Teaching English in a Multicultural Society: Three Models of Reform

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Because of the global status of the English language, and the cultural and linguistic qualities of English literature, English teachers are at the fulcrum of educational debate. As global curriculum expands and re-focuses the challenges and possibilities of multicultural education, teachers, schools, and communities are challenged to re-examine the traditional English curriculum and articulate rationales for change. For this study I interviewed 15 teachers from different schools and school boards in Ontario to explore their views and approaches to these challenges. The participants represented a spectrum of beliefs and practices in response to emerging considerations for teaching English within a prototypically multicultural society such as flourishes in Ontario. Their perspectives and experiences both raised new questions and re-opened fundamental questions posed decades ago within first language learning: What is English? What is the role of a student's identity – including ethnic and linguistic origins? In listening to English teachers describe their current and ongoing efforts to create meaningful learning experiences for students, I identified three approaches: (a) Adaptation/Coping, (b) Collaborative Inquiry/Applied Research, and (c) Activism. English teachers can apply participants' insights and examples to policies and practices for relevancy and effectiveness, and begin to compare and assess new directions for teaching English in a multicultural society and the global age.

Key words: curriculum reform, English language arts, intercultural dialogue, multicultural education, global curriculum

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En raison du statut international de l'anglais et des qualités culturelles et linguistiques de la littérature anglaise, les professeurs d'anglais sont au cœur des débats sur l'enseignement. À mesure que le curriculum se mondialise et réoriente les défis et les possibilités d'une éducation multiculturelle, les enseignants, les écoles et les communautés sont forcées de réexaminer le curriculum traditionnel en anglais et de formuler des argumentaires en faveur du changement. Pour cette étude, l'auteure a interviewé quinze enseignants de différentes écoles et commissions scolaires en Ontario en vue de cerner leurs idées et leurs approches quant à ces défis. Les participants représentaient un éventail de croyances et de pratiques en réponse aux nouveaux aspects à prendre en considération dans l'enseignement de l'anglais dans une société multiculturelle, dont l'Ontario est un exemple éloquent. Leurs points de vue et leurs expériences soulèvent de nouvelles questions et rouvrent un débat fondamental, vieux de quelques décennies, sur la nature de l'anglais et le rôle de l'identité de l'élève, incluant ses origines ethniques et linguistiques, dans l'apprentissage de la langue maternelle. En écoutant ces enseignants décrire leurs efforts systématiques en vue de créer des expériences d'apprentissage intéressantes pour leurs élèves, l'auteure a identité trois approches : l'adaptation, la recherche concertée ou active et l'activisme. Les professeurs d'anglais peuvent, dans un souci de pertinence et d'efficacité, appliquer les perceptions et les exemples des participants aux politiques et pratiques et commencer à comparer et à évaluer de nouvelles orientations pour l'enseignement de l'anglais dans une société multiculturelle à l'ère de la mondialisation.

Mots clés : réforme du curriculum, enseignement de l'anglais, dialogue interculturel, éducation multiculturelle, mondialisation du curriculum

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In the face of changing social realities, some English teachers in Ontario are modelling transformation: (a) revamping course lists, (b) honing dialogic pedagogies for intercultural communication, and (c) redefining "English" as multicultural and global. As global curricula begin to appear alongside multicultural curriculum, all English teachers face the task of reassessing the purposes and priorities of their subject. Yet it is unclear whether sufficient deliberation around these issues is taking place, even while literacy expectations multiply. Further, despite increasing emphasis on diversity in its educational curriculum (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2007a, pp. 30-31, 2007b, pp. 30-31) and being home to one of the most multicultural societies in the world (Fakuda-Parr, 2004, p. 99), Ontario is not immune to the tensions resulting from cultural differences (James, 2004). The debates on religious schools funding and Afrocentric schools are only two of the most critical examples in recent

years. Because language and literature play a significant role in mediating cultural identity and cultural diversity, secondary English teachers face the challenge of defining their practices in response to these tensions.

Historically a tool for cultural assimilation, literary studies have always been subject to postcolonial critiques (Eagleton, 1983), giving rise to critical questions: Are language and literature tools for cultural assimilation or for cultural identity? Can the two be reconciled in the English classroom? To what extent should the secondary English classroom be dedicated to raising global consciousness? And finally, what theoretical framework of the goals, purposes, and methods of secondary English can best serve the educational and cultural needs of diverse school communities within a democratic society?

As with most teachers of language arts, English teachers face growing pressures to meet the needs of increasingly diverse learners, both in terms of ethnicity and language but also in terms of economic and social circumstances. With this change comes the need to balance an expanding set of subject priorities, as media analysis and communication technologies receive equal emphasis with practical language skills, reading and writing, literary analysis, and oral communication. Over the years, the secondary English curriculum for Ontario has placed increased importance on media, and in recent years, metacognitive skills have received special emphasis. Throughout these changes, the curriculum documents from the 1970s onward have continued to reflect Canada's multicultural identity. Although the appeal to use "diverse texts" has gradually led to changes in the classroom, there is little evidence of consensus on the degree to which intercultural learning should be central to English as a school subject. Perhaps educators are witnessing the return of the question, "What is English?" asked with urgency at the 1967 International Conference on the Teaching and Learning of English, known as the Dartmouth Conference, which was held at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.

