as a very obvious back-up. The teacher considered how she came to be surrounded by such lackluster company. To her left stood a teacher who appeared to be of another era, and to the right stood a lifeless person who was simply "not good enough" for more. Both cases, alongside her own, involved previously passionate, misunderstood storytellers.

The teacher, severing herself from this reflection, determined she must work to be understood. Her fellow "the teachers" existed in their own worlds, trying so hard to spark something in their students. The teacher was not interested in solitary confinement, but rather, intended to represent the "real world". Why, however, did it seem so difficult to render English "real?"

"Oh wait!" the teacher said to herself in a rare lightbulb moment, "What about Ms. Frizzle?" The teacher thought back to her beloved red-headed colleague who shared her love of eclectic fashion, but stood apart in her ability to render her teaching material relevant. Frizzle was a fictional teacher who would guide her students on surreal-style educational adventures on *The Magic School Bus.* The students would travel via a magical bus, which could transform itself in size and form, in an *Alice in Wonderland*-style manner. While traditional school outings may involve museums or science centers, Frizzle would bring students into loaves of rising bread or into the digestive tract of a classmate, in an effort to illuminate scientific understandings. The

complicated concepts of photosynthesis and digestion still stuck with the teacher, despite having encountered Frizzle decades ago, and never having stepped on the bus. The teacher wondered about the "magic" ingredient that led to Frizzle's success. She certainly looked over-the-top, even more so than Shields in Ralphie's "A++++" reverie. How, then, was Frizzle able to get through to the students and render her material "real"? The teacher paused and recognized that Frizzle, the master of "real" learning, is a cartoon character, and her world (possibly alongside what it represents), is similarly unreal. This being said, using a motor vehicle to physically enter into course content could not possibly be the only way to access the "real world" by way of the classroom. The teacher figured there must be a way to merge the distanced and misunderstood Shields and Giamatti with the pertinent Frizzle. Perhaps borrowing a little of the latter's "unreal", or possibly "surreal" approach to viewing the "real" content of the curriculum was an option. "I don't intend to take anyone on a bus," the teacher concluded, "but maybe testing the established English system could help my students engage a little more like the Frizzle class. We don't actually need a bus, and we can go on adventures within the classroom itself."

"Okay," the teacher mentally uttered, "it's settled. I'm going to do away with the boring, irrelevant ways we experience English, and construct a surreal, Frizzle-esque classroom!" The teacher took one last contemplative pause before entering her class, which seemed to hold new-found promise. She wondered, "What does a surreal classroom look like? For that matter, what does a "real" classroom look like? Will my class be unreal in my efforts to make it surreal, or could it possibly be more "real" than the reality we know? Will this even constitute education in the end, or could it be something else?" With her questions and possibilities, the teacher entered the classroom.

"Hey Teacher! Get to the point, or leave those kids alone!"

"Hi everyone!" the teacher began. "I hope everyone had a lovely summer. I'm looking forward to trying something new with you this year." The teacher gazed over the class and noted a couple usual suspects. She had done some ruthless trading with her colleague, Madeleine, and had strategically opted for a pack of boys over a clique of girls. The cohort had been the teacher's first group at the school, nearly four years earlier, when she was a student teacher intern. She recalled the moment when the boys standing before her, seemingly checked-out before anyone had checked-in, had prepared her a farewell rap at the end of her stay. Little did everyone know, she would be staying on for many years to come, and accompanying their own departure. "I feel," the teacher began again, sensing unnatural pep in her tone, "that when you all start Grade 11, you think you "know" everything about English. I personally feel there is way more to learn, and we will try to discover that together this year." "Will there be a final exam?" Gregory, a wide-eyed student sitting in the front of the room eagerly inquired. "Yes, there will be one, and I will prepare you for it. For now, however, I'm hoping we can start by setting our sights on more."

The teacher took a breath and started again. "How many of you enjoy English class? Be honest." The eyes around her quickly peeled away, as the students slumped into their chairs and began to deeply contemplate the floor, their shoes, and the calcified gum beneath the non-dynamic furniture (we were only able to be dynamic once in our four-room-switch-fest). Gregory started again, slightly nervously. "English is fine, I guess. It's just that I speak English already and I'm not planning on being a writer, so I don't know if it's the most useful subject. No offence." The eyes around the teacher lowered even further. Vicky, a tiny, and similarly eager student nervously polished off a mini plastic sandwich bag of pretzels. The teacher

recalled Vicky shared her inability to digest lactose, also remarking how Vicky always seemed to be snacking on something or other, despite her delicate frame. "I agree with Greg," Vicky started, "We already *talk* English, but I think we still have things to learn here, because when we get jobs, it's unprofessional to make grammar mistakes." Silence swept over the room again, as Vicky began picking at a bag of puffed rice snacks.

"Thank you for sharing, you two." The teacher started. "From what I hear, it seems we are very interested in the language aspect of English, like the rules and the formulas. Those are important aspects of English and I do not aim to detract from that. However, is there possibly more for English to offer? Perhaps we could try and approach the subject differently. If we maybe saw how the subject could help us in ways beyond grammatical rules, maybe we could take a greater interest in the class!" "But what's the point of the class other than grammar?" Jacques, one of the boys who unfortunately came with a warning amongst the teacher's colleagues, piped in reluctantly. The teacher began, "You will spend this year searching for the real point of English class, or, at the very least, something beyond grammar and spelling." "But what if there isn't a point? Can you just tell us what you want us to find?" Jacques was losing patience in his tone, while his desk mate, Josiah, had fallen asleep. The teacher took a breath. She recalled discussions of the theme paragraph of reading responses, which were nearly identical year after year. Theme, being the meaning, or what the teacher preferred to call, "the meat and bones" of a reading response, formed the essential takeaways transmitted from writers to readers. The task of extracting meaningful themes often seemed arduous to students, prompting frustration and disengagement. In response to Jacques' similarly confused sentiment, the teacher responded with the same answer she always offered to frustrated theme-seekers. "There's always a point. In fact, there isn't just one to find."

"Is this a real story?"

The students had freshly returned from the school's annual Grade 11 trip to the Stratford film festival, a tradition which would unfortunately be halted for the two years to come. The teacher was getting ready to launch a collage activity, which would call upon ethical considerations in the productions. Combining studies of ethics and religious cultures into the English curriculum was a logistical, somewhat bureaucratic decision within her school. Possibly in an effort to save time and address the strange scheduling holes of the English department, the broad concept of ethics found its home there. Due to the open-ended nature of ethics, finding a "general" approach proved to be challenging in the department. However, the teacher found the appendage-style add-on method of approaching ethics in English was also a bit of a missed opportunity. From where she stood, the teacher conceptualized ethics to involve issues of societal anthropology, necessitating an exploration of values and behaviours. Issues of society undoubtedly, in the eyes of the teacher, took the form of social justice. As a self-professed "proponent of justice" (she felt being a "warrior" did not fit her demeanour), the teacher chose to approach ethics from this angle. English often constituted, at least in the teacher's experiences, a study of form. While some of the teacher's colleagues viewed the "English" form as a vessel for constructing arguments on important "ethical" questions of "right and wrong", the teacher desired to take this curricular mash-up a step further. She viewed English as a study of humans, which was a perspective that invited criticism from staunch followers of form. Ethical explorations, thus offered a gateway for the storytelling of English to become relevant in the world beyond books. When met with frequent sighs of impatience, as her student readers wondered why they were going to the trouble of analyzing characters' problems, the teacher made clear how said problems were their own.

Perhaps this fixation on the "real" nature of English was informed by the teacher's own interest in Surrealist philosophy. The movement involved questioning reality, which meant critiquing the validity and existence of all societal constructions. Surrealism aimed to achieve a state of "pure" reality, by moving beyond human's conditioned ideas of "real". The teacher found this philosophical puzzle and the somewhat sacrilegious manner of problematizing high and low "normality" to be very exciting. She had encountered the art movement years ago in France, and for some reason, kept imagining places for the philosophy to fit within her own art domain. Sure, many argued that the English Language Arts were a study of form-for-function and the fine arts constituted an exploration of forms-for-pleasure. Either way, the teacher struggled to see the "real" nature of these approaches to art, and she sensed her students felt the same way. As an introduction to the year, herself, and the loaded responsibilities of being a senior student who would soon enter the elusive "society", which was so often referenced in class, the teacher chose to try something new. She was inspired by Frizzle, Paris, and the band of Surrealist social-justice-oriented predecessors who saw utility and power in the arts, whichever form they may take. Her plan to infuse her traditional, form-focused subject with the philosophy of a 20th century art movement did not seem like an obvious connection. However, the teacher loved connections. She took pleasure in associating unexpected foods, references, works of art, and people. Wasn't that the point of having crowds of distinct individuals share the same societal space? At the same time, could a movement so intrinsically linked with the works it produced truly translate to a contemporary classroom focused on print literature analysis? In any case, the teacher knew that if she was going to achieve any success from inviting her English students to think via the Surrealists' approach to fluid reality, she would need to start small. The teacher launched her first unit with an introduction to the Surrealism movement, hoping to wet

the students' critical appetites. "Look, there are boobs!" Jacques, the clown-meets-politician character of the class called out when viewing the teacher's presentation. The teacher let out a silent sigh, and told herself, "At least something in my class can make them interested."

The teacher did not want her particular brand of social-justice-oriented "ethics in English" to be introspective to the point of alienation. An exploration of societal constructions and the intricate human complexities within our "real world" thus served, according to the teacher, as a solid possibility for asking big questions. She aimed to complicate the "normal" in true Surrealist style. Her privileged student body, as adorable as they were, could benefit from learning how the rest of the world lived. The teacher felt a sense of pedagogical duty to guide her students in broadening their perspectives and exploring a variety of "real" worlds. Ultimately, the teacher hoped to illuminate the role of the individual (student) within the collective (society), through her approach to ethical English. Her ministry curriculum highlighted the importance of societal preparation, which took a decidedly vocational, economic slant. This was the teacher's personal way of preparing her students for the outside world, which undoubtedly would require them to think.

CUT IT OUT!!

She had meticulously collected magazines for the art-making collage assignment, amassing donations from the faculty and pulling from her own personal stash. Pulling apart existing materials to express new messages was, in the teacher's mind, the epitome of Surrealist found art. The idea of making "something" out of nothing, or at the very least, the "existing", had resonated with her strongly in her early explorations of the Surrealism movement. She hoped the connection she had forged would spark critical conversations amongst her students.

"Or," she worried, "will they simply think I've regressed to kindergarten art class and miss any kind of point to be had?"

The boys were animated about their lewd conversations that were overheard during the Stratford trip. "Will you be judging us on our ethical decisions from the trip?" asked Quinn, one of the main suspects involved in the Stratford escapades. In one of her prouder moments, Madeleine and the teacher managed to stay up all night in the hallway, trying to prevent the boys in Stratford from sneaking out to meet girls. The teacher overheard more than traditional teacher/student relationships would dictate, but it oddly gave her some street cred in establishing her authority. The boys, despite feeling frustrated at their failure to elicit illicit dates, had expected the teacher to deny the existence of sex, relationships and raging adolescent hormones. Especially when working with a senior class, it seemed strange to the teacher that "traditional" authority would place barriers around these conversations when maintaining "proper" dynamics. Therefore, when assessing the situation, Madeleine and the teacher not only sensed the boys' intentions, but also stared them in the face. English, according to the teacher, had always been based on humanity. She felt this interaction kickstarted her plan to ground their classroom in the "real" world.

