Critical Conversations With K-12 English Language Teachers:

Inquiries Into Social Class, Privilege, Power and Agency

by

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Abstract

English language teaching contexts in Manitoba reflect the tensions generated by elements such as poverty, educational gaps due to forced migration, and the role of the education system in the colonization of Indigenous Peoples. In this study, I sought to take a dialogic inquiry as a stance and discuss what impedes or enables educational efforts to address inequities in language and literacy education in the K-12 Manitoba school system. Thus, this research pursued opportunities to challenge normalized views of the status quo and contribute to perspectives of English Language Arts (ELA) teaching and learning that further social change. The objective was to understand what happens when educators are invited to critically engage with texts, concepts, and their own experiences. The topics addressed in them revolved around issues of power, agency, privilege, and social class. In order to carry out this investigation, I conducted initial interviews, a series of three meetings, and final interviews with a group of ELA teachers from Manitoba over a period of three months. This study is informed by theories that highlight power and inequalities in language and literacy education and research, drawing upon critical literacies, decolonial theories, and Bourdieu's concepts of class, habitus, symbolic violence, and his theory of action. Findings show that collectively engaging with texts, inquiries, and meaning-making with a focus on power generated opportunities to suspend, interrupt, and respond otherwise to understandings, content, and practices that did not align with the teachers' views of their contexts. Considering that English language teachers are implicated in systems of authority and knowledge informed by colonial understandings, this study advocates for continuous professional learning that critically explores positionalities, identities, places, and literacies that perform and are performed in dynamic relations of power.

Keywords: teacher learning, power, positionality, social class, English language education

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Chapter I. Context & Researcher Stance

Poverty as a global issue affects the economic, social, and political lives of millions of people. According to the United Nations (n.d.), poverty is not only related to the "lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making" (para. 2). With the growing gap between the richest and the most impoverished individuals in society, other forms of inequality related to gender, race, and ethnicity increase (Oxfam, 2018). Thus, reducing poverty is a global need. In this regard, "education is a lever for lifting people out of poverty" (Jefferson, 2018, p. 59). Education helps individuals to make more informed choices about their lives: it might enhance civic participation (Jefferson, 2018) and lead to more access to better-paying jobs, thus providing higher quality of life (e.g., a job with benefits, higher literacy levels).

Nonetheless, students' experiences in education settings depend on variables that involve material conditions and social interactions. Among some of the factors that influence students' achievements, Jefferson (2018) mentions: inferior classroom facilities; high rates of absenteeism due to health issues; fewer incidental benefits from family members' education; and less-experienced teachers. In other words, in contexts marked by inequalities, education might be a significant element in the perpetuation of poverty across generations.

A recent study conducted in 30 different countries by the Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2018) shows the number of generations that would take a child born in poverty to have a better future. The highest numbers come from Colombia and South Africa, where a child would take 11

generations to ascend socially, and Brazil appears second in the list with a child taking nine generations to move up socially. As an international student coming from Brazil, I see that the Brazilian educational context has contributed to deepen my understandings of the relationship between education and social inequities and to expand my perspectives on the current context of this research in Canada, more specifically in the province of Manitoba.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2018), 52.8 million of the country's population were living in poverty and extreme poverty in 2016, and this number increased to 54.8 million people during the years 2016 and 2017. The country continues to face extreme social and economic inequities (Oxfam, n.d.), which have had severe impacts on education. Despite the universality and obligatory nature of public education in Brazil, its low quality is one of the central effects of poverty (Garcia & Yannoulas, 2017; Yannoulas, 2013). Studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between low socioeconomic status and the low quality of education that children receive in Brazil (Groff, 2017; Peregrino, 2011). Brazilian scholars Garcia and Yannoulas (2017) state that, in terms of public policies, "schools represent the main referential for low socioeconomic status families" (p. 37), as data show that seventy percent of the total number of Brazilian children attend public schools. However, only 27 % of these students achieve adequate reading and writing levels (Schleicher, 2018).

Structural problems such as precarious quality of health and education and the lack of training for low-qualified workers maintain the cycle of poverty (Mota, 2018). With limited access to job market opportunities or post-secondary education, social mobility through education becomes a myth in Brazil. Data show that "approximating schools to the poor has not diminished their poverty" (Arroyo & Saraiva, 2017, p. 147). In Brazil, families sacrifice themselves for the education of their children, but they have

learned that even though they might have an education, they will continue to live in poverty (Arroyo & Saraiva, 2017). Identifying the relations between educational outcomes and the cycle of poverty in Brazilian contexts can generate reflections on the effects of poverty in the Canadian Education System.

It is not only in developing countries that low socioeconomic status and poverty negatively influence educational outcomes (McCracken, 2019) and create barriers to learning (Manitoba Teachers' Society, 2019; McCracken, 2019). Recent reports from Statistics Canada (2017) show that the province of Manitoba has one of the highest rates of child poverty within Canada, and this necessarily impacts educational outcomes (Louis Riel School Division, 2019; Manitoba Teachers' Society, 2019; Pembina Trails School Division Report, 2019; Silver & Sjoberg, 2019). Canadian researchers have shown that poverty has negatively impacted student behavior, achievement, and retention at schools (Ferguson et al., 2007; Levin, 2007). These lead to reduced opportunities to be academically and socially successful at school and to accomplish post-secondary education.

Connections between low educational results and socioeconomic status in Manitoba have been observed by Brownell and Nickel (2014) and Brownell et al. (2015). In this light, the authors advocate for more support in terms of incomes, housing, decent jobs, and financial support for parents of this population. In addition to money and material structure being immediate and necessary responses to issues of poverty in educational contexts, poverty needs to be seen in broader terms, as a complex issue (Manitoba Teachers' Society, 2019). Among several variables that influence unequal educational outcomes in Manitoba, exploring issues of inequality entails considering the unequal distribution of academic resources, along with racial, gender, class, and language discrimination, "cultural devaluation, the legacy of the residential

school system[1]" (Brownell et al., 2015, p. xiv), among others, and their effects on society, educational settings, and individuals' achievements. A recent report released by the Manitoba Centre for Health Science (Chartier et al., 2020) shows that First Nations children do not have the same access to health care, clean water, education, and family support as other Manitoban children. The report also points out that immigrants, especially non-voluntary immigrants (for example, refugees) are at a socioeconomically disadvantage in Manitoba. These findings indicate how social status, race, and ethnicity intersect to produce and maintain socioeconomic disparities, which in turn affect educational attainment and quality of life (American Psychological Association, n.d.). As poverty is considered the main cause for low educational outcomes (Silver, 2021), it is not only a matter of getting students to school, but also fully understanding issues of inequality and poverty in the school system (Jefferson, 2018; Manitoba Teachers' Society, 2019), and I would add, in society.

There are no straightforward explanations or solutions for the entanglements of poverty and education. Government policies and actions for reducing (or even eliminating) the impacts of poverty on students' educational achievements are central to education. However, there is the need for interrogating, reflecting, and discussing school systems' and teachers' views on how their work impacts and is impacted by poverty. In contexts marked by poverty, the search for educational responses in English language teaching should involve inquiries, reflections, dialogues, and actions towards

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[1] Organized by the Canadian government and implemented by churches, residential schools worked as an extensive school system from the 1880s until the last decades of the 20th century. While the system aimed at educating Indigenous children, it also had "the more damaging and equally explicit objectives of indoctrinating them into Euro-Canadian and Christian ways of living and assimilating them into mainstream white Canadian society" (Hanson et al., 2020, para. 1). Considered as a form of genocide, the legacy of residential schools is related to the ongoing "intergenerational effects of transmitted personal trauma and loss of language, culture, traditional teachings, and mental/spiritual wellbeing" of Indigenous survivors (Hanson et al., 2020, para. 17).

subjectivities, repertoires, local needs, and their relations with social class, privilege, power and agency.

Education and Social Inequities

Critical views on education that regard it as a search for understanding the coexistence of differences and a site for change, while emmeshed in power relations, deepen discussions about issues of inequity in society. Through education, teachers and students explore “what it means to be human, to dream, and to name and struggle for a particular future and way of life” (Freire, 1985, p. xiii), as well as what it means to have a “good and worthwhile life” (Young & Henley, 2019, p. 4). As ways of being, doing, and living are always connected to life experiences, educational settings need to explore different notions of “what it means to be a good person” (Young & Henley, 2019, p. 4), especially in societies “characterized by a diversity of moral perspectives and priorities” (Young & Henley, 2019, p. 4). As notions of goodness impact crucial decisions that frame peoples’ lives and the lives of their communities, discussions that address issues about the relationship between good life/people and social inequities must be central in democratic societies. As Arroyo and Saraiva (2017) interrogate how notions of goodness are built around poverty in society, they suggest that anyone involved in education should have as a nuclear question: “What does it mean to be gestated, born, and live in this condition?” (p. 148). This question raises understandings of goodness, and “the relation between poverty and education, which lead to different kinds of consequences in terms of precarious bodies, humanities, and identities” (Arroyo & Saraiva, 2017, p. 148).

Progressive views on education emphasize how school knowledge is never neutral and always informed by ideologies. Giroux (1985) explains that radical critics contested the objective knowledge of the school, as “school culture functioned not only

to confirm and privilege students from dominant classes but also through exclusion and insult to discredit the histories, experiences, and dreams of subordinate groups" (p. xv). Objective knowledge is based on the view that what constitutes knowledge and how it is taught are objective, non-context-dependent, and neutral. Such a view does not question how educational practices might reinforce socioeconomic stereotypes. Understanding school knowledge as never neutral and always implicated in power relations (Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1985) promotes educational practices that take into account social contexts, their participants' backgrounds, identities and the experiences, and the social powers that are in operation. Progressive education seeks to identify and change hegemonic systems that exclude large groups of people for the benefit of certain groups in society.

When poverty is present as part of the context, it impacts societies because it deepens economic and cultural inequalities that "have deep-seated effects on all of us, and teachers are not immune" (Picket, 2016, para. 8). Learning experiences are influenced by the possibilities and constraints of teachers' interpretations of the curriculum, their contexts of work and the social world. Therefore, teachers' decisions about what they teach and how they teach are critically important. In a society that "is becoming increasingly segregated by socioeconomic factors" (Tablante & Fiske, 2015, p. 185), research has shown there is a need to incorporate social class into teaching and academic discourse (hooks, 1994, 2000; Pettitt, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2015; Tablante & Fiske, 2015; Vandrick, 2014). Social class "can be defined as unofficial hierarchical stratification of people in a given society, who are ranked according to their social, economic, occupational, and educational statuses" (Vandrick, 2014, p. 86). Intersections of social class and other identity markers, such as gender, race, and others, influence the way one experiences life (Block & Corona, 2014; McCready, 2015). Unpacking how

social class impacts and is impacted by discourses and power relations (Kubota, 2003) can help us better understand its concrete effects on individuals' lived experiences and raise awareness about the "responsibilities of those who have social status and economic privilege" (Vandrick, 2014, p. 90). Thus, it is central to rely on educational practices to explore the normalization of social constructions that foster homogenous ways of thinking, viewing, behaving, living, and reading the world.

Sociocultural Theories of Literacy

Sociocultural perspectives have responded to changes in the social dimension of language studies and literacies. Barton and Hamilton (2000) define literacies as practices that occur through individual and social processes "which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" (p. 7). Dynamic processes of knowing happen in a socially constructed world (Beach et al., 2016). Accordingly, choices for text production and reception are made in context, and decision-making relates to users' awareness of how identities and micro and macro contexts also shape their literacy practices and strategies (Beach et al., 2016).

Sociocultural perspectives on literacy are reflected in new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2004), multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), and critical literacies approaches. As sociocultural perspectives, new literacies and multiliteracies movements include "some considerations of power in relationships" (Perry, 2012, p. 60), whereas critical literacies make power central to literacy research, teaching, and learning. Critical literacies foster understandings of how issues of power, agency, and identity in broader social contexts influence literacy practices (Duboc & Ferraz, 2018; Janks, 2018; Moje, 2007). In this study, I focus on research on literacy and social class informed by a critical literacy lens.

Literacy research related to social class shows us how important it is that teachers' understandings of teaching and learning start from students' identities and communities. Social class profoundly influences ways of living, doing, and being. Thus, there is a need for teachers to deepen discussions about how perceptions and lived experiences of social class affect what is expected from students, and how teachers approach issues of poverty at school (Picket, 2016; Tablante & Fiske, 2015; Williams & Noguera, 2010). Research related to social class has explored the issue as one of the principal agents in shaping the way individuals view the world, express ideas about it, and experience it (Appleman, 2015; Gibson, 2018; Jones, 2012, 2013). Exploring social class through a critical approach pertains to raising questions about "why and how the world is so divided by social class" (Vandrick, 2014, p. 90), and to foster ways of redesigning texts, discourses, and actions that consider and address inequalities in our communities and world today.

Teachers' pedagogical choices "play a vital role in changing the world we live in" (Kemmis, 1995, p. 1). Educational practices as "a form of power" (Kemmis, 1995, p. 1) can raise awareness and challenge social inequities, or they can reinforce and reproduce these inequities. However, educational practices are also promoted or constrained by systems of authority (Andreotti, 2011a). Systems of authority encompass school administration, test scores, reviews, public policies, and official documents, such as the curriculum, which affect teachers' choices and practices. In the province of Manitoba, a new English Language Arts curriculum informed by sociocultural theories was launched in 2017 and added important elements to this study (Manitoba Education, 2020).

English Language Arts & Literacy in Manitoba

In Manitoba, English Language Arts (ELA) teachers have a curriculum that acknowledges multiple reports based on “the significant changes in the ways people live and work in today’s world” (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 1). The curriculum is designed as a “living document” (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. i), “developed in an interactive digital format, available online—…designed to be revisited and updated over time” (Honeyford et al., 2022, p. 150). Moreover, a participatory process with teachers, literacy researchers, university teacher educators, and stakeholders was implemented to inform the document’s ongoing development. The curriculum concentrates efforts in responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) to teach Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians about Indian residential schools and their legacy of harm and colonization. The new curriculum framework also responds to diversity by presenting a student/community-centered perspective and supports practices in which “students will flexibly and dynamically draw upon their ways of knowing, including their other languages” (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 23). It considers different repertoires of knowledge that students might use to make and communicate meanings, while involved in learning opportunities.

The English Language Arts curriculum framework (Manitoba Education, 2020) emphasizes multimodality and creates spaces to explore how power and agency circulate in and through media literacy, multicultural literature, and thematic inquiry. In understanding text as “a variety of resources that we use to make meaning” (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 5), the framework includes digital and media literacy and its possibilities to make meanings through print and non-print texts and multimodal texts in digital and physical spaces. Besides being current and relevant, the curriculum indicates texts should be “representative of many viewpoints and world views, including the ways of knowing of Indigenous Peoples” (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 30); in other

words, texts should represent the interculturality of Manitoba's rural, urban, and northern contexts.

The curriculum is informed by a sociocultural perspective that sees language as social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). The curriculum conceptual framework introduces four language practices as central to language learning. The practice of language as sense-making is about opportunities for activating students' prior knowledge and developing strategies to make meanings. The practice of language as system involves becoming aware of how language works by "exploring patterns, relationships, and conventions" (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 40). The practice of language as exploration and design seeks to promote moments for students to express themselves, communicate their ideas, and creatively engage with the language. The practice of language as power and agency raises possibilities to foster critical understandings. The conception of language as power and agency argues that texts are never neutral, and it encourages teachers and students to interpret and question what relations of power interplay in the reception and production of texts.

The document recognizes the complexities of enacting pedagogical practices that promote meaningful learning experiences, but it does not specify contents. In this way, there is flexibility and freedom for students and teachers to make those decisions. The student-centered perspective allows topics to be included, left out, raised, or silenced depending on the demographics of a group. From a student-centered perspective, freedom and justifications for the choices made must be continuously observed, while teachers engage with their professional knowledge and understandings of their students and communities.

Teachers and Students as Co-Designers of Meaningful Learning Experiences

With a focus on the current and future needs of learners and societies, the curriculum document sees teachers and students as co-designers of rich and meaningful learning experiences. According to the curriculum, these should involve inquiries enacted by students' interests and their contexts. Moreover, students must be provided with opportunities that explore broad questions and significant ideas and use language as sense-making, language as system, language as exploration and design, and language as power and agency. The inquiry lenses that guide these practices are philosophical and personal, social, cultural, and historical, literary and imaginative, and environmental and technological. These perspectives help teachers to develop deep and flexible thinking about meaningful questions and themes.

Furthermore, teachers should be aware that "what counts as meaningful is likely to vary by student and context and may be intimately tied to students' cultural experiences, norms, and conventions" (Kwok et al., 2016, p. 260). Manitoba is on the lands of seven treaty territories, the original lands of the Cree, Dakota, Dene, Ojibway, and Oji-Cree Indigenous nations, and it is the homeland of the Métis[2] Nation. The province has 63 First Nations, and it is home of 18% of the total population of Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017)—the largest population of all provinces (Government of Canada, 2020a). Also, due to multiple immigration programs, Manitoba attracts more than 15,000 immigrants every year (Statistics Canada, 2017), the majority of whom speak English as an additional language. This place of abundant cultural and linguistic diversity enriches and challenges the educational system. Such a context demands attention to cultural experiences, norms, and conventions. In this sense, there is still the need to explore transcultural (Magro & Honeyford, 2019) and multilingual (Ntelioglou et al., 2014) aspects of meaning-making

[2] Métis are recognized as one of Canada's Indigenous Peoples and descend from First Nations and European settlers (primarily the French).

in language and literacy teaching and learning and to create opportunities that expand concepts of what it means to be literate.

It should be noted that teachers' decisions are implicated in systems of authority (Andreotti, 2011a) formed in contexts of broader social, political, and educational spheres. In Manitoba, teachers work in contexts that reflect the tensions generated by realities such as poverty, educational gaps due to forced migration, and the role of the education system in the colonization of Indigenous peoples. Other issues contribute to inequity, such as the chronic underfunding for education services and resources, the industrial model of schooling, and the lack of diversity in the teaching profession. Language as power and agency opens up discussions that consider how diversity and power positions operate in spaces marked by inequities, and how those who take a critical stance can use their multimodal and multilingual repertoires to question, reflect, and act on them.

Language as Power and Agency

The brief curriculum definition of "language as power and agency" (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 42) invites teachers to work with multiple resources and plan activities in which students can question, interpret, and examine bias and engage in ways of thinking about whose voices are privileged or silenced in texts. Teachers should include elements that contribute to enhance and deepen the students' practices of language as power and agency. These elements refer to the recognition and analysis of "inequities, viewpoints, and bias in texts and ideas", the investigation into "complex moral and ethical issues and conflicts", the contemplation of "the actions that can be taken", the consideration of "alternative viewpoints", and the promotion of "other perspectives" (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 43). The document opens possibilities for pedagogical work that embraces different worldviews, while looking at how language is

used to “persuade, deceive, construct and produce representations of the world” (Turner & Griffin, 2019, p. 319).

The Manitoba English Language Arts curriculum identifies the need for a language education that develops an active, flexible, critical, and reflective citizen (Manitoba Education, 2020). A critical literacies perspective is connected to the capacity of critical perception that citizens have about the society in which they live (Monte Mór, 2013a). This capacity does not necessarily have to do with higher educational background or criticism. Monte Mór (2013) explains that meaning-making is developed along with the critical ability to build interpretations by relating facts/events to the world/society in which they live. Thus, a critical perception of the world is based on the individual’s cultural, social, epistemological, and historical experiences.

I advocate for those who take a critical stance and represent a voice for change (hooks, 2010). As I see it, critical thinkers are aware of “[…] how different locations within hierarchies of class, race, and gender” (hooks, 2010, p. 15) influence the way we read and respond to the world. Framed by critical literacies theories, language as power and agency provide “tools to look at the way texts are working to position us and to control the way we think” (Janks, 2019, p. 319). Critical literacies theories help deconstruct/design texts and, more importantly, reconstruct/redesign texts differently (Janks, 2019; Monte Mór, 2019). These movements are central to a project that acknowledges how different identity locations can empower and disempower people and influence the way they access, design, and redesign their social worlds.

This Study

This research was about gathering a small group of ELA teachers from school divisions within Winnipeg who were interested in engaging in conversations about

language and literacy education and social class. As co-designers of learning experiences, teachers always make decisions in educational contexts that require ongoing inquiry and reflection. While engaging with pedagogy as “an unsettling and unsettled question of design” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 56), in this study, I saw teachers as knowers and learners (Kwo, 2010; Sachs, 2011; Vasquez et al., 2013). As knowers, teachers carry professional and personal experiences and knowledge that help them to respond to their contexts. As learners, teachers might change questions, might not know the answers to questions, and might pursue different answers to the same questions. While the learner position produces anxiety about not knowing, it also allows for encounters with new and unpredictable possibilities.

Given the dialogic nature of this study, the participants engaged in asking questions to the self, each other, the texts, and about their contexts (Barak & Lefstein, 2022; Bound, 2010; DeHart et al., 2021; Wilkinson et al., 2017). Their interests helped in building a dialogic inquiry that enabled interrogations about the status quo, mainstream discourses, and discriminatory pedagogical attitudes towards social class and other identity markers. Dialogic inquiry as an approach “position[s] teacher learning as a process of on-going, collective sense making” (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003). The teachers’ initial questions raised in interviews influenced some of my choices of texts. Then, our conversations during the three meetings were shaped by some of the questions that they and I posed. This process generated deeper questions and expanded our pedagogical thinking and possibilities—it was a process of dialogic inquiry. Taking a dialogic inquiry as a stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), and informed by critical literacies (Janks, 2019; Menezes de Souza, 2011; Monte Mór, 2013a), decolonial lenses (Dei, 2019; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), and a Bourdieusian lens (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990; Bourdieu &Wacquant,

1992;Grenfell, 2009), this study was aimed at creating a space to investigate how teachers perceive and understand social class, privilege, and power and agency in English language education, and what kinds of inquiries teachers raise about these topics. By envisioning critical approaches to teacher learning and development, this study was configured as a search for more dialogic and interrogative alternatives to other forms of professional inquiry that could embrace teachers' needs, aspirations, and desires. It was also an opportunity for teachers—and for me—to visit and revisit our own positionality and criticality as individuals and professionals, while focusing on our different experiences and the contexts in which we live and work. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) argue that in order to adopt a critical stance, one should seek out multiple perspectives while reading texts, posing problems, looking for alternative texts, relating texts to their contexts, and finding out who/what knowledge is privileged in texts. The promotion of a critical stance refers to helping teachers to reflect and take the lead in inquiring about their own questions and contexts.

In this study, classroom inquiry is related to the questions that teachers pose about their contexts, the way they listen to their students, and the pedagogical choices they make. Through the lenses of social class, privilege, power and agency, the teachers were invited to raise reflections and possible alternatives to the issues that they encountered in their teaching contexts. Perspectives of classroom inquiry involved having students and communities at the center of inquiry through dialogic approaches to literacy (Freire, 1970) and project-based learning initiatives (Bryce, 2019).

Inquiring about pedagogical decision-making is a way of exploring teaching choices informed by dominant status-quo perspectives and the kinds of systems they reproduce. It also becomes a way of engaging with teachers' critical, progressive, and transformative views. This process contributes to disrupting discourses and practices

that ignore or suppress the plurality of knowledges, and it aids in enacting possibilities that embrace and allow this plurality to flourish. While teachers and I analyzed language as power and agency and privilege, the intent was also to explore what understandings, choices, and questions about what knowledge (Kridel, 2010) the teachers considered important.

Along with the critical lenses, decolonial lenses informed this study. Dei (2019) states that "decolonization is about voice, positionality and authority" (p. 40). Therefore, as we explored the teachers' positionalities and views about their contexts and pedagogical choices, questions of knowledge, power, resistance, and colonization (Andreotti, 2011a; Dei, 2019; hooks, 2010; Mignolo &Walsh, 2018) were central to our conversations. By reflecting and discussing difference through decolonial lenses, this group pursued literacy education that sought to re-imagine new worlds and new futures.

In connection with the critical and decolonial lenses, I sought to problematize the naturalization of ideologies and practices of dominant groups in society and education and discuss "relationships of submission, subordination, and exclusion" (Pardo, 2019, p. 198) experienced by "different political, cultural, social, linguistic, racial, and gender" groups (Pardo, 2019, p. 198). The objective was to challenge naturalized notions of power, privilege, and social class that might impede teachers from having other views or being critical about the status quo, while focusing more on questioning than finding the right answer(s). The idea was to move towards addressing deeper issues that inform and shape choices.

Although the implementation of the document is not the main focus of this study, the new ELA curriculum (Manitoba Education, 2020) was the text that informed this study. As an official document and a system of authority (Andreotti, 2011a) framed by sociocultural research, the fact that it recognizes language as power and agency in

literacy practices represented a venue for expanding conversations through critical lenses. Further, given its student-centered perspective (Philippou & Priestley, 2019; Sinnema & Aitken, 2013), teachers and students are conceived as co-designers of meaningful learning experiences (Manitoba Education, 2020). While the ELA curriculum and its approaches give explicit attention to power and agency, the document does not raise social class and poverty as central issues to be explored in English language classes. However, given the context of high child poverty in Manitoba, topics pertaining to poverty and inequity need to be in the curriculum. Thus, there different ways of approaching these issues. For example, social class might be addressed through a critical lens in discussions of literature in the classroom; thinking critically about how poverty affects children in our classrooms is another aspect to be explored with teachers. This research created a space for conversations with teachers about literacy and social class.

As an international student, researcher, and active participant in these conversations, who was also implicated in the context of Manitoba, my positionality informed choices and decisions in this research as well. My experience resonates with Brazilian scholar Ribeiro's (2011), who takes on his positionality as a reflection of "different itineraries and engagements" (p. 289). As an international student, I reflected on the experiences that emerged from the borders (Anzaldúa, 1987). This reminds me that "keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity is like trying to swim in a new element, an alien element" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. vi). The immigrant experience highlighted the cultural, social, political, historical, and local forces that shaped my identity. Although I thought I could keep traces of my identity intact, these forces operated to make me even more aware of my own fluid identity and the choices I had as an immigrant. Being a Ph.D. international student in Canada has been my new,

"alien" element. I refer to my journey as a learner and a professional and try to project myself as the researcher I am trying to be(come).

Stance as a Researcher: Navigating Transnational Contexts

I am a Brazilian cisgender white[3] woman, who is married, with no kids, from a middle-class background, and I have had privileges in terms of opportunities for studying and working in Brazil. As a middle-class Brazilian, I was raised to believe in the motto "Where there is a will, there is a way." Throughout my educational life, I have been a student who collected the excellent results of working hard. As my middle-class family provided me with "emotional and moral stimulus" (Souza, 2018, p. 16) since my early childhood, my family has enhanced my "capacity of concentration, discipline and self-control, love of reading, prospective thinking and the capacity of abstract thinking" (Souza, 2018, p. 16). I was offered a job just after I finished high school, and I could see the results of productive work at the age of 17, while working as a teacher in a private Catholic school. My personal and professional achievements reinforced central middle-class values, such as freedom and individual autonomy (Souza, 2018). As Souza (2018) explains, the majority of Brazilians coming from a middle-class background are not aware of the invisible privileges of their own class, which go beyond income, such as the ownership of valuable knowledge. According to Brazilian sociologist Souza (2018), the valuable knowledge that is acquired in middle-class homes legitimates unfair privileges. In this sense, there is a liberal pseudoscience based on arguments of individual meritocracy that seek to manipulate and invert causes and effects (Souza, 2018) and invisibly reproduce class privileges such as income and valuable knowledge.

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[3]In Brazil, I am considered white. In Canada, I might be/am considered brown.

In Brazil, I studied in private schools until high school, and I was fortunate to do my undergraduate course *Letras*[4] at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS). Despite not having to pay any tuition at Brazilian public universities, students' access to them is difficult. Public universities become spaces that privilege students with excellent private school backgrounds while excluding students from working-class backgrounds. Even though this panorama changed through systems of social inclusion implemented during the federal government of Partido dos Trabalhadores[5] (PT) from 2003-2016, public universities in Brazil are still considered privileged spaces when it comes to class.

In my student and professional paths, I collected many moments of success, and some failures as well. Looking back at moments of successful accomplishments now, I understand that they were not only a result of hard work but also a set of elements that contributed to my privilege in Brazil—a country with many social inequities. I come from a middle-class family who had a very stable life, as my parents used to be public servants (a stable job in the country). Key to my successful path as an educator was the privilege to become a business partner in a language school at the age of 24. I believe this was a result of my talent, but that it also became a reality because my parents could help me by affording the partnership. This privileged background supported me and prompted me to reproduce traditional, conservative, and neoliberal ideas of doing, living, and knowing for some time, during my professional career. I was unaware of how my positionality reproduced colonial and neoliberal ideals of teaching and learning English as an additional language.

[4] *Letras* is a language teaching license course. It is usually offered with a choice of two languages: Portuguese and English, or Portuguese and Spanish.
[5] Partido dos Trabalhores means Labor Party in Portuguese.

I earned my master's degree from the University of São Paulo (USP), which is also a public university. It was during my master's studies, while conducting research in teaching education programs for public school English teachers, that I had the opportunity to explore social issues through a critical literacies lens and to reflect on public education in Brazilian contexts. Critical literacies helped me to see my privileged positions and how they informed my choices. The research process taught me even more as I deconstructed ideas of emancipation and knowledge privilege. During interactions with the participants, we delved deeply into how we teach English, what materials we use to teach, and what truth(s) we reinforce when choosing this or that way of teaching English, thus legitimizing, or marginalizing certain kinds of knowledge as a result.

I moved to Canada to do my doctorate in 2017. In becoming a student in Canada, I added another angle to my positionality as a researcher and educator: the international lens. Concerned with positionality issues as a Canadian researcher in postcolonial contexts, following Vanner (2015), I also see that "my opinions, values, beliefs, and social background accompanied me through the research process, shaping each methodological and analytical decision that I made" (p. 3). Researchers and research processes are always implicated in political, social, methodological, and historical situations that influence intellectual work (Said, 1978; Vanner, 2015). Becoming aware of these situations and critically observing their impacts on research work has helped me to better comprehend knowledge production and whom it might benefit and/or exclude. In this cross-cultural context, the way I have experienced and understood internationality has also impacted my research journey.

Shaping My Internationality

To be an international student in Canada, I crossed physical borders that "are set

up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3, emphasis in original). I was a South American student in a North American country. Living in Winnipeg, Manitoba, I have also experienced Canada as a borderland, which "is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary." (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3). Inhabiting this physical and emotional space continuously called for shifts in my ways of living, thinking, producing knowledge, and my being and becoming. As I came from the South, I was constantly reminded that I was learning and producing knowledge in the North. This journey was filled with comfortable and uncomfortable choices, with discourses of belonging and unbelonging (Edgeworth, 2014). These have led me to continually question what shaped and shapes my internationality (Madge et al., 2009) as well as what I do with it as a researcher. Moreover, I feel that this international experience has strengthened my actions throughout my research process in Canada and my future research possibilities in Brazil.

Research Questions

The embedded and entangled notions of power, agency, and privilege that inform my work as a researcher are thus shaped by my experiences and identities in two countries: Brazil and Canada. Both countries struggle with offering good-quality public education and addressing inequality issues. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the Brazilian context faces even more challenges when it comes to government investments in education and teacher working conditions, especially in public schools. It is common for English teachers to work three shifts with groups of 30 to 40 students from different grades. While it would have been interesting to include teachers from Brazil in this study, who teach English as a second language, it would have been incredibly difficult, since time would be a restraining factor. However, I hope to expand

and extend my research in this area in Brazil, building on what I have learned through this study.

As an international doctoral student, a speaker and teacher of English as an additional language, and literacy researcher in the Brazilian and Winnipeg contexts, I believe I can contribute with reflections on pedagogical possibilities that embrace the diverse and multicultural classrooms of many schools in Winnipeg. Through a process of dialogic inquiry, teachers could share what happens in the educational system in Winnipeg and move forward through context-based conversations. This experience was configured and collaboratively built as a space in which they could express their voices and choices.

Social class has been a central topic in defining ways of being, doing, and thinking about power, agency, wealth, and privilege (Glodjo, 2017; Hunt & Seiver, 2018; Tablante & Fisk, 2015; Vandrick, 2014). Through this lens, inquiries and reflections on socioeconomic status might lead to deeper understandings of its impacts on individuals' lives, institutions, and societies. As I considered the gateway that the new ELA curriculum (Manitoba Education, 2020) provides for initiating a conversation about language as power and agency, I chose to focus on ELA teachers. This is a group of privileged professionals who are part of a "predominantly Canadian-born, white, female, monolingual English speaking, middle-class teaching force" (Schmidt & Janusch, 2016, p. 140), who face the challenge of "meeting the needs of diverse learner populations" (Schmidt & Janusch, 2016, p. 140). In considering the power they have as language educators, I aimed to focus on conversations about the frameworks that inform their practices and their understandings of the educational system, which has been challenged by diversity and issues of inequality. A group of six to eight ELA teachers and I talked and inquired about social class and privilege in three meetings. I expected

them to engage in discussions that explored language as power and agency and addressed contexts through critical lenses. I envisioned this study as a collaborative space for teachers who are knowledgeable professionals of content and contexts, and who also see themselves as learners in their teaching professional journeys.