English teachers are not alone in facing these questions and different contexts for first language learning, where tensions around the globe in bilingual societies or a history of strife over language policies in multilingual countries pose complex problems for Language 1 (L 1) teachers.

However, there are important ways in which teaching English in an officially English and multicultural context is unique, in particular its "situatedness" within the global dominance of the English language and Anglo-American culture. Arguably, these two aspects of teaching English language and literature add a unique challenge to the curricular and pedagogical tasks of a reflective English teacher.

That this complexity is so can be gleaned from conversations with English teachers who are making considerable efforts to redefine English as a subject that fosters intercultural dialogue. Among the commonalities in their stories, the experience of resistance and bias towards the traditional canon (a misnomer frequently used to refer to the standards taught in school) prove constant. Besides Shakespeare, the list of "old" English works students may typically encounter in high school include British works by authors such as William Golding, John Wyndham, George Eliot, and American works by authors such as Arthur Miller, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Harper Lee, John Steinbeck, and Tennessee Williams. Yet, clearly displacement is occurring as more and more diverse and contemporary works, many by Canadian authors, are appearing on school English syllabi (e.g., works by Nino Ricci, Khaled Hosseini, and Ann-Marie MacDonald). Although the Trillium list [1] authorizes the use of anthologies, teachers have much freedom for local choice because the Ministry documents do not prescribe which texts are taught, but provide guidelines on what outcomes students should achieve. However, the legion number of web sites for teachers and students can certainly provide an idea of which texts dominate, as could bookstore sales of study aids. As new books come in, which ones are replaced on the syllabus? When old books become tattered, which ones are replenished and which ones are phased out? A deeper underlying question, one that only English teachers themselves can answer, is the rationale for the displacement: what criteria are used to make these decisions? And which classroom methodologies best serve the purposes of culturally responsive

[1] According to the official website for the Ontario Ministry of Education, "The Trillium list contains the titles of those textbooks approved by the Minister of Education for use in Ontario schools. The textbooks named on the Trillium list have been subjected to rigorous evaluation in accordance with the criteria specified in Section 4 of *Guidelines for Approval of Textbooks*."

English language arts reform? Intercultural dialogue can help achieve a shared conceptually fluent language for adapting the subject English in response to new realities.

THE CHANGING CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Today there is an embarrassment of riches in critically acclaimed English language literature reflecting non-Western, non-White experience. Canadian literature shines in its contemporary offerings of this kind. The reliance on old canon arguments about the quality of literature to resist "reinventing the wheel" are clearly wearing thin. Few question the greatness of the American novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for example, but it is abundantly clear today that it is not alone in its class either as literature or as a profound depiction of racism and that there are in fact worthy comparisons to be made with works that Black and other non-White authors have written in more recent decades. Simply put, there is an abundant variety of fine English literature from diverse perspectives appropriate for secondary education and very possibly more apt to encourage student engagement, especially in combination with "culturally responsive" pedagogical methods (Gay, 2000).

At the same time, the limits of literacy policies are becoming more evident. In practice, English teachers bear the brunt of responsibility for preparing students to take standardized tests, but many are asking whether there is sufficient understanding of the disparity of resources and incommensurability of assessment, given a vast diversity of learning contexts and learner needs.

In the midst of these opportunities and challenges, English teachers strive to balance common culture with intercultural learning. "Common culture" relates to the idea of a shared Canadian identity, including, for instance, the Canadian English language (in English Canada),[2] constitutionally inscribed political and social values, and the ideal of multicul-

[2] The fact of French Canada problematizes the notion of a common culture in ways both similar and distinct from the multicultural fact. In Canada, the notion of a common culture officially includes all that is French Canadian. In practice, teachers of English are not in the habit of including French culture in the curriculum. For example, I can attest from several years of experience teaching English in Ontario that, with the exception of works by Quebec authors such as Mordecai Richler and Gabrielle Roy, taught less today than formerly, there are few traces of Quebec cultural influence in the English language arts curriculum.

turalism. But "common culture" also entails the inherited curriculum, including standard literary works (mainly Canadian, British, and American) that have contributed to shaping Canadian society from its inception. In contrast to the idea of "common culture" is that of "intercultural" learning, openness to knowledge external to the common culture and inherited curriculum. English teachers are today expected to "become aware of aspects of intercultural communication" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 33). The dual objective is evident in the revised Ontario Curriculum guidelines for grades 9 through 12 which state *both* that "The study of literature and the media provides students with an awareness and appreciation of **the culture** that surrounds, challenges, and nourishes them" (OME, 2007a, 2007b, p. 6), *and* that students should "Read a variety of student- and teacher-selected texts from **diverse cultures** and historical periods, identifying specific purposes for reading" (OME, 2007a, p. 45, 2007b, pp. 46 & 114). A telling example is provided for grade 12: "read editorials and articles in newspapers, magazines, or journals reflecting two opposing views of Canada as a multicultural society, to prepare for a debate . . ." (p. 114).