In working through the collage exercise, the students found it difficult to represent ideas in visual form. "First, you need to isolate the ethical issue you would like to explore," the teacher prompted, "and then you will find ways to show it using your found imagery! Remember to stick to your ethical issue. As you leaf through your pictures, you will discover more and more dimensions of your issue to depict. Do not ignore these problems and questions that come up!" The teacher wondered how a generation of students who seemed so adept at negotiations (principally around deadlines), and recounting stories (often those indicative of the

Stratford moments), could find it challenging to communicate with pictures. "Take a look at the magazine images." The teacher nudged, "Ask yourself what they're saying, and piece together a message using what you see. Who is the intended audience or reader of these magazines?" "Us?" Scarlett inquired out of the blue, while staring out the window. "Exactly." The teacher noted. "We humans, are the intended audience for these images. They are speaking to and about us. Ethical issues concern who, again?" "Us??" Sara-Lee added. "Right again. We are trying to discover ethical concerns to help us learn more about us as a society. You're going to use human-centered content to show this." The teacher paused and realized her use of the word "content" may resonate well, if not in a slightly misaligned manner. The students' current curation of content, after all, bore little immediate resemblance to the social media platforms of the generation. Nonetheless, the teacher was happy to have offered her small piece on humanity, especially following a rather disconcerting sentiment that a student expressed during her previous final examination.

For the year-end evaluation of the year before, the teacher had made a similar spiel about humans and stories. "The only thing we can confirm," the teacher had noted excitedly, "is that the short story you read will contain humans. That is, after all, the point of our subject. English is essentially about humans trying to learn about other humans. We're a complicated species!" "No, it's not." Dennis, an inquisitive, highly critical member at the back of the class offered, "That's not the point of English. That's the point of Philosophy or Psychology." "I see." The teacher took a breath. "It's actually the point of all of these subjects. It's the point of the arts. But we don't have time for that discussion now. Open your exam booklets!"

Now, with a new batch of fresh faces, the teacher had the time. She needed to prioritize exploring the point of the subject. How had English entered the conceptual vacuum that

divorced it from other artistic disciplines? When had the English Language Arts, her subject's namesake, lost its artistic power, rendering it a science? Excitedly, the teacher began distributing the old magazines. There was something therapeutic about seeing her English students' faces, focused upon real paper, rather than screens, fixated on finding the images that would externalize their thoughts. "Perhaps we all need an occasional return to our kindergarten roots," the teacher thought. "Maybe, somewhere along the way, we lost our ability to question what we see." The teacher made a mental note to gain it back.

"Ms. Ho," Jacques had a slightly concerned look on his face, "there's a note in mine. It's from Larry to Jonathan. Should I still use it?" The teacher was suddenly plunged back into her real world. She realized she had been using her teaching and learning environment as an escape from the outside. Sometimes she came close, and the comfort of forging a space with her students that could be controlled, to a certain extent, felt invaluable at this time. For the most part, within the space of her English classroom, the teacher managed to feel special and needed. The responsibility of guiding her students and attempting to open their eyes to new modes of thinking and experiencing their world(s), was a weight she welcomed. In this space, she became her own superhero self, an alter ego of sorts, touched, but not fazed, by the difficulties of her other life. She was Ms. Ho, and here, in her classroom, she was not alone.

"Cut it up, Jacques." "That's the point of this activity. We're making something new from the conventions we see, even if they're from the past!" Quinn struggled to find desk space next to an excited Jacques, who was taking pleasure in hacking up the hockey magazine that unbeknownst to him, was a gift the teacher's brother-in-law had offered to her former partner as a welcome token to Canada. On Quinn's other side, sat a frustrated Josiah. Following the students' trip to the theatre festival, Josiah had received several warnings about his conduct and

use of offensive language. The constant eyes in his direction seemed to have been wearing at his patience. Sookie and Shawn, a pair of quiet and studious English language learners, sat in their regular spots at the back of the room. The teacher glanced in their direction to remind herself that they were still there.

The students continued comparing their magazine selections and Jacques held tightly to what had now become "his" hockey magazine. The teacher was happy to let him have it. Braden wondered why all the people in the magazines were happy. "I want someone not to be happy." He uttered frustratingly. "Try subverting the imagery and critiquing the idea that all social representations of people need to be happy." The teacher offered. Jacques voiced his presence once more from the crowd. "I'm trying to find more white people." Vicky looked up from her frantic flipping of pages, as Scarlett continued staring out the window. "I have loads!" she noted, handing Jacques a handful of Caucasian clippings. The teacher giggled to herself at the students' frank exchange. She wondered, when later recounting this moment, if her readers would cringe. Personally, the teacher found the exchange to be an honest display of engaged students, who were speaking their own "language". The teacher paused, herself not a "white person" like those in the pictures, and wondered if some of her more PC-sensitive colleagues would have chosen to police the authenticity of her classroom. The teacher took another breath and stuck with her initial compulsion to giggle. The students that stood before her were humans, and they were showing, now more than ever, that they were colourful. Especially with the teacher's goal of reading humanity and reality into the characters on the page, she wondered, "where along the way, did we, as real humans, stop becoming characters?" As class concluded, the teacher circulated to collect the dried glue sticks that she had borrowed from the art department. Scarlett, who managed a whiff of inspiration towards the end of the class, was

proud of her work. She pulled out her cellphone to snap a picture for her mother. The teacher would subsequently spend the year chasing moments like this with Scarlett.

Art (movement) meets (life) Classroom

Eventually, it came time to call Surrealism by its name. The teacher had carefully "set the stage" for her new approach to English, aware of the students' existing ways-of-seeing. She had pursued this singular goal for several classes, drawing attention to students' methods of building conversations, while highlighting the societal norms that arose in the process. The last class had taken place in the dynamic classroom, which housed moving chairs on wheels, and puzzle-piece shaped desks. This meant students were rolling all over the tiny space, which was intended for French instruction. In a quintessential Quinn moment, he had decided it would be a great idea to lift weights with the dynamic, bouncing stools. The teacher chose to casually dismiss his claims that he could easily out-fight Conor McGregor in a UFC match-up, as the rest of the "dynamic" students also needed to be herded in. Today, however, the class swapped dynamism for questionable layouts. In another French instruction classroom, the teacher's desk had been placed at the back of the room, with the blackboard (the only remaining member of its species at the time, which has since been replaced) at the front. This meant that the teacher would need to project her presentation slides to the backs of heads. How practical. Nonetheless, the teacher began her introduction to Surrealist philosophy by showing an introductory presentation of the artistic movement.

She awkwardly ran back and forth from the front of the room to the back when switching slides. Braden, in response to the concept of subverting rules and tradition, asked, "Does this mean we can host a rebellion?" The teacher responded, "Let's try and harness the philosophy

that fueled these people's rebellions and focus on that. In other words, for our current purposes, the act of rebelling is perhaps less important than the reasons for doing so. Perhaps we can relate to those reasons." As expected, Jacques and Josiah giggled at the slide of Cabanel's nudes, which the teacher had juxtaposed to Dali's *Persistence of Memory*. The teacher's goal juxtaposing traditional artistic techniques and Surrealist experimentation stood no chance against the power of exposed breasts. Nonetheless, Jacques noted, "I've seen the clocks painting! Josiah and I talked about it at camp!" "Perhaps," the teacher thought, "this *is* going somewhere." The teacher projected an image of the iconic Mona Lisa, noting, "She's Italian, but she lives in Paris. The poor girl is under bullet proof glass! I always walk by her and say, "Hi Mona!" and she goes, "Hi Steph!" It's because an Italian guy tried to steal her. I would never want to sit in that little box!" Gregory chimed in, "The Italian guy didn't just try, he succeeded. I can't remember if he kept the painting in his house for four months or four years." "What did he expect to do from that" asked Sara Lee. "He wanted to return the painting to Italy and actually did hang it there for a while." Gregory stated, bringing the conversation (along with Mona) home.

The class continued, as the teacher showed an image of Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*, the teacher's personal favourite example of bastardized high art. She recalled being exposed to the work for the first time when studying art history during her exchange year in Paris. The concept of the avant-garde and experimentation excited her, and she particularly took to the Surrealists' fascination with life itself, alongside the subversion of it. Subsequently, the teacher would scour thrift stores around her hometown of Vancouver, attempting to find a black rotary phone to accompany the plastic lobster she had purchased for her niece. She was attempting to reconstruct the Dali's masterpiece *Lobster Telephone* that she had been fortunate enough to see

in several exhibitions. The piece was technically a sculpture, but was perplexing in its absurdity and apparent simplicity. The items that constructed it, a black phone and false lobster, almost appeared too "everyday" to warrant a place in the museum. Finding that place took extreme and admirable audacity. The teacher eventually returned to France, finding a gem (or perhaps a brick) of a phone, which she would proceed to truck back to Vancouver to reconstruct the head-scratching masterpiece.

The whimsy and life-like nature of Surrealist work spoke to the teacher. She even briefly wondered why she had pursued a life of print text exploration, rather than studying the visual arts. She was fascinated by the Surrealists' unexpected ways of capturing reality. Perhaps this fascination moved beyond her recreation of the lobster phone, and formed a way-of-seeing that painted her own, seemingly less exotic reality. She recalled her fascination with "found fruit", where she created a retrospective of a fruit-fly infested orange and a banana that had been mysteriously hung from a tree in Oregon. She had done this long before being exposed to Surrealism as a movement, and wondered if the naming of this philosophy had, in a way, explained an aspect of self. She would go on to take photographs on mass, assembling collections of memory nuggets and capturing the amusing, and often unsettling nature of the objects and world around her. Her later practice of hiding oranges in plain sight, allowing others to react to the presence of the unexpected fruits, managed to ignite excitement in the teacher every time. Perhaps her goal lay in transmitting the emotions she felt when interacting with the mundane world around her. Perhaps Surrealism could help her students see life on their own terms. Perhaps, as well, English could return to the "real", and students could start to see themselves in their surrounding art.