Through these conversations, I sought to answer the following **research questions:**

1. How do eight teachers articulate their understandings of power, agency, social class, and privilege in English language education before being given focused readings on these matters and discussing them with peers?
2. When critical theories inform conversations around English Language Arts education, how are these perspectives displayed through the teachers' dialogic inquiries?
3. What are the unfoldings of an online professional learning opportunity for English language teachers, in which social class and language are addressed as power and agency?

In the upcoming chapters, I discuss the research guided by these questions. Chapter II presents the literature review and theoretical framework. The literature review displays an overview of discussions on literacies and social class and inquiries about social class framed by critical literacies and theories of professional learning. The theoretical framework introduces the lenses that inform this study: the decolonial lens, critical literacies, and Bourdieusian lens. Chapter III describes the study design and offers details on data generation, analysis, and ethical issues. Chapter IV engages with data analysis of the initial interviews. Chapter V focuses on analyzing professional dialogic inquiries that emerged from the online meetings. Chapter VI addresses

interpretations of the participants' views on the research process that were shared during the final interviews. Finally, Chapter VII explores the final considerations of this study.

Chapter II. Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in research on professional learning informed by critical literacies and focused on the creation of spaces for collaborative, meaningful, and critical ways of producing knowledge. This literature review is based on research that takes into account diverse and complex ways of being, living, knowing, and doing in education. In this review, I hope to expand understandings of how professional teachers learn and how ELA classroom inquiries informed by critical literacies can be used to approach professional conversations about social class, privilege, and power and agency in educational settings. Classroom inquiry into social class needs to be seen within the context of literature that addresses theory and practice as interlaced. The idea was to raise opportunities for teachers to be involved in professional conversations as reflective practitioners who would take up inquiry as stance. For this, I organized this literature review in three parts in an attempt to inform the research questions:

Literacies and Social Class. It explores how one builds understandings of social class and its intersections with power, agency, and privilege so as to inform question #1: How do eight teachers articulate their understandings of power, agency, social class, and privilege in English language education before being given focused readings on these matters and discussing them with peers?

Classroom Inquiry & Critical Literacies. It searches for pedagogical possibilities informed by critical literacies and encompasses choices that lead to contextualized readings and interpretations of social class, taking power as a central element. This review focuses on question #2: When critical theories inform conversations around English Language Arts education, how are these perspectives displayed through the teachers' dialogic inquiries?

Theories of Learning. It proposes professional learning opportunities as spaces for inquiry to deepen conversations about language issues through a sociocultural approach in an effort to address question #3: What are the unfoldings of an online professional learning opportunity for English language teachers, in which social class and language are addressed as power and agency?

Literacies and Social Class: An Inescapable Conversation

Social class is one of the main elements that constitute the way individuals view and perform the self and understand, express ideas about, and experience the world (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Hunt & Seiver, 2018; Jones & Vagle, 2013; Lareau, 2003; Tablante & Fiske, 2015). Furthermore, researchers have pointed out the importance of discussions about social class inequalities in education, and how this issue has raised interest locally, nationally, internationally, and globally (Leathwood & Archer, 2004; Thompson, 2019). However, recent studies highlight the lack of adequate attention and treatment to social class within education research (Hunt & Seiver, 2018; Pettitt, 2020; Santos & Mastrella-de-Andrade, 2016). In this review, I intend to present reflections that lead to understandings of social class as one of the critical elements in reproducing inequalities in language classrooms.

Critical engagements with the origins of perspectives and assumptions about social class are fundamental in times of internationally growing inequalities. Evidence-based international standards inform reports about OECD countries. In a recent report, OECD (n.d.) shares that "income inequality is at its highest level for the past half-century" (para. 1), where on average "women earn 16% less than men" (para. 6), and in educational settings "poorer students struggle to compete with their wealthier classmates" (para. 12). The results are entrenched relations between education and ongoing job market inequalities. I am particularly interested in research that leads to

more awareness about one's social positions and how these positions are lived, perceived, and made visible and invisible. For this, I selected research studies that explore economic advantages/disadvantages and social mobility/immobility, while raising understandings and questioning beliefs about the reality presented in books, curriculum, and classrooms. I draw on literature that explores neoliberalism as an ideology, and how its connection with social class worldviews informs language education. I also focus on work developed on social class through critical literacies lenses in K-12 ELA contexts.

Neoliberalism and Language Education

Neoliberalism emerged as an economic theory to the 1970s economic crisis. Having free market as a goal, it "championed the view that the state was an inefficient, cumbersome economic player" (Holborow, 2012, p. 14). From this view, social relations and other forces that are into play in market competition do not figure as central. Thus, individuals become mere cogs of a machine that produces supply for society's demands. Also considered as a new form of capitalism, neoliberalism responded to the post-industrial era when local and global economies started interacting more directly and changed domains of social and economic life (Holborow, 2012). This era also demanded language and discourse to represent the new systems that were created by globalization.

Neoliberalism is a political and socioeconomic doctrine that has as principles "unregulated markets, privatization, corporatization and the valorizing of individual responsibility over government's obligation to the public good" (Vandrick, 2014, p. 88). Central to neoliberalism is competition and consumerism. Monbiot (2016) explains that competition drives human relations in neoliberal systems, in which citizens prove how efficient they are by consuming. This is a merit in a system where the market "ensures

that everyone gets what they deserve" (Monbiot, 2016, para. 5). The losers are the ones who fail competition. The maintenance of such an unequal society is a neoliberal project that often rewards the most successful participants of the competition under the guise of the defined or self-defined losers. These societies use social class and economic status to place people in binary positions of winners or losers. Holborow (2012) affirms that "neoliberalism has become the stamp of our society" (p. 14), and that its ideology informs views in connection with a particular social class worldview. For her, the ideology "is a description which retains the link between ideas and reality, between mindsets and social class: it starts from real, active people and, based on their life process, shows the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process" (Holborow, 2012, p. 32). In this process, individuals are subject to judgement for their social class and economic status. Although Block (2012) recognizes the legacy of Marxist perspectives, especially when it comes to raising issues of social class, he interrogates Marx's deterministic views on economic forces and their role in political, cultural, and legal interactions of life. He highlights that these are forces that compel different kinds of moves in society. In this regard, Garcia (2020) adds the importance of conceptualizing social class in academic texts since it has different meanings within the literature. The neoliberal class-stratified world builds hierarchies "of desire, entitlement, intelligence, and worth as reflected in the stratified winners and losers of materialism and capitalism" (Jones & Vagle, 2013, p. 131). The haves and have-nots of neoliberal societies show how some are privileged and others marginalized.

Holborow (2012) draws on ideology to analyze the relation between neoliberalism and language. She defines ideology as a "one-sided representation; articulated from a particular social class but constructed as a world view; part-believed and part-rejected; influenced by real-world events; coextensive with language but

distinct from it" (p. 29). Therefore, ideological representations of the world use social class as a lens, and "in the case of neoliberalism we are dealing with a dominant ideology emanating from a dominant class" (Holborow, 2012, p. 29). This dominant ideology is predominantly based on two discourses: individual abilities and efforts to escalate the metaphorical ladder of success, and the exclusion of government responsibility for the social and economic inequities in a society (Jones & Vagle, 2013). According to Jones and Vagle (2013), the social class metaphor then aligns

> [with] the idea that those in on the bottom rungs earn less in wages, status, overall perceived value and therefore, in order to be recognized as valuable to society either through measures of salary or prestige, must work relentlessly to climb the ladder. (p. 129)

However, this metaphor does not consider the social and political contexts in which people live. As a consequence, success or failure in climbing the ladder is understood as totally dependent on an individual's effort. In its disregard for the complex configurations of class, capital, the government, and other systems responsible for the broader social and political contexts, such discourses "construct a desire for hierarchical understandings of the world" (Jones & Vagle, 2013, p. 131), while reinforcing classist ideas. Through corporate and state influences on education, neoliberalism principles are "complicit in reproducing, reinforcing and exacerbating social class status inequalities" (Vandrick, 2014, p. 88).

Social class identities play a central role in literacy teaching and learning. Ritter (2016, p. 53) states that "literacy is all about class." The author explains that literacy training carries underlying values and beliefs of class representations. However, this statement leads to questions of how and what understandings of social class permeate teachers' practices in different contexts. The thesis of this study involves the exploration

of the nuances that class have in the teachers' views on literacy, teaching, and learning, and its relation to teacher professional learning. In a promise of social uplift, individuals must acquire the language and behaviors of the dominant classes. Consequently, students from dominant classes have some privilege over students from lower classes, and the promise of social mobility does not always become a fact.

For this study, dominant classes are identified as white middle-class in educational settings (Reay, 2004; Windle & Maire, 2019). As a researcher who takes the risk in classifying and "encouraging a perception of theoretical classes, which are fictitious regroupings existing only on paper" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 11), I will define middle-class and white middle-class for the discussions presented here. I see this conceptualization as an initial step towards a more informed investigation of the "particularities of different collective stories" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 3). *Middle-class* is a term used to describe a social class that emerged with the Industrial Revolution. The term middle-class has "many different and contradictory meanings" (Goloboy, 2008, p. 125). Middle-class was initially used to refer to a "huge social group encompassing more or less all Americans, except for those who are extremely poor and those who are extremely rich" (Beckert, 2001, p. 285). In contemporary times, academics have used income, occupation, and ownership of material goods and some level of education (Rycroft, 2017) to define what it means to be a middle-class citizen. In this study, middle-class refers to people who have steady jobs and earn comfortable incomes, with access to post-secondary education, and strong ties to moral and cultural identification to the Western society, which encompass values of neoliberal ideology. Some of the middle-class neoliberal values include individualism, competition, success, and consumerism (Souza, 2018). In her article "Who is Canada's middle class?," Hogan (2019) cites Lehman to define a middle class person as someone who is "the

quintessential reflection of a polite Canadian," and does not have "any particularly radical views on anything" (para. 11). A middle-class person in Canada is someone who pays taxes, owns a home, drives a car, and has a "huge range of needs and experiences" (Hogan, 2019, para. 13). Yet, this view reinforces a stereotyped representation of a middle-class Canadian and does not consider variables (e.g., location, demographic diversity, values, economic choices/priorities), which contribute to the impreciseness of defining class in different contexts.

White middle-class adds the layer of race to the conceptualization of middle-class. In the United States, it reproduces its racist history, and "the implicit whiteness to many conceptualizations of middle-class" (Reeves et al., 2008, para. 68). The white middle-class represents a group of people whose color of skin is white, and who "take for granted: access to health care; sufficient food and lodging; reasonably safe living conditions" (Gorski, 2007, para. 8). In England, scholars have defined white middle-class as a group of people who prioritize "individuality, self-interest, and self-sufficiency" (Reay et al., 2008, p. 238), and who tend to marginalize "civic commitment and a sense of communal responsibility" (Reay et al., 2008, p. 239). White-middle class democratic citizens are "selfish, individualistic, responsible, participatory, active chooser[s]" (Reay et al., 2008, p. 238). An aversion to politics leads this group to build a relationship with the public sector based on "elite separatism rather than on public welfarism" (Reay et al., 2008, p. 252). No entries were found to define the white middle-class in Canada, and this indicates the value and limitations of this search. At the same time that the result of the search shows the complexities of tying race and class together, it also reveals the lack of discussions about this issue in the context of Canada.

Conceptualizing class and its intersectionalities with gender, race, and other identity markers helps to understand social inequities. In "Women Without Class",

Bettie (2003) constructs class identity as she takes into account color, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. The author understands class as performative. Her study shows that individuals perform and are performed by class. As a cultural identity, class performance does not exclude the materiality of the body (for example, race and gender) and the materiality of economic and cultural resources. Instead, the materiality of the body, culture, and possessions regulate class performances through cultural and political discourses that "naturalize and sanction kinds of class relations" (Bettie, 2003, p. 51), which in turn "normalize class inequality" (Bettie, 2003, p. 51). At the same time, these movements produce poor, working, middle, and/or rich class subjects. Class as cultural performance "refers to agency and a conscious attempt at passing" (Bettie, 2003, p. 52). In other words, individuals consciously choose to perform a class identity which might not be their class-origin. Performativity refers to being "caught in unconscious displays of cultural capital that are a consequence of class origin or habitus" (Bettie, 2003, p. 52). Class performativity is a consequence of unequal social structures that use cultural capital to differentiate class subjects and allow membership to a particular class.

Further, Bettie (2003) considers discourse as a constellation of "knowledge" that signifies the world through competing "public meaning systems (e.g., political, social science, popular culture, etc.)" (p. 54). According to Bettie, these are implicated in structures of power that consequently influence the way we participate in social practices and materialize our identities. By thinking about how discourses construct our identities in constrained ways along with institutionalized social practices, Bettie (2003) invites us to look at subjectivities through diverse perspectives. Her work provides a basis for researching knowledge about class discourses and to reflect critically on the fluidity and fixity of identities. Class perspectives are present in discourses of success,

money, values, intelligence, gender, race, ethnicity (Ortner, 1993), and education, “among youth-subcultural styles” (Bettie, 2003, p. 49).

Therefore, becoming aware of class and classist ideas relates to becoming aware of positionalities and privileges. Then, learning about inequities is fundamental. As Jones (2012) posits:

> Teachers learning to teach and learn across differences of all kinds would indeed be immersed in learning about social class inequities in the United States and across the globe, how those inequities come to be and the injustices experienced by the children living those inequities as they enter educational institutions. (p. 29)

Critical views on education question practices that reproduce social inequities and relations of power that exclude students. Then, opportunities to visit and revisit concepts of social class contribute to building inquiries about pedagogical practices and personal attitudes that perpetuate social inequities. This awareness/*conscientização*[6], based on constant reflection, should lead to more egalitarian and libertarian practices in the classroom (Freire, 1970, 1985). There is a need to recognize the world as “dynamically ‘in the making’” (Freire, 1985, p. 106, emphasis in original). Freire’s proposal involves a critical and liberating dialogue, where individuals can become conscious about what matters to them in life, question impositions on ways of thinking, being, and doing, and engage in transformative proposals.

In opposing and resisting dominant conceptions of education and schooling, Freire (1970, 1985) promotes a pedagogy that questions Western education patterns, and searches for the *conscientização* of the individual in society. *Concientização* happens through reflective participation in dialectical movements relating to past

[6] Portuguese word for awareness.

actions and present struggles. Thus, *conscientização* is a process that leads people to perceive how social inequities are projected and maintained, even when there are artifices that lead to understandings that social inequities happen naturally. *Conscientização* requires critical reflection about the transformation of realities and the "unclear" visions that might emerge in new realities (Freire, 1985). As there are different levels of *conscientização*, Freire (1985) points out that intellectual acceptance does not guarantee a change in practices. He reiterates that emotional, political, and existential acceptance is what will generate transformations in action.

Social Class and School Knowledge

Social class and its relation to differences in school knowledge have been investigated in different contexts (Anyon, 1981; Dutro, 2011; Gibson, 2018; Jones, 2013). For example, Anyon (1981) presented reflections on what realities schools sustain, and how these realities impact students' current views of themselves and their future selves. She researched social class and school knowledge in the U.S., where she analyzed curriculum-in-use in elementary schools, which were differentiated by social class. Anyon (1981) found out that although materials and curriculum have similarities, the social class differences among schools show how school knowledge reproduces inequalities, and consequently how they "have profound implications for social change" (p. 4). She addressed the fact that assumptions about children's abilities direct "the type and quality of instruction students receive" (Hunt & Seiver, 2018, p. 342).

In her study, Anyon (1981) found out that working-class students did not develop class consciousness through studies about the history of American working-class struggles: "students were not taught their own history—the history of the American working class and its situation of conflict with powerful business and political groups" (p. 32). As the teachers saw their students as having educational

deficiencies and not being able to engage in inquiries, they chose to focus on fragmented, out of context facts and texts, and mostly on the development of mechanical skills (e.g., copying, filling in the blanks, or matching activities). Middle-class schools thereby reinforced the market value of knowledge and the belief in individual success through the commodification of knowledge. This commodification took place through "the reification of ideas and knowledge into given facts and 'generalizations' that exist separately from one's biography or discovery" (Anyon, 1981, p. 33). Thus, this process reinforced the idea that being socio-economically disadvantaged is a consequence of individual responsibility rather than a result of "structural and system inequality and classism" (Hunt & Seiver, 2018, p. 344). On the other hand, students' high-class counterparts studied their wealthy histories, cultural capital, and the power of their groups in their elite schools.

Anyon's research has informed the work of researchers who continue to investigate class conflict and education. Her research contributed to understanding how education is a powerful tool for reinforcing discourses that hierarchize people through social class and school knowledge in order to reproduce and legitimize ways of being, living, knowing, and doing informed by neoliberal concepts. Almost half a century later, research shows that there is still much to do at all levels of education in terms of how lack of attention to social class marginalizes and pathologizes class lived experiences (Boire, 2004; Gibson, 2018; Hunt & Seiver, 2018; Lareau, 2003; Tarc & Mishra Tarc, 2015), which in turn sustains an unequal society. Anyon referred to how schools emphasized different kinds of knowledge and pedagogical practices based on understandings and beliefs connected to social class. Nevertheless, in current times, assumptions about students' intellectual abilities informed by their social class backgrounds still influence teachers' choices.

As stated by Dutro and Zenkov (2008), urban schools use class-privileged assumptions to guide choices on what success stories should be told in the classroom. The authors state that to "ascribe Otherness to children and families living in poverty operate from an arm's-length perspective, employing 'those people' language both literally and figuratively" (Dutro & Zenkov, 2008, p. 25, emphasis in original). A language "that casts the middle class as the subjects and the poor as objects" (p. 25) perpetuates assumptions as to which stories are considered auspicious. Accordingly, some students are made vulnerable much more than others.

Mainstream deficit discourses of working-class communities and communities that experience poverty continue to influence knowledge that is presented and reproduced in classrooms. Jones (2013) indicates that teachers who pathologize poverty tend to avoid listening and expanding stories that raise awareness about the situations that students from working-class backgrounds experience. Through a feminist approach, Jones analyzes a conversation about how three girls share and build knowledge when talking about buildings and spaces in which there are drug users. Jones' analysis reveals how these working-class girls position themselves when experiencing complex social problems, in contrast to how their positions are imagined/judged by middle-class others. The girls' perceptions show their awareness about social practices that fail to function in their neighborhood (e.g., police action and employment opportunities), and their thoughts on the possibilities of agency. The author argues that a middle-class understanding of agency comes from a neoliberal framework that places responsibility in the individual for all successes and failures in their life, thus reinforcing inequalities.

Moreover, Jones (2013) points out that the girls' narrations about their community lacked critiques about economic inequality. In this context, Jones (2013) advocates for pedagogical opportunities that create spaces for listening to students'

understandings of the complexities of their social worlds and raise inquiries. She argues that teachers should position students as powerful and insightful intellectual workers, who carry with them diverse sociocultural experiences and beliefs about their communities. Consequently, teachers can thereby contribute to students' becomings as active agents for social change.

Critical Literacies Lens: Inquiring into Social Class

In this section, I explore classroom inquiry informed by critical literacies. In this examination, I focus on the work of scholars, researchers, and teachers who approach classroom inquiries through lenses that address the complexities of social and educational contexts. To explore a critical literacies lens, I will refer to the work of critical practitioners who approach texts "by underscoring the power-related aspects of literacy […] and seek to understand meaning-making within wider contextual domains" (Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005, p. 152). Because the work is vast, this literature review will selectively focus on a partial piece of critical literacy research—ELA and critical literacy—where discussions on social class are particularly present.

Following Appleman (2015), I focus on literacy and social class because the latter informs larger systems or sets of beliefs in terms broader than an individual's understandings. I view critical literacies as a movement to go beyond "simply raising consciousness" (Janks, 2019, p. 319), and moving forward with reconstructions/redesigns (Janks, 2019) of thinking, texts, and practices. Moreover, reading and inquiring about social class through critical lenses create possibilities for teachers to address the topic, which in turn might lead to expanding perspectives on ELA teaching and learning.

In this section of the chapter exploring "Critical Literacies Lens: Inquiring into Social Class," my intention was to address research question #2. This review focuses on

classroom work that aims to develop a student-centered praxis, given a context in which the teachers should "bind literacy to social practices and identity" (Janks, 2018, p. 97).

Social Class and Pedagogical Possibilities

Lived experiences and understandings of social class influence the way we see and act in the world. Class and its intersectionalities with other social identities shape frameworks for "how people make sense of the world, communicate with others, and negotiate complex power relations" (Hunt & Seiver, 2018, p. 344). In seeing social class as more than a demographic category and/or a characteristic of our social identity, researchers have argued that pedagogical practices must confront the silenced differences in educational settings (Crawford-Garrett & Riley, 2019; Galen, 2010; hooks, 1994; Vandrick, 2014). Researchers who acknowledge the existence of this silence and its impacts on student learning processes have tried to resist by creating pedagogical possibilities. These movements have challenged naturalized and common-sense discourses of success based on individual effort and meritocracy. The following set of pedagogical initiatives informs practices that encourage the kind of critical thinking aimed at political, democratic, and fair engagements with social class differences in language teaching and learning contexts.

Studies show that critical literacies frameworks inform more responsible and situated responses to issues of class (Crawford-Garrett & Riley, 2019; Dutro, 2011; Jones, 2012; Jones & Vagle, 2013; Luke, 2000). Research has identified that when teachers share their own life stories and respond to students' life stories in open, vulnerable, and authentic ways, classrooms become spaces that promote understandings of equity. Dutro (2011) explores the metaphors of testimony and witness and invites teachers to deeply connect with the life experiences of children who experience poverty and may have stories of trauma and wounds. The author shares the power of story for

teachers of literacy, and the need to "make ourselves vulnerable" (p. 208). She reminds us that students should not feel obliged to share their stories. However, Dutro (2011) calls for awareness of how teachers make meanings out of these stories. Literacy educators should be alert when those stories come into class and "pay attention to how those experiences function for us and our students" (p. 208). The meanings and reactions towards these stories might perpetuate class-privileged views and actions, when interacting with students from high-poverty backgrounds. As readings of "difficult stories are soaked through with the issues of class, race, gender and sexuality" (p. 6), the author challenges interpretations based on materially-privileged images and voices that generalize communities. She proposes a cycle where teachers become critical witnesses and testifiers of their own. *Critical witnessing* involves being aware of the connections and differences of one's and others' stories and choosing to share and listen to vulnerabilities that can lead to deeper understandings of human experiences. In acknowledging the importance of stories for literacy engagement, *critical witnessing* allows commonalities and differences of humans to contribute to dialogue and action that might work toward equity.

Still, there is a challenge in conducting this kind of conversation when classroom texts do not have similar narratives. English texts that do not represent the narratives of students from underprivileged classes contribute to the exclusion of identities (Santos & Mastrella-de-Andrade, 2016; Vandrick, 2014). Accordingly, Jones (2012) points out how early reading instruction often features texts that convey the idea of class-privileged lives as usual, while positioning "working-class lives as non-existent" (p. 1). Such research reminds us that marginalized students need to see their identities reflected in texts in the classroom so that they can feel included and start to question mainstream texts that do not represent working-class lives.

Reading texts through a social, political, and economic lens and interpreting them through interactions with different social identity categories is a way of resisting taken-for-granted discourses of success that place all the responsibility on individual effort. Jones and Vagle (2013, p. 129) point out that "without doing the work it takes to better understand" what informs discourses of meritocracy and social mobility, educators might marginalize their students even more. In proposing a class-sensitive pedagogy, the authors advocate for pedagogical theories and practices that aim at eliminating classism and class bias of all kinds. The authors reinforce that this work does not just refer to studying about social class in the classroom but fundamentally changing the way children, youth, and families are treated in educational settings. This means taking "this principle to another level of responsibility and possibility for everyone" (p. 133).

As stated by Jones and Vagle (2013), class-sensitive pedagogy "is not likely to be a straightforward journey from dominant neoliberal discourses of individualism and meritocracy toward a social and political view of personal experiences of class" (p. 131). This pedagogy is a way for critiquing naturalized and internalized discourses on power and privilege, which are connected to perceptions of class. Informed by anti-classist and anti-poverty commitments, the idea is to infuse more economic and ecological justice discussions in the curriculum and in pedagogical practices. Accordingly, teachers can work towards meaningful educational experiences for working-class youth and children who experience poverty, while inquiring about unearned privilege and undeserved marginalization (Jones & Vagle, 2013). In this context, to tackle unearned privilege refers to talking about experiencing the benefits/advantages of a specific social class group. On the other hand, to talk about undeserved marginalization relates to addressing perceptions of deficiency and the need

for remediation due to their working-class status. Finally, it pertains to questioning generalizations about what it is to be at the top or the bottom of the hierarchical ladder of success.

The idea of consumerism and class are strongly connected. As “an indicator of social class” (Meneley, 2018, p. 117), consumerism is a way of placing products and services into different levels of affordance. What one consumes, in part, displays their social power to others (Carolan, 2005). Since consumerism is associated with the material conditions a person has, and consequently, with power, discussions of class have explored issues related to a consumer society. Critical discussions have addressed issues of social hierarchy, the environmental impacts a consumer society produces, and the need for pursuing a more ecological and sustainable future.

Through an ecological justice-oriented curriculum, teachers could present more discussions about our carbon footprints, and how unsustainable it is to keep a consumerist mindset of the materialistic society in which we live. An ecological-justice oriented perspective is aligned with the environmental lens proposed by the Manitoba ELA curriculum (Manitoba Education, 2020). Jones and Vagle (2013) underline that “accepting or perpetuating a hierarchy of human worth based on materialistic possessions is an unethical stance to take at schools” (p. 133). Conversely, teachers can pursue inquiries about how “materialism and the hierarchy it produces on the backs of low-wage workers and at the expense of natural resources” (p. 133) work against a more ecological and sustainable future. For the authors, locating and disrupting social-class hierarchies and discourses in the classroom is one of the most challenging things to do. They remind us that it is fundamental to understand our social class locations as teachers and students. This framework “pushes educators to be sensitive to all classes, locations and discourses” (Jones & Vagle, 2013, p. 133). Further, the objective is to

move away from criticism focused on individuals and concentrate on inquiries about situated choices concerning social and political contexts.

Inquiring about our complicity with neoliberal discourses and actions pertains to looking at First World theories and how they interpret postcolonial worlds (Kubota & Miller, 2017). For example, in her work informed by poststructuralist and postcolonial theories, Brazilian scholar Andreotti (2005) created the Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry (OSDE) Methodology. It refers to a set of procedures and guidelines that invites the creation of spaces where participants examine assumptions, while being exposed to different points of view about complex issues. Through a philosophical-political rationale that "addresses the link between cultural and material forces that shape subjectivities and world views" (Andreotti, 2011b, p. 192), the OSDE initiative uses critical literacies as an educational framework. Their methodology advocates for independent thinking and the need for critical, political, and transnational literacies in times of "change, complexity, uncertainty and insecurity in diverse contexts" (Andreotti, 2005, p. 1). The initiative regards critical literacies as practices that support learners in analyzing "the relationships among language, power, social practices, identities, and inequities; to imagine otherwise; to engage ethically with difference; and to understand the potential implications of their thoughts and action" (Andreotti, 2011b, p. 194). Their work questions discourses of economic advantages and social mobility concerning social and material contexts, for example, through activities that engage with "ideas about the origins and justifications of unequal distributions of resources and labour" (Andreotti, 2011b, p. 192). Thus, learners examine how belonging to certain identity groups influences the way individuals experience and/or lack power and privilege in society. Andreotti's work was an inspiration for this study, as I intended to build upon it to enable discussions that considered lenses of power with English

language teachers.

These are just a few of the many studies of social class that engage in work with critical literacies. The question is, how can educators contribute to ways of thinking, doing, and being that respond to English language education in more inclusive forms?

Intersectionality lenses inform analysis that considers the complexities of individuals' identities and how they impact their experiences in society. The term *intersectionality* was first used by the American legal scholar Crenshaw (1989, 1991), to address the intersections of race and sexuality, and by the social theorist Collins (1990), to address the intersections of race, class, and gender. Both researchers analyzed how these intersections mutually reinforce sites of power relations (Hankvisky & Jordan-Zachery, 2019). By taking "identity as multilayered and complex" and "the notion that different categories cannot be dealt with in isolation" (Block & Corona, 2014, p. 32), scholars have explored issues through the analysis of inter and intra-categorical phenomena promoted by intersectionality. In educational settings, intersectionality frameworks contribute to understandings and intervention designs that regard such complexities (Block & Corona, 2014; McCready, 2004, 2015; Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011), while observing the role that institutional forces play in privileging or marginalizing identity differences.

Theories of Professional Learning

Theories of professional learning are related to research question #3. This literature review analyzes studies that focus on teachers engaging in inquiry communities framed by critical theories. In an attempt to better understand what is already known and has been studied, a search was conducted in the University of Manitoba databases using search strings as "teacher learning," "teachers as learners" and "teacher inquiry," covering a period from 2010-2022 to locate the most recent

research. Framed by critical theories, articles that address teacher learning in collaborative contexts, understanding teachers as learners and knowers, and building knowledge through critical frameworks were included. This review demonstrates that teacher learning through inquiry opens possibilities for teachers to take positions as knowers and learners. This movement is supported by an ongoing discussion on teaching and learning as always "in motion" (Ellsworth, 2005).

Teachers as Knowers and Learners

Professional development that proposes a view of teacher learning based on "mutual engagement and knowledge creation" (Sachs, 2011, p. 162) aims to have teachers in control over their learning (Sugrue, 2004). Sachs (2011) explains that learning is a result of taking risks while dealing with ambiguities. Thus, teacher learning is a process that should encompass a collaborative endeavor among participants involved in the educational process. In her research on continuous professional development with a group of 29 teachers in Australia, Sachs uses the metaphors of revitalizing and reimagining to respond to a world marked by rapid and ongoing changes, and in which there is a call for teachers to become "producers of professional knowledge" (Sachs, 2011, p. 163). Revitalizing teacher learning fosters transformative views of learning connected to real needs determined by the teachers and their contexts. Through this understanding of professional development, teachers become "reflective learners" who participate in networks that connect them with other teachers and provide them with opportunities to collectively reflect on the needs of their students. Reimagining takes inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smyth & Lytle, 2009) and views teachers as "autonomous professionals" who are willing to rethink knowledge production. Sachs (2011) believes that teacher learning "is an aspiration for a strong and confident profession" (p. 162), when teachers become the authors of their learning processes.

Professional development projects might provide different valuable experiences for teachers. Studies have shown that teachers engage more vigorously in learning processes that recognize who they are as people (Mattos, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2019; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019). They also prefer collaborative spaces where they can share struggles, dilemmas, and ideas that can move forward their teaching (Barak & Lefstein, 2022; Cochran-Smyth & Lytle, 2009; De Jong et al., 2021; Kwo, 2010; Sachs, 2011). Moreover, teachers like the idea to be seen as learners (Hooley & Ryan, 2009; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019; Vasquez et al., 2013)—rather than being knowers and deliverers of content, they learn through and from their practices.

In raising questions about what, where, and how teachers can learn, this review analyzed studies about teacher learning that positioned them as agents who make pedagogical decisions through a critical framework that takes power relations seriously (Janks, 2019; Vasquez, 2017). This kind of research instigates teachers to "critically examine oppression on institutional, cultural, and individual levels" (Hackman, 2005, p. 104). Teachers learn from the challenges with which they need to deal in their everyday practices. Projects that consider teachers as learners have contributed to professional development in terms of recognizing "teacher agency and personal responsibility" (Sachs, 2011, pp. 162–163).

Research has shown that relevant and practical teacher learning involves learning by doing. Vasquez et al. (2013) respond to a lack of work with critical teacher education and teachers as learners and inquirers of their practices. In their book, the authors focus on work with pre-service and in-service teachers as active learners while inquiring about their contexts. Their main point is that

> rather than limiting what we do to telling (lectures) or showing (providing examples from other peoples' classrooms), we are suggesting giving them

> opportunities to experience firsthand what it is like to be a learner where the university teachers or workshop facilitator builds curriculum around their inquiry questions, passions and interests from a critical literacy perspective. (2013, p. 3)

With this in mind, they share a study in which pre-service and in-service teachers had the opportunity to experience activities and tasks informed by critical literacies. The study shows how to become aware of the frames that inform teachers' professional choices by reflecting on how our personal histories work together with our philosophical thinking. For this, they proposed a set of reflection points and pedagogical strategies that contribute to becoming conscious of the discourses and identities that build one's professional habitus. Bourdieu (1979/1984) termed habitus as a set of dispositions and perceptions that are developed through the course of a life, and that people use to navigate their social worlds. In this sense, habitus informs social positions and moderates practices.

For Vasquez et al. (2013), disrupting common-sense ideas "calls for a new level of consciousness" (p. 8). It means that there is a need for "unpacking social practices that perpetuate forces" through multiple perspectives that complicate but also provide "sophisticated, powerful, pleasurable experiences of learning" (Vasquez et al., 2013, p. 5). As individuals share discourses and identities, the complexity of what informs multiple perspectives becomes evident. As Vasquez (2013) points out, "without a doubt, multiple perspectives complicate what we know and thus complicate curriculum" (Vasquez, 2013, p. 74). Inquiry-based learning opportunities can expand, enrich, and empower perspectives, which might lead to transformational proposals.