The alternation of the singular "culture" and the plural "diverse cultures" indicates the equal importance placed on two definitions of culture – the idea that all members of Canadian society share common values, and the idea that multiculturalism is a value that both embraces and contains the full expression of other national cultures: unity within difference. However, debates and other educational and social conflicts in recent years in Ontario attest to the difficulties of living this ideal. The importance of using "texts from diverse cultures" exemplifies what Young (1996) refers to as "intercultural communication," a spirit of openness to the culturally other, vital to the capacity for cultural criticism, which can only exist reflexively. Both matter and method are critical as English teachers handle cultural texts that reflect incomplete representations of diverse experience. Whether cultural difference is celebrated or merely acknowledged, it has first to be identified, posing the problem of whether the English curriculum should mirror the learners or open a window on what is foreign or new to their experience.

CROSSING FROM MULTICULTURAL TO GLOBAL CURRICULUM

Curriculum theory in education includes concern with changing the curriculum – that is, the full complement of programmed learning in schools – to acknowledge and affirm diverse identities as an intrinsic element of educational effectiveness. In this regard, critical pedagogy (Apple, 1999; Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1993; Simon, 1992) and multicultural education theorists (Banks, 1993; Banks & Banks, 1995; hooks, 1994; Irvine & York, 1995; Nieto, 2003) mirror the concerns of language arts education researchers of past (Dixon, 1975; Rosen, 1981) and recent decades (Ball & Farr, 2003; Borovilos, 1990; Greenlaw, 1994), calling for greater cultural and linguistic inclusiveness and postcolonial critical awareness. However, there are many different conceptions of curriculum change informed by various notions on how it should be determined, how it actually takes place, and at what levels (e.g., the government or central education system, the school district, the individual school and its community, the school subject department). The dynamics of curriculum change are difficult to assess. To what extent, for example, is top down curriculum change, as mandated by policy documents, the result of authentic, collaborative deliberation among various stakeholders? How instrumental are grassroots or bottom-up efforts at determining the areas of emphasis and specific manifestations of curriculum change in schools (e.g., pedagogical experimentation by teachers, departmental decisions to replace teaching and learning materials, parent initiatives to enhance a school's ability to meet students' educational and cultural needs)? What role does time, continuity, and consensus play in ensuring the effectiveness of curriculum change? Do the rhetoric and optics of policy align with implementation readiness, financial, and other forms of support for school communities? Do the various levels and sources of curriculum change form a smooth ecology, or is a conflict of visions and goals inevitable as evidenced by recent controversies in Ontario such as the funding of religious schools or Afrocentric schools? Perhaps Canada's noble experiment with multicultural education is, above all, emblematic of the disparity between curriculum change as ideal and as reality.

The rise of multicultural education continues to define Canadian society, in tandem with societal change, bolstered by national multicultural

policies. But it has been increasingly recognized that embracing cultural diversity by itself does not circumvent the difficulties of achieving equality in a multicultural society. Careful critiques of assimilationist practices have begun to lay bare the limitations of multicultural education (Beairisto & Carrigan, 2004; James, 2004) as well as a body of literature by critics seeking more just, racially conscious, and culturally sensitive multicultural education (Gay, 2000; King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997; Richardson & Villenas, 2000).

Part of the unfolding challenges facing multicultural education is the expanded purview of the global education model. Globalization refers to the acceleration and intensification of transnational activity in the domains of politics, law, economics, and culture (Held & McGrew, 2007; Steger, 2003). The influence of globalist thinking in education can readily be seen in the proliferation of globalized education studies (Gough, 2000); global-education focused schools, courses, and school resources; global school partnerships; and new and heightened emphasis on global perspectives in curriculum guidelines, such as Ontario's revised secondary English curriculum's reference to "citizenship in a global society" (OME, 2007b, p. 27), and guidelines for incorporating environmental issues in all areas of the curriculum (OME, 2008). Globalization and global citizenship in education tend to move beyond cultural learning and appreciation towards connecting learning with real world action, often promoting information and communication technologies to make the world smaller and allowing students to connect consciously and materially with fellow "global citizens." As made clear by recent curriculum trends in Ontario, global citizenship education is no longer considered a discrete domain of the Civics curriculum. The present study is embedded in queries and issues about curriculum change that directly result from the rapid changes in Ontario education policy in tandem with societal change. It thus interrogates the boundaries between multicultural and global curriculum change.

METHODOLOGY

The present study relies wholly on qualitative research, based on data consisting of personal, professional reflection on the part of English teachers, a study in which open interviews and social contextual inform-

ation inform composite portraits of current types of English teaching reform practices. Social constructivist theory also informs this study by way of the result of the data collection and interpretation procedures, drawing separate experiences into close comparison, allowing for an exchange and evaluation of ideas not otherwise possible. The group interview of an English department and the interview of a teaching couple, provide two further examples of social constructivist and collaborative dialogic inquiry. In both cases, the interviews provided occasion for the teachers to articulate their shared rationales and compare diverging views in experimenting with curriculum change.