The revelations the teacher had, however, when connecting her subject to a subversive artistic philosophy, did not seem instinctual to the students. The teacher worried that her preface to the Surrealism movement, her use of visual collages to express meaning, and her attention to building arguments via discourse, had been too conceptually distant for her students to grasp. The teacher repeated herself, emphasizing important facets of their exploration, hoping to facilitate the construction of links. The teacher constantly reminded herself that the connection she perceived, which led to her pursuit of new teaching and learning adventures, needed to be revisited on a regular basis. She repeated to herself silently, how Surrealism is not an appendage, but a philosophy. It was not her goal to add a Surrealism unit or task into her English curriculum, but rather, to infuse the presence of Surrealist thinking into the students' ways of approaching books; and this, she reassured herself, would take time. She fought the pressure she felt, which crept up occasionally and urged her to produce something from her exploration. She felt compelled to justify her new method to her students (and herself), as their fatigue and impatience begged the question, "why bother?" She sometimes asked herself why she was going to this trouble, and wondered if she was crazy to not simply pursue another year of teaching using the dusty resources her colleagues confirmed "had stood the test of time". She felt guilty dragging her students through her exploration, at times wondering if her own hunch and hunger, were means of compensating for lacking areas in her outside life. When confusion arose, in response to a discussion of Surrealist philosophy and the teacher's invitation to "see" in new ways, she felt like a bad mom. However, amidst (verbal and silent) questions of "why go to the trouble?" and "what's the point of all of this?", the teacher reminded herself that nothing new could come without disrupting norms. Perhaps lostness could be re-worked as an ingredient for discovery, rather than a sign of misstep.

Rings, pretty things, and off-topic bonding

"Hi Ms. Ho!" Vicky and Scarlett waved from the hallway as they entered the sauna-like classroom. Years later, the teacher would actually enjoy a spa holiday in the mountains, where she would successfully sweat out toxins for two minutes at a time in the sweltering hot cedar mini-rooms. Little did she know, her teaching had prepped her for essential life moments such as those. "How was your visit with your parents?" Vicky asked, while Scarlett wiped beads of sweat off her forehead. Before the weekend, the teacher had told the girls about her parents' upcoming visit. It was atypical for the parents to come at this time of year, what with Vancouver being so far and the Thanksgiving weekend offering little time to see the city (and their daughter). At this time, however, with the freshness of the teacher's life challenges, the parents figured a fall visit was in order. "It was amazing, girls!" the teacher responded, while flashing her new Gucci lion ring. It was a new acquisition, and a gift from the teacher's mother. Being a Leo, who recently viewed *Cleo de 5 à 7* for the first time, the teacher had embarked on a journey to find the perfect pearl ring. The search did not last long, as her mother (the perfect shopping partner), helped her locate the massive bronze and glass showstopper that claimed the former home of another significant band. "Oh my god, you got it!" Scarlett pronounced, with widening eyes. "We went shopping too! Halloween shopping!" "Amazing, dressing up is so fun!" the teacher responded, fully believing her words. After all, she "dressed up" every day to come to work.

Scarlett helped the teacher transport the *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* novels from the students' previous classroom to the current, boiling one. She subtly gestured at the Hermes bangle she had intentionally donned to match the teacher. The teacher felt a small wave of warmth sweep over, which she welcomed despite the suffocating heat. She realized how fortunate she was to have

the girls show genuine happiness in response to her small successes. She sometimes felt insecure about her connections with students on the basis of clothing and jewelry, wondering if they enjoyed bonding with her as a means to move off-task. The teacher recalled one of her former high school teachers, who would do just that. As a student, the teacher and her peers would long to pull their teacher away from the mundane course content to share stories of her amazing adventures. That teacher remained one of the teacher's favourite instructors to this day. Maybe a little off-topic storytelling had its place in the (her) classroom. The teacher also recalled, when lifting books through the hallway with Scarlett, how the girls reveled in her own adventures, but never pried into her (evolving) personal life. At one point, Scarlett has said to Jacques, who innocently asked about the teacher's marital status and also displayed a clear interest in dating Scarlett, "She never talks about him." The teacher, who now found herself "maritally" alone for the first time in nearly a decade, did not have the heart to tell her students about her recent failure. The teacher took Scarlett's message as a quiet, yet firm warning to Jacques and the rest of the class.

The Ethics of being a "Real" Boy

"Okay everyone, let's get started!" the teacher began, while gesturing for cellphones to be stashed away as the students sent final text messages concerning surely urgent matters. "Now, we have been discussing ethics for some time now. What are ethics again?" "Our ideas of what is right and wrong." Sara Lee offered. "Very good. Ethics, therefore, are personal, but it's fair to say we have been helped along a little in shaping our ethical mindsets. Let's discuss another term that we have touched upon a little bit, especially when chatting about Surrealism: the real. We could consider our ethics to be actions and beliefs based on our ideas of what is

real. So, what *does* it mean for something to be real?" "It's something that's tangible and we can hold on to it." Braden offered, as the teacher hid her excitement at his use of the word "tangible". Braden continued, "For example, it's like when people invest money in properties versus stocks." "How does it make you feel when you invest in something you can't touch?" the teacher inquired, offering an anecdote about a former landlord, who accepted rent money in the form of cryptocurrency. "Think about Jacques," the teacher continued. "We know he is real because he is right in front of us and we did not imagine him. However, he is also real because I legitimized him and registered him to be REAL. Jacques is a "real" boy. I do not want to touch him, but if I did, I know he would be tangible. However, the fact that I register Jacques to be a "boy" is a matter of construction. He could very well be a unicorn, as it's entirely arbitrary." Braden responded, with a puzzled expression, "Jacques is a real boy because there are only two genders." "Actually," the teacher said, "there aren't. You can be intersex. That's for your Science teachers to discuss." "Really?" asked Braden, "Well I feel that science tells us there are only two genders. I don't understand people who want to be called something other than "he" or "she" because those are real pronouns, whereas "them" isn't real." The teacher paused and contemplated Braden's use of the term "real", alongside the interesting push and pull of conservative and liberal thinking that was being displayed in the class. The teacher found Braden's traditional nature to be honest and oddly refreshing, despite her drastically differing viewpoints. Oddly, the teacher felt their school's flashy positioning on openness, where "woke" mindsets had become an unspoken norm, to feel less "real" than Braden's sincere perspectives. Though he was rigid in his stance, the teacher would continue to welcome Braden's opinions throughout the year, as she hoped to advocate for critical reflection (in all its forms). "Those terms," the teacher continued, referencing Braden's thoughts on genders, "are real because you

have legitimized them. Take Quinn for example. He *is* a boy. However, I can't say "congratulations on being a boy, Quinn." He didn't do anything like walk out of the womb and choose to be a boy. However, beyond his "male" status, for example if he is macho, empathetic…" "Alpha male?" added Jacques. "Yes, alpha male. Those are constructions. Think about how sometimes we actually blame our constructions and think we have no choice in enacting them, whereas they are very much that. Constructions. For example, we may say, "I hate women because society tells me I need to be misogynist." Well, no, that's a construction that you have internalized as a norm."

"Can we go back to pronouns?" Braden asked. "Nice use of Zwiers' conversation starters! That is called establishing a focus." The teacher had, in the previous summer, been invited to attend a Ministry of Education workshop on the use of talk in English. The organizing committee noticed how talk was a dimension of English that was often taken for granted, especially with the program assuming a level of native-speaking competence. A point was raised about English teachers naturally enjoying to talk, which highly resonated with the chatty teacher. The consequence of this tendency, however, was that English teachers did not always systematize the process of talk, instead approaching it on the basis of holistic, qualitative pleasure. The teacher was introduced to strategies for breaking down the process of talking and constructing arguments, and had eagerly attempted to introduce the method to her English department. Naturally, amongst what some (not her) may refer to as "dinosaurs", the only teacher who welcomed the strategy was her buddy, Madeleine. Braden smiled at the teacher's compliment on his argumentative approach. The rest of the class, especially Jacques, would jokingly remark on Braden's charisma, along with his "thirty-year-old" comportment and beard. The teacher was sure he was destined to be a high-powered business person in the future, and

subtly attempted to broaden his perspectives on the way there. "There are only two genders," he repeated, "and if I don't want to refer to someone as "them", I don't need to do it." Even in response to Braden's controversial claim, the teacher beamed at the heated direction of her class conversation. The students were using her class as a platform to reflect and react to their surrounding society. "That," the teacher thought to herself, "is what English is all about."

Sara Lee, somewhat exasperated, shot an angry look in Braden's direction. She wondered why some boys were so clueless. Luckily her own, curly haired, slightly nerdy partner seemed to be an exception. The teacher, who seemed to love "shipping" members of the class, had told Sara Lee how much she approved of their match. "If you're any kind of good human being," she continued in response to her infuriating classmate, "you would do what they ask because it could not have been easy to open up and come out like that." Sara Lee offered one last eye roll, as she thought about her boyfriend's best friend, Chandler. Originally, Sara Lee had assumed Chandler, a striking trans boy, to be her boyfriend's true love interest. Feeling completely inferior to the guy, Sara Lee gave up all hope in pursuing her partner, but instead forged a strong friendship with both boys. It would be Chandler who would later confide in Sara Lee, regarding his best friend's feelings for her. She felt a fond sense of admiration for Chandler's bravery, and would be eternally grateful that he was willing to share her partner's heart. Chandler had become her superhero brother of sorts, and Sara Lee felt, in that instant, that her family was being attacked. "Sara Lee," the teacher interjected, "let's deconstruct what you just said. I'm hearing that you mentioned "a good human being" which links to a value judgement based upon right and wrong. This sentiment speaks to your ethics. Your concept of acknowledging the desires of a friend in this situation shows your recognition that we all shape our own realities." The teacher paused, fighting the urge to show how strongly she sat in

accordance with Sara Lee's feelings. She told herself, in the moment, that this was not her time. She should let the students "do their thing" and build as they felt fit. Scarlett, in her typical free-spirited warmth, chimed in by saying, "I could come out as a horse on Instagram and everyone would accept it!" The teacher paused again; this time slightly lost in response to Scarlett's revelation. "I'm not well versed in social media, but I'm not entirely sure everyone would accept that. I feel that more so, it's the culture of the social community on Instagram to accept this coming out as a norm, and *YOUR* reality. In other words, you may feel it is normal to accept a person identifying as being a horse, and norms via your social platforms may dictate that people need to say they are also cool with it, but this does not necessarily mean everyone will agree, or that the actual horse-human thing will become a norm." The teacher paused again, noticed the time, and realized that she had forgotten about the heat of the room. "Wow," the teacher started, "that was a fantastic discussion about reality! I would like to thank you for sharing your perspectives and allowing yourselves to be vulnerable when considering the concept. For now, class is over! Have a great day and go find yourselves a swimming pool!"