Professional learning that promotes multiple perspectives and an ongoing critical analysis connects teachers' stories to broad social contexts. Teachers build knowledge

from their contexts by storytelling and story interpreting, which help them better understand who they and their students are (Dan-Jun et al., 2010; Larsen, 2009; Mattos, 2009) as well as how they learn from their own practices.

Teachers always make decisions that require ongoing inquiries and reflections on "unexpected moments" (Honeyford, 2019), which are unforeseen, unpredictable, and situated. The creation of spaces to think about and respond to local educational contexts involves a kind of care for the liveliness of teachers' learning, which increases when teachers experience their beliefs and practices as active and reflective learners (Kwo, 2010). Drawing on Winnicot, Ellsworth (2005) points out that growing up means developing a sense of aliveness (Phillips, 1988)—that is, "to have a sense of aliveness a person needs a capacity to access the world around her and then to use it creatively and responsibly rather than simply to comply with" it (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 59). Put it differently, if we understand teachers' learning and development as having a sense of aliveness, they need to be offered opportunities in which they can access and respond to the world in ways that lead to more thinking and inquiring about their own contexts.

Studies indicate that teachers commit to professional learning projects which expand their knowledge while raising inquiries, and deepening their understandings of their social positions, dilemmas, vulnerabilities, and learning. This kind of teacher professional learning engages with pedagogical decisions that work toward "a moral commitment to education" (Kwo, 2010, p. 313), which explores pedagogical responsibilities, intentions, and choices located in personal, social, cultural, political, economic, and historical contexts. In order to inform teacher professional learning opportunities and research decisions that embrace this challenge, the next section will present critical theories that frame this study.

Theoretical Framework

As an educator and researcher, I am committed to critical and anti-oppressive practices. Thus, I argue for research opportunities "to make overt how power relations permeate the construction and legitimation of knowledge" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 10). This movement must be accompanied by inquiries and reflections with participants as well as ongoing reflexivity about how the researcher's location and political commitments permeate and shape research approaches and understandings (Brown & Strega, 2005). Aware of the illusion of neutrality and objectivity fostered by positivist approaches, I understand that research plays a central role in resisting practices and theories that reinforce ideologies and methodologies that do not question power and privilege. Furthermore, I am aligned with theorists who seek educational practices through political, creative, and inventive venues.

To delineate a theoretical framework, I will refer to critical theories that aim at constant intellectual movement and development throughout the research process. Such a work should be marked by hyper-reflexivity (Kapoor, 2004), that is, "a rigorously and vigilantly reflexivity […] for acknowledging one's complicity in hierarchical relations of power" (Kubota & Miller, 2017, p. 144). Hyper-reflexivity involves being and becoming aware of "the history and itinerary of one's prejudices and learned habits" (Kapoor, 2004, p. 641).

I draw on decolonial perspectives, critical literacies, and Bourdieu's theoretical framework to inform this research journey. In the next session, I explore how these frameworks inform research about privilege and power and agency in English Language Arts teaching and learning. First, I explore understandings of decolonial perspectives, and specific ways they have been explored in language and literacy education. Then, I present critical literacies to conceptualize how I understand criticality in this research.

Finally, I rely on a Bourdieusian framework to engage in concepts of class, habitus, and symbolic violence that inform this study.

Decolonial Lens

A decolonial lens challenges colonial thoughts and practices. Decolonial thinking has a “radical potential of unsettling and reconstituting standard processes of knowledge production” (Bhambra, 2014, p. 115). Coming from a Latin American perspective, I question forms of epistemological dominance, while advancing a critical consciousness of myself “as a learner, having a sense of place, history, identity, culture, and memory” (Dei, 2019, p. 13). A decolonizing framework compels action-oriented teaching and learning, which question mechanisms that create subordination and invisibility (Maldonado-Torres, 2004). It promotes spaces that invite/create different/new epistemologies for re-evaluating the continuities of colonialism (Abdi, 2012) and contesting knowledge production.

Thinking and doing things through a decolonial lens means to build understandings on what knowledges and ways of producing knowledge have been ignored. Mignolo and Walsh (2018) state that “decolonial thinking and doing aim to delink from the epistemic assumptions common to all areas of knowledge established in the Western world since the European Renaissance and through the European Enlightenment” (p. 106). Such epistemic assumptions compose the “colonial matrix of power” (CMP) (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). As Europeans invaded other territories, they tried to wipe out local histories and impose their ways of living, knowing, and doing based on hegemonic understandings of knowledge, language, and religion. In building the “fiction of the totality of knowledge” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 222), the fiction of a universal and superior knowledge, the “colonial matrix of power” sustains and is

sustained by the supremacy of Eurocentric ways of telling stories and having conversations (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

The colonial matrix of power remains by creating, telling, and retelling macro narratives. These narratives of modernity use salvation, progress, and development to justify historical crimes, working for an agenda that hides the darker side of modernity. Decolonial projects are movements organized by people that wish "to delink from the colonial matrix" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 115) and seek to value and strengthen their local histories. For this study, I tried to be attentive to elements from the colonial matrix of power in the discipline English Language Arts, and by looking at teachers as subjects, I focused on what responses we could build through decoloniality. Coloniality in the English language curriculum is present, for example, when it disregards diversity and multiple subjectivities, such as those of Indigenous communities, blacks, the LGBTQIAP+ community, and people with disabilities. Another critical aspect is what questions an English language curriculum raises about this colonial language (Borelli et al., 2020), and what pedagogical orientations a curriculum document offers for teachers to engage with full repertoires. Also, it is crucial to problematize evaluation processes that reproduce colonial thinking and doing in the curriculum.

Furthermore, Mignolo and Walsh (2018) remind us that "there is no outside of the colonial matrix of power [and] no privileged position (ethnic or sexual) from which to confront coloniality" (p. 108). In this sense, it is important to recognize that "each one of us is 'at the interstices' of race, gender, culture, class, and nation in context-specific ways" (Asher, 2009, p. 74). In other words, educators are often involved in Eurocentric, colonial, and oppressive systems of education. However, by becoming aware of this involvement and looking attentively at "mechanisms associated with the activation, maintenance, transposition, and dispute, bridging, crossing and dissolution of

boundaries" (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 187), we might find alternatives for thinking and doing education through a decolonial lens.

Exploring possibilities of decolonial thinking and doing in education is not an easy task, as those who resist oppression are always implicated in official and formal hegemonic structures of power. Aligned with Mignolo and Walsh (2018), I understand that "in my own decolonial conception, there is no proprietor or privileged plan for decoloniality" (p. 108). Decoloniality demands to delink oneself from knowledges and practices that sustain the English Language Arts "colonial matrix of power," and the borders it creates. As Mignolo and Walsh (2018) posit, "decoloniality is the exercise of power within the colonial matrix to undermine the mechanism that keeps it in place requiring obeisance. Such a mechanism is epistemic and so decolonial liberation implies epistemic disobedience" (p. 115). In their view, this requires the recognition of the "globally dispersed decolonial planetary energies becoming interconnected in our diverse local histories, in the present" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 115). In other words, as teachers/inquirers/researchers, we need to look at and respond to the present through knowledges that respect, represent, and validate the diverse ways of understanding life, which have been subjugated by Western colonial views of truth, power, and knowledge.

Decolonizing education necessarily involves the acknowledgement of one's history and location. Some of the most oppressive moments involving Indigenous Peoples in Manitoba include "exploitation by settlers and traders, unfulfilled treaties by governments, repression of the Red River Resistance and the murder of Louis Riel", [and the creation of] "dozens of Indian residential and day schools" (Sinclair & Cariou, 2011, p. 3). The legacy of harm and colonization of Indian residential schools involved separating children from their families and sending them to boarding schools. Due to "forced assimilation policies and practices that disrespected who they were, where they

came from, their language, culture, and relationships, or skills on the land" (Battiste, 2010, p. 15), children suffered the "tragedies of a lost childhood" (Battiste, 2010, p. 15). Indian residential and day schools became places where children experienced colonialization, racism, and many suffered from physical and sexual abuse. Psychological and emotional consequences generated trauma and blocks to learning (Battiste, 2010). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) was created in order to "guide Canadians through the difficult discovery of the facts behind the residential school system," and "to lay the foundation for lasting reconciliation across Canada" (Moran, 2015, para. 1). To teach Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians about Indian residential schools and their legacy of harm and colonization was included in the section "Education for Reconciliation" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, pp. 7-8). Teaching about Indian residential schools pertains to acknowledging the truths of the past and engaging in critical reflections about the exclusion and cultural genocide created by colonial education.

For Canadian scholar Dei (2019), a subversive pedagogy understands the need to fight "to bring a new educational and social order" (p. 21). As colonial education was violent and oppressive, and it has deeply influenced our current education system, "subversive pedagogies with the potential to liberate minds, ideas, and practices" are necessary (Dei, 2019, p. 21). Then, decolonization "calls for unlearning what we have learned" (Dei, 2019, p. 22). By recognizing the inequities in how individuals are positioned in society and schools and its implications for the lives of students, teachers can explore different possibilities in the curricula and contribute to creating a more inclusive history now and for the future.

A decolonial project for education is "critically engaged with social difference" (Dei, 2019, p. 3). In Dei's view, this means that we should foster political-epistemic

communities that think and act towards difference and knowledge through pedagogies that subvert and disrupt hegemonic/dominant knowledge and practices. A decolonial educational agenda supports teachers, students, institutions, and families to take part in a process that focuses on "resistance to oppression" and the development of "critical consciousness" (Dei, 2019). According to the author, the pursuit of the wholeness of everyone involved in the educational process welcomes social difference, where "difference is an acknowledgement of voice, positionality, place, context, and history" (Dei, 2019, p. 15).

Even though there are attempts to decolonize education through anti-oppressive and anti-racist pedagogical practices, discrimination and exclusion of people based on class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, and nationality continue to exist (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004). Thus, I agree with the authors that "although decolonisation challenged, countered and spawned contradictory impulses towards change, in most societies this process has only modified rather than erased embedded patterns of disadvantage" (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004, p. 7). They claim that education has taken steps in interrogating knowledge and knowledge production, privileges, and margins. However, the authors also point out that barriers such as monocultural curricula driven by capitalist discourse impede change and transformation. As freedom and individuality are central to capitalism, "the individual, as the sovereign citizen or the consumer, is king" (Machan, 1996, p. 4). In being free to make choices that respond to one's self-interest, the individual pursues wealth in a constant need to accumulate (Hernández, 2017). The underlying idea is that when the individual generates wealth, they also create a wealthier society. Capitalist discourses contribute to making individuals think in individualistic rather than collective ways about society.

Furthermore, monocultural curricula often ignore how privileges and borders are

delineated by colonialism (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004). By not including accounts of domination, resistance, and injustice and their historical configurations, these monocultural curricula do not explore "how discourses of power are established and why they need to be undermined" (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004, p. 8). The authors invite educators and practitioners to engage in practices that challenge monocultural curricula and take into account intercultural contexts. Abdi (2012) explains that in order for one to reconstruct learning structures through a decolonial lens, they need to go beyond

> the monocentrality of official discourses, thus aiming for the critical construction of new epistemic formation that is not *a priori* anti-anybody but want to affirm the collective credit that should be given to all humanity in the across-millennia constitution of philosophies, knowledges and socially located epistemologies. (p. 11)

Crossing the boundaries of monocentrality leads to possibilities that challenge notions of universality. Based on Mignolo (1996), Brazilian scholar Menezes de Souza (2017) reflects on how "academic colonialism" proliferates when critics/analysts tend to validate monolingual and monocultural ways of producing knowledge while excluding multicultural and multilingual epistemologies. The author suggests more research on transcultural encounters that consider power inequalities and unbalanced epistemological relationships.

Instead of ascribing different values to different knowledges, decolonial pedagogies aim at the co-existence of them, where "there is no pre-established point of arrival; only the need for justice and change" (Menezes de Souza & Monte Mór, 2018, p. 450). Decolonial pedagogical practices take into account teachers' and students' social locations, bodies, identities, and knowledge production (Dei, 2019). That is why

situatedness and plurality are central to decolonial projects aimed at identifying how pedagogical work might constrain othering, enhance agency, and work towards the co-existence of knowledges.

The acknowledgement of one's situatedness and appreciation of plurality can enable deeper understandings about the Other. Here I shall draw on the concept of *abyssal lines*, proposed by Santos (2007, 2009). As a result of dominant abyssal thinking, the abyssal lines place human and nonhuman realities in different sides of the lines, which means that existing realities of the other side of the line are made invisible or even actively produced as non-existent (Santos, 2007). Abyssal lines represent binary thinking that creates, reproduces, and maintains colonial frontiers for what and whose knowledge, literacies, bodies, cultures, and experiences are considered worthy or unworthy, which in turn leads them to be treated as visible or invisible. I understand the action of creating abyssal lines as a process of othering. I take this term from poet and literature professor Mackey (1992), who conceives otherness as "something people do" to another person (p. 51). Thus, the author refers to *other* as a verb, instead of using it as a noun or an adjective, and he explains its operational process of othering. He states that "artistic othering has to do with innovation, invention, and change upon which cultural health and diversity depend and thrive. Social othering has to do with power, exclusion, and privilege, the centralizing of a norm against which otherness is measured, meted out, marginalized" (Mackey, 1992, p. 51). Abyssal thinking and social othering add to understandings of how education might conform, reinforce, or resist ways of othering.

Towards an Action-Oriented Perspective

I have sought possibilities for decolonizing ELA classes based on a perspective that recognizes the need of effective actions. As bell hooks (2010) reminds us, "we are bombarded daily by a colonizing mentality" (p. 26). Then, a decolonizing mentality

invites us to be critically vigilant. hooks (2010) explains that liberation is an ongoing process, and consequently, teachers who see education as the practice of freedom "deliberately choose ways to further the interests of democracy, of justice" (p. 27). Scholars have explored decolonizing possibilities by engaging with alternative epistemologies and social movements (Andreotti, 2011a); working with Indigenous cultural knowings (Dei, 2019); providing Indigenous frameworks (Anderson, 2019; Battiste, 2005); confronting systems of oppression imposed by white, middle-class institutionalized ways of being, and knowing (Sinclair, 2018); examining agency and the struggles with complex forces, and the myth of being in control (Hernandez-Zamora, 2010); proposing translanguaging as a borderless space for languages, nations, and cultures (García & Wei, 2014); proposing alternative methods of theorizing and enacting pedagogies (De los Ríos & Seltzer, 2017); and advocating for broader understandings of language and our relations established with it through decolonial and posthumanist perspectives (Sousa & Pessoa, 2019).

Pedagogical practices shaped by decolonial views make visible colonial investments/power on knowledge production and the politics of identity (Dei, 2019; Sinclair, 2018). As Dei (2019) points out, "who we are and how we come to know and understand the world are inextricably linked" (p. 14). From a decolonial perspective, "there is no universal learner or voice" (Dei, 2019, p. 15), because understandings of what universal means are often based on dominant views of reality, which lead to certain constructs of difference/otherness/the Other. Thus, decolonizing the educational agenda means validating the pluricentrality of knowledge.

Sinclair (2018) reminds us that English texts often carry the idea of a white, middle-class savior, which is an aspect that reinforces complicity with systems of oppression. Drawing from Freire (1996/2006), Sinclair points out that "as educators, we

cannot name the world for our students regardless of their positions and identities" (Sinclair, 2018, p. 94). The author claims that, as students have their own experiences with systems of oppression, working with texts that name and confront systems of oppression is central to a curriculum and pedagogy that takes decolonial thinking as a framework. Such texts lead to difficult conversations about how different ways of living, being, and doing relate with power. Informed by critical literacies, I would add that teachers need to be aware of the kinds of questions they ask and how their pedagogical choices might contribute to raising critical conversations.

Santos (2009) proposes an epistemological breakthrough in the theories of "Epistemologies of the South." The author critiques a Western-centered aim at excelling in criticality. A Western-centered view is a biased worldview that favors ways of living, being, and doing informed by Western European culture. From this perspective, Western understandings have superiority over non-Western ones. Santos (2007) proposes a move to decentralize knowledge by considering an ecology of knowledges that favors "pluralistic, propositive thinking" (p. 75) and happens in "a field of practical interactions" (that is, which have practical objectives) (Santos, 2009, p. 473). The ecology of knowledges expands the view on all forms of knowledge, including the relations between scientific and non-scientific knowledge (Santos, 2007).

However, scholars have raised concerns about how relativism might be associated with the idea of a plurality of knowledges. Santos (2007) explains that there is a hierarchy of knowledges depends on the context. When there is a need to put this hierarchy in practice, "preference must be given to the form of knowledge that guarantees the greatest level of participation of the social groups involved in its design, execution and control and in the benefits of the intervention" (Santos, 2007, p. 36). For this, Andreotti (2011a) elicits four principles when engaging with different

epistemologies and social movements: “a strong emphasis on the geopolitics of production of knowledge, a focus on the development of hyper-reflexivity, a pedagogical focus on ‘dissensus,’ and an explicit commitment to the difficult and ongoing task of imagining global citizenship education beyond” binaries (p. 395).

Going beyond binaries relates to contesting universal knowledge. Drawing on Maldonado-Torres’s arguments, Andreotti (2011a) emphasizes that universal knowledge comes from privileged epistemic sites (e.g., Europe, America/Canada) and creates the presupposition of neutral epistemic subjects. These subjects believe they have answers for problems elsewhere because of the privileged spaces in which they are located as thinkers (Maldonado-Torres, 2004). Regarding where knowledge is produced and who produces valuable knowledge, the geopolitics of knowledge production raises reflections on how “epistemic racism disregards the epistemic capacity of certain groups of people” (Maldonado-Torres, 2004, p. 34). The geopolitics of knowledge production challenges epistemic privilege and racism through “a process of epistemic transformation and decolonial cosmopolitanism leading to a movement towards radical diversality” (Andreotti, 2011a, p. 388). Emphasizing the geopolitics of knowledge production refers to becoming aware that anyone whose desire is to create ways of responding to different contexts—where Western hegemonic ethnocentrism is present—must keep a position of hyper-reflexivity. In this context, this means to be attentive not to reaffirm epistemic sites of privilege when critiquing universal knowledge.

Spaces of dissensus become an essential ally to contest epistemic privilege, as they work towards the promotion, understanding, and respect of differences. These “spaces of dissensus” raise reflections on the origins and implications of subjectivities and worldviews, and they “may prevent the reproduction of mechanisms that generate

or maintain hegemonic ethnocentrism and relationships based on epistemic violence" (Andreotti, 2011b, p. 192). Through an uncoercive process, self-transformation happens when participants do not need to reach consensus. Instead, through a collective and ethical commitment, they are encouraged to experience different epistemologies and engage critically with dissensus.

Central to engagements with dissensus is an ethics of care, and "whether, words, texts, discourses, policies, and practices help or hurt people" (Janks, 2018, p. 98). An ethics of care is relational and contextual (Gilligan, 1993; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Tracy, 2010). Therefore, by recognizing social, political and pedagogical identities, ethical decisions should respond to the particularities of each situation. Tracy (2010) explains that relational ethics pertains to an ethics of care according to which rules must be negotiated with participants, which is an aspect that stresses that the well-being of the ones involved in the process is of great importance. In line with an ethics of care, any discourse that incites feelings of hate and violence against any person or group needs to be questioned, confronted, and banned from the conversation.

A research process that takes decolonizing knowledge and knowledge acquisition as a focus raises questions about "who knowledge is created for, how it is created, and for what purposes" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 4). These questions "are interwoven with a concrete description of how politically committed researchers can address these concerns in their work" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 4). Decolonizing opportunities for committed political agency encourage profound reflections on local classrooms in connection with global, connected, and changing perspectives of education. Nonetheless, as Andreotti (2011b) reminds us, we cannot forget that agency is always embedded, contaminated, constrained, and enabled by context. She states that "between enunciation (e.g., a neoliberal educational agenda) and interpretation (e.g.,

teachers 'on the ground') lies a space of negotiation that is always pregnant with (risky) possibilities" (Andreotti, 2011a, p. 395). Working towards language teachers' and learners' agency opens up spaces where processes of inquiry include "the messy complexities of people's lives, especially the lives of those on the margins" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 11), while taking the plurality of knowledges as central.

This in turn requires that readers and writers recognize and resist texts that reinforce the colonial matrix of power. In ELA teaching and learning, critical literacies theories have played a pivotal role in framing discourses and pedagogical practices that recognize and resist such a materiality. Critical literacies have also contributed to moving forward in redesigning (Janks, 2019; Monte Mór, 2019) practices, discourses, and texts that privilege the plurality of knowledges.

Critical Literacies

The proposed study is focused on language arts and literacy. Thus, a theoretical framework for understanding literacy, and one that sees literacy as related to agency and power, is essential. Historically, critical literacies are associated with principles of critical theory developed by Frankfurt School scholars in the 1920s. The group focused on political and economic philosophy to highlight "the importance of class struggle in society" (Vasquez, 2017, p. 2). Critical literacies are also rooted in the theory of critical pedagogy framed by the Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire. As he reflected on teaching and learning concepts and practices, the author questioned the imposition of dominant discourses and values through education (Freire, 1970). In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he advocates for more critical and emancipatory pedagogies that aim at social transformation.

Various theoretical and pedagogical orientations have influenced the conceptualization of critical literacies. Mattos (2009), Menezes de Souza (2011, 2019),

Jordão (2013), Monte Mór (2013a, 2013b, 2019), Duboc and Ferraz (2018), and Takaki (2021) are contemporary Brazilian scholars who interpret Freire's work on critical pedagogy and expand it into critical literacy concepts, which build informed dialogues about teaching languages, teacher education, and professional learning in the current Brazilian context. According to Monte Mór (2013a), critical literacy as a concept is connected to the capacity of critical perception that citizens have about the society in which they live, and this capacity does not necessarily have to do with advanced academic study. This framework helps scholars to examine and discuss inequity, exclusion, privilege, and issues of power. Critical literacy theories acknowledge that our epistemological, cultural, social, and historical life experiences shape the way we view, understand, and live in the world. This perception influences our understandings of reality and leads to reflections and considerations on what is right or wrong in diverse contexts of knowledge production.

Within a critical literacy framework, reading is an act of coming to know the world and the word, and a means of social transformation (Freire, 1970, 1985). Therefore, from this perspective, as a text presents more than authorial intentions, it generates interpretations that acknowledge certain social and historical contexts. In critical pedagogies, inquiries into local and relevant issues might ask who wants to manipulate whom, what it is to be right or wrong, and who emancipates whom (Menezes de Souza, 2011).

Critical literacies question taken-for-granted assumptions and literacy practices imposed by dominant groups. Critical awareness is developed by presenting contexts and how they implicate meaning systems that privilege and/or marginalize knowledges. Students should engage in opportunities for understanding, critiquing, and also transforming their social and cultural worlds (Luke & Dooley, 2011). As individuals

experience different contexts, complex variables shape their personal histories and identities. In turn, these identities will produce different engagements with texts.

As contexts and subjectivities interplay in critical literacy practices, Janks (2018) argues that "identity becomes the basis of how people respond to texts" (p. 96), which calls for work on developing students' abilities to engage with and interrogate texts. The author builds a relation among texts, identities, and ethics through lenses of power. She draws attention to the fact that reading with and against the text is necessary, insofar as readers take up or resist ideas presented in texts. People shape some aspects of their identities by maintaining or contesting relations of power. Nevertheless, Janks (2018) emphasizes that we should work with them so that they consider can ethical ways of being in the world, highlighting that "hard questions about morality" (p. 98) should be raised.

Drawing on Freire's (1972) perspectives on literacy as a process of reading the word and the world, Janks (2013) develops a redesign cycle to "problematize the wor(l)d" (p. 227). The redesign cycle is informed by a critical literacy framework that includes "four dimensions: power, diversity, access, and design/redesign" (Janks, 2013, p. 225), used as an analytical lens where the dimensions interplay. Janks (2010, 2013) questions what pedagogical approaches would look like when taking any of the dimensions as central while excluding the others. In literacy teaching and learning, Janks (2013) focuses on text production, and design and redesign becomes the "entry point[s] of literacy" (p. 238). While students make texts (design/redesign) that matter to them, they become empowered decision-makers of what they read as a result of exercising choice "that caters for diverse interests and abilities" (Janks, 2013, p. 238). Contexts of redesign and students' identities have a central place in this process. Despite being rooted in literacy teaching, this framework can be applied to other

settings that acknowledge the complexities of realities and envision redesigns which confront inequities.

In Manitoba and elsewhere, we have contact with diversity, enhanced by flows of immigration and internet connections (Brydon, 2011; Janks, 2018; Vasquez, 2017). Consequently, teaching and learning settings are now challenged by shifting conditions across time, space, place, and circumstances (Vasquez, 2017). Critical literacies constitute a theoretical and pedagogical framework that responds to such challenges and enables “spaces for literacy work that can contribute to creating a more critically informed and just world” (Vasquez, 2017, p. 1). Brydon (2010) reminds us that “what hegemonic forms of knowing do not know is defined as not worth knowing” (p. 21). She suggests that further work with critical literacies should question “the advice that comes to us from the established centres of our worlds” (Brydon, 2010, p. 25), so that the work in transcultural contexts can meet the needs of students and strengthen their agency. Furthermore, understanding that issues of oppression challenge our social settings, Menezes de Souza and Monte Mór (2018) remind us that there is still a need to work with critique. For this, I draw on critical literacies to “think *from* each other’s location and *with* each other” (Menezes de Souza & Monte Mór, 2018, p. 450, emphasis in original) and problematize hegemonic forms of knowing.

The last section of this theoretical framework follows the critical lens as a thread to problematize hegemonic forms of knowing. More specifically, it explores Bourdieu’s perspectives as a frame for discussions about language and power.

Through a Bourdieusian Lens

Class

The work of Bourdieu frames views, definitions, and studies of social class and education. The French sociologist and theorist ruptures the economic concepts of class. For Bourdieu (1979/1984),

> class […] is defined not only by its position in the relations of production, as identified through indices such as occupation, income or even educational level, but also by a certain sex-ratio, a certain distribution in geographical space (which is never socially neutral) and by a whole set of subsidiary characteristics which may function, in the form of tacit requirements, as real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated (this is the case with ethnic origin and sex). Several social criteria serve as a mask for hidden criteria: for example, the requiring of a given diploma can be a way of demanding a particular social origin. (p. 102)

Bourdieu points out that class is also linked to context, ethnicity, gender, and the transmission of capital that is not only material or connected to the workplace. In his view, economic capital is "immediately and directly convertible into money and maybe institutionalized in the forms of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 3), but class goes beyond having economic capital. Class includes another social kind of wealth: *cultural* capital, "which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and maybe institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications" (Bourdieu,1986, p. 3). Cultural capital is embodied (e.g., what we acquire from our parents, manners), objectified (e.g., the materialization of status), and institutionalized (e.g., certificates, diplomas). Furthermore, Bourdieu identifies *social* capital as "made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 3), and it "improves the social position of the actors in a

variety of different fields" (Siisiäinem, 2003, p. 12). Social capital is associated with a social network or group membership in which members use this capital and its privileges/benefits as a form of classification and power. Through recognition and distinction, social capital "acquires a symbolic character and is transformed into symbolic capital" (Siisiäinem, 2003, p. 12). As it has an ideological function, symbolic capital "defines what forms and uses of capital are recognized as legitimate bases of social positions in a given society" (Siisiäinem, 2003, p. 12). In this view, implicated by the materiality of economic and cultural capital, social classes "are transformed into meaningful differences" (Siisiäinem, 2003, p. 12), mediated by symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

In their influential work *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture,* Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1990) argue that schools reinforce cultural capital from dominant classes (e.g., tastes, judgments, preferences). According to Reay (2004), due to "the close relationship between cultural and economic capital" (p. 82), cultural capital continues to legitimize the privileges of the middle-class in public school settings through policies and practices that reinforce their historic educational advantages. Cultural capital may be "understood as possession of the right cultural resources and assets in a field" (Block, 2012, p. 79). In educational settings, policies that mobilize cultural capital, such as the ones that require more parent involvement, along with assessment and testing, work to "celebrate the individualized, rational, self-interested middle classes" (Reay, 2004, p. 84). The result is an increase in segregation and polarization both between and within schools (Reay, 2004).

However, interpretations and use of the concept of cultural capital and the theory of social reproduction have been criticized. Goldthorpe (2007) explains that in discussing educational and wider social inequities, researchers have approached

"Bourdieu domesticated or wild" (p. 11). Goldthorpe (2007) criticizes Bourdieu's claims on cultural capital, and how researchers tie this concept to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction concerning modern societies. The author problematizes the ideas of "family as the only locus of creation and transmission of cultural capital" (p. 16). Goldthorpe (2007) questions how the concept of cultural capital in Bourdieu's view "can be kept fit for research purposes" (p. 19). The author interrogates "the monopolization of [the transmission of] cultural capital by dominant classes" (p. 16) by highlighting the possibilities for children from working-class backgrounds to achieve high levels of education and social mobility. In seeing schools as playing "a major role in the transmission of cultural capital that has some significant degree of independence from the influences of family and class" (Goldthorpe, 2007, p. 16), the author even suggests that researchers who do not agree with the theory of social reproduction should abandon the concept of cultural capital and use the concept of cultural resources. For Goldthorpe (2007), cultural resources as a concept allows researchers to make distinctions "between cultural resources and cultural values, between cultural resources and academic ability, or between different kinds of cultural resources that need not be closely correlated and that may enhance children's educational performance in quite differing ways" (p. 19). In this sense, the author's arguments refer to the fact that schools play the role of agents of re-socialization and creation of cultural capital.

Despite Bourdieu's structuralist conceptualization of cultural capital, he contributes to expanding notions of social class as encompassing different kinds of capital. His theory of reproduction explains how some institutions work to keep the status quo of dominant classes. Bourdieu (1998) also presents a search for change through constructivist views in his theory of action. His arguments help us understand class as emergent and in practice, situated in diverse contexts, as he sees that "classes

exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given, but as something to be done" (1998, p. 12). Drawing on Bourdieu, Block (2012) observes that "class categories are not clearly defined containers into which people simply slot themselves" (p. 82). Instead, class categories become microflows (Bettie, 2003; Tarc & Mishra Tarc, 2015), in which individuals place themselves and are placed through economic and material realities and social interactions.

Based on a structuralist view, Bourdieu (1998) believed that objective structures exist "independent of the consciousness or will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or representations" (p. 14). In developing a constructivist view, Bourdieu (1998) deepens understandings of social structures built-in and by social classes, and how they influence perceptions, actions, and thoughts about the social world. Based on these two perspectives, Bourdieu considers the relationship between objective and subjective views of the social world and analyzes how the different positions that agents occupy in such structures influence their vision.

Individuals build world views in productive ways but also in ways constrained by social structures. According to Bourdieu (1998), the internalization of social structures—for example, the social class, the people, the nation—leads people to experience the world as a true and evident reality. These social structures substantiate especially disadvantaged ones to experience a naturalized world, which means a world that cannot be changed. Bourdieu (1998) refers to a "sense of one's place", coined by Goffman (1959), to describe how social spaces construct individuals and contribute to classifications that operate in keeping people together or distant. Bourdieu (1998) states that "to change the world, one has to change the ways of world-making" (p. 23), and this means changing views and ways in which social structures are produced and reproduced in society.

Class is a relevant construct to understand curriculum perspectives and pedagogical practices and their implications for the perpetuation of inequities. Hunt and Seiver (2018) highlight that "educators' class-biased assumptions, high-stakes assessment practices, and class-biased documents" (p. 342) reproduce deficit discourses on economically disadvantaged communities and thus help in pathologizing class differences. In current times, neither access to education nor quality of education are equitable to students across different social and economic backgrounds. When there is access to education, the institution of schooling often reproduces a whole social system based on ruling ideas related to structures of class, production, and power. In the case of public schools, middle/upper-middle class ideas still rule decisions in diverse contexts (Gorski, 2007; Orlowski, 2012; Reay, 2004; Windle & Maire, 2019). As "patterns of dominance within society" (Grenfell, 2010, p. 94) are reproduced in schools, they become implicated in practices that generate symbolic violence.

Symbolic Violence

Symbolic violence is a powerful way of perpetuating inequities, and it "is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 167). Such a complicity with submissive positions happens "through the gradual internalization and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them" (Connolly & Healy, 2004, p. 15). In educational contexts, symbolic violence happens when children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are continuously exposed to neoliberal and meritocracy discourses that do not take into account the central role social inequities play in their success and failures in society (Jones & Vagle, 2013). Symbolic violence also takes place when only dominant language is allowed in additional language classrooms (García, 2017), or the use of ability grouping in literacy and numeracy classes classifies and frames students while creating fixed positions

(McGillicuddy & Devine, 2018). These are some examples of language and literacy being used “in the fashioning of the instruments of symbolic violence” (Hasan, 1998, p. 58).