Participants

I chose participants from a variety of schools in different districts representing a cross-section of socio-economic areas. Some came to my attention as a result of their involvement in graduate studies or educational research projects based at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Others were known to me through my career as an English teacher. I interviewed 15 English teachers from six secondary schools representing four school boards, two Catholic and two public. The participants consisted of four individual teachers, a teacher couple working at the same school, and all the members of one school's English department interviewed as a group. This article focuses mainly on the data collected from the focus group, the couple, and two of the other teachers to highlight and reveal three models of culturally responsive change in secondary school English language arts programs in Ontario.

Data Collection

Interviews, which were either audiotaped and/or videotaped, comprised the main data. Individual interviews took an hour to an hour and a half, while the group department interview lasted two hours. In three cases, the participants opted to be interviewed in their homes. Through informal preliminary interviewing and research, I gathered information about each teacher's career background and school context. Using field notes, I recorded additional contextual information based on observations at the school and my reflections after an interview. School observations included numerous visits whereby I took note of surroundings, cultural

content of texts such as school announcements and displays, and in one case I attended the Credit Recovery class of one of my participants. As an example of post-interview reflection, on one occasion, a teacher from the department interview stopped me in the school parking lot to tell me about his feelings of disillusionment after teaching English for nine years, referring to the gap between the Ontario Ministry of Education expectations and the reality of learning needs. This conversation helped to confirm my impressions of the fissures between members of the department in terms of outlook, hopefulness, and confidence to achieve meaningful change.

The general mode of each interview was open. I began by asking a broad general question, such as: "What is your sense, based on your current and past experience, of how English is changing as a subject domain and as a teaching/learning experience, and how have you responded to these changes?" Using a constant comparative method (Glasner & Strauss, 1967), I easily found the recurring themes in each interview. In fact, this task was not difficult because consistently the teachers discussed similar issues: (a) the need for the curriculum to better reflect the evolving diversity of the student population, (b) the linguistic and cultural challenges faced by students, (c) the pitfalls of standardized testing, (d) the exceptionality of Shakespeare in a changing English language arts curriculum, (e) the factors that make curriculum reform difficult, and (f) the importance of experimenting with new books and new approaches more attuned to students' needs, identities, diverse backgrounds, and experiences.

With each interview, I used probing questions to encourage elaboration and examples. On occasion, I drew from my own experiences as an English teacher as a reference point. Although my chief goal was to provide as full as possible an opportunity for the participants to articulate their beliefs and experiences, I did not attempt to mask my own subjectivity as someone with several years of English teaching experience. I believe that this revelation enhanced the dialogic quality of the interviews because I regarded my own experience as a relevant but incomplete lens on the realities of English teaching.

Data Analysis

I began formal data analysis with transcription of the audiotapes and videotapes, using bolding and captions during the initial transcription to highlight recurrent themes. When completed, I reviewed each transcription individually and comparatively to arrive at a consistent coding formula. In interpreting the data, I compared social contexts (school, community, departmental culture), policy contexts (the latest Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum documents), and individual contexts (teacher beliefs, background, and experiences). The process of analysis disclosed sets of shared traits among particular participants, revealing three models of teacher-led efforts to transform English language arts curriculum in terms of greater cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness, as detailed in the section that follows.

FINDINGS

The data reveal how English teachers occupy contrasting positions in the curriculum change debate. In part, this divergence can be explained in terms of epistemological orientations. The participants represent three categories: (a) Adaptation/Coping, (b) Applied Research/Collaborative Inquiry, and (c) Activism, each by turn more geared toward reconceptualizing English for social diversity and global consciousness. Beyond these classifications, the teachers reflect dissonant perceptions, sometimes personal ambivalence, on the changing role of text choice and written and oral dialogue in the English classroom. From passionate defences of Shakespeare, to radical measures to revamp book lists for cultural relevance, to remarkable illustrations of curriculum linked with global consciousness and civic action, the responses of the English teachers delineate zones of difficulty, change, and possibility.

Three Categories of Participants

In comparing the participants' modes of operating within their particular contexts, I found that three categories emerged which proximally outline their current dispositions to multicultural and global curriculum change. In the following sections, I describe and compare the participants using

these categories loosely to illustrate sets of traits, which are not mutually exclusive, nor are they meant to represent the English teaching practices of the participants in a comprehensive way.

Adaptation/Coping. The present study included a group interview consisting of all the members of a high school English department. The Ontario Secondary School [3] English Department has existed for 30 years, undergoing a dramatic demographic shift over the past decade from a mainly White to a mainly Black student population. The community where the school is located represents a low socio-economic index. This group of participants can be identified as an instance of adaptation/coping, given wide differences of opinion amid teachers' numerous efforts to adjust to the changing cultural context of the school. The former English department head, who began to encourage change on the part of individual English teachers, continues to support such initiatives, morally and through funding, in his more current role as principal of the school. For example, one English teacher's experiment to introduce graphic texts to motivate students, especially boys, received matching board funding because the school had decided to fund the project. To date, the project has received a total of five thousand dollars. The department head's approval was also required for this project. In keeping with her precursor's lead, she supported teacher choice of which texts to teach. A further sign of commitment to reform is that, together with other members of the English department, she participated in an after-school Mother/Daughter book club (Kooy, 2006) that is part of a professional development research project, conducted at OISE.[4]

The two-hour interview with this group of teachers revealed a general solidarity including mutual respect for acting autonomously in the classroom, but also, as common in schools, many fault lines of philosophical differences appeared: for example, the place of Shakespeare, the canon, the effectiveness of literacy tests, or the relative value of particular texts for teaching. Thus, it was difficult to discern connections between, or a unified lucid rationale for, the initiatives being tried. This group

[3] A pseudonym.