To the teacher: Try not to take this personally

"I'm back!" Jacques announced his return after having spent a large portion of the class in the bathroom (or roaming the halls). "Welcome back, Jacques," the teacher exclaimed sarcastically. "You just missed my entire description of the task, so you can get Josiah to explain it to you." "Why would I help him?" Josiah responded defiantly, "He can do it himself." Slightly taken aback, the teacher responded, "Excuse me? Why are you being snarky? You said, "why would I help him?"" The teacher recognized her use of air quotations and her adolescent mocking voice may have been a slightly harsh call. "I don't sound like that, Ms. Ho." Josiah

responded. "Yes, you did." The teacher's voice had picked up wind. She could not understand how the very student who stood before her, angry and constantly sporting a sour expression, had spearheaded the creation of her farewell rap years ago. What happened to that kind young boy? "Josiah, it's 2020 and I can't do this anymore. Why are we still having these arguments? It's a waste of my time, your time, and everyone else's time. It's insulting." Josiah, not understanding why the teacher seemed to particularly lack patience with him, was becoming more and more fed up. Sure, he had severely messed up during the Stratford trip, and she had caught him in the act. He had written a stupid joke on a hotel napkin in an attempt to get a rise out of his buddies. He had cultivated a bad-boy image, and for some reason, became known for pushing back on any type of rules. Even Quinn, his best buddy for life, was a bit of a goody-two-shoes when it came to school, and that bothered Josiah to the core. How was he supposed to know that a hotel cleaning lady would find the napkin and report it to the teachers? He understood that the joke was rude and inappropriate, but that was the point. Now, his friends seemed to have left him behind and all become "serious" about cleaning up their acts, while he had been labelled the disrespectful, entitled bad kid who says racist things. He knew the teacher still held the mistake over his head. However, he messed up, and he knew it, so wasn't that enough? When would he finally get to move on from his problems and be treated fairly? "I said," Josiah continued, "why would I help Jacques when he can just do everything on his own. I don't see how that's insulting to you." "Okay." The teacher took a breath. She knew she kept Josiah on a tight leash, yet she had spoken to him weeks ago, assuring him that she had moved past his Stratford misstep, and that mistakes do not define us. She believed what she had said, but recognized, especially in that moment, how unconvincing she may have seemed. "Your friend, Josiah, was out of class for my instructions and since you always talk to him when I'm talking anyways, I figured you might

help him catch up with the rest of the class. But no. Jacques, don't ask Josiah for any help because he won't give it to you." Josiah rolled his eyes.

GET ME OUT OF HERE

Jason, the "tech guy", had come to fix a faulty power cord. The teacher felt a slight sense of guilt in calling him for what was often a solvable crisis. Most of her desperate calls resulted in him coming in and simply breathing on the materials to bring them back to orderly life. Either he was the computer version of a horse whisperer, or the teacher was allergic to technology; or both. The class was taking place in the cramped Mathematics room, and the students' antsy nature was transforming into belligerence. On top of being packed into the sweaty room like sardines, there was a scheduled day change in the timetable. This, according to the teacher, was the educational equivalent of jetlag, and she happened to be so lucky as to catch the students after an "exceptional" double period of gym. The teacher wondered, slightly demoralized at how everything seemed to lack order in her day, if the students treated English as a decompressing class. Years later, during the teacher's aforementioned spa vacation in the mountains, she would relax in several meditation rooms. She learned that decompressing was an important element, even in a routine of spa relaxation, and that it ought to be built into a cycle of "grueling" sauna and hot springs activities. Despite being a necessary component of her day, the teacher found herself bored after a couple minutes of scheduled relaxation in the meditation rooms, becoming slightly stressed at the lack of activity in the room. She wondered if her class was the school place counterpart to the meditation room, and she was possibly witnessing the same level of boredom from conceptual inactivity (and purpose). The thought was unsettling, and she

wondered if the lack of engagement she witnessed in her subject was due to students never being fully “on”.

Jason continued to fiddle around with the cords, coaxing them to behave. On her own, the teacher would have already abandoned ship and thrown the lot in the garbage. As the “introduction” to class continued its extended delay, the students were uncontrollable and the teacher felt as if she were in an airplane full of crying babies. “Get me out of here.” She thought, as Jason continued to work. She looked up from Jason’s cords to see Scarlett flaunting what appeared to be a supermarket points card. “Scarlett,” the teacher said, “your McGill ID is way too flimsy to be a fake ID. I go to McGill and they don’t look like that. Sorry.” The teacher giggled to herself and noted the difference between her current conversation and the ones she would advise prospective McGill teaching interns to have in the field. She wondered then, about how the moment would be received by future readers of her account, and how she could justify that this was not alarming, but rather, a common interaction between her and Scarlett. She told herself, “They don’t teach these things in teaching school. You just had to be there.” “I don’t use the McGill one, Ms. Ho! I use the South Carolina for “Da Club”.” “No offence, Scarlett,” Quinn chimed in, “but you’re not getting in the club.” “Except I already have twice!” Scarlett responded quickly with a smooth middle finger. The teacher continued giggling at the conversation around her. This, she concluded, was far preferable to the students throwing recycle bins at one another’s heads out of boredom (that would come many years later). “Why isn’t it working??” The teacher burst out, a little too loudly. After what felt like an eternity, Jason managed to get the technology in order. So much for practicality in the modern age. The teacher wiped off her nose sweat and perceived the slightest bit of a moan, as the students peeled themselves off the walls and came back into the hot tub.

Nuggets: Gold, Chicken, Brilliance

"It's settled," the teacher thought to herself, "I never want to have kids, because kids will become teenagers." The teacher was feeling frustrated at the stopping and stalling that took place in her current class. She couldn't understand how this was the same class of students, who at times, showed her nuggets of pure brilliance, to which she latched on to for days and nights and weekends. Those astute, respectful pre-adults would turn into the group that stood before her today. She wondered if she was wrong to try and instill a philosophy of openness and experimentation, when order, control and top-down authority just felt so good sometimes. She took a breath and addressed her zoo. "Okay," she started, feeling significantly shorter than she stood at the beginning of class, "for the next five minutes, I'm going to be your mom. There was a lot going on today. I don't know what was in the water." "There was lead in the water." Braden said, far too matter-of-factly. "Okay," the teacher continued, "well going from farting noises to Gregory's Crayola lunch kit and his grandma's pastries, which he should not have been eating in class, to Scarlett's straightened hair, which seemed to attract as much attention as the pastries, to this." The teacher momentarily stood silent at pointed at Jacques, because there were no words. "I understand," she trucked forward, "we have off-days, but let's not have any anymore. Today was an off-day and tomorrow we are going to show up to class and focus. Moving forward, you have a lit essay where you are going to prepare a research proposal on a real-life topic in the novel before writing. In previous years, students didn't use this opportunity to work out kinks and experiment. I want you to really use this assignment to plan and workshop with me, and that will help you create very good literary essays. Think about how you will do this at McGill. You should all go to McGill, it's a good school and it's not expensive." "The guidance counsellor said that Concordia business school is better." Braden

responded. “I don’t care much about business school.” The teacher responded, perhaps too honestly. “McGill has the name.” Gregory added, while arranging his remaining pastries. “Exactly.” The teacher said, fully recognizing the how “best practice” involved “unbiased” perspectives, according to teaching school. Gregory, currently on point, would later put his foot in his mouth alongside his pastries. In a subsequent visit with the guidance counsellor, Gregory would make a claim to the effect of “why would anyone want to go into the arts?” The teacher, sitting at her desk, would take a couple luxurious moments to compile a Sephora cart as the guidance counsellor instructed students on how to create their Cegep applications. The teacher would pause her shopping and shoot her eyes Gregory’s direction. The rest of the class would, in ping-pong style, transfer their gaze from the livid teacher to the scrambling Gregory, and back. Gregory would later apologize to the self-professed arts-pushing teacher, acknowledging in what appeared to be some strategic flattery, that her success was due, in part, to the arts. The teacher would swiftly forgive Gregory, taking every opportunity to remind him how invaluable the arts would be in his life.

The students assured the teacher that they would not repeat their rambunctious ways in future classes, and assured her that the double period of gym, plus the day change had made them hyper. The teacher sighed and asked, “Why do I always seem to get you like this?” “It’s because you can handle us.” Braden offered. The teacher paused. She felt a small pang of adoration for her zoo, and recognized that while she couldn’t always handle them, she appreciated the vote of confidence.” “Thanks, I guess.” She responded, feeling an inch taller.

Is This Normal?

"Okay everyone." The teacher said, as students piled into 405, the only room in the group's rotation that was devoted to English instruction; hence, the posters of poems and inspirational quotes on the walls in place of mathematical equations or French verbs. The room, however, was teacher's least favourite of the lot. It had been the only class she used years ago during her final student teaching internship and even then, she had remarked on the stuffy air and the strange collection of smells. At times, she would learn, these smells were due to double gym periods, but most often, they were the result of faulty ventilation and mildew in the walls. To her knowledge, this was the only room in the building with this special collection of issues.

"Now it's a new day, so let's turn over a new looseleaf" the teacher continued, giggling at her non-funny pun. "Let's continue thinking about social constructions and consider what they really mean." Sara Lee, confused, shot up her hand, saying, "I feel like we haven't talked about social conventions before. I feel like before you called it social norms." This year, the teacher had begun to remark students' reliance on specific terms. It seemed that students learned according to names, and when teachers attached several names to a concept, the learning needed to be repeated. The teacher had attempted to promote a knowledge of concepts, which she felt facilitated connection-building. She also recognized, especially within her discussion of societal norms, that naming often preceded meaning making. She thought about her beloved (stuffed) dog, Bill Bill, who lived in Vancouver atop a bookcase. Bill Bill was in fact a polar bear (by species-origin), but the teacher recalled, as a young child, instinctually labelling him as a dog. This posed no problem until the teacher's niece came along many years later and in a somewhat concerned toddler manner, declared, "Auntie Steph, it's a bear." Perhaps naming was a reality in and of itself when it came to understanding (or becoming frustrated at) the world. "It's the same

thing." The teacher responded to a non-toddler Sara Lee, who expressed the same bear-dog confusion that seemed all too familiar amongst learners. "Think about the Surrealism movement and how the entire movement is attempting to move against social norms. I mean, Surrealists didn't just break rules for the sake of it, they questioned why these rules exist and who created them." Braden, cautious of the concept of rule breaking, still enjoyed flirting with its possibilities, asking, "What is someone who just breaks every rule in society called? A psychopath?" The teacher contemplated the inquiry, noting, "That's a good question. A person who breaks rules and conventions because they are pushing back on them and trying to question why these rules exist would be a maverick, and possibly a Surrealist. They are questioning our society's reality. However, someone who just breaks rules for the sake of doing it, just because they don't like rules, would be an anarchist." "But I don't think that some conventions are actually conventions," Braden added, "I think they're just like that. Like for example, if I want to be a boy with long hair, no one says I can't." The teacher attempted to hide her own puzzled expression, noting a little too enthusiastically, "True, but there are still conventionalized, normal ways of being and you would be putting yourself outside of the norm." "I mean," Braden continued, "it's possible that people didn't mean to make these things normal, they just became normal." "Oh!" the teacher noted, using the lightbulb that went off in her head to navigate Braden's ruminations. "1000%." She continued, "The nature of social conventions is that they become normalized behaviour but not intentionally so. And in the process, that behaviour separates itself from everything else that doesn't fit the rules." Quinn, who had purchased a BLT sandwich that sat in front of him, restaurant-style, added, "I don't think these are necessarily rules, because at school, for example, the rules are actually put in place. However, in society, you can break conventions but there are no actual written rules that say you're doing anything

wrong." Quinn proceeded to offer an anecdote about how he used to dress up as a girl when he was in elementary school, calling himself Quinnita. The class bubbled with laughter at the familiar recollection. The teacher, wondering if anyone would finally acknowledge the rogue sandwich, enjoyed this amusing example, which displayed Quinn's personal engagement with the concept of norms. Gregory, wide-eyed and picking up on the laughter Quinn's story garnered, added, "When I was a kid and we would be driving and I would see a guy with long hair, I would go, "mom, that's a manwoman". "That just goes to show," the teacher responded, attempting to subtly bring the conversation back to the central focus, "how much social norms have an impact on you."