This is a context that involves institutions operating under specific infrastructures and systems. Grenfell (2009) considers that “Bourdieu’s big ‘discovery’” (p. 440) was that the school was not democratic. It has been a cultural filter for and of students whose academic success was believed to be dependent on natural talents. The concept of interpellation helps in understanding the role of educational institutions. *Interpellation* is a term associated with the French philosopher Althusser (1971/2006). It is a process where we encounter our culture’s values and internalize them. Interpellation might happen through repressive means (repressive state apparatuses), when assimilation happens by force: the work of police, armies, prisons, residential schools, that is, any threat through violence. Ideological means (ideological state apparatuses) also guide interpellation, when assimilation happens by ideas, by training and conditioning us into certain seemingly natural attitudes, values, feelings, and behaviors. This kind of interpellation happens, for example, through schools, churches, toys, fashion, technology, games. Althusser (1971/2006) uses the term to make ideology central. For him, schools are hailers of capitalist ideology, where students are considered laborers of learning, and teachers are the experts. Althusser (1971/2006) argued that the process of interpellation works best when individuals are not aware of it, as they are placed in their proper place in society. The concept of interpellation questions pedagogical work as “hailing” performances informed by “hailing structures.” In this study, the idea of interpellation expands examinations of social class as performance (Bettie, 2003) in spaces of reproduction of ideologies (Lewis, 2017), for example, in educational settings.

Habitus and Field

Bourdieu (1998) also approaches class through the concepts of habitus and field. He posits that habitus "is both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices" (p. 19). In his view, one's social position impacts the way an individual builds "a sense of one's place but also a sense of the place of others" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 19). Block (2012) interprets Bourdieu's concept of habitus as an "individual's internalized dispositions, formulated out of engagement in situated social practices and shaped by institutions as well as larger social structures, such as global economic forces" (p. 79). The concept of habitus is used to understand social worlds and their intricate relations with class, race, and gender. Nolan and Molla (2018) emphasize that "habitus is not a result of conscious learning or an ideological imposition—it is rather acquired through a gradual process of inculcation—early socialization, education and acculturation" (p. 355). Habitus helps in understanding the social world as it relates to structures (e.g., rules, dispositions, and values) that are at work (Nolan & Molla, 2018), and how they generate discourses and practices.

Drawing on Bourdieu, Reay (2004) emphasizes habitus as a way of interrogating data and research accounts and using it as a "means of viewing structure as occurring within small-scale interactions and activity within large-scale settings" (p. 439). The author takes Bourdieu's idea of habitus as "a conceptual tool to be used in empirical research rather than an idea to be debated in texts" (Reay, 2004, p. 439). She argues that "there is plenty of scope … for putting habitus into practice" (p. 442). For her, this is a fluid concept that can be used as a method and/or theory, as it raises understandings of how teachers as agents engage in social worlds informed by broader structures. Researchers have investigated the centrality of teachers' habitus in reproducing inequities and/or transforming education. There has been research on teachers' habitus

and the impacts of monolingual and multilingual pedagogies on students' outcomes (Flynn, 2015), the role of professional learning on investigating, interrogating and transforming teachers' habitus (Nolan & Molla, 2018), and professional learning communities as an essential way of creating a "habitus engagement" in ongoing, reflexive practices that aim at challenging complicity with discourses and practices not oriented to socially-just teaching (Feldman, 2016).

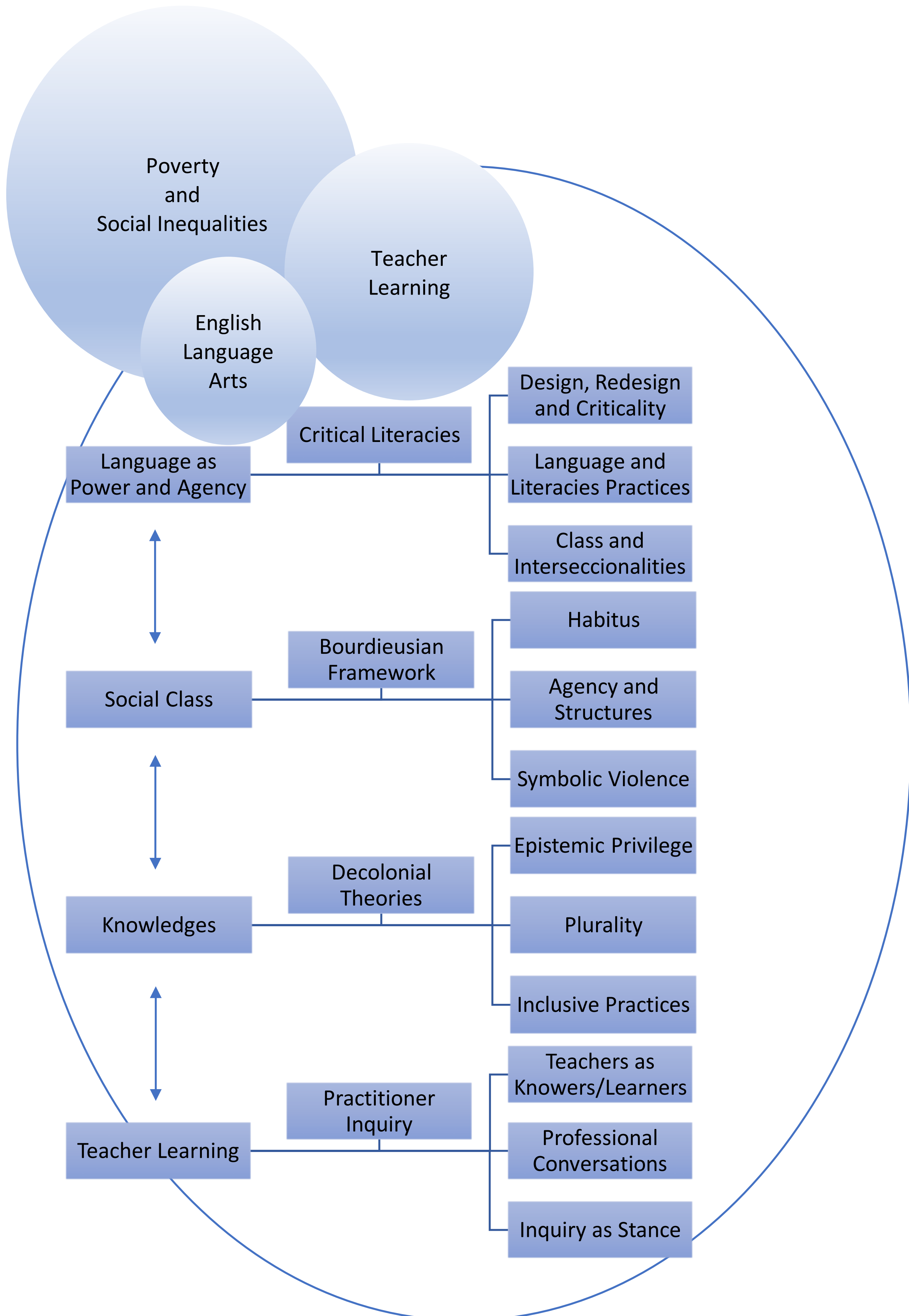
Grenfell (2009) states that "Bourdieu's method was above all a reflexive one" (p. 439), and this indicates a way of advancing studies in the field of language and literacy. The author refers to Bourdieu's views on how social and economic conditions influence language acquisition and the role of the teacher in leading academic discourse. Understanding that agency and structure have a fluid relationship (Lareau, 2003), Bourdieu's theories help us to interpret "the way classroom knowledge is constructed and how concepts of habitus and field allow us to understand the logic of practice operating in pedagogical structures" (Grenfell, 2009, p. 444).

Despite the criticism about the materialist, structuralist, or determinist nature of Bourdieu's theory, I see this study as an opportunity to focus on Bourdieu's constructivist views. As I see it, they advance understandings about "the different kinds of capitals, which are also weapons" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 12), operating in "a space of differences" (p. 12), and influencing "representations of this space and in the position-taking struggles to transform or preserve it" (p. 12). Bourdieu's framework offers input for research orientation and interpretations of social inequities, especially considering the ones that are constructed through culture and language in educational institutions.

Figure 1 summarizes the main ideas of this study.

Figure 1

Context, Main Ideas, and Theoretical Framework



In Summary

Figure 1 refers to Manitoba as a context with issues of poverty connected with social, economic, and cultural inequalities present in society, and consequently, in its educational settings. Pedagogical practices that take a critical stance seek to name and propose reflections about inequalities and systems of oppression with the intention of resisting and transforming them. In this sense, spaces for teacher learning that raise conversations and reflections on what and how teachers teach are critically important. With a focus on English Language Arts, this study takes critical literacies theories to frame understandings of language as power and agency and inform possibilities for designing and redesigning texts, inquiries, reflections, and practices aligned with individuals' backgrounds and contexts. In this perspective, critical awareness is developed through becoming aware of contexts and individuals' positionalities in those contexts, and how these implicate and are implicated in systems that privilege and/or marginalize peoples and knowledges.

By drawing on critical literacies, this study seeks to better comprehend and foster class-sensitive perspectives and teaching practices. In this study, the participants' individual and collective meaning-making takes social class as a lens to investigate how social positions and their intersectionalities are implicated in inequitable power relations and impact the way we are positioned by, interpret, and act in society. However, teachers' habitus and agency are also enabled or constrained by structures and systems of authority such as the curriculum, assessment tools, and school structures. Key actions in this research involved naming and challenging forms of symbolic violence and their roles in deepening gaps of access associated with social positions in the context of Manitoba. Bourdieu's theory of action helps in understanding class as a construct, and how perceptions of class influence the ways reality can be built, showing it is not a

given. This perspective adds a frame to explore social class and its intersectionalities as a dynamic identity marker that influences participants' positionalities, materialities, performances, and perceptions in different contexts. A decolonial lens contributes to understandings of what is considered knowledge and whose knowledge is valid in school contexts. This lens challenges epistemic privilege and naturalized colonial views built through ELA as a discipline, and it considers the plurality of lived experiences, knowledges, languages, and literacies that students bring with them to their classrooms. This study also uses decolonial thinking in an attempt to explore and examine the content and the terms of conversations (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) in teacher learning spaces. In this context, I see teachers as experts of their contexts and practices and learners of multiple perspectives that challenge their contexts and practices. Taking inquiry as stance, practitioner inquiry, in the form of professional conversations, configures the methodology used for the design of this research.

Chapter III. Study Design

This study was designed as an attempt to answer the following **research questions**:

1. How do eight teachers articulate their understandings of power, agency, social class, and privilege in English language education before being given focused readings on these matters and discussing them with peers?
2. When critical theories inform conversations around English Language Arts education, how are these perspectives displayed through the teachers' dialogic inquiries?
3. What are the unfoldings of an online professional learning opportunity for English language teachers, in which social class and language are addressed as power and agency?

While recognizing participants as inquirers and knowledge producers in particular contexts, the methodology of this study needed to open up critical conversations and pedagogical possibilities about social class, power, privilege, and inequity. The methodology needed to be responsive to individual and collaborative reflexivity and acknowledge theories as informing understandings and emerging from the inquiry.

Qualitative research entails different approaches to inquiry and considers individuals' and groups' perspectives on complex issues and problems. Central to critical qualitative approaches are the questions researchers ask, and they "must be continuously rethought, repurposed, reinvigorated, and envisioned as always already leading to a justice-oriented action" (Koro-Ljungberg & Cannella, 2017, p. 330). In understanding that education has a responsibility in resisting the reproduction of inequalities (Freire, 1992/2013; Vasquez et al., 2013) and focusing on teachers'

epistemic privilege (Campano & Damico, 2007), I chose to conduct this study through practitioner inquiry.

Practitioner Inquiry

Practitioner inquiry emerged from the social action work of Lewin (1946) and Corey (1949). It refers to providing room for challenging dominant propositional knowledge in the field. Educational researchers advocate for practitioner inquiry as a methodology that approximates theory and practice while teachers build meaningful inquiries about their contexts (Cochran & Lytle, 1999; Dahlström, 2016; Newman & Mowbray, 2012; Simon et al., 2012). Then, practice becomes subject to constant critical appraisal, where change is not an event but a process (Fox et al., 2007). In recognizing the expertise of teachers through a collaborative approach, this approach enables academics and teachers to "share and grow knowledge and understanding together and bring about sustainable teacher change" (Newman & Mowbray, 2012, p. 465). Collaborative practitioner inquiry happens within supportive groups and encourages teachers to share ideas, practices, and concerns while selecting an issue or problem to investigate, reflect, talk about, and imagine pedagogical possibilities.

Practitioner inquiry assumes that teachers play a fundamental role in educational and social change. In this approach, the "voice of the teacher" (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990; Stremmel, 2007) is central to understandings of what teaching means and how learning takes place, because teachers' knowledge about their contexts positions them as the best inquirers. This methodology recognizes their epistemic privilege, the advantageous and unique position that teachers have in relation to their contexts (Campano & Damico, 2007). In understanding teachers as knowers and knowledge generators (Cochran-Smyth & Lytle, 1999), instead of passive consumers of research,

teacher research is philosophically informed by inquiry and reflection that collectively foster meaningful conversations about and answers to situated problems.

Newman and Mowbray (2012) view practitioner inquiry as a way of becoming an activist teacher through relevant and meaningful professional development. As researchers, they see it as providing an avenue to ethical, sustainable, authentic, relevant, and meaningful teacher/academic research and action for change" (p. 463). In redistributing intellectual authority, proponents of practitioner inquiry advocate for a more democratic research methodology that works alongside members of a community and "takes seriously their own questions, forms of knowledge and interests" (Campano et al., 2015, p. 30). This study focused on generating data with English Language Arts teachers from the province of Manitoba. There was a concern to enable situated reflections so that the participants could engage in reading, interpreting, and inquiring about their positionalities and their contexts in all phases of the research. The idea was to create a space where practitioners collaborated with other educational stakeholders and capitalized "their collective intellectual capacity" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 153), while generating knowledge towards educational transformation. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) refer to this kind of engagement as "inquiry as stance."

As an approach to practitioner inquiry, inquiry as stance "is linked to the individual and collective professional growth of teachers" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 46). Considering inquiry as a theory of action grounded in dialectical relationships means to ground research "on problems and contexts of practices in the first place and in the ways practitioners collaboratively theorize, study, and act on those problems in the best interests of the learning and life chances of students and their communities" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 123). Inquiry as stance celebrates teachers' intellectual work and expands the notion of practitioner inquiry into a

profoundly relational and social approach to knowledge creation (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009). Through an organic and democratic theoretical framework (Cochran-Smyth & Lytle, 2009), practitioners' knowledges, practices, and interactions have a place in the center of inquiry.

Thus, communities are created as sites where teachers join to collectively explore their practices through personal and professional lenses. Such exploration leads to the "contextualization of professional knowledge and learning" (Campbell, 2011, p. 141), and teachers' professional learning happens through inquiring and imagining ways of responding to their contexts. This collaborative work contributes to the awareness and understanding of the complexities of teacher knowledge.

Professional Conversations

As Freeman (1993) states, "the issue of how and out-of-what teachers make understandings of classroom practices is a critical one" (p. 236) in the area of teacher development and learning. According to Orland-Barak (2006), professional conversations might raise opportunities "for practitioners to articulate, share, negotiate, and develop new understandings of their practice" (p. 28). Constructing professional knowledge is an individual and collective process, and professional conversations have proved to contribute to it (Orland-Barak, 2006; Orland-Barak & Tillema, 2006; Parker & Howard, 2009; Yoon, 2016). Research on professional conversations has raised important considerations about "the conditions that sustain professional conversation frameworks, on the outcomes for professional learning, and on process and content of teacher professional learning" (Orland-Barak & Tillema, 2006, p. 2). Some of the conditions for collaborative learning involve "the presence of a shared problem understanding, a willingness to change one's perspective, and a commitment to participate in the dynamics of the group" (Orland-Barak & Tillema, 2006, p. 6).

Moreover, the content and process of professional conversations differ as a result of the purpose of the conversations and the power relations inside the group (Barak-Orland, 2006; Griffiths, 1995). Besides that, Orland-Barak (2006) explains that during professional conversations, participants might engage in different forms of dialogue. Through these dialogues, participants might find out solutions for dilemmas (convergent dialogues), challenge others' perceptions and perspectives (divergent dialogues), and reflect on personal beliefs (parallel dialogues).

Teachers and conversations are seen as situated in socio-historical moments, and dialogue is regarded as a tool for educators "to reflect on their realities as they make and remake it" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 13). Professional conversations become spaces for learning opportunities, in which inquiry as stance is an orientation to research and practice, deeply grounded in the beliefs and perspectives of practitioners. Research shows that this collaborative work contributes to the awareness and understanding of the complexities of teacher knowledge.

The Design

Poverty is an issue that has challenged the educational system and the work of teachers in the context of Manitoba. The aim of this study was to problematize their roles in reinforcing or resisting social inequities through pedagogical choices. Professional conversations reflected my vision for a teacher learning opportunity through different forms of dialogue (Orland-Barak, 2006) that would potentially navigate processes of *conscientização*[7] (Freire, 1970), mediated by reflective participation (Freire, 1970; Monte Mór, 2013a; Menezes de Souza, 2011). As we relied on text-based discussions, I proposed and pursued dialogic inquiry that attempted to raise, position, and challenge the participants' epistemological beliefs (Barak &

[7] Term in Portuguese used to refer to awareness.

Lefstein, 2022; Simon et al., 2012; Stewart et al., 2019). My hope was that these conversations could draw our attention to how English Language Arts teaching legitimize and/or marginalize ways of producing, sharing, and validating knowledge in the province of Manitoba.

The design for this study encompassed three phases: initial interviews, a series of three meetings, and final interviews, all conducted virtually. The online setting responded to the government directives regarding COVID-19 and social distancing requirements, as this configuration of work has become a way of managing public life during these times. This design also responded to university protocols for conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic that suspended in-person data collection for health and safety and instructed that research was conducted online, in cases where that was possible. With the aid of interview guides and a tentative meeting plan, the initial interview (see Appendix A) was aimed at creating rapport with the participants and learn about their perspectives and understandings of social class, poverty, social justice issues, and English Language Arts. For the meetings, the idea was to co-create a space for professional conversations that explored critical perspectives on conventional notions of power, agency, privilege, poverty, and social class practiced in education. Final interviews (see Appendix B) were designed to encourage the participants to share what they had learned during the meetings and the meanings they constructed from this experience (Seidman, 1991).

Recruitment

After approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, I recruited eight English Language Arts teachers from the city of Winnipeg in Manitoba. This number was chosen so the participants could have more opportunities to take turns during the meetings. The data analysis shows that a higher number of participants

would not have allowed enough time for sharing detailed narratives. A lower number would be problematic if missed a meeting, and there would be less representation in the data related to the teachers' backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, and contexts. Another reason for having this number of participants was that it would be easier to arrange meeting dates with a smaller group of participants.

I contacted and invited potential participants by email, using my graduate student professional network. I sent a poster (see Appendix C) about the study to all my contacts. The poster invited teachers to contact me via email to learn more about the study and presented the required criteria for recruitment. As potential participants contacted me, I sent them the consent letter, invited them to contact me with any questions, and asked them to forward the poster to other potential participants. Ten teachers exchanged emails with me over a period of almost a month (June 1-June 26), and I accepted eight who met the criteria: ELA educators who had experience teaching students from diverse economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. They represented professional diversity in terms of teaching at private and public schools in different areas of Winnipeg, teaching diverse groups from different grades, being from other countries, and taking part in this study in different moments of their careers.

Participants

During the recruitment, teachers sent emails to me with information about their professional background and their interests in taking part in the study. They shared the grades, names of the schools and divisions where they were working, and some information about their students' backgrounds. This helped me to see the diversity present in their teaching backgrounds and contexts.

The group was composed of early years teachers (Emma and Trena), middle years teachers (Maria, Kay, and Patrick), and senior years teachers (Margaret, Joe, and

Sasha). Two of them were working in private schools, while six worked at public schools. Patrick, Sasha, and Trena also mentioned that they had experience in French Immersion schools. As two immigrant teachers (Maria and Joe) reached out to partake in the study, another identity marker was added to the diversity of the group. They reported their experience in teaching in terms of years, and that they were in different moments in their careers. Such aspects would enrich our conversations.

Table 1 shows participants' information regarding their professional background, some personal characteristics, and the phases in which teachers participated in the study:

Table 1

Participants' Information

Participant	Participant information
Emma	• has been working as a Reading Recovery teacher since 2002 • also works as a teacher leader • has taught abroad • works at a public urban school in Winnipeg • participated in all phases of the study
Joe	• has been teaching English in high school since 2015 • is from the Philippines • works at a public urban school in Winnipeg • participated in the initial interview
Kay	• has been teaching since 2001 • teaches middle school • has taught abroad • has a masters' degree • works at a private urban school in Winnipeg • participated in all phases of the study
Margaret	• has been teaching since 1998 • teaches high school students • teaches English as an Additional Language • is the first family member to go to university • has a masters' degree • works at a public urban school in Winnipeg • participated in all phases of the study
Maria	• started teaching in 2006 • has been working as a teacher in Winnipeg since 2018 • teaches middle school • is from Brazil

	• has a masters' degree • works at a public urban school in Winnipeg • participated in the initial interview
Patrick	• teaches grade 8 in a French Immersion middle school • has worked in elementary schools and middle schools • also teaches math • is pursuing a master's degree • works at a public urban school in Winnipeg • participated in all phases of the study
Sasha	• has been teaching since 2016 • has taught at a public urban school • teaches at a private urban school in Winnipeg • also teaches social studies • is the first family member to go to university • participated in the initial interview, meetings 1 and 2, and the final interview
Trena	• is a Reading Recovery teacher • has been a classroom teacher and a specialist teacher since 2003 • has experience with early years French Immersion • is pursuing a masters' degree • is a daughter of Ukrainian immigrants • works at a public urban school in Winnipeg • participated in all phases of the study

Another criterion for selecting participants was their motivation to participate in the study. Their stated interests, shared during the initial interview, were related to working with issues of social justice. In addition, they conveyed understandings of language as power and agency and shared experiences in which they tried to reflect on, inquire about, and respond to inequities that involved their students' identities. The information mentioned is described in Table 2:

Table 2

Reasons for Participating in the Study

Participant	**Reasons**	**In their own words**
Margaret	Issues of social justice	"I am very interested in helping students develop power and agency through writing. Social justice issues play a large role in my teaching."

Sasha	Language as power and agency	"I am particularly interested in your study of language as power and agency, as it reminds me of why I first wanted to be a teacher as well as the works of Linda Christensen, who I also admire."
Trena	Language	"Language is an area of interest for me. I have seen some of the ways it interacts with learning over the years. I have worked with students from a few different cultural and economic background over the years."
Patrick	Issues of identity	"I have found that teachers are sometimes unaware of the various factors that make students unique and, therefore, do not consider the implications. And, it is for this reason that I am particularly interested in participating in the sorts of conversations your study proposes. I am also someone who spends lots of time engaging in identity work with my students to help them see how language can be used as power and agency. So, I think there are good links to be made between your study conversations and my practice."
Maria	Language as power and agency Privilege	"I believe that the ability to speak a language of power, such as English and French, gives anyone the privilege to be heard and to participate in the political agenda that can make a difference in the decision making that privilege those in power!"
Emma	Teacher talk	"I am *exceedingly* interested in understanding the ways in which teachers 'ply' the tool of their trade —their 'teacher talk'. And how the use of this tool can work to affect a student's sense of self and agency, both positively and negatively."
Joe	Critical discussions	"Critical discussion is a huge part of my teaching. I find that, as a Filipino immigrant, who moved from the Philippines at the age of 13, and as a gay male, I am able to provide different/critical perspectives to my students (and at times even challenge their own perspectives). Because of my experiences as a person and as a teacher, I am very interested in participating in your study."
Kay	Issues of identity	"I have been interested in this topic since I started my master's degree: Identity and English Language Arts classes and how identity is so linked to how we learn. Looking at class, race, gender orientation, who is represented and who is not has kind of become a passion for me."

In general, the teachers were interested in exploring issues of identity and language as power and agency in relation to their contexts. Patrick expressed interest in issues of identity associated with teachers' perceptions of their students and the implications for pedagogical practices. Kay mentioned the connections between identity

and learning processes, and the role of English Language Arts in this context. Joe referred to how his identity markers contributed to "critical perspectives" in his teaching practices and to his willingness in joining this study and raising questions. Ways of looking at language as power and agency varied. Trena wanted to explore the role of language in learning processes, while Emma hoped for discussions on the power of teacher talk. Attentive to the power of English language, Maria wished to explore the privilege of speaking languages such as English and French. Sasha pointed out language as power and agency as an inspiring motive to become a teacher and, by mentioning Linda Christensen[8], she showed interest in literacy work involved with issues of social justice. In a similar fashion, Margaret mentioned social justice with a focus on the power of writing. Their interests and inquiries indicated how their motivations were relevant for the research and connected with the objectives of the study.

Data Generation

I looked forward to launching the study, which included an initial online interview with eight participants (see Appendix A). I also conducted a series of three online meetings with six participants as a group and final interviews with the same participants (see Appendix C). Data collection instruments are available in the Appendices (see Appendices A to G). The two teachers who did the initial interview and could not participate in the meetings sent me emails explaining their reasons. Maria shared that she would not attend the first meeting and tried to join in the second meeting, but the technology did not work. Joe contacted me in August 2020, when the

[8] Linda Christensen is well-known for her work with literacy and social justice. She is the author of *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching about Social Justice* and *The Power of the Written Word, Teaching for Joy and Justice: Re-Imagining the Language Arts Classroom.* She is also the Director of Oregon Writing Project located in the Graduate School of Education at Lewis & Clark College.

data collection process was already done, and explained that he usually disconnects during summer and had not seen my email with the tentative plan.

I used Blue Jeans, a video conferencing software, to conduct and record the initial and final interviews and the meetings. I recorded the interviews and meetings using an Olympus VN-702 PC digital voice recorder and an iPhone. I transcribed the recordings in non-verbatim form, as the focus of this study was on the content of the participants' talk. I sought to ensure the originality of the teachers' participation throughout the conversations. However, in order to provide a smooth reading, I removed stammers and repetitions. Table 3 shows the codes used in the transcription:

Table 3

Codes Used in the Transcription

Code	Meaning
{ }	Pause, interruption
[ ]	Comments added by the researcher
…	Incomplete word/phrase
Italic	Emphasis added

Initial Interviews

Eight teachers participated in a one-to-one initial interview with me. Each took approximately an hour. The participants had the chance to member check their interviews. Although they made no further comments through the member-checking process, three participants made some edits on words, expressions, and spellings on both initial and final interviews. The initial interview prompted input for the meetings and a more detailed profile of the participants: who they were, their understandings of social class, background experiences, pedagogical practices and questions. It also provided a space for participants to share what questions they would like to discuss during the meetings. Although they were attracted to the study for different reasons, these teachers shared a will to learn more about issues of social class and discuss

language as power and agency and expressed a concern to work with diversity in their contexts. During the initial interviews, they talked about their reasons and expectations for taking part in this study, and they shared some of their pedagogical practices and dilemmas. Table 4 shows some of the issues that they raised in the initial interview:

Table 4

Initial Dilemmas

"The tricky thing, you know, is how we support our kids who are struggling in a way that is sort of just and that you are not making anybody feel singled out, and I guess how best to teach kids to develop empathy to others."
(Margaret, Initial Interview)

"Finally, just like the question I had before, how do you open up a student's world view when they are coming from a privileged place? How do you do it in a way that's authentic and genuine and honoring the fact that this isn't always the experience of other people?"
(Sasha, Initial Interview)

"So yeah, how do you bring these issues to younger students? is my challenge, because I've had the older ones for so long. How do I do that with the younger kids?"
(Kay, Initial Interview)

"So that's always like a question that I have about social class. I mean, we can discuss it. I could definitely challenge people's perceptions of it. We could definitely, I could definitely make my kids, who are the higher class, be more aware of it. Aware of their privileges. But what else can we do to help students and youth that are from a lesser privileged position?"
(Joe, Initial Interview)

"I'm really interested in sort of systems and education and just how do our, how do our systems or teachers even and children, how do they, kind of like your question how do they impede or enable, how do they support equitable education?"
(Emma, Initial Interview)

"I don't know how you address [social class] or teach about it without making them feel singled out or making them feel bad about it, because they shouldn't feel bad about it, right?"
(Trena, Initial Interview)

"I'm always curious about how people see social class here because of their own concepts of what is being privileged or not. And if they have an awareness of how they are privileged just because they speak English, for example."
(Maria, Initial Interview)

"How I will shape some of my units to better incorporate other voices than the ones I might have predominantly featured before."
(Patrick, Initial Interview)

Some of the participants introduced dilemmas regarding understandings of social class differences in their classrooms (Sasha) and the structures that produced and reproduced inequalities in their contexts (Joe and Emma). Others wanted to know about understandings of privilege in the context of Manitoba (Maria) and pedagogical possibilities that addressed social differences through meaningful, respectful, and age-appropriate practices for students (Margaret, Kay, and Trena). Another teacher was also looking for alternatives to engage with difference in more inclusive ways (Patrick). I

used these and other interests expressed in the initial interviews for the preparation of the meetings.

Initial questions and dilemmas, suggested readings, and a hyper-reflective attitude led to further inquiries throughout the study. In this process, teachers recalled pedagogical choices, reflected on them, raised questions, engaged in reading texts and contexts, and imagined the possibilities of doing their work differently.

Meetings

I used Doodle Poll to arrange the days and times of our meetings based on the availability shared by the participants. Our online group meetings took place every two weeks and lasted for two hours each. In terms of the frequency of participants, there were six teachers in the first meeting. The second meeting had four teachers, and I arranged an extra meeting with the two participants who could not participate in the second meeting. There were five participants in the third meeting. As only one participant missed the third meeting, I decided not to meet with that participant separately.

Our group of inquiry was informed by the texts that I suggested and the ones that teachers chose to read on their own and discuss. According to Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999), these choices play “a critical role in forming and maintaining communities with an inquiry stance” (p. 323). The authors state that the choice of readings directly impacts how inquiries are problematized, answered, and expanded. In this community, the participants brought their inquiries during their initial interviews, and in order to better align the study with these questions, I substituted some readings from the initial tentative plan. They received such a plan with suggested readings and questions for the series of three online meetings (see Appendix B).

When selecting the texts, I chose articles that balanced theory and practice and were informed by critical theories. Choosing the readings beforehand was fundamental for the organization and preparation of the meetings. The teachers complimented the selection of texts as being "professional articles,". In their view, they presented both a theoretical scope and some practical examples and contributed to proposing "talking points" and offering "a common language moving forward." However, one of the teachers commented that none of the authors or the contexts of the articles were Canadian. I selected these readings because they resonated with the issues I sought to raise in our discussions. It turned out that all of them were non-Canadian. After this comment and the reflections that they raised, I realized that explicitly including something from the Canadian context would probably have been important. Another teacher also mentioned the potential bias involved in selecting the texts related to the theoretical perspectives that the authors emphasized. Acknowledging that researchers should be aware of their bias, I understand that the chosen texts shared understandings aligned with my personal and professional interests, background, and experience. Both comments made me look even more attentively to the criteria I used to select the texts and the central role of beliefs and contexts in conversations.

As we shared knowledge, doubts and challenges, and suggested readings, activities, and materials, a collaborative re-design of the research occurred throughout the meetings. The teachers' knowledge and questions worked as guides in the subsequent meetings. As a community, we furthered meaningful inquiries by "explicating values and acknowledging differences" (Snoeren et al., 2012, p. 200). Our dialogue searched for and encouraged change informed by increased class-sensitive understandings of contexts and pedagogical decision-making and their impacts in the Manitoba school system. But above all, it opened space for sharing strengths and

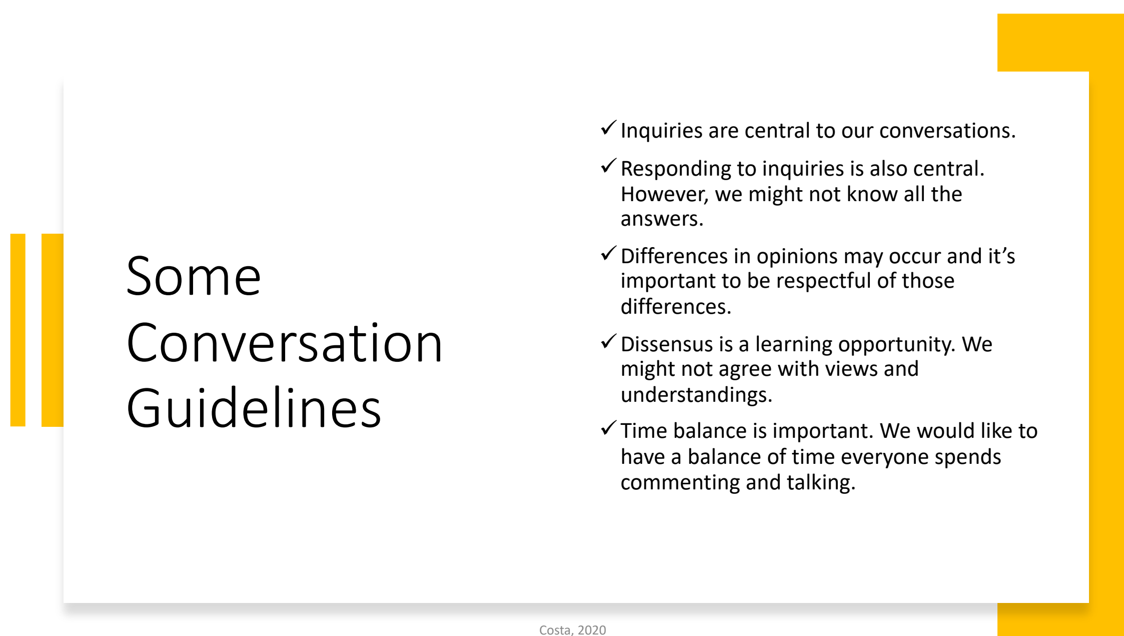
vulnerabilities, showing that "there are no easy answers" (Snoeren et al., 2012, p. 202) in a critical and participatory research process.