[4] This Mother/Daughter book club is entering its fourth year and has recently won an Exemplary Practice Award from the school board in question.

represents "adaptation/coping" because a culture of openness allowed for some changes mainly by way of teacher autonomy. However, not yet in evidence is a unified vision or shared philosophy for multicultural and/or global curriculum. This interview seemed a rare and welcome opportunity on the part of the department members for in-depth dialogue on their different professional perspectives.

Collaborative Inquiry/Applied Research. Among the individual teachers interviewed, Rhea and Paolo were strangers working at different schools and for different school boards, yet they were very close in their epistemology, practice, and background teaching experiences. Paolo's initial teaching experience involved conforming to Eurocentric ideology at a school with a large population of South Asians. However, in his subsequent teaching experience at a school known as "The Brown School," Paolo was inspired by a reform-oriented department head to reinvent his curriculum. Paolo's passion for curriculum reform led him to innovative practices in his current role as department head, graduate studies in education, and presentations at the school board level where he has encountered ongoing resistance.

Like Paolo, Rhea has experience as an English department head where she spearheaded a major upheaval of the old English syllabus in favour of more culturally relevant texts. Her administrative appointment was interrupted due to a family move to the United States where she completed a Master's degree in Education. Teaching English at the time of this study at a relatively new school in Ontario with an 85 per cent Muslim population, she has been instrumental in forming a professional learning community to develop new approaches to curriculum with the help of student feedback.

Both Rhea and Paolo were actively increasing the diversity of texts used in their respective English departments, modelling the book club method of response to literature with students and fellow teachers (Kooy, 2006), and engaging in dialogic forms of professional development. In both cases, their rationales are student-centred, with emphasis on respect for diversity and optimizing affective engagement. Not evident in either example, however, is a deliberate effort or priority on connecting multicultural content and intercultural dialogue with global consciousness and civic action.

Activism. A third category of participants is needed for two English teachers who, like those in the other categories, recognized the need for fundamental change of the curriculum, but who stood alone in their determination to build a global curriculum, believing that it would go far to accommodate diversity much more successfully than the old approach to multicultural content. The couple, Jen and Art, happen to be married and teaching in the same department, but it is through Jen's influence in particular that Art, after twenty years of English teaching, has focused his role as department head on implementing profound curricular changes. Jen's vision is first and foremost one of justice and diversity through a global curriculum. As a young Civics teacher, she devised a unit to engage students in raising several thousand dollars for disadvantaged members of society, without department approval. In her subsequent experience as an English teacher, she introduced a set of books featuring global and social justice issues (e.g., AIDS, war, poverty), building support for a fledging school in Tanzania into lesson plans.

Art and Jen's collaboration led not only to a heightened diversity of texts, but to modelling culturally responsive curriculum and teaching strategies at department and school board levels. As Jen explained,

> *We actually planned it from grade 9 like the whole progress . . . and if they stay in this program they would have ideally gone on a trip around the world and they'll see the global village is quite small . . . no matter which book they're reading, they all have the same struggle and the same concerns. . . .* (teacher Jen)

In Jen and Art's view, English is an ideal educational site to raise global consciousness. Unlike the previous examples, however, their approach is activist, going beyond multicultural representation and cross cultural dialogue, to motivate direct student (and school) involvement in global issues.

Summary. Despite their unique epistemological positions, all the teachers interviewed shared common concerns. All expressed the importance of reevaluating texts from the perspective of culturally diverse students; all told stories of the resistance to their curriculum change efforts; and an inevitable point of special concern was the dominant role of Shakespeare in the English language arts curriculum.

A Rationale for Syllabus Change

All participants possessed a desire to change the English language arts syllabus for greater relevance and engagement of student interest. However, the complexity of making changes reveals itself when I contrasted some of their stories. For example, Rhea expressed a view shared by all the participants when she described her decision as an English department head to put an end to a largely "dead White male" book list and its alienating effects on a mainly non-White school community:

> *So one of the things I realized we had to do … was to offer more reading experiences to students so that they can see themselves represented in the texts, so that they could identify and connect … and this was a school that had the lowest literacy scores in the board, so … we needed to get them involved in the healing process … I also think you need to respect your clientele, you know, and see who are your students and what their interests are – not just their cultural backgrounds – what are their reading needs … and if I have a bookroom with a variety – a diverse set of texts then that would be nice…* (department head, Rhea)

Rhea made clear that what was at stake in revising the English language arts curriculum was nothing less than student success. In her experience, the students' diverse identities were a crucial argument for access to as wide a variety of texts as possible from which to plan the most rewarding and meaningful learning experiences.