Sookie and Shawn listened pensively to their classmate's exchanges, but, as usual, remained silent. "Shawn, do you agree with what he just said?" Sookie's attention had been sparked by Quinn and Greg's discussions of gender norms. "No, I don't." Shawn whispered, "But it's not really my place to say anything. We don't come from here, so maybe it's a question of culture." "Yes, but our own culture isn't normal either." Sookie whispered back, "At least not according to me. It's like we're living outside of both cultures. I don't even know what's supposed to be considered normal." Shawn stopped and contemplated the girls' shared dilemma. She had been doing a great deal of reflection recently, in the process of negotiating her new home and observing her familiar context from across the ocean. "I guess some groups of people can benefit from norms but the same norms can harm those who stand outside of them." "Doesn't that mean we will never be normal?" Sookie responded, somewhat concerned. "No," Shawn offered softly. "We are normal in some ways and not normal in others. It's not as simple as we learn about in books. Real people don't look like that. I mean, that's part of it, but it's not the full story." Sookie sat silently, as the teacher continued to speak.

"Okay class, let's think about a standard example of a social convention, which happens to be a hot topic in our class novel: heteronormativity. What does that word mean?" Quinn responded, "well hetero means one thing and normativity means normal." "Yes" the teacher responded, "and what is the term hetero most likely used to describe?" "Well…," Quinn contemplated, "sex, I guess…and relationships." "I agree," said the teacher, adding, "so what does this term mean in relation to sex and relationships?" "That it is normal for a man and a woman to be in a couple." Quinn responded. "That is correct." The teacher said, feeling slightly upset at herself, as she had vowed to limit the use of the words "right and wrong" and anything to that effect, in her English class. She added, "But does the fact that we live in a heteronormative society mean that more people are heterosexual than homosexual?" Braden, Sara Lee, Quinn and Gregory nodded their heads and uttered "yes" in perfect, off-pitch harmony. The teacher paused, sported her "emphasis" face and said, "Does it? Heteronormativity. What does it actually show us? Does it for sure mean *more* people are straight than gay?" "At the base heteronormativity means you have kids." Braden chimed in again, adding, "Otherwise, you are not productive." "You can adopt!" Scarlett said, with her typical warm, somewhat child-like air of positivity. "Yes," Quinn said, matter-of-factly, "but you aren't directly producing for society." The teacher paused excitedly. The students hadn't quite arrived at where she hoped to bring them, but they were doing some pretty exciting experimentation on the metaphorical bus. She enjoyed seeing the students build, consider, add and deconstruct from the collaborative soup of considerations that stood before them. It was too bad that her beloved group of shy Croc-donning girls stood silent at the side of the room. Oh, and Sookie and Shawn were sitting there too. Had she marked them as present?

Sara Lee raised her hand and said, “Heteronormativity also means that more people are identifying as being straight.” “Ding-ding!” the teacher said. She continued by saying, “Social conventions do not actually say anything about what is in here,” as she pointed to her stomach, “and here,” as she pointed at her head. “Social conventions describe the behaviour of people and what behaviour is considered normal. This means that heteronormative society means the majority of people are “behaving” as straight people. The social norm doesn’t necessarily reflect someone’s reality. I could be gay and you wouldn’t know.” The teacher was adlibbing at this point, but felt the lesson was flowing out of her. She was proud of the building the students were doing, feeling it to be far more meaningful than a vacuumed discussion of their novel. “Sometimes it’s obvious,” Gregory noted, in reference to the teacher’s discussion of “gay”. “Yes,” the teacher added, “but it isn’t always.” Scarlett, in the same tone that some may label as spaciness, but where the teacher detected a commitment to justice, added, “lots of people come out with no problem, like if I went to my parents and said, I’m bringing my girlfriend home.” “Yes,” the teacher noted, “but even a good coming out is still a coming out, why?” “Well,” Sara Lee answered, “if you’re straight you don’t really need to come out.” “Why?” asked the teacher in an exciting return of the tennis ball. “Because no one does that.” Quinn added, with his sandwich intact. “You’re just straight.” “Exactly!” the teacher responded with an air of finality. She was proud of her bus-riding bunch. She felt, in that moment, what would be declared so aptly by an enthusiastic student years later. That student would, as many of her peers, attend class electronically due to her Covid-19 diagnosis. Her presence would unnaturally be plastered on a television screen, in the name of safety. Upon her return, the student would say, following an exciting exchange that mirrored that of the teacher’s former class, “Gosh! I missed this!”

Call a spade a spade, call a backpack a suitcase

"Hi everyone!" the teacher said jovially, in between rushed sips of too-hot coffee. "Braden, please move your suitcase off the desk." "It's a backpack!" Braden exclaimed, somewhat inflamed at the teacher's mom-style repetition of the joke. Jacques chimed in, saying, "It's a big carry-on, but I think it would still fit on the plane!" The teacher continued sipping her coffee, as students piled in. "Romia," she inquired, "did you know Braden's suitcase is in fact super luxe?" "I'm not even doing this." Braden let out. "It's a backpack!" "In airports…" the teacher started. "I did not buy it from an airport!" Braden cried. "At airports," the teacher moved on, far too committed to her off-beat humour, "they have those weird metal things to see if your carry-ons fit, and everyone is always jamming their suitcases into them. Braden's might not fit in the metal thing." Braden eyed Romia's computer, as she had not so subtly been searching airport carry-on allowances online. He commandeered Romia's keyboard and quickly launched a search for his "backpack". "It's a backpack!" he claimed excitedly, "it's even called that! Oh wait, what on Earth? They don't even have mine!" Braden continued to scroll the Tumi site, as Romia patiently waited for her property to be returned. The teacher, who was also curiously researching the bag on her own, and perhaps dipping a little into the beginning of class time to do so, gasped. "Braden! Your suitcase costs $600?" She took a breath and evaluated the hunk of material sitting before her. "Like I knew it was expensive, but what?" "And that's American!" Braden said proudly. The teacher let out a louder gasp. "Braden! That's a thousand dollars! That's how much my Balenciagas cost!" "Why would you buy Balenciagas?" Braden said in a practical tone that the teacher had heard all too often amongst the male contingent of her life. "I'll have this for life," he continued, "plus it's not a thousand dollars Canadian!" "It's more like $900!" Gregory stated, having seemingly popped up out of nowhere.

Gregory had recently fallen ill with a nasty cold, but seemed to have revived himself and was now motivated to work. In addition to participating in the productive suitcase debate, he also decided he would restart all of his nearly-completed pending projects. The teacher sighed, suddenly curious about what Balenciaga was up to these days.

WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD

Scarlett was staring out the window. Any discussion of the world outside the classroom scared her. She had, since kindergarten, been cocooned in her safe little school bubble, where teachers were forgiving, helping to break down confusing concepts and offer her extensions upon extensions for deadlines. Next year, she knew this would not be the case, and despite having spent twelve years of basking in the privilege of her luxurious "system", she knew she would need to grow up one day; or, precisely, in around sixty days plus a summer holiday. Vicky, forever the supportive teammate, could detect Scarlett's waning attention from a mile away. "Scarlett, pay attention!" she nudged a skinny elbow into Scarlett's spine. "You'll need this for the real world! The teacher just said so!" Scarlett decided she would play the deferral game a little longer. "We're not in the real world yet, Vicky! That won't come till after university!" She paused a little bit, solidly believing her argument. "This stuff is just fun, Vicky! It's not like the grammar or the public speaking stuff we need for the real world. We're just talking right now." Scarlett resumed her daydreaming, attempting to silence the anxious voices that were warning her about the real-life adulting that awaited her. She wasn't quite sure what the real world really was, and despite enjoying the fun discussions about romance and homosexuality that she had had in class, did not understand which world she was living in. "If the world after high school is real, then is everything we are doing now fake?" Scarlett had been living under

the assumption that her comfy safety bubble of adolescence was a period of fun and games before the "real" work would begin. She then remembered a recent discussion she had had with Vicky, who told her she should stop ignoring her responsibilities. "Why?" Scarlett wondered why she couldn't sit around and enjoy the fun before she would need to become a fun-less adult in the real world. Scarlett then fought the uncomfortable thought that frequently arose as the school year was beginning to wind down. What would she do without Vicky, who was a responsible mom of a bestie? Surely, in the real world, Vicky could not help her the way she had done for the past twelve years. Another unsettling thought entered Scarlett's mind, as she poked Vicky in her thin arm. "Vicky, when we're in the real world, we'll need to pay for our food, but what about people who can't pay? Food is just normal for us, but there are homeless people who can't eat." Scarlett wondered if her anticipation of lunch was affecting her current concerns. Vicky stopped notetaking to consider her friend's reflection. "I guess that's their normal. It's horrible, but we are lucky, so I guess it's kind of normal to be lucky." "But it's not normal for people to not eat!" Scarlett's strong sense of sympathy had surfaced. "We're supposed to be preparing for the real world, even if we're not going to be in it for a long time, but when we do go there, it won't ever look like it does for those people. That's their real world and it's sad." "Yea I don't know." Vicky paused, "I guess I take a lot of things for granted in my life, it just *is*." "I just don't really understand what I'm supposed to be doing." Scarlett expressed, slightly concerned. "For the assignment?" Vicky began handing over her detailed notes. "No." Scarlett shook her head, "When I get into the real world. I don't even know what that will look like. The teacher told us we all experience the world differently and my real world is going to be different than yours, so how do I prepare, here in English class?" Vicky had stopped typing. "I'm not sure. I guess we can just try to get something from all of this. At least we know that grammar is

important in all real worlds so we can focus on that." Scarlett worried that the real world was a dark and dangerous place of taxes and hunger, and preferred to relish a little longer in her cozy current existence.

"Jacques," the teacher called out, interrupting the daydreams of Scarlett and around 90% of the rest of the class. "Please stop staring at Scarlett." The teacher had started the year with a bit of baseless fun, imagining a budding romance between Jacques and Scarlett. Recently, however, she began to wonder if her jokes may be grounded in a bit of reality. Jacques had interrupted a recent class to make a bold announcement, professing his undying love to Scarlett. At times, the class felt like a panoramic cinema (or perhaps a circus) of sorts, with exciting stories unfolding all over the place. Jokes would bleed into reality, and the students always marveled at the teacher's ability to keep a deadpan straight face. At the moment, Jacques was clearly making eyes at Scarlett, and the teacher wondered if this was a situation of art imitating life, or perhaps the reverse. "I'm sorry." Jacques bubbled, seemingly without defense. "She's just so pretty." Scarlett's face warmed into a tomato red, as Jacques sent an adoring wink in her direction. The rest of the class seemed unfazed at the realities that unfolded around them. This was, it seems, was the "norm".