Meeting Design

At the beginning of all the meetings, I mentioned the informed consent and the confidentiality waiver participants had signed, and I reminded them about the conversation guidelines. In the first meeting, I shared some conversation guidelines, which had the objective to make people feel more comfortable to express views, questions, and ideas. Orland-Barak and Tillema (2006) argue that "becoming a participant in a conversation is triggered both by self-regulation and by the group's decision to allow participation" (p. 10). Thus, I was attentive to building a space that could include convergent and divergent dialogues (Orland-Barak & Tillema, 2006). For this, I shared the following conversation guidelines (see Figure 2) in our first meeting:

Figure 2

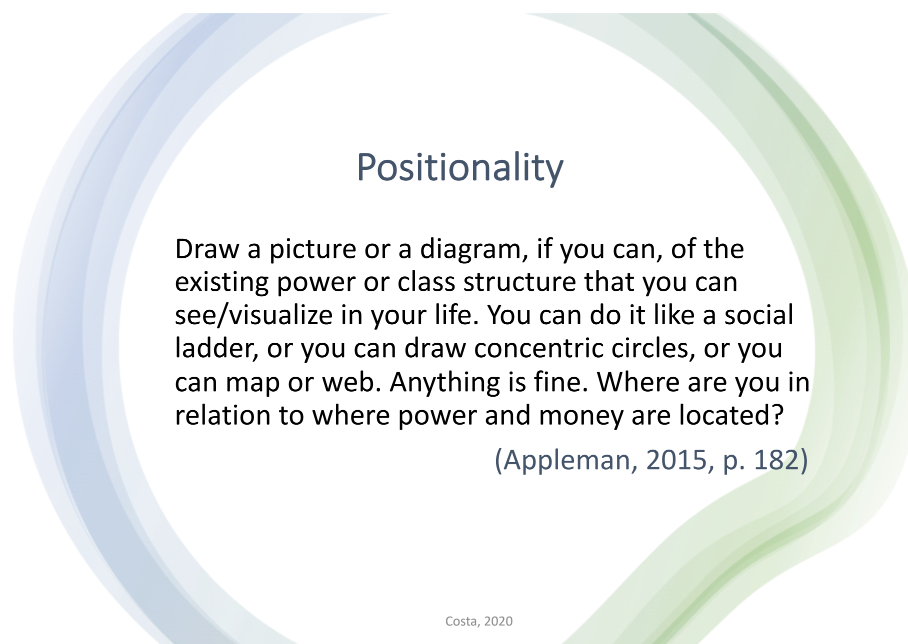
Conversation Guidelines (Slide 3—Meetings 1, 2 and 3)



After reviewing the guidelines, I asked participants if they would like to make any comments or add to the any guidelines in any way. There were no comments, and after a participant said, “Sounds fair,” we started the first meeting. We used the same guidelines for the second and third meetings. In the sequence, I usually proposed an exercise for participants to connect with their understanding of the topic discussed. For example, the following activity (see Figure 3) was proposed in the second meeting:

Figure 3

Inquiring About Positionality (Slide 4—Meeting 2)

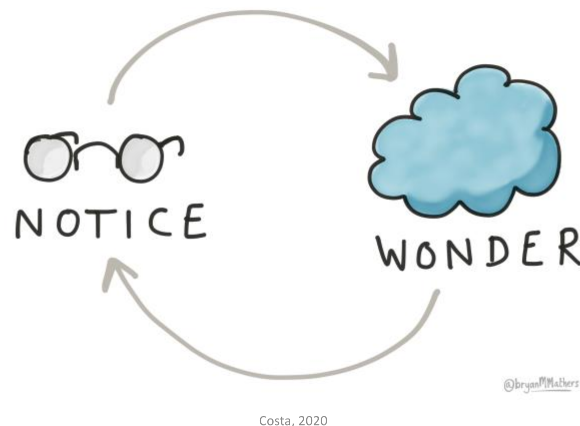


Then, guided by the exercise, we shared our initial responses, thoughts, and stories and started building some collective understandings of the topic. At that moment, the participants usually started making some connections with the suggested readings. After that, in order to provide them with opportunities to raise points that they had not mentioned during the exercise, I used the prompt shown in Figure 4:

Figure 4

Notice and Wonder (Mathers, 2016)

The readings ...



Note: A thinkery of notice and wonder. From *Open Visual Thinkery*, by B. Mathers (2016) (https://bryanmmathers.com/notice-and-wonder/). CC-BY-ND 4.0. Copyright 2016 by Bryan Mathers. Reprinted with permission.

With this prompt, I invited the participants to share what they had noticed and wondered about the readings. The intention was to have the teachers talking about what drew their attention to the texts and their interpretations. On the one hand, it was interesting to see when they started making connections, and how sometimes we felt the conversations took directions that, for some, might have sounded as going off the topic (as some of the participants mentioned it during the final interview). On the other hand, these moments also showed how some participants engaged with issues that were not mentioned in the text but that were meaningful to them, showing the power of local understandings and contexts in guiding inquiries during professional development conversations. The question relied on what threads we should critically explore and deepen conversations. After doing the "Notice and Wonder" exercise, I used quotes from other texts and questions to give some other prompts to further reflections during the discussions. For example, during the first meeting, we conceptualized social class

and critically reflected on our understandings, while connecting them with our experiences.

The participants suggested readings and inquiries throughout the process (I register and discuss these suggestions and moments in the next chapters). Their commitment to the whole research process helped us to raise dialogic possibilities. In this regard, facilitation was a shared role to decide on the directions that the conversations should take. As we deepened our understandings of how social class and its intersectionality with other identity markers aid in creating privileges and margins in society, educational settings, and in ELA as a discipline. Further, we examined how language is "being learned and taught in a way that reproduces or disrupts the existing social structure" (Kanno, 2014, p. 122). The teachers engaged in discussions on these issues by looking at their contexts and exploring current social topics.

Building Trust

The group's profile during the meetings was diverse in terms of experiences and backgrounds, but very homogenous regarding identity markers such as social class, race, and language. I recruited two immigrant teachers (Maria and Joe) during the initial interviews, but unfortunately, they did not join the group during the meetings. Thus, the teachers who participated in the group conversations shared similar identity markers such as middle-class, white, and Canadian-born. As we talked about our positionalities through critical lenses, this homogeneity might have contributed to participants exploring their successes, vulnerabilities, and challenges in a more comfortable way. However, this homogeneity might also have prevented the emergence of discussions related to the margins produced and experienced by the intersections of race, language, and social class.

The first step to building trust was to negotiate some procedures and conversational protocols (Segal et al., 2018) for all of us. The readings and exercises I designed to start each meeting occasioned thinking about the development of self-awareness of our social positions and prompted ongoing reflections about the contexts in which we lived and worked (Boa Sorte & Vicentini, 2020). During these exercises, the teachers shared authentic personal and professional stories, thus creating a community where there was trust (Leat et al., 2015).

Throughout the process, as a researcher, my efforts to build trust involved promptly responding to the participants' emails and questions about the study, respecting deadlines when sharing readings and documents, listening attentively to their stories, presenting and following conversational protocols, sharing some of my personal and professional stories, and being attentive to my talking time. Their commitment and participation built trust in the group. The teachers read the selected texts before the meetings, looked for other texts during the process, kept inquiring with other colleagues outside our meetings, bought books suggested during the conversations, retold stories from other participants, and showed that they were willing to participate in the process. From the first interactions, the emphasis was on furthering inquiries. This might have contributed to the sharing of their stories of success and their uncertainties, professional failures, and personal vulnerabilities. In this study, the stories and dilemmas that the participants individually decided to share motivated threads of conversation, which other participants readdressed in our meetings different times. The openness fostered by the trust was a collective endeavor and a result of the individuals' commitment.

Final Interviews

Six teachers participated in the final interviews (see Appendix C). Each interview took between forty-five minutes and one hour, and the participants had the

chance to member check their interviews. They provided feedback about the research process and highlighted their perspectives on what they had learned, reflected, and experienced through this study. They were willing to talk about how they felt and what could have been different. The final interviews showed that the teachers were engaged in the inquiry by raising questions about their positionalities and teaching contexts.

Researcher Positionality

By thoughtfully considering the teachers' expectations and what it takes to build a supportive environment, I experienced how extrinsic, acquired, learned, or evolved features shaped and shifted my positionality as a researcher (Shah, 2014). I participated in this research with my local and international expertise and personal and professional lived experiences. Throughout the process, I saw myself as an in-betweener researcher: someone who is "neither entirely inside or outside" (Milligan, 2016, p. 235) this research context, group, conversations, and data generation and analysis. Milligan (2016) points out how the researcher's status and power influence reflections on positionality. In my case, I am an international researcher whose study and writing took place in transnational spaces. Especially during the meetings, I felt like an insider, as I shared similar interests and questions concerning English language teaching with the group. I related to their uncertainties and dilemmas as an English language teacher. I had also worked as a research assistant for a study with ELA teachers from Manitoba, and this experience allowed me to familiarize myself with and look at their context through different lenses. Sometimes, however, I felt as an outsider because I was the only member of the group who was not Canadian-born (as the two immigrant teachers only participated in the initial interview). I was the only one coming from another country, and English was a second language for me. In addition, I did not have any experience as a teacher in the Manitoba school system.

During most of the process, I viewed my position as a betweener, who intended to build a dialogic space where transformation and knowledge production welcomed multiple ways of thinking (Diversi & Moreira, 2009). As a researcher, reflecting on the conversations we had as a group and the feedback from the final interviews, I consider we built honest relationships during the research (Milligan, 2016). These helped me to become alert to positioning myself as an outsider or insider (Milligan, 2016), in different moments of the process, and reflecting on how I was positioned by the group. Such moments will be commented upon further in later chapters.

Summaries

After each meeting, the participants received a summary (see Appendix E for a summary of the first meeting; see Appendices F & G for summaries of the second meetings; and see Appendix H for a summary of the third meeting). The summaries were based on the notes I took during the meetings. The teachers were asked to review and make any edits they considered necessary. They did not make any edits, except for a small correction during the first meeting. However, they complimented the summaries and said they were helpful. Although the teachers did not talk about the role of the summaries for them, for me, as a researcher, they contributed to my attentiveness to the issues they raised during conversations. As I highlighted these moments and comments, the summaries became a useful tool to make decisions about inquiries for the following meetings and later on to review my choices during analysis.

My Journal

I kept a journal on my computer where I wrote my impressions, reflections, and feelings during the research process. The journal was a way of documenting the researcher's and the participants' roles with an intent to "clarify, re-interpret and define much of [the] work" (Janesick, 1999, p. 521). I journaled immediately after each

meeting, as I tried to recall how each teacher engaged in discussion. I revisited my journal, the participants' inquiries, and the summaries before each new meeting. They were used to remind me about the directions each participant was taking, how they impacted the group, and what I could do to keep a collaborative and dialogic inquiry stance. The journal allowed me the opportunity for free writing, as it helped me to ease some of my tensions, as a researcher. They were related to my concerns on not having enough data, raising questions that I could have asked, and wondering about my positionality as an international researcher and my contributions to the research context. The journal also helped me to think about my own questions regarding social class, affected my actions during the meetings, and allowed me to write about my feelings as a non-native speaker of English. As a space for me to think about the process, the journal became a useful tool to reflect upon and plan the sessions.

Data Analysis

I collected the data in Winnipeg, as the initial and final interviews and all meetings were conducted online while I was in Canada. In the middle of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, I returned to Brazil. Therefore, my writing of the data analysis was done in Brazil. I crossed borders to collect data and crossed borders again to analyze data. This transition positively impacted my analysis because it added movements, perspectives, and confidence to the process. In addition, moving back to Brazil led me to interpretations of the data that emerged from the different associations, realities, positions, and possibilities I was experiencing on my return.

I transcribed the online initial and final interviews and the online meetings and uploaded eighteen transcripts to Dedoose, a secure (encrypted) web-based research platform to analyze data. Participants signed an agreement to have their data stored at

Dedoose, and data were anonymized before being uploaded to the platform. The participants chose their own pseudonyms.

Creswell and Poth (2018) point out that "the process of coding is central to qualitative research and involves making sense of the text collected from interviews, observations, and documents" (p. 190). In my initial work with data, I used the research questions to create codes and to get a sense of the whole. Data were coded not only following patterns of sameness but also through a diffractive process (Barad, 2007), as a way of following trends of difference (Mazzei, 2014). A diffractive analysis is based on the fact that "knowing is never done in isolation but is always effected by different forces coming together" (Mazzei, 2014, p. 743). In this work, diffractive analysis is marked by the plugging in of different angles such as critical literacies and decolonial perspectives, and from different fields, for example, from sociology, economy, psychoanalysis, education, and applied linguistics. Patterns of difference were also followed when making decisions during the data analysis by asking questions such as: What was produced in and through the conversations? What was happening/unfolding, as people, beliefs, practices, and experiences were related? What was I paying attention to and why? When did I feel compelled to go deeper, and what happened when I did it? What new questions, relations, tensions, etc. emerged? These questions contributed to focusing on ideas, perceptions, and questions that the participants shared and to paying heed to the different subjectivities, experiences, and interpretations that became part of this research process.

Within the main codes, I created child codes as information emerged from the data. I tried to come with "an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text" (Seidman, 1991, p. 89). This process generated 73 codes, 590 excerpts, and 1,528 code applications. The number of code applications is related to the

different codes associated to an excerpt. In other words, there were excerpts that received a number of different codes. Inspired by the figure Maraña, by Molano (2012), in which the author represents intersections of bodies and sexualities, I have tried to represent the messy intersections that this study initially produced (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Initial Analysis: Emerging Intersections

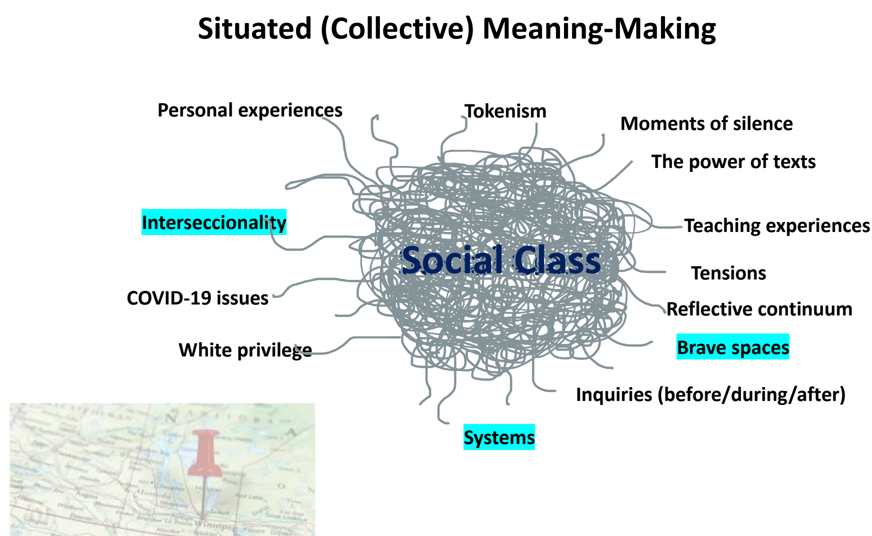


Figure 5 shows how the theme of social class became entangled with many other topics during our conversations. The discussions allowed us to take multiple directions and perspectives. Other social locations, concepts, and understandings emerged at different times during this study, as we shared our positionalities, personal, and professional experiences, and readings of the texts and the world. The initial inquiries proposed to and by the teachers enabled more inquiries and situated collective meaning-making. The threads represent some of the codes that emerged in the analysis, such as white privilege, COVID issues, tensions, and reflective continuum. Three complex concepts emerged at the initial moment of data analysis, and they were highlighted: systems, intersectionality, and brave spaces. According to Burnett and Merchant (2021),

"meaning potential exceeds exponentially what is available for meanings to be made, just as meanings made exceed what it is possible to notice" (p. 9). Threads without any codes represent the "meaning potential" of this initial analysis and show what I had not identified at that time, what I might never identify, and what readers might identify as they engage with this study.

As I linked the excerpts to the codes and child codes, I also added memos of my interpretation of the data, observations, and inquiries. Miles et al. (2018) reinforce that memos are "not just descriptive summaries of data" (p. 95). Instead, in writing emergent ideas and concepts from the data, the researcher might describe and elaborate on guiding ideas. With this in mind, I went back to the data and tried to do a more in-depth analysis and develop more elaborated interpretations. In returning and forwarding with data, I also had as guides the following questions: What understandings of social class, privilege, power and agency in English language education do these data generate? What can we learn and what do we need to unlearn from inquiring about social class and language as power and agency as a group of teachers?

The process of data analysis involved plugging in texts, thoughts, and lived experiences in a rhizomatic process (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Mazzei, 2014). In "thinking with theory" (Mazzei, 2014, p. 742), I thought about the data through critical literacies and decolonial theories lenses to raise interpretations that I think might have led to situated, plural, and broad understandings of social class, language as power and agency, and ELA teaching and learning. In this process, I hoped to learn more about how materiality and discourses interplayed to produce subjectivities and performative enactments. These ideas will be discussed further in Chapter V.

Ethical Issues

To think about ethical issues in qualitative research is "to examine them as they

apply to different phases of the research process" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 54). Accordingly, the researcher needs to be attentive to ethical issues before, during, and after the study. Tracy (2010) identifies ethics in different phases of a study as procedural ethics (before), situational and culturally specific ethics or relational ethics (during), and exiting ethics (after). In this participatory study, there were ethical dilemmas connected to my presence, choices, responses, and the process as a whole. I will explore some of them and how I tried to mitigate the tensions in the following sections.

Ethical Issues: Before the Research Process

The procedural ethics demanded describing in detail all the phases and choices made for this study. This helped me to predict possible situations and dilemmas that I would experience in the process. I felt both the protection and the control of the Institutional Review Board requirements. As I wondered how that control could be positive, I inquired myself about how those reflections were more connected to my ethical understandings as an international student than a naturalized acceptance of the university's rules. At the same time these procedural ethics helped me to make more informed decisions during the process and protected all of us as participants, I felt constrained by the fact that I would have to follow a plan, since changes in the materials or in the process would demand additional time and approval. For example, when a participant suggested we have one more meeting as a group, and as I knew that an approval from the university's Institutional Review Board would be mandatory, I decided not to have the meeting with them due to time constraints.

Ethical Issues: During the Research Process

During the process, ethical decisions were related to relationships. I already knew three out of the eight participants that I recruited to this study. One of them had

taken a course with me at the university, another one had participated in a small study that I conducted, and the other one was a friend. These relationships were built through professional encounters. The fact that I had these previous connections made me feel more confident in this process. When six of them came together as a group, there was one participant who had worked with two other participants. During the meetings, they took turns in sharing personal and professional experiences. There were also some silent moments. The group connection increased after each meeting, as we started telling each other about our vulnerabilities and mistakes, along with exchanging ideas, texts, and pedagogical practices.

When moments of dissensus happened, the participants relied on their contexts, readings, and knowledge to support their opinions. I saw dissensus as a way of searching for the origins and the material forces that shape perspectives, subjectivities, and worldviews through ethical relationality (Andreotti, 2011b). Thus, one of my ethical decisions was that I would interfere as little as possible to come to a consensus during these moments. During the meetings, the objective was to engage in conversations to build answers as well as further reflections and inquiries. To come to any consensus as a group was not the aim. However, when I transcribed the conversations, I noticed how I came to conclusions and shared some of them with the group. As I produced summaries of the conversations and echoed some points mentioned by each participant, that led me into reflecting on how much control I would like to have or that I was already exercising in the direction of our discussions. Participatory research entanglements require researchers to consider the complex dimensions of positionality as multiple, evolving, dynamic, and negotiated positions. Finding a balance between speaking and becoming silent during a participatory research process was one of the biggest challenges for me as a researcher, facilitator, and

participant of the meetings.

Ethical Issues: After the Research Process

Exiting ethics involve the way the researcher leaves the scene and reports findings (Tracy, 2010). This is ethics in choosing which stories to tell and how to tell these stories. I wanted to honor the participants' stories and where they took us as individuals and a group in this situated collaborative meaning-making process. The research questions were the first guide to inform my choices. However, the amount of data, codes, and excerpts that emerged from this study made this selection even more difficult. Then, to ethically connect with the stories, reflections, and moments that I chose to register in this dissertation, I used the following questions: Whom do these stories/reflections/moments benefit? Whose voices are amplified by my choices as a researcher? What do these stories/reflections/moments reinforce or oppose? How will I tell them? What am I reinforcing or resisting as a researcher/writer with these stories/reflections/moments? What stories interrogate my certainties and understandings as a researcher? Despite contributing to more informed choices during this phase of the research, these were complicated questions that urged ethically responsible answers.

Following the phases of this study in generating possible answers to the research questions, while ethically engaging with data, the next chapter will present the analysis from initial interviews.

Chapter IV. Contexts and Discourses: Social Class, Privilege, Power and Agency

Social and historical characteristics of contexts and institutional and societal discourses inform and become evident in pedagogical understandings and practices in language education (Chimbutane, 2011). Accordingly, the first question was supposed to help me to learn more about the teachers' awareness of social class, privilege, power and agency in their contexts. For this, I divided the answer into two dimensions, which emerged from data analysis. As the participants gave detailed answers, analysis suggested interpretations that could deepen discussions about their understandings of the broader scope of their social and historical contexts. They also presented specific discourses focused on English language education. Thus, in the first dimension, I focused on macro aspects (society) and, in the second, on micro aspects (ELA). In this study, I concentrate on the disciplines of English Language Arts and English as an Additional Language.

Most of the data for the writing of this chapter came from the participants' initial interviews. They show what the teachers brought with them as individuals to this process as well as how their individual perceptions, inquiries, and reflections were shaped by broader and historical contexts and societal and institutional discourses. Thus, by doing this analysis, I reflected on individual meaning-making informed by broader, historical, political, cultural and language education contexts, discourses, understandings, and practices.

Dimension 1: Understandings of the Broader Social and Historical Context of Social Class, Privilege, and Power and Agency

Ways of being, living, doing, and knowing are built in broader social and historical contexts. Thus, I selected what I considered to be the participants' understandings, reflections, and inquiries about the broader social and historical

contexts of social class, privilege, power and agency. For this study, broader social contexts involved the places in which the teachers lived and worked, while broader historical contexts referred to past and contemporary events mentioned by them.

Engaging with Social Class

Exploring understandings of social class was a starting point to raise issues of power, privilege, and oppression in English language education. From discussions on social class, the teachers introduced other axes of difference significant to their understandings and contexts throughout the research process. I will explore conceptualizations, views, and observations of social class in their contexts.

Conceptualizing Social Class

When they were asked to define social class, most teachers connected the term with the socio-economic aspect of the classification. Their definitions showed traditional understandings of social class based on a fixed and individualized social stratification. For example, Trena assumed an understanding based on a general view:

> My perception, I think, along with the general public, the first idea is where you live, how much money you make, your ability, your buying power, right? Your ability to go to university, to go to school, to live somewhere that people consider safe. I think that it's very much related to that. (Trena, Initial Interview)

In connecting social class with money and buying power, Trena considered a way of life, the affordances of an education and purchasing a home in a "safe" neighborhood central to determining a person's social class. Similarly, Patrick shared his personal experience to explain the focus of social class on socio-economic status and the privilege of being able to afford:

> I look at it somewhat like socioeconomic status. And so, my ability to go to university and have my parents pay for part of that, and for them to give me like,

> you know, interest-free loans to finish it—that is not a universal experience. (Patrick, Initial Interview)

Going to university, having money, and buying things were mentioned by both participants as privileges that social class produced. These responses showed that Patrick and Trena related class to the material things to which one has access or chooses to access due to buying power. The materiality of different economic realities grounded such interpretations, and these understandings showed "traditional notions of income, occupation and education" (Block, 2012, p. 75). These traditional notions did not consider class as informing how individuals perceive the world and power relations.

In the same direction, although Sasha considered the social aspect of class, she emphasized the role of money in producing connections, access, and hierarchy in society:

> I find it's mostly economic in mind in terms of how well off you are, because I think your social class, your connections, and the hierarchy of where you are in society is very much dictated by money. I think it's like 75% economics and 25% the societal norms and hierarchy in society, whether like upper or lower, or whatever, or middle class. I think it's mostly related to money because from what I've seen, where you are in society are often dictated by that, about how many resources you have and how many connections you have, which are always economical. Like sometimes who you know and your experiences, and things like that. I think those things become easier to come by when you have money. It's a blend of that: of societal norms and understanding of hierarchies and where people are in society, but also where you are in terms of how much money you make. (Sasha, Initial Interview)

Even though Sasha raised the importance of societal norms in defining social

class, she highlighted that hierarchies and connections were determined by how much money one has and makes. Her answer sheds light on social capital (Bourdieu, 1998) as a form of capital related to the connections, benefits, and power an individual gets from being a member of a specific group. However, her emphasis was on the networks created by how much material capital one has. Creating and maintaining these notions of the benefits and successes, based on how much money one has, are central to neoliberal and capitalist societies and were also present in Kay's response. She referred to the divisions created by social class and mentioned that people are aware of those different positions:

> I would say the social class is a division, a division based on social and economic status, division of people {pause} and I think people know where they stand within those divisions. (Kay, Initial Interview)

During the interview, I wondered how she was defining those divisions. When I asked for clarification, she added:

> It's like the things that you have, and that you can bring with you. So material, material goods for sure. (Kay, Initial Interview)

Just like Sasha, even though Kay mentioned the social aspect, she attached the meaning of social class to the economic and material aspects of the term. Along the same lines, in relation to how much one earns in society, Emma focused on how class is connected to opportunity, with those in higher classes having more opportunities:

> I think it goes to that socioeconomic piece, that status you have because that will dictate where you will fit into society. So, if you are upper, or middle, or low, I just see that there are more opportunities if you've got a higher socio-economic status. (Emma, Initial Interview)

Emma associated socio-economic positions with the opportunities that came

with status. Her notion of status as "where you will fit in society" conveys an understanding of class as a fixed position, which privileges high positions in a class-stratified society (Jones & Vagle, 2013).

Joe reflected on the materiality of social class but also explained why, for him, it represents one's "standing in society" when it comes to success:

> We can look at social class in terms of wealth. But we can also look at the social class as more of an abstract term, like what's your standing in society. There are many different definitions of social class, but I feel like the social class is almost like your path to success. For example, a social class could be like the middle class. You have a relatively okay path to success. But then, if you are a kid who grew up in a foster home, you'll have a more challenging road ahead in terms of succeeding, and there's a lot of baggage. There is a lot of historical baggage from residential schools and generations of abuse and poverty. I would say social classes are almost like your standing in society, like your path to success. (Joe, Initial Interview)

In referring to the social and historical baggage that a person carries, he considered social class as intersecting with and intersected by an individual's characteristics. Taking a critical stance, Joe raised some of the complex power relations that emerge with social class positions (Hunt & Seiver, 2018). Similarly, Margaret reflected on other aspects that might lead a person to be a member of a specific class. However, she added a concern about issues of social justice and explained how her definition of social class had changed in recent years:

> Initially, I would have said the social class is sort of the socio-economic kind of state a person is in. You think about upper-class and middle-class and lower-class and that kind of thing. But again, in recent years, I have been thinking

> more about social justice issues. You realize that people who are typically marginalized are the people that are in the lower social classes quite often. So, it's not just an economic factor. It ties into other aspects as well.
>
> Researcher: And what other aspects come to your mind?
>
> It's more of social justice. It has more social justice implications. It's not just about wealth or lack of wealth. It's about advantages and disadvantages because of who you are. When you think about systemic racism, for example, when you look at neighbourhoods that are impoverished, typically those are the neighbourhoods that people of color have been kind of forced into in a lot of ways. (Margaret, Initial Interview)

This excerpt showed how the teacher understood social class due to intersections with other identity markers that advantage and disadvantage people in society.

Joe and Margaret shared insights that moved beyond traditional understandings by relying on social and historical reasons as to how and why people are positioned in specific classes in society. Their definitions considered class as relational and emergent (Bourdieu, 1998). They highlighted how social class "stands at the crossroads of socio-historically situated life trajectories and dispositions, on the one hand, and situated activities with others taking place in a wide variety of physical, social and psychological contexts, on the other" (Block, 2012, p. 80). They understood that there were classifications that worked inside the dynamics of power of social structures (Bettie, 2003; Bourdieu, 1998). In light of both perspectives, the following analysis focused on how the participants viewed social class concerning identity formation and its intersection with their teaching contexts.

Social Class as an Identity Marker

In general, as the teachers looked at the differences of lived experiences that social class status might entail, they agreed that social class had an important role in identity formation. Sasha believed that the impact of social class on someone's identity was substantial:

> I think it's hugely impactful in how it changes people's identities. Again, I've seen two extremes, and where I'm working right now, and even in my own past history. It's clear that there is a huge connection as to how somebody's lived experience and the experiences that they have economically and socially are going to impact who they are and who they become to an extent. Students are looking to get an education here, where it's gonna look good on their transcripts when they apply for universities. And they are applying for very, very high-end universities, like Ivy League universities. It's crazy. Again, this isn't my lived experience. But it's like being in that environment I'm seeing. I used to be of the mind that you know merits would get you wherever you need to go, and that if you worked hard enough, you could achieve whatever you want—which again is a very idealistic thing. (Initial Interview, Sasha)

The teacher gave examples of how her students' lived experiences differed from hers and each other in both schools in terms of social class. Her definitions of meritocracy were shaken by seeing the networking connections and educational access, resources, and opportunities that her students had at a private school. As Sasha examined her professional and personal experiences through social class lenses, she challenged her idealistic views on meritocracy. She reflected on the different levels of access and networks that social class positions produced, as teaching at a private school made her aware of elite educational and historical legacies and their impacts on her

students' choices. In this excerpt, Sasha presented notions of economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1986). Her students with affluent backgrounds let her see how their social class position played a role in the institutions they wished to be connected to (cultural capital) and the people they were connected with (social capital). Thus, identity formation was closely related to awareness of these forms of capital and the access to them. The latter was created and facilitated by their families and the institutions in which they participated and belonged.

In telling his own experience as an immigrant, Joe believed that social class, associated with being an immigrant, was central in building his perceptions of reality:

> Me, myself, I am an immigrant. I feel like that's really shaped me as a person, where I really have to work hard to get where I am. My parents had to really work hard to get where they are. Moving from the Philippines to Canada—it wasn't easy. That's definitely shaped our outlook in life. From a young age, my parents have already told me like, school is everything, to be educated. That's sort of the path to success. We're not really rich. This is how you can succeed in life—it is through education. I definitely think that being an immigrant has definitely made me work really hard to achieve where I am. (Joe, Initial Interview)

Joe's social class experiences were attached to his immigrant background, which demanded hard work from him and his family in Canada. The immigrant positionality makes a person become more conscious of other identity layers. Therefore, becoming educated in this context was crucial for his success. Also, from an immigrant perspective, Maria reflected on her social class background and her Brazilian nationality to consider how much she learned throughout her life:

> I am from a very, in terms of financial, I am from a very, I wouldn't say poor, that I was from a very modest social background in Brazil. My mom is a hairdresser. My dad is a photographer. And I always had my granddad paying for my education, and it's been very interesting in my life. And I lost count of how many times people asked me, they look at me, and they ask: "How do you know all these things?" Especially when they find out where I'm from. They always ask. They're very blunt, and they say, "How do you know all these things?" In the beginning, I was kind of curious, and I would explain that I studied, I read, I talked to people about that. But over the course of the years, I started getting {pause} not frustrated, but I started getting very uncomfortable with the question, and my husband did this question to me. That was one of the first conversations we had, and I felt comfortable enough to turn back to him and say: "Why are you asking this?", and he said: "Well, I haven't had this conversation with many people." And I said: "But that doesn't mean that you can. Well, do you think that because I am Brazilian? Or what goes through your mind when you ask me this question?" And so, I think that people have assumptions about who should know or not know things according to their social class. And I can present myself pretty well in terms of being the higher class. (Maria, Initial Interview)

In telling me who she had become and what she had achieved as an immigrant in Manitoba, Maria shared her perceptions of people's inquiries about her accomplishments. At first, she understood questions as a genuine interest in her achievements, but then she started questioning people's assumptions about the identity one presents and the knowledge one has concerning their social class status and immigrant positionality. When sharing class discourses, Maria reminds us that class is

also an act of cultural performance in which individuals might consciously choose to perform a class identity, whether it is their class of origin or not (Bettie, 2003). Her reflections turned the attention to stereotyped beliefs concerning how low social positions might be associated with particular nationalities and the aptitude to succeed in neoliberal societies like Canada.