On the same matter, Paolo related a story to highlight some of the difficulties involved in devising a more culturally responsive curriculum:

> *I remember a student asking . . . "How come we don't study Black history?" . . . My colleague said, "Well, it's not history, it's English." . . . I think her question has to do with whose writing are we reading and are we being fair in terms of what we are able to provide in terms of reading materials? I think we are, but I think the student's comment had something to do with that she didn't see herself enough in what she was reading. . . . Some students like horror and fantasy and why can't we read some of those texts? . . . We ought to give them choices . . . because as English teachers we're biased and so part of what you do is work against that bias.* (department head, Paolo)

Like Rhea, Paolo stressed the importance of a holistic approach to curriculum, one that considered the learner's needs and interests, as well as ethnic identity. Paolo's account also reminds English educators of the disparity of opinion within communities of English teachers who often need to negotiate a shared practice for practical purposes, making arriving at a common praxis very challenging. The tension runs along three axes: (a) that of the student in the role of curriculum critic, (b) the teacher who clings to a traditional definition of English as school subject ("It's not history; it's English"), and (c) her fellow teacher (Paolo) who sought a solution that lay beyond teacher bias. For Jen, the interests and preferences of students was part of the larger issue of a "null curriculum" (Eisner, 1985) – the conversations excluded as a result of not questioning bias:

I was looking at the syllabus and realizing these are all dead White men and . . . and this is not a boy's school – even if it was that's still a limited perspective. I thought, why do these books not change? Why are we still having such a biased – in terms of gender, in terms of class, in terms of race, religion, everything – it's completely imbalanced and this is not speaking to the kids. You'd have to be deaf not to hear the kids say 'this is boring' all the time. (teacher, Jen)

As with Paolo and Rhea, Jen empathized with students whose needs were neglected and whose identities were overlooked. She shared Paolo's use of the term "bias" to identify the problem as rooted in traditional teacher beliefs and also shared his recognition of students as curriculum critics worth listening to.

That the matter of a more culturally representative curriculum is not an easy one further comes to light by comparing Paolo's and Rhea's anecdotes with yet another by Teacher 1 at the Ontario Secondary School:

A few years ago we brought in a couple of different books, and a couple of kids came up to me and said in one class, "Why are we doing two Black authors in one course?" You know, my first thought was . . . "Look around – why wouldn't we?" . . . my response was, "Well, why have you never questioned why we did entire courses by dead White guys?" Personally, I do think it is important to hear voices that reflect their reality, it's important that we not let Western Anglosaxon culture be the only one we address. . . . I

think you have to consider what's important to them and I know sometimes it's hard . . . talk about racism, well, they experience racism every day of their lives. (Teacher 1)

This anecdote illustrates the pitfalls of multicultural approaches to education that intersect thornily with cultural essentialism, classism, and racism. In stark contrast to the critiques in the above quotations of traditional, monocultural curriculum seen earlier, a student was wary of the *absence* of traditional curriculum. The White teacher was caught in a double bind, having to defend a non-traditional curriculum to both teachers and some students. Some students, too, like many teachers and parents, can be conditioned by old paradigms to equate traditional standards with superior ones, rather than questioning bias.

Shakespeare's Exceptionality

A recurrent theme in the interviews was the place of Shakespeare - often taking significant space in the overall secondary language arts program in Ontario – within the displacement of old texts with new ones. As one example, there is the account of Teacher 2 of Ontario Secondary School, that her grade-9 Essential [5] students felt "[a] sense of accomplishment and sense of belonging" when she chose to introduce them to *Romeo and Juliet*. Another example is Paolo's story of the negative reaction when he chose one year not to teach Shakespeare at Brown School: "I think some parents believed I was denying their sons and daughters . . . the privilege to participate in Western culture." The spontaneous debate between Jen and Art on the matter further shows the complexity of the issue, Jen averring, "Nothing to me is so sacred that it can't be taken off . . . [the English course syllabus]" when she responded to Art's attestation he would sooner take anything off the curriculum before Shakespeare. Overall, however, whether Shakespeare is viewed as the perennial anchor to a traditional English curriculum, or an independent and potentially subversive discursive force (cf. Lanier, 2002; Shepherd, 1991), all

[5] Essential is one of the levels of courses in Ontario. The practice of streaming students into "levels" is controversial. In contrast to other provinces in Canada, Ontario streams students in each grade based on predicted outcomes and postsecondary destinations. In grades 9 and 10, these include "applied" (college destination); "academic" (university destination) and "essential" (workplace or college destination). In grades 11 and 12, the levels are "college" and "university."

but one of the teachers committed to curriculum reform affirmed the contemporary relevance of the bard's plays.