"Jacques, do you care to comment on my question?" the teacher continued, "I had asked what you make of the connection between our discussions of norms, societal conventions, and reality. Why do you think we've been doing this, and how might these conversations help you in the real world?" Jacques paused at the question, as the teacher pointed outside the window in her usual manner. He knew, when she did this, that she was gesturing to the famous "real world" outside the classroom. He didn't know, however, why discussing what was real or not real was such a big deal. He knew, from a recent discussion about societal pressures, that Instagram

behaviour had become decently fake. His was perhaps the first generation in history to create "stories" of their lives, entirely comprised of curated, edited images. These stories somehow managed to hold their weight in legitimacy, and people's trust in these narratives complicated the definition of "reality" itself. However, Jacques wasn't ever a filters and lighting kind of guy. He always felt like a real, flesh and blood male, who was living a non-fake existence. He wondered why all of this song and dance about reality was necessary for him. "No offense," he started, "but the real world is not something that an English teacher needs to teach me about." The teacher was not offended, and instead intrigued. "In English class we talk about the real world," Jacques said, "but we don't learn about social skills. I just pick those up and I don't need English class to teach me those." "Okay, then why are we here?" Braden hesitated before placing his suitcase on the desk. The teacher giggled, saying, "Do you feel better when you hug your suitcase?" Jacques continued, saying, "I guess we're here to be critical. I mean, that's what you told us, right?" He gestured towards the teacher, who appeared to be reading the unfolding scene with excitement. Somebody should have offered her some popcorn. "I don't know." Jacques followed up. "I'm not really creative every day. Or critical." "What does that mean though?" Braden asked, wrapping his arms tightly around his suitcase-backpack. "Does that mean showing someone they're wrong? I don't really think about that all the time." Jacques stared at his friend, who had established a comforting stronghold on his animal of a carry-on. "I'm still not sure what we're supposed to learn here." Braden said in an honest declaration to the class. "We keep talking about things being normal and not normal, but why do I need to know that?" Suddenly, the class had become a family dinner, and they were clearly past the jovial drinks phase. Despite the declarations of confusion and existential questions that unfolded before her, the teacher felt a warm sense of pleasure. The plot was thickening, and they were

reaching the top of the mountain. Her bus may have frequently stalled throughout the year, but she knew they would get there at some point. The teacher felt concerned eyes glance in her direction, as the group's longstanding elephant of a conflict appeared before the crowd. The quintessential questions of "Where are we going?" and "Are we there yet?" were uttered in some way, shape or form on a regular basis. The students wondered why this small, fast-talking teacher, who seemed to have a sense of boundless energy, which renewed itself during discussions of big things, was so fascinated with what was real. This was not to say they didn't have fun exploring and musing alongside one another, asking questions that seemed to have thousands of answers. Clearly, chatting about the real world was more fun than learning about Cegep applications and taxes; Braden, who had a penchant for stock portfolios, was the only person who swayed from consensus on this matter. Nonetheless, the students wondered what the teacher was hoping to gain from all of this discussion and thinking. Thinking could be fun, but it was hard work. At a certain point, the students found themselves wondering when they would think themselves to where the teacher hoped they would go. They wondered why the teacher was sitting back and not giving the Braden and Jacques the answer to the big question, when they were clearly sweating from mental heat. Jacques sighed, and in a moment, appeared to be the spokesperson for the confused class of characters that stood before him. "I don't know, maybe the talking and the thinking is the point." He listened to himself, and offered a new lightbulb of a consideration to the dinner table. "Maybe," he mused, "the point is to expand, and not to be taught. Maybe we need to be the ones who find the answers, even if we don't find them. Maybe the trip is the point."

The teacher, who was sitting silently throughout this entire exchange, stood up with a smile. "I couldn't have written it better myself. I don't often like to conclude with "The End." What do you think? Does it look "not-normal" to say "The Beginning"?"

Chapter 7: Analysis and Conclusions: Philosophical Ruminations of Artefacts

Within this chapter, I share my analysis and conclusions from processing my data artefacts. I begin by placing my data artefacts, including my in-class jot notes, my student-interviews, and my personal self-study, in conversation. I aimed to join the student collective, individual student voices, and my personal teacher self, as a means of reconstructing our shared teaching and learning experience. This reconstruction would eventually inform the creation of my narrative account in Chapter 6. In this chapter, I also engage in some philosophical ruminations, using my theoretical strands of inquiry (Surrealism, Neoliberalism and Critical Pedagogy) to make meaning of my ELA teaching and learning experience.

Conversations Across Artefacts: Data Elements in Conversation

After having analyzed my three artefacts separately, I put them in conversation with one another. I contemplated how the observations of the respective artefacts differed, compared and impacted one another. I followed the approach Benoit (2016) used when observing his own artefacts, including personal photographs. Benoit (2016) made observations of his memories but contextualized these considerations in theory; in other words, he brought the voices of the field into his examination of self. When exploring my artefacts, I also echoed Benoit's search for connections between his school experiences and sense of personal self. I mirrored his attention to the sensory, visceral, and experiential feelings of his memories. Adrian Martin (2014) also used theory as an analytical tool to examine his own classroom practice. Martin's (2014) journaling process mirrors my own production of observational jot notes, as he noted his accounts to include "daily experiences with students and colleagues [which] also dipped into the well of [his] memory and past teaching experiences" (Martin, 2014, p. 145). Martin (2014)

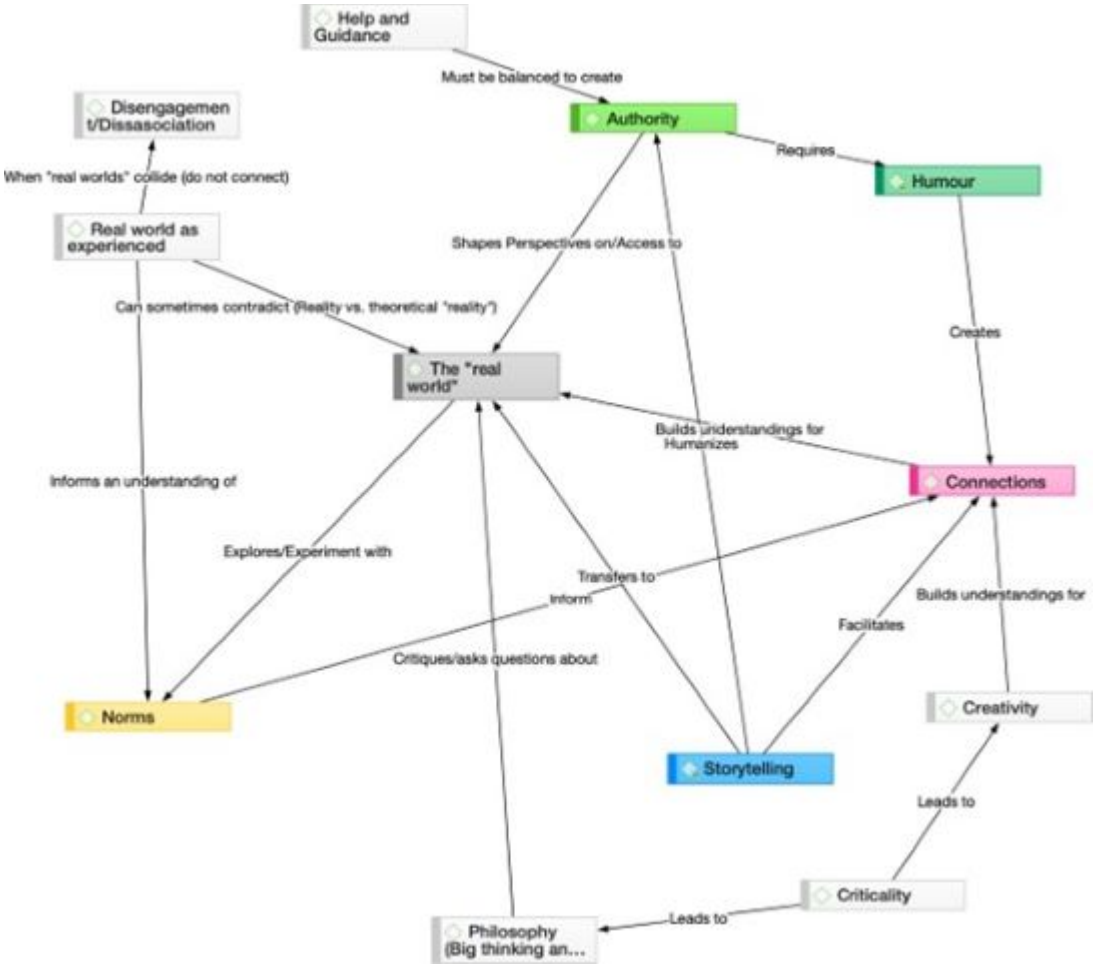
subsequently read his entries through theoretical lenses such as post-structuralism and queer theory, in order to question dominant narratives of gender and sexuality within his practice. This interrogation of the status quo coupled with a critical exploration of the teacher self, once again echoes the Surrealist impetus of my study. As with Martin (2014), I began my quest with a hunch indicative of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014); that being the possible impact Surrealist philosophy could positively impact ELA teaching and learning. During my study, I compiled artefacts for observation, and analyzed them individually. The joint conversation that followed, therefore formed the point at which I chose to read my observations through the lens of the original theoretical strands that formed my study. These strands were Critical Pedagogy, Neoliberalism, and Surrealism. I used these strands to help unify my observations and contextualize them within the larger educational context I had established at the onset of my study. Reading my processed artefacts through the lens of these theories also allowed me to revisit my initial hunch and render (possibly generalizable) meaning from my microcosmic exploration of practice.

Atlas TI: Building Connections Between Artefacts

In addition to reading my data through the lens of theory, I also used the software, Atlas TI, to establish connections between my respective artefacts. Atlas TI is a software designed to help organize and analyze qualitative research. I started by uploading my data artefacts into the system, then coded the data according to the colour codes (strands of inquiry) I used on my observational jot notes. I then re-examined my artefacts to establish additional codes. I applied codes such as “criticality”, “creativity” and “philosophy and big thinking”. I was then able to track the co-concurrency of the codes within and across artefacts, using the Atlas TI platform. I

tracked the common occurrences of different codes and created a visual mind map to illustrate relationships between my codes (see mindmap below).

Atlas TI Artefacts Comparison



I noticed four strands of inquiry (codes) to be recurrent across my analysis of artefacts. These strands were “Norms”, “Storytelling”, “Connections”, and “The Real World”. I spent the duration of my classroom study engaging students in discussions and explorations of societal norms. For this reason, my observational jot notes and interviews focused on discussions of norms and a critical exploration of them within ELA.