Joe and Maria focused on social mobility despite the hard work and challenges they experienced as immigrants in Canada. Thinking about these intersections of environment, immigration, and social mobility through education show that Maria and Joe experienced Canada as a society where social mobility was possible despite the challenges they faced. They also raise reflections on Canada as a place, where, perhaps, success may be met with questions, assumptions, and suspicion.

Observations of Social Class in Context

The teachers shared observations of their educational contexts, and most of them related social class differences with the diverse student populations in the schools where they taught. As Joe considered the broader social and historical context of Indigenous students in Canada, he talked about the reality of Indigenous students in his school:

> During the colonization, their lands were taken from them. They were put in reserves[9]. A lot of my Indigenous kids come from reserves and reserves are underfunded. There is a lot of lack. They lack a lot of things. When they move in some of them don't even have high schools. That's why they have to move to the city away from their family. Away from their family to study high school.
>
> And a lot of them end up dropping out and going back to their res, not finishing

[9] "A reserve is land set aside by our federal government for the use and occupancy of a First Nation group. Reserves were created as part of the treaty making process with First Nations peoples. If a First Nation did not sign a treaty they were relocated to reserves anyway" (Aboriginal Awareness Canada, n.d., paras. 1-2). According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, 63 First Nations occupy 376 reserves in Manitoba (James-Abra, 2022). Most of them are in remote locations.

> their studies. My question is, “What I can do?”, right? This is a symptom of the system. The system is not doing enough for these students, for these youth. So, what can I do as a teacher to help these kids? That’s always the question. Kindness is not everything, right? I can be kind to them, but I’m not a social worker. (Joe, Initial Interview)

Joe was aware of how the socioeconomic conditions of Indigenous students and their families are a direct result of colonization, not from their choices. There was a perception that teachers are limited in the extent to which they can deal with these issues, and that systems need to address them in other ways. As Joe noted the limits of the work of a teacher, he also stresses that systems should take responsibility for the generational trauma and impacts of colonization on Indigenous students. Structural discrimination and inequity towards Indigenous bodies and knowledges are still central issues in Canada (Dei, 2019; Kuly, 2019). For example, even though the curriculum and teachers in Manitoba respond to teach about the impact of historical and ongoing colonization of Indigenous Peoples (following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015)), the reality of many Indigenous children is marked by poverty, lack of access to health care, education, and family support (Chartier et al., 2020). In educational settings, these systemic inequities and the reality of generational trauma, loss, and oppression brings even more complexities to the work of teachers.

Emma detailed that she worked with many Indigenous students and with those that she identified as “lower social class”:

> I think of the children that I work with. A lot of them are Indigenous, a lot of them are lower social class, from homes like that. I just think if you don’t catch them or work with those kids, where will they be? I just think of their opportunities. And then again that relation, we just look at the data and just think

> whomever it is we will support, we will create a system to support, and try to get the child into the building. It's a struggle, though. It can be a struggle because sometimes, I think it takes the village to raise the child. (Initial Interview, Emma)

The teacher seems to have felt responsible for her students who were living in difficult situations. There was also an understanding that the school would be the only place that would create opportunities for kids who might be experiencing socioeconomic difficulties. This excerpt also showed understandings of a better life connected with the opportunities created through the school context. The village approach idea made Emma feel supported, as a teacher, by a broader context that was also committed to her students' growth and success.

All the participants mentioned how immigration initiatives had influenced changes in the demographics of students in their schools. Kay pointed to the changes in the private school where she worked:

> I think it's probably related to immigration—like a lot of my students have come from other places, and their families have settled in Winnipeg. They are looking for possibly a Catholic school or an all-girl school, and our school is relatively low priced compared to other places. Like tuition in other places is very high, so we get a really good variety of students—like people would assume that it is a very privileged place, and of course it is. (Kay, Initial Interview)

In recognizing her school as a privileged space in the context of Winnipeg, she understood that the access that immigrant students had to her school was due to the low cost of tuition in comparison with other private institutions in the city. A more heterogeneous building was associated with immigrants' buying power and the relative low price to attend an independent school. In giving details about students' social class

background in her school, Margaret reinforced the fact that her students come from different parts of the world:

> And, because there is such a range of kids in my school from, we've got kids that live in very wealthy neighborhoods, kids who live in Manitoba Housing and again, from every part of the globe. Some will come as refugees, some will come for economic reasons. (Margaret, Initial Interview)

Trena also drew attention to the multiculturality of her context and related that to a very affordable neighborhood:

> It's like this school, I'd have to say is the most multicultural for immigration that I have been to. We're a multicultural society. But for immigration, there's a lot of families that come from multiple countries and are living around the school, and I think part of that is that the housing is very affordable. (Trena, Initial Interview)

As teachers mentioned Indigenous and immigrant students, I captured the following sayings: "a lot of lack," "the housing is very affordable," "I just think if you don't catch them or work with those kids, where will they be?," "from every part of the globe", Some will come as refugees, and some will come as, you know, economic, for economic reasons," "like tuition in other places is very high, so we get a really good variety of students." In analyzing these understandings, I interpreted that the issue of social class led to observations about Indigenous and immigrant students as groups that lacked, needed support, and lived in certain parts of the city. These responses raised questions such as: Were the participants aware of what framed their class discourses on the lived experiences of immigrants and Indigenous students? How did these discourses contribute to reproducing structures of class inequality and "social othering" (Mackey,

1992, p. 51) in their contexts? To what extent are teachers' views of Indigenous and immigrant students' literacy practices related to social class?

Engaging with Privilege

The teachers used the term *privilege* to describe perceptions of their own advantages and highlight social and historical disadvantages of marginalized groups. As they thought about their personal and professional experiences, the participants shared diverse considerations on what privilege looked like in their contexts.

Perspectives on Canada as a Society of Privilege

Some participants referred to Canada as a society of privilege by mentioning freedom of choice and the opportunities offered in this country. As Trena talked about her context and explored why there were more single income families in her school, she said:

> Compared to the other school that I was at, there's more single income families. I think it's more because of choice, because they wanted to have one parent home with their children. So then again, sort of that stereotypical social class piece of a family with money and the one who does not. These are families who are choosing not to have as much money, because they're choosing to have one parent home as a stay-at-home parent, while their children are young. It's not by choice if that makes—Oh, sorry, not that they don't want a job. Does that make sense? It's a choice to be in a lower income bracket. (Trena, Initial Interview)

She believed there were single income families who had the privilege to choose to be in the lower-income bracket:

> And they make choices to have less to live with less income and tangible things, like not having as big of a house, not going on as many family vacations. Because we are a society of privilege, right? You have the ability to make that

> choice, if that makes sense. And then they go back to work, or they work part time, because they want to be there. I think that sometimes that's not taken into consideration. Your social class. People go, "Oh, well, you know, they're, they're not educated," or "Oh, well, you know, they don't have a good paying job"—but sometimes they make that choice. They are educated and they chose to stay home. They chose not to have a second huge income because they wanted to be there for their family, and they value young children and young children's development. (Trena, Initial Interview)

To clarify that she might have been talking about a certain group of families and to deepen understandings of her point of view, I added the following question:

> Researcher: And do you think this choice works for immigrant families too? Does this work in the same way?
>
> Yeah. At the school that I'm teaching right now, a lot of immigrant families—a very interesting mix of students—a lot of our immigrant families will have parents who work opposite shifts. They will work, the mother or the father will work sort of that 7 o'clock in the morning until 2 or 3 in the afternoon, and then they come home, and then the other parent works from 4 till 10 [pm]. There's a lot of that, or they work part time from 4 till 10 so that they don't have to pay for childcare. And they will do it that way. (Trena, Initial Interview)

The teacher said that immigrant parents also made a choice of not paying for childcare. However, it seems that they could not choose to stop working, in her context. This means that even though immigrant parents could choose not to use the childcare system, they did not have the advantage of not having to work. Instead, they had to organize work during night shifts. Trena showed an understanding that privilege worked in similar ways for Canadian and immigrant families. This was associated with her

assumptions about the way she viewed the parents' realities in her school. The teacher's version can be interpreted as informed by neoliberal views reinforced by government discourses, which have been presented to implement childcare programs in Canada. McKenna (2015) wrote about how the Canadian government appropriated the terms *freedom* and *choice* to convince women of how empowered they were to make choices concerning childcare. She wrote "this language of 'choice' used by feminists, liberals, and neoliberals obscures the women who are unable to choose—the poor or already working women for whom childcare was and is a necessity" (McKenna, 2015, p. 47). In her study, the author states that when childcare acts and reports did not consider class and gender, "this discursive framing of the childcare issue privileged middle- and upper-class women's perspectives at the expense of poor and working-class women's experiences" (p. 47). Without questioning how other layers of identity influenced the choices, Trena was reproducing a neoliberal discourse on choice concerning childcare in which issues of class, gender, race, and language became invisible. In analyzing my follow-up question, I reflected that I could have added other identity axes. Perhaps I had not thought of other possibilities because of my lived experience as a temporary immigrant in Canada. This excerpt prompted reflections on the challenges of dealing with differences that do not affect our own lived experiences and the need for ongoing conversations that encompass them.

Regarding the socio-economic circumstances of some people in Canada, Margaret recognized the country as a wealthy society, but she questioned how it had been dealing with poverty:

> In Canada, in a country like this, that we have so many people using food banks and living below the poverty line and earning two or three minimum wage jobs

> just to get by, it does seem like a real injustice that in a country as wealthy as ours that this is happening. (Margaret, Initial Interview)

Aware of the different socioeconomic realities in Canada, the participant raised the issue of poverty in this context. In comparison with other countries, one could say that poverty would not be an issue here. Nevertheless, Jefferson (2018) states that "at its core, poverty is contextual. What matters is an individual's well-being relative to the community in which she exists" (p. 4). Considering poverty and injustice in this contextual situation, Margaret recognized that some people did not experience Canada from a privileged standpoint.

Bubbles of Privilege

Bubbles of privilege envelop people who have power and advantages due to their identities in those contexts. For example, looking at the educational context of Manitoba, private educational institutions were seen as bubbles of privilege by some of the participants:

> I'm still trying to navigate this weird environment that I'm in now in terms of what's it like being, how do I manage being a teacher in an environment where kids don't necessarily want for anything? I'm trying to teach in an environment where students are very privileged, so I'm facing this weird kind of dynamic where I'm hitting bubbles a lot. I'm trying to teach about poverty and teach about the experience of people just living in Winnipeg, and how different it is in terms of the diversity of experiences here. They haven't lived that experience, not that most people would have; we are born into a situation, and that's what we're exposed to. But at the same time, it's hard for them to comprehend that people in a situation are very different from their own. And that is even a bubble even within the city, that if you just keep going North, you're going to face a

completely different reality than what they live in this moment. (Sasha, Initial Interview)

The teacher shared her struggle in teaching students about poverty in the context of a private school. Her account illustrates how addressing issues of poverty might make room for meritocratic assumptions produced in those bubbles. Using the North End[10] of Winnipeg as a reference for the different socioeconomic realities that coexist in the city, she doubted if students were even aware of this situation in their own city. The North End raises questions about the existing abyssal lines (Santos, 2007) in the context of Winnipeg. Santos (2007) explains that "abyssal lines are being drawn both in a literal and metaphorical sense" (p. 16)—these lines divide cities into "savage and civilized zones," (p.18) and as a consequence, differentiate citizens' lives, bodies, and epistemologies. Abyssal thinking is a kind of modern western thinking that creates these lines and defines who is visible or invisible, and what knowledge is valid or not in social realms (Santos, 2007). For the author, confronting abyssal thinking through epistemological resistance is central to a more just world. Sasha's excerpt shows that contexts of elite schools reinforce abyssal thinking and abyssal lines in the context of Winnipeg, and this poses even more challenges for teachers.

In another private school context, Kay shared a surprising anecdote about what some students said during a sporting event:

[10] The North End of Winnipeg is an urban area of the city that has historically been a place for low-income families. This area is associated with gang violence, crime and high drug use, and these associations might lead to stereotypical views about this part of the city as a ghetto (Silver, 2010). In addressing different perspectives on the North End, Katherena Vermette (2012) wrote a poetry collection about her neighborhood's beauty and the harsh reality of prejudice and discrimination that her family experienced after her brother's disappearance. She is a Métis and Mennonite writer, who grew up and still lives in the North End of Winnipeg. She won an award for the collection titled *North End Love Songs*.

> The team was losing, and they started chanting: “Hey, hey, that’s okay. You’re all going to work for us some day.” And that story really affected me. Because those students are very aware of their privilege. They’re not blinded to it. They know that they are in powerful positions. They know that these connections exist within the system that they are a part of. And so, when you read that people are aware of an oppressive system, and they support it because it supports their position and it advances them in the society, right? (Kay, Meeting 2)

This short account showed how aware students were of their social positions and how that resulted from connections and networks within an elitist system. Their understanding of the context reinforced views on the power they had because of their positions, and students reproduced elitist comments on job positions. Kay was surprised and affected by this situation, and she acted:

> So that type of attitude is something that I try to work on from within the system. I talk to my students about these kinds of attitudes. I talk to them about their position, and we look at the real world, not just the world that they’re living in, but it’s a very difficult conversation to have. And sometimes I wonder, you know, could I get in trouble for some of these conversations? Is it okay to break down a system of which you are a part of? (Kay, Meeting 2)

Even though she consciously decided to talk about privilege in this space, Kay reflected on the problems and consequences that she might face as a member of an elitist system.

Understandings of bubbles of privilege emerged when Joe was talking about social class and identity formation:

> I think it’s everything, right? I think depending on what social class you have, it could affect your outlook in life. Let’s say you’re middle class, and maybe

> you're rich. I think you can be blind to some of the injustices that are going on in the world. I've seen it happen with friends, and maybe even some students, where people who are in a higher social class, even middle class, can be blind to the difficulties of lower classes, low lower classes. Privilege is a word. So, they're standing from a place of privilege. Meanwhile, someone who grew up in foster care, or an immigrant, a refugee, there's many more challenges for them. (Joe, Initial Interview)

In the case of public schools, Patrick talked about French Immersion schools and compared stereotyped understandings and the reality of the students who attended them. As he described his context, he contested some assumptions people might have about students' social class in French Immersion schools:

> I worked at an Elementary French Immersion school, and historically in Canada, French Immersion has been seen as an elitist program. It's for the parents who can access that because often there was the expectation that you would purchase more French books [for your children] and take them [your child/ren] to French things. The Elementary School I worked with was in a quite wealthy area of the School Division, whereas the other Elementary Schools in the Division were not. They were different socioeconomic statuses in those areas. Where I came from, everyone saw students and families as being rich and having whatever they want. And the stereotypes, I suppose, that come with that and the assumptions that are sometimes made in decision-making. (Patrick, Initial Interview)

According to Patrick, the historical profile of students in French Immersion schools in Canada has helped build stereotypes that influence school decisions. Patrick

described how the school population have changed, and that conversations about poverty have become more frequent:

> They're talking more about poverty and assumptions that might come of that. All three of those schools with varying statuses all funnel through to the school I'm at now. However, I still find that a lot of this teaching staff, a lot of my colleagues, and to some extent myself as well, forget that students are coming from all over and therefore, it's impossible to generalize about what a student might be able to do or might not be able to do because there is no medium. We have both extremes of the scale, to speak, from families that live in a very wealthy like in [name] to those living in the more areas with a lower socioeconomic status. (Patrick, Initial Interview)

Although conversations about poverty have increased in his context, Patrick's reflections demonstrate how assumptions about the student body at his school still played a substantial role in deciding what students might do or not according to their socio-economic status. His account called on reflections on views informed by privilege and how pedagogical and administrative decisions reproduce exclusionary attitudes towards students' differences.

These accounts showed how privilege function to perpetuate exclusion. Becoming aware of what makes educational institutions protect or reproduce bubbles of privilege and how teachers contribute to or maintain these bubbles might deepen inquiries and possibilities to confront spaces that reproduce mis-conceptualized views on different kinds of marginalization.

The Privilege of Becoming and Being a Teacher in Canada

While becoming a teacher in Canada was seen as a result of being privileged, being a teacher provided benefits that kept the participants in an advantaged social

position in this context. They mentioned different advantages that benefited them in becoming teachers. For example, Patrick talked about what role his social class played in his career choice:

> Becoming a teacher means that I am decently well-paid and have a number of privileges that go along with that. Vacation time and relative job stability and flexibility, and those sorts of things. I know that my social class influences that, and I know that because of who I am and the other factors that make up my identity. I would say all of those factors influenced it, and the role it had in my choice of the job was that if my social class was such that it was easy to go into this profession, I never faced any sort of roadblocks or hurdles along the way. And I can recognize that is a result of many factors in my identity, the social class being part of it. I would say it has a huge role in kind of everything that I do, 'cause I have a hard time separating that from other factors. (Patrick, Initial Interview)

The teacher acknowledged that his social class position along with other identity factors facilitated his access to the profession. For him, becoming a teacher resulted from a privileged background, and being a teacher gave him a number of advantages in this society. From an immigrant perspective, Joe shared a similar view on being a teacher in Canada:

> I always look at it from a perspective of like, teachers barely get paid in the Philippines, in other countries, but in Canada, we get paid pretty well. That's where I was coming from as well. The stability, the stability, but also, I'm pretty lucky that in my school division we have a lot of freedom as teachers. (Joe, Initial Interview)

In comparing Canada to the Philippines, he emphasized stability, and later on he mentioned the vacation days as having influenced his choice. The freedom he had as a teacher in his school division also counted as a benefit.

Sasha associated her choice of a job with her families' social class position, which influenced her mindset. By linking social class and privilege, she recollected her freedom of choice:

> Sometimes I don't reflect on "Did my social class have an impact on what I chose?" I like to think that I have options for whatever I want to be. My second option from a teacher was going to be law school, which was very different from the environment I'm in now. I know I could have achieved that regardless. I'm from a middle-class, upper-middle-class environment. For me, maybe I'm speaking from that privilege that I feel like I can achieve whatever I want to achieve. That helps me reflect on that a little bit. I like that question because it's kind of, "Oh, maybe I am a product of that, um, that privilege that I feel like I can actually achieve those things that I had, that I think I can". (Sasha, Initial Interview)

Aware of a mindset developed in her upper middle-class environment, she wondered how being the first member of her family to have a university degree reinforced that mentality:

> I am the first member of my family to go to university, to have degrees. And then even though it's just a teaching degree, still it's university level [laughs]. (Sasha, Initial Interview, p. 8)

However, at the same time that she recognized going to university as a privilege, Sasha seemed to undervalue her degree by saying, "even though it's just a teaching degree."

Like Sasha, Margaret was the first member of her family to go to university. While Margaret pondered about her disadvantaged childhood, she remarked on her white privilege:

> I think I wasn't privileged growing up, but now that I've learned about what white privilege really means, yeah, I didn't have the same obstacles of someone from a different social group would've had. I wanted to go to university, and I got the grants, and I didn't have roadblocks in my way getting there. So, for me, social class didn't have as much of an impact as it would for others. (Margaret, Initial Interview)

The teacher was aware of how her white privilege eliminated some of the difficulties that someone not white could face in getting grants at university. Emma also recognized having advantages in becoming and being a teacher:

> I think it comes down to that again right like privilege [laughs]. I was able to travel to different countries, and I was able to get the qualifications I needed. When I came back to Manitoba, the Reading Recovery piece got me the job. I didn't have to kind of go head-to-head with other teachers wanting in. I had a bit of an advantage, but then I had opportunities to do that, and I think, too, being female and Caucasian[11], I just think about it. (Emma, Initial Interview)

The participant noted that her international experience along with her race and gender privileged her in becoming and being a teacher in Winnipeg. While Emma referred to her international experience in New Zealand as an advantage in getting a job in Canada, Maria used her international experience in Brazil to share her views on professional privileges Canadian teachers have:

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[11] According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.) Online Dictionary, Caucasian means "of or relating to a group of people having European ancestry, classified according to physical traits (such as light skin pigmentation), and formerly considered to constitute a race (see RACE ENTRY 1 of humans" (para. 2).

> The fact that we can go to school, and we have one group of students from 9 to 3:30, seriously? For any teacher in Brazil that will be a dream. Especially when they teach from grade 6 on, and they have to teach like 8 different groups with 25 students each, when you are lucky. But if you have forty, forty-five students [in a classroom], you'll have like 300 students. And what about the teachers that have to teach grade 1 students, and they have to teach a class, two classes of 35 students how to read? One in the morning, one in the afternoon. And I wonder, we're only aware of Brazil. And what about Paraguay? Ecuador? Bolivia? When you think about countries all over the world, they're in the same kind of pot. And how privileged people are here. I wonder if they're aware of that. Yes, they do pay a lot of tax, but are they aware of their privilege? What is their concept of social class? What is their concept of privilege? (Maria, Initial Interview)

The teacher compared the amount of work in terms of the number of students and teaching schedules that Brazilian and Canadian teachers had. In imagining other international contexts and mentioning countries from South America, she saw Canadian teachers as privileged professionals and inquired about their awareness of their advantaged situation under these terms.

Living in what they considered a society of privilege, the participants shared their perceptions of privilege related to life and professional experiences. The teachers associated it with identity categories and considered advantages such as freedom of choice, access to university, and teacher working conditions in Canada. Some of them shared how their working contexts became spaces in which meritocratic understandings of access and success reproduced inequalities. They also showed an awareness of how intersections of social class, gender, and race benefited them in this context of becoming and being a teacher.

Engaging with Power and Agency

Agency "involves doing things in the world" (Miller et al., 2018, p. 1), and it is motivated or constrained by socio-historical contexts. Thus, it is essential to look at what teachers have to say about doing or not doing things in their contexts. Drawing from Arendt, Monte Mór (2013b) states that "all participate in social contexts by means of their abilities and capabilities with words and acts" (p. 1). In understanding agency as participation through speech and action, silence, and inertia, I tried to figure out what actions, people and institutions the teachers considered powerful and how people and institutions used their power to reproduce or resist inequalities. I also asked the following sub-questions in relation to data: Who and what had power in their views? Who and what had agency? Why did they act the way they acted? I focused on issues of power and agency that included Canada, Manitoba, and their teaching contexts.

Historical Moment: COVID-19 Pandemic and Black Lives Matter Protests

The participants raised understandings of power and agency in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives movement. During their initial interviews, five out of the eight participants mentioned the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their professional contexts. As it made inequities more evident worldwide, several educational settings faced the challenges of students' increased socioeconomic vulnerability (Pinar, 2021; Santos, 2020; Whitley et al., 2021). Remote learning was not an option for students who did not have access to computers and the internet (Pinar, 2021; Whitley et al., 2021). Furthermore, there were challenges related to emergency remote learning, as teachers and students shared feelings of stress, anxiety, and failure (Fernandes & Gattolin, 2021).

The pandemic motivated different responses from governments. For Margaret, this global health crisis had contributed to some actions aimed at reducing inequities in Canada:

> It's interesting to see how, in the light of a pandemic, how the government has really stepped up and is trying to help people out with CERB[12] and other benefits. It's taking a pandemic for this discussion to start happening again. You hear people talking about a basic minimum wage and so on. (Initial Interview, Margaret)

The teacher reflected on how the pandemic advanced societal discussions and government actions to cope with the situation in a fair way. The government of Canada created a robust plan to face the challenges and inequities raised by the pandemic. Its response[13] involved seventeen lines of attention, among them, health care preparedness, guidance and ethics, economic and financial support, diverse communities, public education, and immunization (Government of Canada, 2020b). Dyer (2020) wrote for CBC News that for international standards, "the federal government's smooth and rapid processing of millions of CERB claims was a bureaucratic achievement few other countries were able to pull off " (para. 10). This in turn allowed "the stay-at-home policy to have an effect on the virus's spread" (para. 11). In this context, as the pandemic hit hard all sectors, schools had to be closed. Educational settings all over the

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[12] Lee and Hamidian (2020) explain that "key federal economic supports include the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (or CEWS, which pays 75 per cent of wages to employers that keep workers on payroll, with a maximum of $847 per week per worker) and the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (or CERB, which pays $500 per week directly to individuals who have lost income due to COVID-19). It has also boosted child benefits and the low-income GST credit payment, while providing liquidity by deferring tax payments and creating loan and credit programs for small businesses. A number of specialized supports for Indigenous communities, NGOs and charities, and vulnerable populations have also been announced" (para. 5).

[13] See more information on Canada's response at https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/canadas-reponse.html

country (and the world) were highly impacted by emergency remote learning. It soon became a challenge for many schools in the province of Manitoba. A report prepared by the Government of Manitoba (2021), entitled *One Year Later: Learning from COVID-19 to Shape the Future of Education*, presented the following evidence: “Early in the suspension of in-class learning, a scan across school divisions of the number of students with limited or no technology revealed that approximately 6 percent of the student population had technology challenges. This represents over 10,000 students. In Northern school divisions, this percentage increased to 33 percent” (Manitoba Government, 2020, p. 3). Emma, Joe, and Margaret shared the challenges they had at their schools with the implementation of an emergency remote learning plan. Emma talked about how her students “sort of went off the map”:

> I think this whole COVID pandemic is, for my little people, they sort of went off the map, and it was only through support with administrators, counsellors, and the resource teachers that they were able to get the connection. And then I was able to connect. There was lots of effort, but it was sooo wonderful to see. They got them on to Teams [a collaboration app built for hybrid work] and just to be able to connect, and that idea that we are not in a vacuum. And that is not that child’s fault or the family’s fault. Sometimes things happen and you just support where you can, but it really came to light during this pandemic, of equity, you know, even to have a laptop or a device that could be used to meet, because one family didn’t. So, we’ll get them one. (Emma, Initial Interview)

On the one hand, Emma seemed to have experienced the challenges with the timing of the implementation of an emergency remote learning plan. On the other hand, she evidenced how her school worked as a community to succeed in responding to the students’ needs. Emma also saw remote learning as an opportunity for getting engaged

with parents more easily. As a Reading Recovery teacher, she thought that it contributed to increase parent and family support during her classes:

> And again, this pandemic, I was able to connect with another student and I got to meet his whole family. We had mom, and his brother had come in to watch a lesson one time. And that was nice, but it was just, it was really special. And the same with the other little guy that I needed support getting to connect with, and finally, he got me, dad. He had his whole family there when we were working. Thus, it was just again an opportunity, but how you really have to mindfully work at it, working from those other perspectives, not just your own, so I'm always aware of that. (Emma, Initial Interview)

Margaret also talked about her school initiative in providing laptops for students, but she highlighted the existing inequalities when it comes to learning from home:

> Um, very currently a lot of issues around learning from home. So, we saw very firsthand some of the disparity between groups of kids in schools. Kids who have computers and know how to use technology and a lot of kids who didn't have computers at school. So, we actually had to give out laptops at school to kids, so they got those. (Margaret, Initial Interview)

The teacher mentioned how the use of technology had already been an issue in her school and how the pandemic increased the difficulties in using technology from home. Similarly, one of the main issues for Joe was about distance learning for kids in foster care or group homes:

> Some of my questions are like the kids who are in foster care or group homes, how are they going to be able? Well, during the past three months that we've been doing distance learning, you know, how are they benefiting from this? Especially kids who don't have a good home life, it's really challenging to do

> distance learning with them, right? We actually had to send out some laptops for some of the kids. But even so, like some of them don't have the internet, or who knows, they have a lot of difficulties at home. And, so, there's a lot of questions surrounding the impacts of the pandemic and distance learning. (Joe, Initial Interview)

For this participant, the challenges of implementing emergency remote learning involved more than the material response that the government gave in terms of laptops. He claimed that the social contexts of students' homes were central to analyze the consequences for those learners' achievements during the pandemic. Responding to this reality was beyond school and/or teachers' power and agency.

In the case of Margaret and Emma, their school contexts responded to the material technological needs of students. Thus, when the community demanded responses at their schools, teachers faced very different realities. A context of emergency constrained the teachers' agency, and understandings of power and agency showed they used their power to act towards their realities. While Joe called broader systems into action, Margaret and Emma had positive views of how their schools solved students' lack of technological devices. They both mentioned that their students received laptops and could connect with teachers. However, these efforts were not enough to solve students' lack of knowledge of technology (Margaret). Moreover, Emma also shared how the dynamics of her work were affected by the remote work. She shared the story of her student being helped by his sister and how she had to consider this new configuration when teaching. Finally, Emma reflected on how having the family around during classes made her consider other perspectives during her online classes.

Five participants mentioned Black Lives Matter during the initial interviews. The wave of protests around Black Lives Matter started happening after George Floyd was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis, in the United States of America. This brought racism to the center of socio-political debates in the USA and many countries around the world. Education has been pivotal to Black Lives Matter (#BLM), a movement created in 2013. Margaret and Trena referred to the movement to talk about how it influenced book choices at their schools. While Trena explored how the protests triggered token observations when selecting books for students, Joe and Margaret were proud to share how their schools had been working with books that approached racism even before the protests. Black Lives Matter protests were mentioned by Patrick and Kay as what they were professionally grappling with. While Patrick was thinking about how to engage in discussion with his students about it, Kay shared how she used the news to address the Black Lives Matter movement:

> I also tried to keep a pulse on the news. So, for example, my classes had moved to online learning, but when the whole Black Lives Matter movement really started picking up during this period of COVID, I used that with my grade 11 and 12 students to bring discussion. I found a video, I posted it, it broke down a lot of the issues, and students were comfortable posting on a thread. (Kay, Initial Interview)

In choosing to talk about the movement, Kay showed her agency in discussing current issues through meaningful use and the development of digital literacies. She later asserted:

> And I'm quite happy because even the post that my students were making on the topics of Black Lives Matter, they really care. They really care, and they want to do what they can to change the world. So, you know, what makes the job

> worthwhile for sure when you see that positive change in ideas happening. (Kay, Initial Interview)

There was pride in looking at how her students engaged in the topic in a caring way. But, from this excerpt, I also wondered, apart from the news, “What makes a teacher choose to conduct or to silence discussions involving topics like racism in the classroom”? Teaching about racism results from intersections of personal, intellectual, political, and pedagogical reflections (Austin et al., 2016). Recent publications about anti-racist education have shown that teachers’ initiatives have sparkled from personal positionalities and experiences with grief (Moore, 2016), teaching experiences with students of color (Jiménez, 2016; Hinderlie, 2017), inquiries about and engagements with activism (Au & Hagopian, 2017; Cumberbatch & Trujillo-Pagán, 2016), political and critical reflections on ongoing struggles of black and brown bodies (Kraig-Turner, 2017; Sanchez & Hagopian, 2017; Williams et al., 2016). Not engaging explicitly with an anti-racist pedagogy calls for reflections on how privileged views of society implicitly inform school practices. For example, in the ELA curriculum (Manitoba Education, 2020), the terms *anti-racist*, *discrimination*, and *black* are not referenced. Analyzing what and who is included or left out in curriculum documents and government educational plans raises questions about the political forces informing teachers’ work.

While Kay addressed the issue before the fall term, Patrick was concerned about not silencing the topic once classes returned:

> So, what I’m grappling with right now professionally is what the fall is going to look like, not just in the context of COVID and the pandemic but what this looks like when we come back together, and there’s awful things happening. There has been a lot of action and movements and protest and activism. We can’t possibly

> come back in the fall and just pretend that none of that exists. If we do, our kids will notice that, and that really concerns me about what message that sends. (Patrick, Initial Interview)

It seemed that the teacher had not worked with the issue before the fall, and I regret not having asked follow-up questions to investigate the reasons for that.

In this section, I turned attention to COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter as powerful current events that have influenced different kinds of agency. Consequently, they exercise power and agency in everyday pedagogical choices. Although Canada had the power and agency to respond to COVID issues, local realities continued to impact teachers' work. Families' social situations and students' knowledge of and access to technology influenced their work contexts. The participants felt the impacts differently, even though, in their view, it seemed that their schools responded to remote learning in the best way they could. More than ever, the disparities in students' homes pervaded learning and teaching experiences during these pandemic times. Despite advances to end racism, the Black Lives Matter movement highlights the fact that there is still much to do. The teachers showed that there is a need for ongoing conversations about racism through critical lenses. From their perspectives, there is a need to question tokenism and the power and agency of systems in reproducing inequitable realities. They also asked for support that could enable more informed and anti-racist/anti-oppressive practices in education settings.

Institutional Programs and Projects

The educators talked about initiatives at their schools that had had a direct influence on their work. For example, Kay mentioned how the bursary programs increased the diversity of the student body at her school:

> And we have a number of students who are very privileged, but I would say that in the last five or six years, our schools have been offering bursary programs and they also opened an inner-city school program. [...] We have students coming from there [inner-city programs] now, who are on bursary. So, we've kind of got this split of kids who are paying full tuition and coming from affluent families, and then kids who wouldn't be able to afford to come here without the bursary programs that are offered. (Kay, Initial Interview)

Bursary programs can be interpreted as an action taken by the institution related to their commitment to a more inclusive school. However, Kay reflected on how the school curriculum was not prepared for these students. While she understood that the school needed time for change, she took responsibility for choosing materials that could represent her diverse body of students:

> My belief is that the school has to take the time to then say: "Okay, our student body has changed. Therefore, our program has to change as well". So that's kind of my personal battle. It's changed my practice because I'm looking for new texts and new ways to represent the group that I have in front of me. (Kay, Initial Interview)

Kay's narrative raised some important considerations about institutional agency towards difference. At the same time that it made a move towards inclusion through a bursary program, the school might not have been concerned about pedagogical changes that considered the increased diversity in their student bodies. This shows institutional understandings of what learners should look like and should learn based on a more homogenous view. Despite that, Kay shared how she tried to resist the system by acting on her own. Her agency can be related in part to her master's degree, which she had

previously said made her interested in identity issues and contributed to more informed pedagogical choices.