Challenges of the Change Process

Another shared experience of the English teachers was the difficulties entailed in trying to implement reforms including resistance from parents, students, and especially colleagues. For Paolo, the first and most difficult obstacle was within himself when he began his first job and found it difficult to overcome the pressure to conform to familiar educational experience and images of authority. His epiphany was catalyzed at the mainly non-White school where Eurocentric curriculum prevailed. He recalled,

> *Suddenly . . . I was the foreigner. I was the person who didn't know the Koran. I didn't know the religious symbolism that these students had been privy to growing up. . . . I began to question what it meant to have knowledge or to be knowledgeable or to impart knowledge because . . . it wasn't anything that they could relate to.* (department head, Paolo)

Paolo presents as an example of an English teacher questioning the conventional idea of professional content knowledge and his role as the expert reference. The teaching of English language and literature led him to realize that lacking the official frame of reference, the students were unjustly disadvantaged, their own cultural capital devalued. Paolo shifted his thinking about an English teacher's role, and began to explore the relevance of the curriculum to the identities of his students, and the potential role of literary texts in intercultural communication. He named a new role and responsibility for an English teacher: as model cultural learner.

Jen did not mince words in naming another key source of resistance to the vision for curriculum changes she and Art shared:

> *[There's] . . . laziness of making new materials and fear of trying something new and . . . racism, honestly I feel that there is a very latent [racism]. . . . I went to a board meeting where their antiracism coordinator was introducing all this new literature – hardly any-*

body tried it out; but I showed Art some books and said, let's change – let's try these. And then right away we were getting these negative comments. (teacher, Jen)

For Jen, the reluctance of her colleagues to introduce more culturally and racially responsive literature was no less than racism. Because her own empathy for students had led her to pursue dramatic curriculum reform at her school, she saw selfishness and a lack of caring for students in those who preferred the status quo.

That much work and motivation is indeed involved in making significant changes is clear in Rhea's recollection of the efforts she made as a department head to dismantle and rebuild the school's English course:

So we went out and we did some research on what culturally diverse texts there are and that was a re-educating on the teachers' part too, because you know, we were so used to the literary canon, what we've been teaching for years, what we were taught, what's available in the book room. . . . I contacted some book stores in Toronto . . . and one that focuses on Afro-American texts to find out what was there, what students were reading, and then [began] calling up students to read and provide us with some feedback. (teacher, Rhea)

Rhea carefully used the word "we" although the efforts she described began through her initiative. Her reference to "re-educating on the teachers' part" indicates the ongoing struggle of leadership, to bring others onside through example, such as doing the leg work to find unconventional texts and polling student opinion.

SUMMARY

Each participant and the department group profiled in the present study have taken unusual strides to reshape the curriculum in their schools to be more culturally responsive. Paolo formed alliances with like-minded colleagues to read and vet new literature choices to engage students better. By creating new spaces for students to imprint their own cultural identities back onto the curriculum, he modelled dialogic methods of teaching and learning and began to extend his example forward by making presentations at the board level. Likewise, Rhea sought the best new directions for her new school's curriculum. She met regularly with colleagues in a book-club, a teacher-development project based at OISE to

reflect upon specific texts from personal, social, and educational vantage points, considering texts for possible inclusion in the English syllabus, exchanging pedagogical perspectives, articulating their growing understanding of the needs and interests of the mainly Muslim students at the school. Both Rhea and Paolo are examples of curriculum reform efforts based on dialogic inquiry and applied research.

The Ontario Secondary School is typical of schools where the professional culture of the educational community grows in its openness to change as it strives to respond to the diverse needs of a demographically and generationally changing clientele. The participation of three of the English department teachers in a monthly, after-school book club for female students and their mothers signals the kind of efforts being made to promote learning in unconventional ways, as is the graphic-novels-for-boys initiative. Both programs have continued after two or more years in existence. Such efforts suggest a general trend toward curriculum reform, together with the leadership styles of the principal and English department head, both of whom encouraged independent choices on the part of teachers and a "whatever it takes" approach to change. However, the interview with the entire department at Ontario Secondary School revealed key philosophical differences informing divergent practices by the English department staff. From views on the canon to their perceptions of the potential of the students in the school, the teachers revealed the conflicting beliefs predicating their teaching practice. As a whole, the Ontario Secondary School represents a kind of sociological norm in education where old and new ideas collide and change encounters resistance.

The case of Jen and Art stands apart from the others in two important ways: Change is an urgent far-seeing mandate rather than a process unfolding in tandem with inquiry, and resistance is overcome through example and staged implementation. Jen and Art's vision for reform of the English language arts curriculum reflects global diversity, a vision that does not rest primarily on the notion of cultural representation that reflects world diversity or mirrors demographics, but is one that takes its cue from a philosophy of social justice.

As a result, there is no waiting on the ceremony of extended consultation for the implementation of new books. Their plan, rather, was to

phase in unit by unit and course by course a new curriculum to allow, ideally, not only opportunity for students to become familiar with and sensitized to the plight of the world, but also to make a difference. The teachers in Jen's department who did not yet share this vision could initially avoid the courses in question. Ultimately, however, the department will become a model of global education in English language arts which future prospective teachers can migrate to or not. In seeking more profound systemic change, Jen and Art necessarily took a more radical action-oriented approach, gaining further momentum through their extracurricular leadership in social justice initiatives at the school.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study suggest that teachers in Ontario schools are currently using different approaches to reform English language arts curriculum. In particular, I identified three models of reform: a) Adaptation; b) Collaborative Inquiry / Applied Research; and c) Activism. Although each model represents grassroots rather than top-down, policy-mandated change, and although they share the common goal of reforming English curriculum to be more relevant, representative, and culturally responsive, they differ from each other in significant ways that reveal some fault lines of language arts curriculum theory.