However, through my mind-mapping in Atlas TI, I was also able to conceptualize a relationship between the engagement and experience of norms, and the development of connections. I have formed a triangular loop of understanding between "The Real World", "Norms" and "Connections". I argue that within the "real" world, one is able to experiment with societal norms. These exact norms also inform the connections one builds, which are thus used to shape understandings about the "real" world. I noticed that the connections students were building in class between elements of course content and their own lived experiences were largely informed by their personal engagements with societal norms. Likewise, my photograph collections displayed a number of connections, namely involving my lived experiences and my personal desire to capture or omit these memories from my memory roster. However, I also noticed that my personal photo collections presented a degree of critical questioning and experimentation with new possibilities. Especially evidenced through my aforementioned obsessive images of vegan food, itself a convincing and ideologically laden substitute for "real" meat, I noticed myself engaging in an exploration of societal representations of reality and the ever-present alternatives around me. This private exploration was mirrored in my engagements with students, both within the ELA class and our interviews, where I attempted to further dig and solidify the goals of the year. I argue that the triangular relationship between "Norms", "Connections" and "The Real World" illustrates my Surrealist impetus of questioning reality and the constructed nature of the ways in which we understand our world. Somewhat unconsciously, it appears my learning objectives have filtered into my private life and vice versa. The real world, or my real world at least, has greatly informed the ways in which I attempted to create meaning with my students. The mirroring of my personal and professional artefacts, based on my triangle of codes, also speaks to the fluid barriers between the classroom, the private life of

the teacher, and the lived experiences of students (within and outside the classroom walls). As previously noted, I argue that ELA is a discipline that focuses on humanity and, as I always say to my students, "the sticky, messy, complicated nature of how and why we are the way we are". Perhaps these artefacts display not only a relationship to one another, and the influence of the private life of the teacher on a lived practice, but also possibilities for "real world" ELA learning. I argue that ELA could perhaps be reconceptualized, and rather than treating it as an academic discipline onto which we apply real-world understandings and experiences, it could be a laboratory, or breeding ground, for experimentation and creativity that extends far beyond the classroom. I argue that it is possible, as I have inadvertently been engaging in this exact task, to continue ELA learning outside of the classroom and constantly ask questions and construct meaning beyond the context (confines) of a paper text. I argue that the "Storytelling" thread of inquiry (code) that was present across my artefacts speaks to the relevance and need for ELA within and outside of the classroom. The goal of my research, from the beginning of my study, has been to explore and ultimately represent the specific ELA experience that I shared with my students. Throughout the study, and my process of data collection, it has become clear that this experience was far from linear, was co-constructed, and transcended the conceptual barriers of school and life. Storytelling has always formed my personal method of meaning making but also connection building, both between concepts I am exploring and between myself and my audience. I have observed a significant fallacy within my practice, one that prompted much of my desire to further explore possibilities for ELA. This fallacy involves students (and teachers) treating texts as vacuums that harbour little relation to one another and above all, minimal significance for readers' lived experiences. Butler-Kisber (2010) noted that narrative inquiry (a methodological strand I have used within this study and discussed within Chapter 3 of this

thesis), “is the way humans account for their actions and events around them and shape their everyday experience” (Butler-Kisber, p. 63). I argue that our world, which encompasses individual and shared experiences, is comprised of an ever-expanding collection of stories. Recognizing the narrative component of human experience and adopting a perspective of humans as characters within their own stories, once again illuminates the relevance of exploring sample texts within ELA.

Within Atlas TI, I also formed a relationship between “Storytelling”, “Connections”, and “The real world”. My personal meaning making impetus of using stories to channel questions and understandings about the world outside the classroom were evidenced in the ways in which I shaped my classes. I frequently reached outside of the class to anecdotally present the world through storytelling nuggets and illustrate classroom concepts. I also noticed, however, that in my personal photograph collections, I engaged in a number of stories. In a sense, the people, places and elements that formed my personal experiences also held storytelling power unto themselves. Therefore, while my artefacts displayed a Surrealist engagement with societal norms and constructions, stories served to process and package these critical considerations. In other words, I argue that stories have allowed for the formation of context, within and outside the classroom, in order to couch critical, possibly subversive questions. This context, as evidenced within my observational jot notes, has allowed for an exploration of the real world within a contained, manageable and meaningful lens. Also, as I previously argued that the world is comprised of narratives, some of which are new, and some of which are evolving or recurring, the use of storytelling has helped in building conceptual bridges, first between concepts and then between the classroom and students’ lived experiences. My reliance on storytelling within and outside of my practice also stems from a desire to illuminate the power and “entertainment

value" of everyday life. The conceptual delineation between fiction and non-fiction and stories and life form, as previously noted, an important area for further ELA exploration. However, I argue that we are doing both our day-to-day lives and our entertainment stories a disservice if we read them in isolation. ELA, which constitutes the exploration of human centered themes through text offers the possibility for humans to make sense of their own lived stories, if only we release our stronghold on constructions of "reality" and recognize ourselves to be characters.

After having analyzed my processed artefacts together to form new observations of their relationships, I created a composite narrative account. I intended to capture, as fully as possible, the interactions of my students within our class community, their reactions and engagement in response to our Surrealist pedagogical strategy, and also their unique relationships, including their successes and struggles with our subject matter. I also placed my personal self in the narrative, utilizing my photographs to offer a commentary on my state of being and seeing during our period of study. This final account, upon which I also employed Mitchell and Weber's strategy of interrogating drafts (Mitchell & Weber, 1999) represents, to the best of my capacity, our shared teaching and learning experience, from the communal to the individual, the professional to the private, and the present to the past.

A Surrealist Approach to Data

After having placed my artefacts into conversation by using Atlas TI to aid in the construction of my narrative account, I then approached my artefacts through the theoretical lens of Surrealism. My goal, after having reconstructed my ELA experimental experience, was to critically analyze this experience, for the purposes of my current practice and beyond.

Breton (1972) and the historic Surrealists forged their movement on the notion that reality, as we know it, is a mental construction (Breton et al., 1972). The Surrealists called into question the fabricated nature of reality, specifically as it pertained to the art domain. Breton (1972) argued that by accepting constructed "realities" as truths, human beings were relinquishing their rights to criticality and freedom of thought. This idea of questioning the constructed nature of the world is an aim reflected in the QEP curriculum for ELA (MEES, 2019/2022). However, the MEES (2019/2022) referencing of the "real world", which connotes the importance of transferability in terms of skills and knowledge, illuminated a Surrealist gap in my practice. I noticed that I constantly referenced the "real world" in my artefacts, perhaps attempting to emphasize the (practical) relevance of our course content. What I failed to notice in "real" time, was that there is not a single real world that forms our communal destination. The QEP (MEES, 2019/2022) does not explicitly state what constitutes the "real world" within the context of the curriculum. However, this absence of clarification, alongside the program's description of reality as the "bringing together [of] several fields of knowledge that we are able to grasp" (MEES, 2019, p. 5) does not suggest that the QEP's conceptualized world is based on human experience. Rather, this perspective of reality emphasizes the comparing and contrasting of perspectives and facts, possibly with the goal of establishing some form of "truth" in understanding the world. Essentially, this resilience-minded, society-building narrative acknowledges the curriculum's responsibility to prepare students for their future endeavours. These endeavours, and the experiences that constitute each student's "real world", however, vary drastically. For this reason, it could be argued that the QEP involves preparing students for an established version of the real world; thus, ELA involves a Surrealist conflict of realities, or, a battle of art vs. life. On the one hand, ELA teachers present students with something that

symbolizes reality. On the other hand, students' lived experiences in the outside world can likely become disassociated from this construction.

When considering my observations of minimal criticality in ELA, my artefacts illuminated another artistic problem. My students frequently stressed the technical components of English, reducing it to a language without art. This perspective confirmed my initial hunch about students lacking engagement in ELA, but also suggested a possibility that they were not being offered opportunities to be critical and playful. Perhaps in the process of misunderstanding the objectives and utility of ELA, teachers and students have missed an opportunity to engage in meaningful experiences. It appears, from my artefacts, that students considered ELA to exclusively involve spelling and grammar rules, exercised through formulaic tasks. This misinterpretation could therefore have led students to the assumption that ELA is not the domain for experimentation and questioning, hence, the lack of critical engagement that I have witnessed. Personally, I have always drawn connections between my observations and experiences, and have taken comfort in rendering meaning from art. In fact, my favourite art forms tend to be those that mimic life, as was evidenced in my photo collections and the pictures I took during my visit to MoMA in New York. It appears that I instinctively gravitate towards the fluid borders between art and life, and by extension, the flexible, constructed nature of reality. My photo collections seemed to have expressed a fascination with vegan foods and their uncanny representations of "real" animal products. It is interesting, therefore, how this interest of mine contrasts the rigid barriers that can be observed within ELA teaching and learning. The severing of the arts from the English Language Arts immediately limits what I argue to be the possibilities for ELA. I argue that critical thinking, engagement and experimenting with the world via art forms a unique impetus for ELA. My observations of students' understandings of

ELA mirror the criticality lacking context that fueled the historic Surrealist movement. I argue that this connection speaks to the relevance of this philosophy in negotiating more contemporary (art) problems.

The Neoliberal Context

Continuing my discussion on the concept of reality, I approached my artefacts for a second time through the lens of Neoliberalism. If one were to consider Harvey's (2007) conceptualization of Neoliberalism, which involves freedom with regards to markets and economic trade, alongside my previous discussion of the QEP's orientation towards preparing students for the "real-world", one might better understand the origins of ELA experiences such as mine. My students, in my artefacts, frequently referenced the QEP's focus on "real world" preparation, without having read the QEP document. This referencing suggests a common narrative that has been woven into the fabric of education and its function within society. This becomes problematic when overarching societal narratives, such as those of Neoliberalism, impact the ways in which information is presented in the classroom; and thus, the experiences of learners (Shahsavari-Googhari, 2017). Biesta (2009) illuminated the lack of choice involved in education systems influenced by Neoliberalism. Biesta (2009) discussed how, as opposed to a democratic system of openness and exploration, Neoliberal education involves a limited examination of approved, standardized content and perspectives. This notion further complicates the (QEP) goals of ELA which involve fostering criticality and creativity. I therefore argue that our domain of ELA, rather than being a victim of the Neoliberal system, should also be considered a contributor to it. While I often referenced norms within my artefacts, I recognized that much of our literary analysis involved dissecting human behaviour and themes, and

discussing them in relation to a set of established understandings. These understandings, or "norms", constitute established ideas of anything from gender and sexuality, to the constructs of marriage and occupations. These reference points, while they are indeed pulled from the "real world", are not pulled from an unbiased one. The lenses students have used when approaching literary themes and building meaning, have already been influenced by their (Neoliberal) societal conditioning, and my role within the ELA classroom has served in confirming these norms. Students approach education, as expressed in my artefacts, with the narrative of work-force preparation. The work-force becomes somewhat synonymous with the term "real world", as it is an understood norm to work for income, and the dominant societal narrative dictates that an influx of income connotes a successful reality. Therefore, it could be argued that students interpret education's connection to the real world to involve preparation for economic success. This perspective, which does not encourage openness and criticality (Shahsavari-Googhari, 2017), shifts the focus of ELA from a discovery of possibilities to an affirmation of what is familiar. I argue that the practice of ELA to focus on certain canonized voices, most of whom are male and heterosexual (Hall & Eggington, 2000), supports the dominant Neoliberal norm. My ELA students, despite coming from a diverse array of backgrounds, explore the subject that presents itself as a microcosm of the "real world", through the stories of the privileged elite. The QEP rhetoric of exploration and critical discovery of "new knowledge" (MEES, 2019, p. 67) is once again problematized by the limited voices that have been chosen to represent the world.