School projects based on finding out solutions for society problems are great opportunities to involve students in issues aimed at the construction of more equitable communities. At Sasha's school, students taking the Global Issues Course[14] are expected to engage in a project as part of the curriculum:

> When I'm teaching Global Issues, one of the big projects that we do is called the Take Action Project, which is something where they have to find a problem in society and then try to research it to understand what's the source of this problem and then try to solve it. And not like to solve the world's problems, but like make a difference in somewhere, have an experience that changes their perspective in some way. It could be an empathy building exercise or it could be like actually raising donations, things like that. (Sasha, Initial Interview)

The idea of the project was fascinating. The issue was with the solutions that students chose to take:

> Almost always the kids, and the first, the first time I introduced this project they always go: "Okay, I'll just raise some money"— just like, "I'll just all do that and, like, it'll be easy." And then I have to kind of push them and say: "Well, not every problem can be solved by throwing money at it. Like we have to, I want you to think about another way, like what is the source of this. If you are going to raise something, I would rather you raise the products that you need." If a student wanted to help with one of our, I guess, homeless shelters, if they were

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[14] Global Issues is a Grade 12 Social Studies course. It uses ecological literacy as a lens to explore complex global issues that human beings and societies face nowadays. The course is aimed at teaching students to apply concepts of sustainability, learn about the interdependence of environmental, social, political, and economic systems, and think and act towards social change as ecologically literate citizens (Manitoba Education, 2017).

> worried about hygiene, then I want them to focus on, actually, getting donation products, like toothpaste and soap and stuff like that. "See how hard it is to get people actually donating things like that versus asking for money." That's been a shift, too. It's been a weird process for me in terms of identity, and seeing how different my lived experiences are compared to a lot of these students that I'm teaching.

From this excerpt, it is possible to see how the idea of charity is internalized as a way of solving problems of inequality in society. Although the charity movement is important for any social problem or issue, it might impede engagement with solutions that aim at equity. Freire (1970) presents the concept of *false generosity* to refer to charity as a way of targeting the symptoms and not the underlying causes of oppressive systems. As people feel good about helping those in need, their generosity also contributes to maintaining unjust social structures. Thus, "true generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity" (Freire, 1970, p. 45), and creating possibilities for true liberation from oppressive systems. This anecdote opened reflections on the questions the teachers asked in our meetings, and how they might lead to different approaches to social problems.

Teaching about poverty through an empathy building approach was a recurrent choice among participants. As Margaret reflected:

> That's one of my biggest issues is helping kids to see that too, because I think a lot of students, especially the ones that aren't impoverished, just don't get it. Trying to move kids to have empathy and understanding and hopefully build a better future. And then there is what I said earlier, the other issues that come with it, it's not just about the income of the family, but it's also about who are the groups that are impoverished. In my school you see it is the newcomers, and

> those are the people that are, you know, the people of color and a lot of our Indigenous kids are in care, and that kind of thing. It's a wider social issue, and it's not about income. (Margaret, Initial Interview)

For Maria, there was a difference between teaching about poverty and empathy:

> I think that you can kind of bring videos, media, and testimonials. You can bring things so students have an idea of what poverty is. You can teach about poverty, but you can't teach about empathy as much. Teaching about poverty is one thing. Now teaching about empathy and understanding what other people are going through because of poverty, it's different. (Maria, Initial Interview)

Margaret and Maria talked about their desire for an empathic attitude towards the causes and effects of poverty. While Maria emphasized the difficulties in teaching about empathy, Margaret also mentioned how important it was to consider and explore how groups of people might become marginalized because of who they are. Her broader multicultural context reinforced the need to develop empathy among students:

> The school I am in right now is very multicultural. We've got a lot of newcomers, so ideas around reconciliation that they have no idea. They have to learn about residential schools and all of that. So, we do a lot of work around those issues as an example. So, there is a real variety there. That idea of empathy and understanding and helping them understand each other and the world around them, for me, is really important. (Margaret, Initial Interview)

Broader social and historical contexts informed Margaret's teaching about facts and actions that have impacted the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada. From Margaret's words, we notice a focus on "that idea of empathy and understanding."

Looking for ethical possibilities to approach issues of social justice in education, Todd (2003) problematized learning through empathy, as it is "not rooted in a learning

from the Other" (p. 62). In her philosophical investigation, she recognizes that empathy serves for self-reflection and learning about ourselves in relation to others. However, she explains that an empathic perspective might not respect "the singularity and uniqueness of the Other" (p. 62). According to the author, "empathy necessarily leads to questionable assumptions that the Other is ultimately someone like me, that what I feel is the same as (or at least approximates) the Other's feelings, whether I project or identify or not" (p. 63). She proposes an "ethical attentiveness to difference qua difference" (p. 63): learning from the Other goes beyond projection and identification, and it involves being mindful of how one becomes challenged to be modified by the Other. Todd's perspective leads us into looking at understandings of empathy through critical and ethical lenses. In this regard, in summary, the participants talked about empathy as an understanding or feeling to be developed towards others. However, I wonder how the idea of developing an empathetic attitude would encompass perspectives of being "modified by the Other", while engaging with singularities that might not be the ones we project or identify with.

Tokenism

Books represent cultural knowledge that is validated by teachers and school contexts. In this excerpt, Trena shared her experience in selecting books at her school:

> I go to the principal as a Reading Recovery teacher and say: "We need more books for home reading. Classroom teachers need more books. Can I order more books for them?" And he would: "Okay, they are in need of them." And part of it is, he says: "Just don't order what you want, order what they want." So I go to the teachers, and one of the things for example, one of the things that has been in the media recently is skin color, right? Because of Flo... I forgot his first name. [The researcher mentions it: Floyd, George Floyd.] The inequality and how

> people are treated based on their race. There is a lot of that. So, teachers ask: "Can we have some books with kids with different skin colors?" But there is more than just that. Like I said, the little Arabic boy, he didn't have those same experiences, so not only does he need to have models in the book of people who have other skin colors, he needs to have models of people who have similar culture to him, who are successful. He also needs to have experiences with what other cultures are experiencing so that he's aware of them, so that he can be successful with them. He needs more than just pictures with kids with the same skin color. (Trena, Initial Interview)

In sharing this anecdote, Trena illustrated the teacher's agency informed by tokenism and the need to be aware of that at schools. With the intention to convince that we live in a post-racial world, tokenism represents "a white desire to 'prove' how diverse one's business or school can be" (Ruby, 2020, p. 675). This was exactly what happened in Trena's context when teachers asked her, "Can we have some books with kids with different skin colors?" Trena saw the big picture of what was involved in using books that represented the diversity of kids that Winnipeg classrooms have. She reinforced the power of books, but the teacher went even further, as she analyzed how teachers respond to issues of race.

In a similar way, when we talked about the challenges of discussing privilege in the classroom during our second meeting, Patrick and Kay addressed some points about how tokenism is present in their contexts:

> I think teachers often like being able to check the little boxes and move things on. But this doesn't work that way. It's both a challenge, and it's a whole shift of mindset that a teacher would have. Maybe that's part of the difference between those who are doing the work and those who aren't. Have they shifted that

> mindset from "I need to accomplish everything to I need to do the best I can with the tools I have to help students, in whatever ways I can possibly do, without having that goal in mind." And when we started talking about assessment and standardized tests and measures, and all that sort of thing, then that goal-oriented meritocracy is coming up. How do we get there and ensure everyone gets there and that sort of thing? (Patrick, Second Meeting)

> I like what you're saying about people having this goal in mind because it can lead to things like tokenism, where you're just checking a box. My program was colonial, and now I fix it, because I added in a poem by Maya Angelou. (Kay, Second Meeting)

Patrick referred to how assessment and standardized tests reinforced pedagogical practices informed by meritocracy discourses. In his view, there is work to do in terms of changing teachers' mindsets in ways that lead to more informed practices. In agreeing with Patrick, Kay remarked on the issue of pedagogical choices that respond to changes in the system without addressing deeper structures in the system. Both participants reflected on the need for teachers' awareness of the power of larger systems in their work and how teachers might be working to reinforce meritocratic and colonial systems.

Tokenism is "the practice or policy of admitting an extremely small number of members of racial (e.g., African American), ethnic (e.g., Latino) or gender (e.g., women) groups...to give the impression of being inclusive, when in actuality these groups are not welcomed" (Riccucci, 2008, p. 132). Tokenism, as a discriminatory practice, reinforces issues of marginalization and exclusion (Crenshaw, 2015; Simpson, 2009). According to Blake (2019), who wrote about making reading lists to teach about Canadian literature in Slovenia, "tokenism is hypocritical in that it entails paying lip

service to diversity" (p. 353). Kay and Trena talked about tokenistic inclusion of readings in their contexts, just as Patrick used the term "check the little boxes", as he referred to the way some teachers might teach about issues of privilege. Exploring issues of marginalization in English language classrooms calls for ongoing critical reflection on the power and agency of institutions and teachers in relation to texts and interpretations that avoid tokenistic choices and practices.

Dimension 1 focused on teachers' understandings of their broader social and historical context concerning social class, privilege, and power and agency. The participants conceptualized social class, engaged with it as an identity marker, and observed how it looked like in their contexts. Further, they examined Canada as a society of privilege, zoomed-in on bubbles of it, and described the privilege of becoming and being teachers in this context. The educators referred to power and agency concerning the challenges posed by current historical events, discussed the role of institutional programs and projects, and raised issues of tokenism in critical ways. In the next section, I will explore the second dimension, which focuses on the teachers' perspectives on English language education.

Dimension 2: Understandings of Institutional and Societal Discourses about Power, Agency, Social Class, and Privilege in English Language Education

For this dimension, I aimed to select institutional and societal discourses that the participants circulated when talking about English language education. English language education encompasses both English Language Arts and English as an Additional Language—they might be considered different disciplines in contexts where English is the native language. Regarding issues of English language education, I tried to acknowledge discourses that reinforced and resisted societal differences by exploring

perspectives of language awareness, notes on explicit positionalities, and evidence of a critical stance (Jordão & Martinez, 2021).

Discourses About Social Class in English Language Education

Contextualized perceptions of social class through these participants' words, beliefs, discourses, and practices related to the challenges that assumptions about social class can create. There was a focus on issues with the materiality of resources that reflected the different classifications in society, in institutions, and in the classroom.

Materiality and Belonging

One point that some participants explicitly talked about was how "social class does come into education when you're asking kids to provide their own materials" (Margaret, Initial Interview). For example, Kay referred to her own positionality and perceptions of social class to consider how some students might feel inside classrooms:

> I came from a middle-class family. As a student, I remember feeling where I was positioned—like, "What is my standpoint?" There were students at my school who had more than me—and clearly had more than me, and students at my school who had less. I think it can definitely affect how you see yourself and I can see that same thing happening with my students. Like some of the students who feel out of place here, you can see it. On days where they're allowed to wear something other than their uniform. I had students say to me that: "I'm really uncomfortable because there's a group of girls who are all wearing brand name clothing, and they have expensive purses, and they have expensive equipment." They have an advantage, they come into the classroom with nice computers and cell phones and all of these digital devices that can give them an advantage in the classroom, and then you have others who have nothing. Like they're here on a bursary, and they can't afford those tools and that clothing.

> You can see how it affects their opinion of themselves, and where they belong in the classroom. (Kay, Initial Interview)

On the one hand, Kay shared how a group of students felt safe to talk about their material differences with her, which I interpreted as a relationship of trust between teacher and students. On the other hand, she also brought up how everyday practices might reinforce the idea of being advantaged based on material differences, which affect students' opinion of themselves and their "sense of one's place" (Bourdieu,1998; Goffman, 1959). Considering the classroom as a social space that builds subjectivities, this sense also results in classifications that keep students in groups, in which they consciously or unconsciously reproduce social distances/differences.

Kay demonstrated that she was aware of some of her students' feelings and reactions towards such situations. This leads to inquiries about an attempt to show in the language social class as a category that produces dividing and classifying discourses and practices in spaces. The abstract idea of social classes comes to concrete terms in situations where "what exists is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as something to be done" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 12). In a classroom, division lines created by social class (or any other identity marker) are there, and how teachers perceive and deal with these lines also inform students' perceptions of themselves. Regarding the theory of action proposed by Bourdieu, the question is: What would schools and teachers do to "change the ways of world-making" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 23)?

Social Class Stereotypes

Educational discourses might contribute to reproducing stereotyped representations of students. According to Jordão and Martinez (2021), "stereotypes are part of the politics of representation, which in coloniality means the most powerful

having the authority to speak for the powerless" (p. 588). For English language teaching, literacy levels are often used as a discourse that guides teachers' work. Without questioning literacy levels, Sasha talked about differences in comparing students positioned in different social classes:

> I understand that some students are gonna have an aptitude for understanding literature and reading and things like that. And even if a student isn't very well off, if they're exposed to literature, they're still going to be okay, you're still going to have an understanding. But you know in terms of, actually, getting the material out there, there is a huge discrepancy between, and also just in terms of what that social class experience is and what their values and beliefs are. But these students who are in situations where their parents are just like, "I need you to get a good job or whether or not you're incredibly literate, that doesn't matter. You can still work, you can still get some income and that's all you need." That kind of mentality, that kind of worldview is completely different from the world view that you would get with an upper middle-class or upper-class family where they know "Okay, you're tracked for success very much: You need to be learned. You need to be educated. You need to be professional, so I want you to read at least an hour every day." So that sort of thing is very different, and I think that that relates back to not just economics, but also the understanding of what that particular class group feels as being a priority. So that was my understanding, too. (Sasha, Initial Interview, p. 14)

The participant's assumptions about students and parents with relatively low socio-economic status showed classist understandings informed by discourses of "culture of poverty" (Gorski, 2007). These discourses suggest that "we must fix poor people instead of eliminate the inequities that oppress them" (Gorski, 2007, para. 3). As

Sasha associated social classes to beliefs and values, she suggested that, while middle-class and upper middle-class families usually focused on success based on being literate and following an educational path, parents from low social class positions might not have that as a priority, and as a consequence their attitude affected their children's outcomes at school:

> In terms of English Language Arts, I think it really impacts. The biggest example I can think of is the resources that I had, Admin role, the literacy levels, the diversity of reading and writing levels in that environment where students didn't necessarily have a whole lot in terms of their social class and economics. It's hard for me to kind of separate those two things from being connected, when I saw it so explicitly in that environment and I don't see it as much in this school. Most students are well read, they have resources. Of course, you have diversity within that classroom, but at the same time it's not the same extreme that I had back in my earlier experience. I think in terms of literacy levels and reading levels, it has to play a role in terms of, again, what kinds of environments you're in, even just down to what your parents teach you. If your parents are, if your family is concerned and their most immediate concern is getting food on the table, then maybe they don't have time to read you a book at the end of the day, before you go to bed. Maybe they're working multiple jobs, and I had that experience for students who were. (Sasha, Initial Interview, p. 13)

The teacher might have unintentionally reproduced stereotypical ideas about literacy development for students whose families are struggling to make ends meet. Sasha did not problematize the role of literacy levels in reproducing inequalities in language classrooms and placed responsibility on the individual and their parent's/s' concerns and attitudes. Mentioning how literacy levels worked as a guide for teaching

practices and comparing her teaching experiences at a public and a private school contributed to reinforcing beliefs about students' outcomes based on observations of social class contexts. Thus, there is evidence of how perspectives on what it means to be literate, successfully informed by neoliberal understandings, contribute to the reproduction of classist discourses (Bettie, 2003; Holborow, 2012). As she had described her students' performance according to literacy levels in the public school with diversity in students' backgrounds, Sasha talked about her expectations:

> I had to lower my expectations in terms of my own capacity of what I could achieve at that moment. Because it was just so hard, and I had kids from very different literacy levels. (Sasha, Initial Interview)

We can see that Sasha's expectations related to literacy levels were not met. She was a first-year teacher, which might raise questions about the university's and/or the school's approach to these realities and reinforce classist discourses. Her comments also raised thoughts on class-biased prejudices about students' disadvantaged realities and abilities, and the kind of instruction they might receive (Anyon, 1981; Hunt & Seiver, 2018). Not only should the "culture of poverty" be problematized as a myth, but also there should be encouragement to critically navigate the "culture of classism" (Gorski, 2007) that permeates understandings, discourses, and practices towards poverty, class, and education.

Teachers' Habitus

Sasha shared her experience as a first-year teacher to raise some issues about dealing with social class realities that were completely different from hers:

> And I was from a middle-class, you know, fairly upper-middle-class background, and so I was used to that type of environment. And then I was placed in a very challenging environment, where kids, you know, we had a

> breakfast program. So, once I realized the reality of whom I was teaching and the kids I was teaching, and what their lived experience was in their homes at the time, I realized very quickly that, you know, my expectations and my hopes about dealing with content and dealing with curriculum and things like that were almost on the back burner. (Sasha, Initial Interview, p. 4)

The teacher soon noticed she could not accomplish the curriculum as she had planned, which seemed the right decision. Sasha apparently "created a blurring blame that seemed to be having an immobilizing effect on" her work (Stacey, 2019, p. 72):

> Like, I understand that is a frightening thing for a teacher to say, but at the same time I realized that half of these kids, I should just be grateful that they came into my classroom on that day because I knew they were safe. I guess, they were, at least, getting a lunch; they were here. I was teaching grade 8, but I had about, I would say I had three, no I had four students that were at a level of grade 5 and below, some of them were kindergarten, and some of them were grade 2 in terms of their reading and writing. And then I had others kind of all over the place—and so it was a very, very, very challenging experience as a first-year teacher. (Sasha, Initial Interview)

The unexpected diversity of students' lived experiences and literacy levels disturbed her certainties as an early-year career teacher with a middle-class background. Moreover, early career teachers "feel the pressure to do the right thing as they understand it" (Comber, 2016, p. 406). In recalling feelings and needs towards the unknown as a first-year teacher, she pointed to the role of practicum at universities:

> I just realized very quickly that I could go in with the best intentions, but that I might not achieve all those things I had hoped to achieve, because I was facing a very different reality of the kinds of kids and the diversity of learning that these

> kids had and their backgrounds and their social backgrounds. I wasn't exposed to that in my practicum in terms of like having kids from, you know, children in care, all those types of things where some of them have histories of abuse and things like that. I was coming into that without any knowledge or understanding of how to handle that. So, I had to get on a lot of support to help me with that. (Sasha, Initial Interview, p. 3)

From her narrative, we can interpret that her social class background played a central role in her literacy expectations for her students. As she realized she lacked knowledge about other realities, Sasha called on the role of practicum in informing undergraduate education students about working with students with diverse backgrounds. The teacher also talked about her recent experience at a private school:

> And then now that I am in a private school where students are paying to be there, it's very different, because these kids are mostly motivated on their own, and their parents have a lot of pressure for them, because they are paying for this. It's very expensive, and so it's a completely different dynamic that I am facing. It's just that I am still trying to figure that out in terms of how my philosophy and motivations have changed now that I am in this new environment. Still so foreign and new to me, because I only have ever been a public school student in my past, I've worked in public schools, and now I'm in a private school. So, I'm still trying to navigate that myself. (Sasha, Initial Interview)

The educator shared how experiencing significantly different social realities impacted her views and identity as a teacher. These realities had challenged her expectations about literacy levels, students' motivation, parents' demands, and teacher learning at university. For Bourdieu (1998) habitus are also

> classificatory schemes, principles of classification, principles of vision and division, different tastes. They make a distinction between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar, and so forth, but distinctions are not identical. (p. 8)

Sasha's narrative raises questions about what teaching habitus has been sustained in language teacher education. In her analysis of early career teachers' habitus, Stacey (2019) draws attention to the need for practicum experiences, pointing out that "ensuring a diversity of well-supported professional experience placements is important in preparing teachers for contexts unlike those they experienced themselves, enabling the development of a more reflexive habitus" (Stacey, 2019, p. 75). As Sasha's reflections might suggest, there is a need for practicum experiences that question notions of knowledge attached to literacy levels. Moreover, she underlines the importance of looking at literacy levels and their impacts on language teaching habitus.

Discourses on Privilege in English Language Education

This section is aimed at identifying discourses on privilege in the data. I sought to capture discourses in the participants' responses that reproduced and resisted the arbitrary distribution of power and resources to categories of people.

Homogenizing Programs

As a text that communicates institutional discourses, school programs informed by white, Euro-centric views legitimate school knowledge "as predominantly constitutive of the knowledge and values of particular interest and power groups" (Kanu, 2006, p. 5). This was the case at Kay's school:

> When I came in 2008, our building was a predominantly white, white staff, white students, and it's changed. It's changed so much over the years that my

> belief is that the program has to change as well, right? Because your program should represent the people that you're teaching. I'd say that belief is newer for me, and it's definitely changed my practice. I work harder now to look at a unit, look at a program, and say, okay, whose voice is here and who's missing. (Kay, Initial Interview)

Kay was encouraged to pay heed to identity issues and take a critical stance as she worked on updating her program and engaging students from diverse backgrounds. However, she shared how hard it was to challenge the system. By mentioning that her private school had initiated a program for students to come on a bursary, Kay reflected on how the school program was not prepared for these students:

> Because the bursary program is quite new and the school has actually been seeking like a wider student body, our classrooms have really changed—who is in our classroom has changed. I think that is a really good change, but the school also has to take the time. (Kay, Initial Interview)

The participant's narrative raised some thoughts about institutional discourses and decisions and the impacts on teachers' work and students' learning opportunities. At the same time that her institution made a move towards inclusion, it seemed not to advance the changes in the program at the same speed. Considering the description of the school's white staff and students, and the changes in the student population effected by the bursary program, Kay articulated insights about institutional discourses as systems of authority (Andreotti, 2011b) and their homogenizing views that privilege dominant knowledge and identities while silencing and marginalizing cultural differences. In this case, dominant knowledge and identities relate to white, upper-middle-class Canadians. Also, Kay demonstrated how becoming aware of the complexities and difficulties of educational systems is central to pedagogical decisions

that challenge privileged views in contexts marked by racial, cultural, linguistic, and other forms of differences.

ELA and Privilege

As part of the ELA curriculum (Manitoba Education, 2020), literature can be another venue that reinforces privilege at schools. As the teachers recognized how it was still present in their contexts, they shared some initiatives to challenge the idea of privilege associated with literature. Margaret described some of the changes they had been doing at her school:

> It certain[ly] ties back to what we were talking about earlier about teaching the canon versus, you know, teaching these books that are more open and engaging. The certain idea of privilege and literature and you know being well-read and knowing certain books. I think we're doing lots of kind of breaking down in that thinking. And it's not about what you know, it's about the skills you have. It's not about being of a certain class, being cultured and knowing *Hamlet*; it's about being a person who can think critically and act on your thinking more. I think in that way, the English Language Arts classroom is becoming a lot more democratic. (Margaret, Initial Interview)

Understandings of language and literacy learning informed shifts in language teaching practices. Such shifts were aimed at representing their community of students:

> I think I've made a lot of headway, is that shift from teaching the novel or the play as a unit and looking at studying the cannon to bringing in more choice and more young adult literature that kids find engaging, but at the same time that mostly tell important stories that we feel they need to learn about. We're working on building up our resources and having up to our book clubs sets. As I said earlier Indigenous stories, things around Black Lives Matter, and those

> kinds of issues, issues related to refugees, kids affected by war and so on. (Margaret, Initial Interview)

The teachers also shared how they explored intersecting issues of inequalities through literature. For example, Kay described some of her work with the representation of Indigenous peoples in Canadian literature:

> We also look a lot into Canadian history. I teach you a text called *Broken Circle*, which is about residential schools, and it really digs into the idea of class, being from history. This is a group of people who has been devastated throughout history, and it actually causes this problem: the cyclical problem of poverty, of addiction, of no fear of authority figures like school and hospitals and all these institutions where systematic racism is present. In that Canadian literature unit we do a lot of digging and saying, you know, where do you stand? What's your identity? And is your success a part of that? Is it a part of where you're sitting? (Kay, Initial Interview)

Using Canadian literature to deepen discussions about social class differences, Kay explored Canadian history through a book written by Theodore Fontaine (2010), a survivor of the residential schools. While analyzing history, she also asked questions that prioritized reflections on students' positionalities and privileges in this society.

Language Privilege

Jordão (2009) points out that "it is crucial knowledge that languages are important elements for human development, for information flows and the financial market in the contemporary world" (p. 95). However, in our globalized societies, there are languages that are considered more powerful, and that is the case of English: "the language of international communication, also known as lingua franca or global

language" (Jordão, 2009, p. 95). This scenario sustains understandings that speaking English is a privilege:

> Well, I think that if you are able to speak English, you are already very privileged in a class. Being able to speak English, you can be anywhere in the world. It's way easier. And you can conquer, you can work, you can do much more because you speak English. Because you have the language and that opens up the access to the world. It's so much easier, right? (Maria, Initial Interview)

From an immigrant perspective, Maria emphasized how lack of knowledge about the English language might become a barrier for opportunities in countries like Canada:

> If you have someone, there are so many Brazilians that are brilliant people, brilliant but because they don't speak English they can't use as much as their brilliance because they are unable to speak the language. English language Arts being taught at school is already a privilege to so many people here. Sometimes they don't have an idea of how privileged it is to speak the language, to be able to communicate in English, to learn English and open software in the middle of a pandemic and understand everything that is written there. (Maria, Initial Interview)

The teacher considered it a privilege to learn English at school because she came from a place where learning English at public schools is not a shared reality. As an immigrant, she also had the experience of seeing friends who could not access opportunities because of their lack of knowledge of the language.

In bilingual Canada, French language proficiency also plays a significant role in terms of opportunities. Patrick worked at a French Immersion school and talked about

how speaking French privileged him to get a permanent teaching position in this context:

> The fact that I speak French, for instance, resulted in me getting a permanent job right away. Whereas other teachers may wait five or six years before being offered a permanent contract. (Initial Interview, Patrick)

In a context like Canada, in which official languages are English and French, to speak these languages is considered a form of privilege by native and nonnative speakers. Maria pointed out the privilege that comes from speaking English to highlight the different opportunities a person has because they speak the language. In the case of Patrick, his experiences demonstrate how and what language works to privilege some in this context. Language as a privilege raises inquiries about notions of the power of English and French and the opportunities that they create or hinder in a society marked by plurilingualism, such as Canada.

Current times are marked by intense global flows and contact zones (Pratt, 1991; Santos, 2009) that demand new ways of living, doing, and knowing (Takaki, 2021). Schools as a contact zone can be considered "a site of permanent struggle" (Takaki, 2021, p. 34), permeated by pluridiversity. Superdiversity has been theorized by Vertovec (2007) in Britain while studying issues related to immigration. Superdiversity is a concept used to explain immigration and the diverse variables, the "diversification of diversity" that impacts immigrant life. The complexity of this dynamic encompasses among variables such as race, gender, nationality, legal status, thus demanding responses from local authorities, local service providers, and local residents, among others. All these variables challenge public policies and practices to build a more just society. In language studies, theorists have been investigating the role that superdiversity plays in language learning, acquisition, and teaching (Blommaert, 2015;

Lucena & Pires-Santos, 2018; Rocha & Maciel, 2015). Superdiversity has come to challenge every discourse that does not consider the diversification inside the diversity.

Pluriversality "provides a counternarrative to contemporary Northern assumptions of the universal" (Perry, 2021, p. 293) and acknowledges the need to consider human and non-human elements in complex meaning-making processes. Pluriversality calls for pluriversal literacies practices (Perry, 2021) that engage with relations, bodies, places, affect, discourses, and print, in connection with "cultural practices, collective imaginaries, and speculation in response to the present" (Perry, 2021, p. 306).

Discourses on Power and Agency in English Language Education

Agency here is understood as "an emergent phenomenon of actor-situation transaction" (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 626). Therefore, selected understandings also involved how the participants acted and what enabled or constrained their agency as language teachers in their contexts.

Language as Power and Agency

The English Language Arts team at Manitoba Education has been attentive to the possibilities and challenges of its educational system. One of their most recent responses is the renewal of the ELA curriculum. Figure 6 is a graphic of the ELA conceptual framework (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 22):

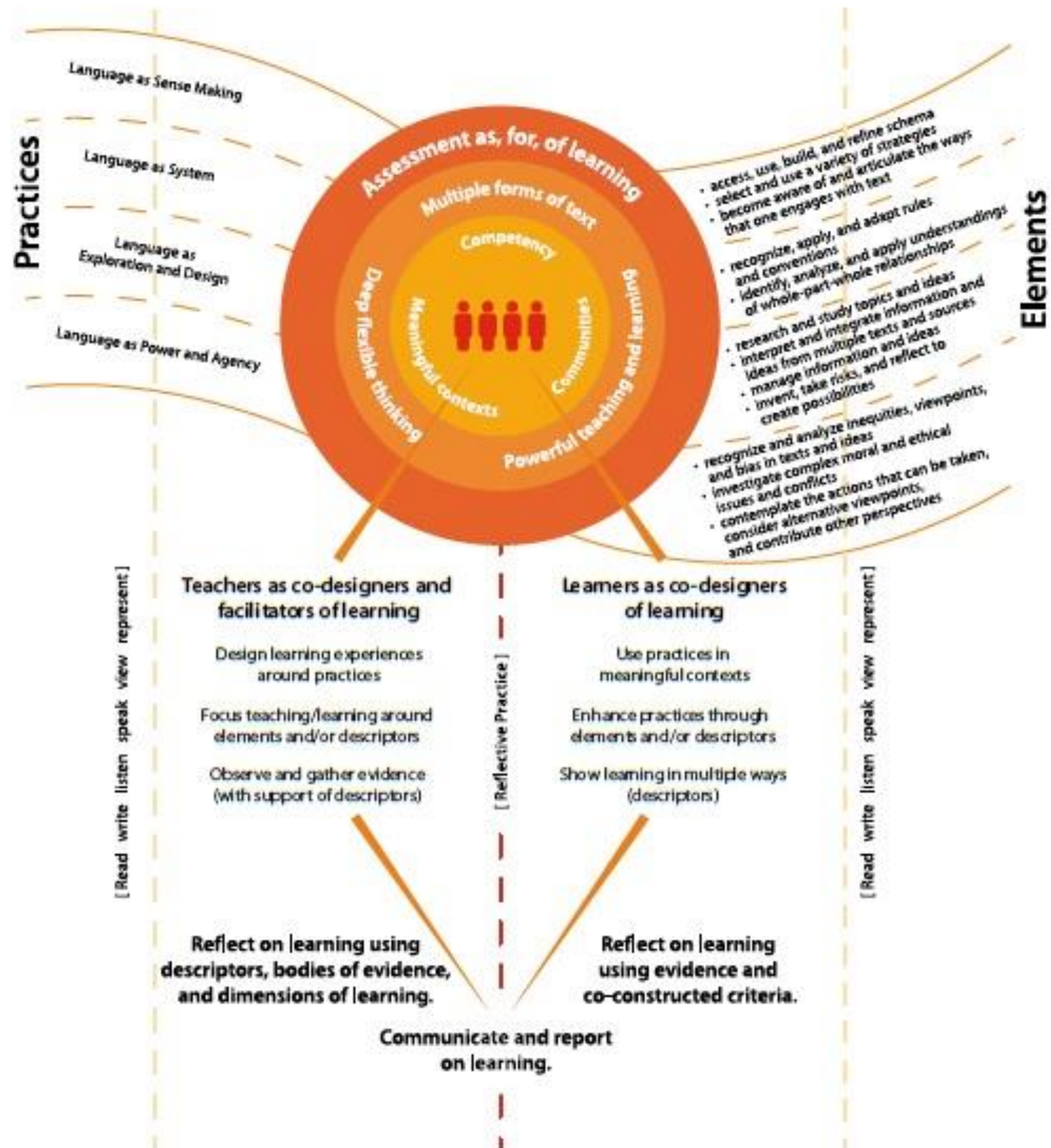
Figure 6

The English Language Arts Conceptual Framework

What Grounds the Design of the ELA Curriculum?

The following graphic represents a large scale view of the ELA curriculum—its conceptual framework. It represents the relationships and the environments that support English language arts learning. Subsequent pages explain each "part of the whole."

The English Language Arts Conceptual Framework



22 ■ English Language Arts Curriculum Framework: A Living Document

This graphic represents "relationships and environments that support ELA learning" (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 22). Four practices flow through the target and

inform the design of meaningful learning experiences. The practices are: language as sense-making, language as system, language as exploration and design, and language as power and agency. Given this overview, I will focus on language as power and agency.

Exploring language as power and agency was there in the curriculum. The difference is that language and literacies as practices of power and agency were embedded in the new curriculum. Language as power and agency refers to interrogating, questioning, and designing and re-designing other meaningful texts (Janks, 2018). The open-endedness of the curriculum document allows a wide range of choices for teaching themes and content. It provides teachers with agency to design rich learning experiences, and it encourages powerful practice, learning, literacy growth, and assessment.