The Adaptation model centres on individual teachers' initiatives to replace old curriculum materials with more contemporary and diverse selections and to invent new lesson plans to respond more fully to the diversity of students in the classroom. These initiatives rely on a culture of individual professionalism, reflected in a department head's openness to teacher suggestions, preferences, and requests for new books. The strength of the Adaptation model is that it emphasizes the agency of a teacher within his or her own practice to overcome the "perennial" or "received" curriculum. Its weakness is that it is not geared toward lasting change because teacher autonomy overrides any collective effort, common vision, or unified approach towards reform. Many initiatives are fleeting with one teacher's preference simply giving way to another's.

By contrast, the Collaborative Inquiry / Applied Research model centres on a common purpose, a dialogic method, and a shared commitment

to collective curriculum reform. Its strength is to engage practitioners themselves to author lasting reform as members of a professional learning community. Rather than disparate and disconnected teacher rationales and efforts creating a curriculum change vacuum that then tends to be filled externally, integral, deep-structure reform is made possible through collaborative processes of dialogic learning, research, and consensus. A limitation of the Collaborative Inquiry / Applied Research model is that it requires ample time to develop a shared vision or consensus for change. However, with effective leadership, it can be simultaneously "collaborative" and "applied" because mentorship and modelling support immediate changes (e.g., unconventional literary selections, social constructivist methods) while ongoing collaboration gradually shapes a collective vision that continuously informs and renews efforts to meet diverse learners' needs.

The Collaborative Inquiry / Applied Research model is in this way, however, limited when compared with the Activism model that subordinates collaborative inquiry to a plan of action for direct social justice impact. By definition, the Activism model extends the whole concept of "learners needs" beyond traditional constructs of schooling, as learning outcomes are intertwined with social justice initiatives. Increasingly connected in recent years with global education and global teaching, the Activism model presents a compelling and challenging provocation to English teachers, given that language and literature are always windows to the world and powerful tools for global consciousness and social transformation. The limitation of the Activism model, therefore, is that it relies upon identification of the teachers and learners with the specific proposed plan for social justice, without the benefit of extensive collaborative inquiry. The Activism model, consequently, requires leaders capable of inspiring many others (teachers, students, the wider community) toward achieving predefined goals. There must be a 'leap of faith' that the personal investment and the displacement of traditional curriculum objectives will be not only compensated but exceeded by the civic learning experience.

Thus, in the quest for relevance, engagement, and equity for learners, each of these models of curriculum reform reflects a distinct bias, whether towards teacher professional autonomy (Adaptation), profes-

sional learning community (Collaborative Inquiry / Applied Research) or direct action for social and global justice (Activism) as the best means of reforming curriculum to meet diverse learners' needs today and tomorrow. Teacher candidates should be exposed to and urged to reflect upon the comparative strengths of each of these pathways of agency.

A decade ago, Semeniuk reflected that the "English curriculum is in disarray," citing both local resistance to curriculum change and global pressures for conformity (Aitken & Semeniuk, 1997, p. 5). In Canada, the Western provinces continue the trend towards standardized curriculum (Saskatchewan Education, 1996), although it is unclear how this regionalism will play out within increased consciousness of the role of local specificities and global connectedness in education. At the same time, scholars have recently questioned the sustainability of English as a discrete domain of education. Eagleton (1983) predicted its transformation into "cultural studies." Others wonder if English will atomize into its strands, with language newly divorced from literature, especially in a context where curriculum is narrowed to satisfy standardized literacy tests. At the same time, the centrality of English gives it great communicative power (it is the only secondary course required in all years of schooling), its unique access to evolving multiple perspectives by way of new texts, and dialogic learning. English teachers, researchers, and teacher educators can play a central role in forging the future of English as one that responds to global realities, navigates technology humanly, and optimizes the democratic, moral, and liberating potential of learning through literature and cultural conversation (Applebee, 1994). The three models of reform for English language arts that are highlighted in the present study are all driven by the common desire to critically reappraise the English language arts curriculum as Eurocentric, monocultural, and out of step with both the current literary and social landscape. They indicate a readiness to move beyond the limitations of multicultural curriculum to meet the new exigencies of social consciousness and global connectedness, whether through their individual or collective actions as teachers.

More challenges for English teachers are in the offing. Globalization and the dominance of the English language are receiving concerned attention from those who wonder if English curriculum is keeping pace

(Waks, 2003; Yagelski, 1997). To make possible a culturally (if not globally) responsive curriculum, English teachers more than ever must aspire to the traits of those teachers documented in the present study: reflective practitioners who inspire change and overcome obstacles, and above all teachers as learners who recognize that students carry the key to intercultural dialogue.

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