A Critical Pedagogical Reading of Data

Finally, I explored my artefacts through the lens of Critical Pedagogy. I feel my exchanges with students and my attempt at creating a democratic space for sharing reflect my

efforts to become a Freirean (2018) anti-oppressor. Giroux (1988) noted school places to be exchange sites for legitimized forms of knowledge, hence the lack of diverse thinking to which I previously referred. Critical Pedagogy was therefore reflected in my attempt at opening dialogue and encouraging students to question the "real world". I recognize that my goals to achieve openness and subvert established norms within ELA and beyond, have met resistance not only in the form of the limited narratives expressed in texts, but the construct of ELA itself. As much as I have engaged in dialogue and contemplation with my students, the subject of ELA nonetheless places a heavy focus on reading; and by extension, correct forms of reading. When students are analyzing a text, ELA teachers equip them with skills to identify themes and justify their perspectives. However, as with the examination of any artistic work, there exists a hierarchy of established, accepted readings, and those that deviate from the norm may possibly be rejected altogether. I came to wonder, upon examining my Critical Pedagogy influenced stance, whether or not the hidden curriculum (Giroux, 1988) of ELA involves learning to locate clues and hints. There appears to be a detective-oriented stance involved in ELA textual analysis, which suggests there to be certain correct readings. In short, I began considering the purpose of ELA, wondering if it was about knowing the English language in a practical, technical sense, or learning the language of literature, which involves navigating a text for answers. Both possibilities seem, once again, to form missed opportunities for eliciting criticality in ELA.

I also discovered, upon re-examining my artefacts, that exploring the domain of ELA teaching and learning involves coming to terms with a number of ghosts. First, as mentioned in my photographic analysis, self-studies can involve recognizing the haunting presences of figures from the past (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). These figures can offer insight on the teacher self via their ghostly presences. The teacher self is, as Sontag (2008) and Freedman (2011) noted, a

collector of sorts. This individual is a traveler whose destination and previous adventures have had, and continue to have, an impact on the creation of experiences. My ghosts have brought me to my current positioning, and I would not be the same teacher self were I not to be haunted by them. At the same time, I feel our domain is communally haunted by practices, voices, and systems that preceded us. In ELA, the canon forms a collection of ghosts deemed to be the approved voices of English. The norms that shape our practice form the ghostly remnants of previous teachers and learners, and the material upon which we build our foundations for understanding. I argue that as ELA education is perpetually haunted, employing philosophies of Critical Pedagogy necessitate bringing these ghosts into the light.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by analyzing my data artefacts together, placing them in conversation in order to reconstruct my experimental experience with ELA. I then used the theoretical strands of inquiry, which form the foundation of my teacher-researcher study, to interpret my data artefacts. I used these strands to raise and respond to questions surrounding my teaching practice and shared ELA experience. These ruminations will ideally pave the way for further considerations with regards to Surrealism-inspired associations with ELA.

Chapter 8: Potential Contributions and Further Considerations

From an academic perspective, my research holds significant implications for classroom practice, through addressing gaps between the theory (QEP) and practice (teaching and learning experiences) of ELA. These limitations became apparent through the infrequent criticality and imaginative thinking that I observed in my classes. From my experiences of working with the competency-based QEP for Secondary ELA, I argue that Quebec is an ideal site for my proposed pedagogy; that being, a Surrealism-inspired approach to ELA teaching and learning. Here, standardized testing is coupled with competency-oriented grading (MEES, 2022). Using the competency aims (read, write, talk) through a Surrealist lens could possibly support criticality within standardized tasks such as reading responses and essays. Highlighted in the MEES (2022) QEP, Secondary competency-based learning "require[s] students to mobilize the resources in their repertoire and apply them effectively…[in a complex manner beyond] rote learning or a cumulative set of information and skills" (p. 6). In other words, competency-based learning aims to foster understanding and critical engagement, in order to transfer learning contexts beyond immediate classroom circumstances. The MEES (2022) description of competencies also suggests a departure from compartmentalized information acquisition. I argue that a key problem with non-competency-based approaches, is that students often gather information with their primary objective being (standardized) evaluations. However, it is possible that evaluation-oriented learning and compartmentalized instruction exist within a competency umbrella. From my experience, rather than learning transferrable understandings, students often approach their learning with their evaluation "strategies" in mind. Thus, despite the QEP stating goals for meaning-making (this term is used most commonly in the Talk competency section), the reality of Secondary Five Ministry expectations has prioritized the

aforementioned “rote learning” (MEES, 2022, p. 6). I argue that while “meaning-making” (MEES, 2002) is referenced as a goal for the ELA curriculum, my personal experience has suggested that students are still left with an incomplete picture of the program’s personal and societal relevance. As discussed in this thesis, I argue that while the QEP for Secondary ELA displays a solid guide for language arts teaching and learning, the vagueness accompanying several complex terms (aesthetics, meaning-making) could alienate (or complicate) its goals.

Returning to my specific ELA competencies of reading, writing and speaking, I therefore argue that a Surrealist approach could offer students a contextual model for critical thinking. Surrealism constitutes a philosophy based on unrestricted thinking (Breton et al., 1972), so the achievements of the historic Surrealists and a walk in their philosophical shoes could possibly offer relevance when approaching texts with criticality. The Surrealism movement’s goals for free thought also bridged gaps between artistic mediums such as painting and poetry, which has served as a foundation for my ELA connection. However, despite a common goal for questioning the world and critically engaging with texts, Surrealism and the QEP’s description of ELA differ in their paths to meaning-making. I recognize the QEP’s intention for breaking down ELA into a “system” of meaningful competencies, but argue that by rendering reading, writing and speaking distinct, students have been deprived of a holistic image. The historic Surrealists exercised reading, writing and speaking in conjunction, as all competencies comprised the movement’s push towards emancipatory expression. Showing students how criticality and meaning-making could feel (or be experienced), via an engagement with Surrealist philosophy, could serve in contextualizing the relationship between ELA competencies; in other words, it could “mobilize” (MEES, 2022, p. 6) students’ theoretical understandings of what it means to read, write and talk.

My research forms, to my knowledge, the only study that examines the use of Surrealist concepts to support the teaching of ELA. My study illuminates how Surrealism holds promise in addressing artistic concerns within the contemporary space of ELA education. I have added to existing literature surrounding Surrealism's focus on subversive imagination in art. I then connected these theories to the politics of Critical Pedagogy, which focus on education (Giroux, 1988), to create an alternative theoretical framework for conceptualizing ELA education. Through associating ELA to the emancipatory impetus of Surrealist philosophy, I have hoped to justify the academic subject's place within the art world.

From this correlation, I aim to further explore the possibilities for imaginative and critical inquiry that move beyond my current ELA practice. I argue that the experiences of viewing visual art and reading written stories share a goal of meaning making. My study therefore emphasizes possibilities for reading in the ELA domain. Approaching traditional mediums of ELA study, including books and short stories, through the lens of artistic analysis, encourages transactional reading experiences (Rosenblatt, 1994). A text becomes not only an assemblage of words, but a construction of meaning. Likewise, treating visual art works as literature could help scaffold students in being systematic (and mindful) with their analysis. In other words, the tools for reading in ELA could help students contemplate and express the messages communicated through visual works. The emphasis on feelings and imagination intrinsic to the visual arts domain (Dewey, 2005) could, at the same time, render literature personal, through the active participation of the "evolved" viewer-reader.

In addition, my ELA experiment contributes to self-study as a method. My use of personal photographs displays an engagement with memory work (Strong-Wilson, 2008) from the recent past. From my study, I suggest that the automatic, and at times passive act of creating

photographs (Freedman, 2011; Sontag, 2001) could speak to a teacher's similarly normalized decision-making in the classroom. My use of a large photograph collection involved treating a wealth of non-curated, haphazard, and non-thematic pictures of everyday life. However, my treatment of these pictures, involving sorting and meaning-making, illuminated important considerations on a "self" from my very recent past. This self could therefore inform my practice, thus suggesting value in teachers using our pictures to inform, reflect upon, and possibly revise our teaching stories. My use of iPhone pictures also suggests that modern technological advances in photo taking, storing and sharing practices reflect contextual, cultural shifts. These shifts could therefore bring new considerations to self-study and memory work.

In combination with my Surrealist impetus, my self-study work also contributes to the work of Mitchell et al., (2019) in Kitchen et al. (2019) *2nd International Handbook of Self-Study of Teacher and Teacher Education*, which describes the use of self-study to address social justice issues. The specific social justice issue that permeates my research involves the political influence upon the education sector, and the perpetuation of dominant norms. Mitchell et al. (2019) emphasized Van Manen's (1990) notion of "starting with ourselves" (Mitchell et al., 2019, p. 4) when conducting research grounded in social justice. My initial observations of disengagement and a lack of criticality in my ELA class sparked an interest in exploring the societal structures surrounding my discipline. This exploration brought me to my examination of the Neoliberal umbrella that houses (and informs) my educational practice. My correlations of Neoliberalism and its impact on the narratives presented and confirmed within the educational sector (Shahsavari-Googhari, 2017) supported my introduction of a Surrealism-infused philosophy within the ELA curriculum. However, after having formed this connection, my research required an exploration of my personal teacher self and my place within this

problematized context. Neoliberal teachers could be understood as complicit in confirming the status quo, but could become Surrealists when orienting their practices towards themselves. My base of Surrealist philosophy informed my emancipatory aims, and prompted me to explore my role in confirming (and eventually subverting) the Neoliberal status quo. My mixed-method, experimental approach to self-study therefore illuminates possibilities for future social-justice-oriented explorations surrounding the associations I have forged (Critical Pedagogy and Surrealism being used to counter Neoliberalism and bolster the potential of ELA). By conceptualizing ELA as a space for imaginative experimentation, my inquiry-based approach to personal and contextual discovery suggests the need for continued research in democratizing the ELA domain.

From a practical perspective, my research is valuable in its empowering impetus and practice-oriented approach to creativity and criticality. My stakeholders are disempowered teachers who experience pressures from ministry-mandated examinations, funding and time limitations. Surrealism's subversive approach offers avenues of pedagogical exploration that could counter the above restrictions. It could also help teachers retool their practices to claim personal agency over the status quo. In addition, my personal, self-study analysis of a teaching and learning experience, read through my lens as an ELA teacher, could offer significant contributions to the domain of teacher self-study and professional development. My combination of both narrative inquiry and a personal exploration of photographic artefacts displays my attempt at exploring my (and the) teacher self within the classroom.

Similar to disempowered teachers, students also encounter results-based pressures from deadlines and parental (and societal) expectations. Criticality is identified as a target of ELA teaching and learning, but students are not always offered tangible, relatable strategies or

frameworks to conceptualize these elusive skills. My aim is to use Surrealist motivations and philosophy to place ELA within a larger artistic and societal framework, thus allowing for the subject's real-life implications to come into conversation. With certain changes in pedagogical orientation, the ELA curriculum has potential to spark engagement, render personal meaning, and even elicit social change. Current ELA practices do not always optimize (and at times discourage) independent thought. Surrealism offers a playful strategy to get students to think.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Surrealism Unit Introductory Presentation References

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