In Emma's words, "there's a lot of power with literacy learning, and I love that our new curriculum has that directly stated" (Emma, Initial Interview). She meant that as a Reading Recovery teacher, she had the responsibility to help "children see language as power" and "realize that they have something to say" (Emma, Initial Interview). As she showed an understanding of the power of children's voices, Emma perceived the centrality of promoting opportunities to engage with students' multiple perspectives in the classroom. Through a critical literacies lens, her attitude indicates understandings of language teaching that encompass students as generators of knowledge (Riley, 2015; Vasquez, 2017). However, this also raises questions about pedagogical choices in her role, and how they created spaces to welcome students' plurilingual repertoires while questioning inequities (Vasquez, 2017). For example, inequities related to classist assumptions, epistemic privilege, and whose background knowledge is relevant at Canadian schools.

In noting the relations he saw between ELA and social class, Joe shared how he had already been working with the theme through the practice of language as power and agency:

> Racism is a great topic to look at in terms of social class, right? For example, like in the novel that we discuss, *The Hate U Give* [(Thomas, 20180], we looked at how a lot of times Black people are seen as inferior, or poor, or from the ghetto, like thugs. And same thing with like the Indigenous in here: they're overrepresented in prisons and in gang violence. And we look at that: Why is it like that? We ask questions: Why did it become like that? So, we definitely look at social class all the time. Why is it—a lot of the times, that certain races are at the bottom of the totem pole? At the bottom of social class? So, we definitely look at it all the time in my English class, at least. (Joe, Initial Interview)

The teacher addressed questions with his students, and it was thought-provoking to analyze how he approached racism and social class using a novel. He explored the practice of language as power and agency through questions that raised the complexities of unequal power relations in society. Thus, he invited students to reflect on the current situation through looking into the past and having students engaging with "an ongoing process of quest for the revelation of 'why' of things and facts" (Freire, 1992/2013, p. 90). By shedding light on the shaping of socio-economic materialities and complexities that intersections of race and class promote, he encouraged his students to reflect on identities and how society produces relations of domination and subordination (Janks, 2010; Levine-Rasky, 2011).

The Power of Teacher-Talk

Aware of the consequences of their discourses, some of the participants reflected on the power of teacher-talk. They reported being afraid of teaching about poverty

because they feared they might harm their students, or at least make them uncomfortable, by sharing their perceptions. Patrick commented on his reasons for not addressing poverty in the classroom:

> It's hard to know because we have such a diverse background of students here, from all over the place. I'm just kind of testing this, I don't know how much I believe it. I wonder how much I haven't talked about it because I wasn't sure if I would cause harm in any way. Recognizing that we have the rich and then we also have those who are not the rich, all within the same building and potentially all within the same class. And I think that's because we serve the entire school division. Sometimes it's easy for kids, and adults too, to refer to certain areas as being rougher or more dangerous than others. (Patrick, Initial Interview)

The educator showed an ethics of care in relation to discourse (Janks, 2018) when it came to the negative differences of specific neighborhoods in the city. Informed by classist understandings, he did not question what other possibilities his students (and even he, as a teacher) could bring to the classroom. Teachers should have opportunities to engage with questions that generate different understandings when deciding what discourses support their views on inequity:

> And I recognize that doing so and a teacher voicing that that sends a message to students about what they believe and what they value. And so I, you know, my hypothesis is I wonder how much that is influenced by silence about poverty. (Patrick, Initial Interview)

His analysis of the reasons for not teaching about poverty, when he silenced a topic in his classroom, led him into a self-reflective moment, prompting a feeling of doing otherwise. Then, as he talked about his ability to discuss gender, he added that

lack of knowledge about social class and how to approach it might have prevented some conversations in his classroom:

> And so what that might suggest, I guess, is that I'm not sure how to address that in the best way. Whereas when we talk about gender, I have no issue exploring those sorts of issues in class. But perhaps it's just because I don't know enough about social class and poverty to effectively kind of facilitate conversations about that. (Patrick, Initial Interview)

Through his anecdote, Patrick observed that knowing the topic becomes central to promoting difficult conversations. In the context of teaching in early years classrooms, Trena reported similar feelings on teaching about poverty:

> It's very on the surface and I don't know it's maybe because they are in kindergarten to grade 3, but I think I'd stick very much to the curriculum and what's there and I don't usually go much deeper than that. I don't know if I'm necessarily afraid of it or afraid that I'm going to say it in the wrong way. (Trena, Initial Interview)

Patrick and Trena shared how talking about social class and poverty in contexts marked by diverse student backgrounds was not an easy task. Concerned about the impacts of their teacher talk, Patrick referred to lack of knowledge about the topics, while Trena shared her fears about the topics and the ways she would address them. Classist assumptions about what poverty looked like seemed to pervade their perceptions (Gorski, 2007; Jones & Vagle, 2013), and that influenced the way they raised the topic in the classroom. Their comments also led to reflections on traditional understandings of the role of teachers as knowers and producers of content, and the critical stance of seeing their roles as inquirers, learners, and re/designers of content through dimensions of power, diversity, and access (Janks, 2013).

Meanwhile, Joe, who had already explored issues of social class and poverty in his diverse classroom, encouraged reflections on going beyond becoming aware of privilege and engaging in changing systems:

> Who should be involved to change this [helping students and youth that are from a lesser privileged position]? We've been technically doing this somewhat same education system for decades, hundred years. We're very much the same in a way. So, what should we be doing? Because I feel like sometimes we're trying to fit. (Joe, Initial Interview)

The teacher reflected on the educational system and how difficult it is to resist and change systems. Freire (1992/2013) reminds us that our duty as progressive educators is to keep the conversation going.

Teacher Learning

As getting updated professionally plays a significant role in teachers' agency, the participants talked about some of their experiences. Kay mentioned how her master's degree was central to some changes in her practices. She shared how she became interested in what informed educational systems:

> They changed probably within the last five or six years. So, before I did my master's degree, I kind of just followed the program. You come to school, a teacher would say here's our course outline, here's what you're going to do, and I would just follow the program. I didn't really dig any deeper than that. But once I started analyzing educational systems and how these programs are formed and where they come from, they can seem to be quite dated and so when you get to that point, and you say, "All right. Well, this course is very dated and here's the time where it came from, how can I adopt that and make it current." (Kay, Initial Interview)

The educator shared how she became more aware of the weight of educational systems and programs in representing students' identities and informing teachers' practices. The adoption of a critical perspective on how e her context was configured, along with the need to respond to an outdated and non-representative program, potentialized her action. It can be interpreted that Kay's agency resulted from a powerful interaction of beliefs, habits, decision-making, critique, and engagement with her context. Accordingly, her agency became a dynamic interplay between routine (past), purpose (future) and judgement (present) (Biesta et al., 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) within and across a set of actions. Engaged in problematizing a program that did not represent her students and changing situations in her context, she imagined possibilities and advocated for changes.

Summary

The question *How do eight teachers articulate their understandings of power, agency, social class, and privilege in English language education before being given focused readings on these matters and discussing them with peers?* involved analyzing participants' perspectives and experiences of social class, privilege, power and agency in educational contexts in Manitoba. Through conceptualizations of social class, the participants mainly engaged with the materiality of economics in contexts and discourses. Reflecting on the role of social class in identity formation contributed to raising observations about meritocracy, privilege, and both opportunities and barriers created by the interplay of other identity categories. Differences in resources and possibilities relative to social class status were central in teachers'accounts. There were insights on social class and its intersectionalities with other identity markers in producing privileged positions in their contexts, while emphasizing what people in lower classes lacked. In mentioning Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee students, the

participants reflected on the heterogeneity they brought to their contexts. Most of them focused on the challenges, complexities, and difficulties of their lived experiences when referring to these students.

As the teachers explored their privileges, they recognized their social class position, race, gender, and family support. Viewing Canada as a society of privilege, some of the participants focused on ongoing government initiatives to reduce the impact of economic differences. They also remarked on the difficulties faced by some groups of people, for example, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and refugees. Informed by discourses of meritocracy, some reinforced the idea of individual effort, choice, and freedom in being successful in this society. Others recognized the power of structures and systems to differentiate opportunities for categories of people. The teachers talked about how their social class positionalities influence their career choice and give them privileges. The teachers that worked at private schools shared some observations regarding how privileged students in these advantaged spaces behaved and the need for interrogating school programs, as well as staff's and students' perspectives on privilege.

Mention of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement revealed the impacts of these events in the educators' teaching contexts and work. Even though COVID-19 increased the difficulties to work with students with no internet access or few technological resources, the participants recognized how their institutions responded to these issues. The Black Lives Matter movement shed light on racism and motivated inquiries and classroom work on the topic. The teachers commented on being attentive to approach racism and remarked on the tokenism at schools when dealing issues of marginalization.

In some educational contexts, pedagogical and administrative decisions reproduced discourses that reinforced normalized neoliberal arrangements of haves and

have-nots, in connection to having access and success. In language education, on the one hand, understandings of literacy levels, as a guide to measure students' success influenced the teachers' habitus and expectations and strengthened stereotypes of students' circumstances and learning. On the other hand, perceptions of homogenizing programs and inquiries into literary privilege motivated pedagogical choices that recognized and responded to differences. Some teachers saw language as power and agency in the ELA curriculum (Manitoba Education, 2020) as license to explore significant and current issues. Further, while some participants had already been teaching about poverty and social class, others reported being afraid to hurt their students' feelings through teacher talk and their positionalities during difficult conversations.

Answering the first research question prompted inquiry that led to insights on the current and ongoing need to discuss normalized views on social class, privilege, power and agency while thinking progressively about English language education in pluricultural contexts. Aware of the partial reading and understanding of this context and its discourses, I draw on Freire (1992/2013) to consider progressive education as respecting students' cultural contexts and lived experiences. In this sense, "the role of the progressive educator, which neither can nor ought to be omitted, in offering her or his 'readings of the world', is to bring out the fact that there are other 'readings of the world'" (Freire, 1992/2013, p. 96, emphasis in original). All that was done and presented in this chapter helped to inform inquiries for the second phase of this research: the online meetings.

Chapter V. English Language Arts: Critical Theories and Professional Inquiries

For this chapter, I focused on data from the online meetings to answer the question: When critical theories inform conversations around English Language Arts education, how are these perspectives displayed through the teachers' dialogic inquiries? As an opportunity to deepen the individual conversations we had during the initial interviews, these group meetings became moments to reflect, inquire, and explore issues of social class, privilege, and language as power and agency and their role on English language learning and teaching. As I wrote about each meeting separately, I selected data that included the participants' conceptualizations, inquiries, reflections, and "A-ha moments" (Morgan, 2019) for this study. These were moments "in which previously unrecognized aspects of language, literacy and everyday life 'suddenly' or 'unexpectedly' [took] on broader ideological relevance and social authenticity" (Morgan, 2019, p. 226). I also analyzed the teachers' engagement with the articles, their own stories, and each other's anecdotes during the online meetings. In casting a critical lens on these conversations, I was interested in the teachers' positionalities and pedagogical choices for language teaching that resisted systems of oppression and advanced conversations that embraced difference as a rule, not as an exception.

In this chapter, dialogues during the group meetings and my analysis are woven together. As the participants were willing to talk, they generated rich dialogue in response to the prompts I offered. They also took on different and new threads throughout this process. I should note that I limited my talk during the meetings to allow for as much participant dialogue as possible. As the participants constructed meanings as a group, I engaged with insights, reflections, and interpretations to build on the meanings they were making and on other possible meanings that emerged during the analysis. My analysis tried to follow and capture responses to their initial questions,

engage with issues they raised concerning the themes of each meeting, and to pursue alternative threads that the participants shared and with which the group engaged during the meetings.

The teachers' questions from their initial interviews and the themes from each meeting primarily guided the selection of the data. Here sometimes conversations as they happened are reproduced, and other times excerpts are selected and put together by theme to show these threads across conversations and meetings. Also, in considering "inquiry as stance" as the ability to question, investigate, make associations, and test hypotheses, I asked the following questions from the data: Where can I go deeper? What points might I raise? Is there anything new that I can see?

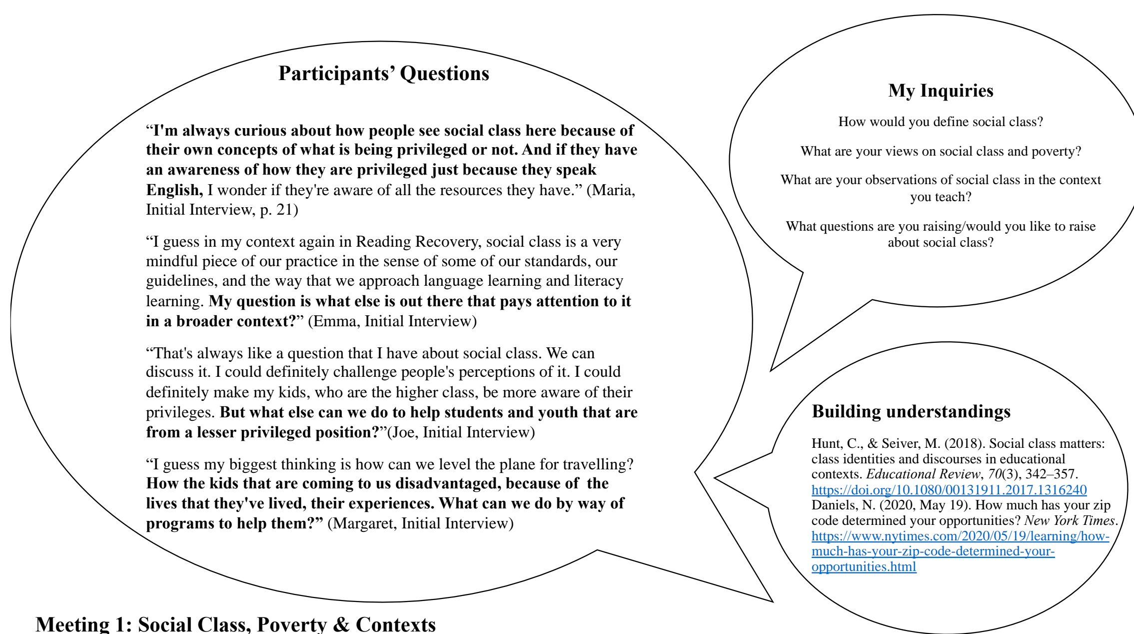
The First Meeting

It was July 14, 2020, a hot summer Tuesday morning in Winnipeg. The sun was shining in a cloudless blue sky, the day was gorgeous, and the noise of Winnipeg construction season was coming through my living room windows. Feeling anxious, I organized my space to start what I considered the most exciting part of this study: getting participants together to inquire about social class in connection with English language teaching and learning and see where these conversations would take us as teachers, learners, and researchers. As hooks (2010) reminds us, "by choosing and fostering dialogue, we engage mutually in a learning partnership" (p. 43), and just as some of the participants mentioned in their initial interviews, I was excited to begin this phase of our work. With my laptop, some books, and papers on the table, I connected on Blue Jeans five minutes before the arranged time to start. I felt very excited to open my screen and see that four participants were already connected. By 10:05 a.m., six participants were connected, and I started the meeting by following some ethical procedures. I reminded them that they had signed the informed consent and I had asked

them to sign a confidentiality waiver and send it to me via email before we started the meeting. We took about ten minutes for these procedures, and after that, we introduced ourselves and talked about some conversation guidelines for the meetings. I organized the first meeting based on the teachers' questions from the initial interviews (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Guiding Questions and References for the First Meeting



The participants had been asked to read two articles so we could discuss them in this meeting. In order to explore concepts and understandings of social class, I selected the article "Social Class Matters: Class Identities and Discourses in Educational Contexts," by Hunt and Seiver (2018). With this choice, the idea was to discuss our conceptualizations of social class and how it is performed in educational contexts. The other article I chose was, "How Much Has Your Zip Code Determined Your Opportunities?", written by Daniels (2020) for the *New York Times*, because it explores

realities and pre-conceptions of opportunities based on where people lived, more specifically on their zip codes.

Engaging with Social Class: Learning from the Articles and Each Other

In their initial interviews, the teachers inquired about what understandings of social class other participants would have. So, we started our discussion by talking about conceptualizations of social class, and for this, I asked the questions "What is social class?", "Where do class discourses live?" (Bettie, 2003), and the quote "Why and how the world is so divided by social class?" (Vandrick, 2014, p. 90) to stimulate the conversation.

> **Researcher**: So, I would like you to say some keywords, or if you want to say some definitions or anything you connect with social class. What comes to your mind?
>
> **Kay**: For me, I think it is an economic divide, economic divisions. That's what makes up the social class in my mind.
>
> **Margaret**: I would agree with that. And I think the more I've been thinking about this lately too in terms of the Black Lives Matter movement, the protests that are going on and then the idea of systemic racism, I'm trying to understand that better. I'm seeing the connection between, you know, the economic disparities certainly, but the fact that you know, race and culture and there's other factors that tie into it and compound that.
>
> **Trena**: I would agree with Kay and Margaret. I think for me, it has always been related to, I guess, the economic part of this. Whether you're in a stable family that's able to provide, and I have been thinking about it more from the articles. And I do think that there's also an aspect of how one is presented, which would be related to buying a house in the right neighborhood, and having your child go

to the correct school, and making sure the car that you drive looks nice, and the clothes that you wear are labeled or name brand. And if there's some of those other pieces that are very visual about people's belief of what social class someone may be part of.

Sasha: Yeah, I agree with everyone so far in terms of what you kind of mentioned here. I was looking at the article from Hunt and Seiver [2018], and I was looking at that my initial impression of social class is always rooted in economics and people's standing, and how well they're doing in terms of their financial situation. But again, there's so much more tied to how people end up in those economic categories, like other demographics, like race, gender, ethnicity, age, all those types of things influence social class, as well.

Emma: I just started thinking of all the complexity involved and thinking of our students, whom we work with, and their social class is already defined for them. And possibly their social classes, their grandparents, and just how it can be very rigid in some ways and then impact on those opportunities that are offered for children.

Patrick: I would kind of just agree with what everyone said. But certainly, for me, the challenge was separating the notion of socioeconomic status and social class and trying to keep them separate, and recognizing socioeconomic status more as a measure and social class more as an identity marker. I think the article ["Social Class Matters: Class Identities and Discourses in Educational Contexts" (Hunt and Seiver, 2018)] was helpful in helping me kind of understand that difference and seeing how terms like poverty, low income, and all of that fit into or fit under the umbrella of the social class overall. And I thought the part of the

article where it talked about just the intersections between social class and everything else results in something quite complicated and complex.

This was our initial interaction about social class, and I included this first exchange in its entirety because it demonstrates several important points at the outset (e.g., the fluidity, the weaving in of references to readings, and the participants' openness to learn more about social class and its complexities). The fluidity of this conversation (at least, as I felt it) showed how participants added to each other's definitions, engaging with the topic in thoughtful ways.

This was an opportunity for them to see that their initial views on social class had some similarities in relation to the centrality of financial and material aspects. Their conceptions were initially informed by neoliberal understandings that indicated connections with the haves and have-nots of a capitalist society (Holborow, 2012; Jones & Vagle, 2013; Monbiot, 2016). The article by Hunt and Seiver (2018) and observations of social class and racism (Margaret) motivated them to share thoughts on social class positions as produced in relation with other identity markers. Although the participants considered the complexities that positioned individuals in different social classes, there were few mentions of how systems worked to maintain social class inequalities (Margaret, Emma).

Social Class as Performance and as Performing Us

In the sequence, I tried to relate the idea of social class and performance:

Researcher: I think the article by Hunt and Seiver [(2018)] also gave us some input to think about social class as performance and as performing us. So, I'd like to hear your thoughts on that too, if you would like to share. How do you see that? Because we usually talk about the materiality of social class, but we can also talk about the discourses of social class, where those discourses live,

how they perform us and how they perform society. Would you like to comment on that?

As they engaged with this question, Emma talked about perceptions of social class in educational contexts and mentioned to the consequences of preconceived notions:

Emma: You see someone as a certain class, and it categorizes them. You have all these preconceived notions of what that social class entails. And so, getting to the heart of what that child is or can do or can't do.

The educator talked about how lived experiences might inform preconceived notions of how social class affects teachers' views of students' performances. It is important to keep in mind that in public schools, decisions are informed by middle/ upper-middle class ideas (Gorski, 2007; Orlowski, 2012; Reay, 2004; Windle & Maire, 2019). In this sense, Emma's comments raise observations on the role of teachers and schools in perpetuating inequities through symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As an example, she mentions evaluating students' performance without taking into account the central role social inequities play in students' success and failures at school (Jones & Vagle, 2013).

Then, Sasha pointed out the tensions between teachers' social class experiences and their own performance in the classroom:

Sasha: I think it also influences not just the student and how a teacher perceives the student, but also how the teachers perceive themselves and then how that becomes something that you embody in your own teaching. I know that' something I struggled with, from jumping from public to private school and having a very different demographic. Then, I was teaching from my own experience, and there is that really big imposter syndrome. I cannot cope with

> that, or you're not exactly in that, in the same place that you had grown up in, and so there's these weird tensions and assumptions that you make about your students and say that access to resources that they may have in their own home versus like what you grew up with. So, there's lots of weird tensions there that you kind of have to overcome as well.

Confronted by teaching experiences that highlighted social class differences, Sasha drew attention to the feelings teachers may have within themselves in relation to social class while performing their jobs. As she named tensions that students' demographics raise in a classroom, she reflected on the assumptions that teachers have in relation to their own and their students' social class.

Inquiring About Struggling Readers

According to Hunt and Seiver (2018), "struggling readers" are usually associated with a deficit mindset related to marginalized students because of their social class. In connection with the teacher talk piece, Sasha pulled the following thread:

> **Sasha**: Yeah, I wanted to echo Trena kind of there. One of the articles mentioned something about this concept of struggling readers and that sort of thing, right? And it kind of reminds me, I was talking to my partner about it, and we're both teachers, and we're thinking like, okay, some of that stuff is actually really useful for a teacher to have discussions and to talk about assessment and to navigate our world and to be able to say: "Okay, what am I going to do for those students in my class who are in this category?" And there's that weird tension that you feel, as well, in doing that. Like part of me feels a little guilty by using an adjective to discuss a student when it's useful for teachers to do that. But at the same time, it's that labelling, and you're like: "Oh, I feel kind of dirty labelling a kid like that." I don't really know how to navigate that in a way that's

fair and not like, obviously, you would never say that to a kid. But at the same time, we say it in our staff meetings and things like that. There are the kids who are struggling, who are low or whatever it happens to be because we use different language now that it's still essentially the same thing. I feel a little weird doing that. And then when you look at it: Are you doing that based on these social class assumptions, or is it actually based on academic ability? That kind of brought in my understanding of that as well. It's like: "Well, where are these labels coming from, and how are you driving them?" But at the same time, I still don't know how to use effective language to talk to my colleagues about assessment in relation to these kids while also honoring the fact that these kids are very individual, they come from different environments and not labelling them and giving them some sort of like a self-fulfilling prophecy that we do in our own heads. I still don't really know how to navigate that myself.

Margaret: And I think it's really problematic too when teachers make assumptions about it because this student struggles at reading. They must not have a home where reading happens. I think we need to face those conversations in the data around the student and not in the assumptions that we make—and again, going back to what people were saying earlier about how we categorize.

Trena: Teacher talk is the tool of our trade. Yet, how thoughtfully are we supported to examine that? Honestly, in my own experiences, my training that I had as an early intervention teacher, in my Reading Recovery training, and my experiences examining teacher talk has been a key component of the training. It starts off with, "We'll say these prompts," but then it gradually turns into, "Well, what do these prompts mean, and when would you use them?" I think Margaret, you had mentioned the idea of using our data. Our data inform us. So,

> being able to recognize when children are able to do something, and it may not look like what we would hope this child to do right now. But that's where they’re at and being able to put a name to that. I just keep thinking of the complexity of all the little bits and the components that go into it. And it’s no wonder it’s so tricky, sometimes, to use the right language.

While Sasha inquired about the consequences of teacher talk, she focused on the understanding of students’ performance in connection with social class and considered her own lived experiences. The educator shared that she felt guilty when referring to students as struggling readers. At the same time that she did not know how to do it differently; she could not avoid the use of terms. Drawing on Triplett (2007), the Hunt and Seiver (2018) explain that the concept of “struggling readers” is often based on socially constructed deficit discourses around home and community literacies, parents’ support, and material resources. The curriculum or institutionalized practice (e.g., turning to Fountas & Pinnell (2022) and levels) reinforce these discourses, which contributes to building up teachers’ assumptions about students who need literacy interventions.

As Sasha inquired about assumptions, “Are you doing that based on these social class assumptions, or is it actually based on academic ability?”, and Margaret talked about “data around students,” I asked the teachers:

> **Researcher**: Where does this idea of struggling come from? Struggling readers? I think we can look at data, and I like the way you said that, Emma, about the way we put language on that. But I keep thinking about how we have come to keep this cycle of repeating those discourses. And I also see Sasha’s concern about how we could stop that. How can we do that in a different way? I think we could talk a little bit about this idea of struggling, too.

When I questioned data, I was wondering what data teachers had in hand that described students as "struggling readers"? I wondered if teachers had ever questioned the information that was there and the profile of who would easily become labelled as a "struggling reader." Participants took turns in commenting about "struggling readers" and "struggling students":

> **Kay**: I'm working at the high school level, so I can think of a few students who are on bursary at my school. They wouldn't be able to come to the school without the bursary. And you hear teachers saying things like you're saying like: "She sleeps in and she never shows up on time," and "She doesn't hand anything in, and it doesn't matter how many times I remind her," or, "I call home and nobody there seems to care." And it's almost like those ideas become excuses to not engage that student.
>
> **Margaret**: I come from the high school perspective. So, it's interesting by the time we get them in high school that they've really bought into that identity piece, "I struggle, I don't do well, I'm not going to do well, and you have to really work at that idea." Trying to change their mindset to that growth mindset that, "Well, you don't have this yet. But we're gonna keep working on it." I think systemically to our school systems, we've got so many kids, and they get passed along, and when you get to a situation where they can have some one-to-one, you can make great headway. I think part of it is just the institutionalization of the way we do school that kids get labelled very early on and don't find a way to get on that.
>
> **Sasha**: I think that's very similar to both experiences that I had in the past. When you think about who is considered struggling and not. My main kind of

thing at this point is like, I look at the IEPs as an Individual Education Plan [15] and things like that. Then I remember in my first school, it was really hard because my principal once told me: “How about you hold off on looking at those IEPs, and I want you to look at how the kid performs and then make your assumptions and understandings after that. You don’t actually know which kid needs certain support in certain areas.” And there was and having gone through that experience and then going through the experience of a school which was very open with it and said: “Hey, look, these are the kids in your class. This is what they need. This is a lot.” It was interesting because there was a benefit in that.

Kay: I’ve always been curious about like I’ve encountered that attitude as like should you get the background on the student, or shouldn’t you? I'm not sure where that comes from. And if it’s an idea that you can’t trust the colleagues that went before you, like whoever put those notes down or is it that it’s going to make us biased when we then encounter those students? I would hope that we’re all able to read the information on a student’s background and then still see the person in front of us and understand where they're coming from and the growth that they’ve had over time.

Trena: There should be supports that are universal and able to support all children whether you are white or black, or English as an additional language to be based on what that child needs that they can be successful so that you the classroom teacher can offer that support to all students because it will benefit

[15] IEP stands for Individual Educational Plan. According to Manitoba Education, it is “a written document developed and implemented by a team, outlining a plan to address the individual learning needs of students” (Manitoba Education, 2010, p. 6). Manitoba Education (2010) has a handbook for developing and implementing IEPs available online.

> them all and move that child along with the rest of the class. It’s interesting, institutionally, they have things set up and that the policies and procedures we have set up are not always helpful.

The participants reflected on categorizing students as “struggling readers” and on what was involved in this classification in their contexts. In analyzing some of these characteristics, the teachers recognized that it might be related to their students’ social class positions, for example, when Kay mentioned how teachers talked about students who were on a bursary in her school. In inquiring about attitudes towards IEPs, the participants shared how these plans helped teachers, but at the same time, might contribute to creating stereotypes about students. While Trena detailed some of the information that might be in an IEP, she verbalized her will of homogenizing students’ needs and learning processes: “There should be supports that are universal and able to support all children whether you are white or black, or English as an additional language, to be based on what that child needs that they can be successful.”

According to Menezes de Souza and Duboc (2021), decolonial perspectives regard universal knowledge as “the knowledge produced nowhere by nobody” (p. 879) and question it “in order to recuperate the spatial/geographic aspect of the coloniality of knowledge” (p. 879). Trena might not be aware that her claim for a universal evaluation carries colonial understandings of what is considered to be a successful English language user.

Patrick critically questioned the use of the term “struggling” by bringing in places and bodies:

> **Patrick:** I think it’s really important that we interrogate this word struggling and according to whom, because although I mean, even as a group collectively we’ve identified that it's not good, we continue to use that word. I mean that

says a lot of the power of that word in our teacher talk. Anyway, if we recognize how wrong it is but we still use it. Who says that they're struggling? And I think, especially right now with the COVID context, you hear a lot of conversation about kids going behind when they come back in the fall? And like so what does that mean? According to whom? COVID related, I'm wondering in which schools are you going to hear teacher teams say: "Oh, they'll be fine." And in which schools are you going to hear them say: "Oh well, you know what, we got to go back to basics. They are going to be so far behind." And I wouldn't be surprised if you found that negative teacher talk, and these deficit discourses in those schools where the conversation as you know we've got to get them caught up because the reality is that students are always behind, so to speak. We always, as someone mentioned, do our best to bring them along. I think we have to really interrogate quite harshly that notion of struggling with that notion of being behind because, like says, who? And then we look at English. Scientists like Fountas and Pinnell [(20220] have nothing to do with Manitoba, but we rely so heavily on it. We're constantly talking about reading levels, and those are important measures for teachers to know. But how does that fit into the big picture? We often then turn to just what feels right. Well, there are no answers, so I better turn to Fountas and Pinnell [(20220]. It's the best thing out there, and unfortunately, our new curriculum doesn't really clarify much of any thinking. What we do is we continue operating with arbitrary frameworks that probably perpetuate a lot of these issues we've identified with regard to social class.

Patrick complicated the discussion by drawing attention to the contentious use of the term "struggling" and added other layers, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, to reflect on which schools would respond to students – which would say, "they're fine"

and which would say “we need to go back and teach the basics.” Such a distinction would be related to where deficit discourse is prevalent. By relating “struggling students” and “being behind,” he questioned who decided which students would be categorized as so and where. He also inquired about evaluation systems that were broadly used, but lacked contextualized information about assessment, and contributed to reproducing deficit discourses based on social class. Patrick was critically aware of such issues and thus encouraged the other teachers to look at and question the roots of their assumptions about their school contexts and students’ performances, while considering how society and school systems informed what should be privileged and marginalized in their classrooms.

Analyzing the term “struggling readers” through the lenses of social class allowed the teachers to question taken-for granted assumptions about their students’ performances. The problematization of the language that teachers and schools use to refer to students who present low performance, led to reflections on evaluations and assumptions based on neoliberal notions of social class. Revisiting the term enabled discussions about classist discourses and attitudes that reproduced inequalities at educational institutions.

I concluded this meeting with two questions: What deficit views and discourses do we notice in our contexts? How are social class discourses reproduced and resisted within the K-12 educational system in Manitoba? As I invited teachers to observe their contexts with these inquiries, I reminded them about the readings for Meeting 2. The intention was to generate questions and thoughts on views and discourses that involved issues of social class in their teaching settings and the educational system in Manitoba.

The First Meeting: Tracking Inquiries

After the meeting, I tracked some of the participants' discourses from the first meeting. Table 5 shows some of their inquiries.

Table 5

Participants' Initial Inquiries, as Raised in the First Meeting

Inquiring about struggling readers	**Sasha**: Okay, what am I going to do for those students in my class who are in this category [struggling students]? Are you doing that based on these social class assumptions, or is it actually based on academic ability? Well, where are these labels coming from, and how are you driving them?
	Kay: And if it's an idea that you can't trust the colleagues that went before you, like whoever put those notes down [on an IEP] or is it that it's going to make us biased when we then encounter those students?
	Patrick: I think it's really important that we interrogate this word struggling and according to whom, because although I mean, even as a group collectively we've identified that it'the s not good, we continue to use that word. And so, I think we have to really interrogate quite harshly that notion of struggling with that notion of being behind because, like, says who? We're constantly talking about reading levels, and those are important measures for teachers to know. But how does that fit into the big picture?
Inquiring about teacher talk	**Trena**: Teacher talk is the tool of our trade. Yet, how thoughtfully are we supported to examine that?

By engaging in the topic of struggling readers through the lenses of social class, participants questioned the relations between teachers' social class assumptions and attitudes towards assessment, inquired about assessment instruments, and reflected on teachers' biases and teacher talk. Encouraged by critical literacies lenses, the teachers

engaged with a reflective attitude on assumptions about social class and questioned what and whose knowledge was privileged and/or marginalized by assessments, schools, and teachers. For the second meeting, their questions about social class assumptions and teachers' biases led me to plan a moment to analyze their own positionalities. There was also an invitation for them to explore and interrogate assessment instruments and their discourses concerning social class in the classroom.

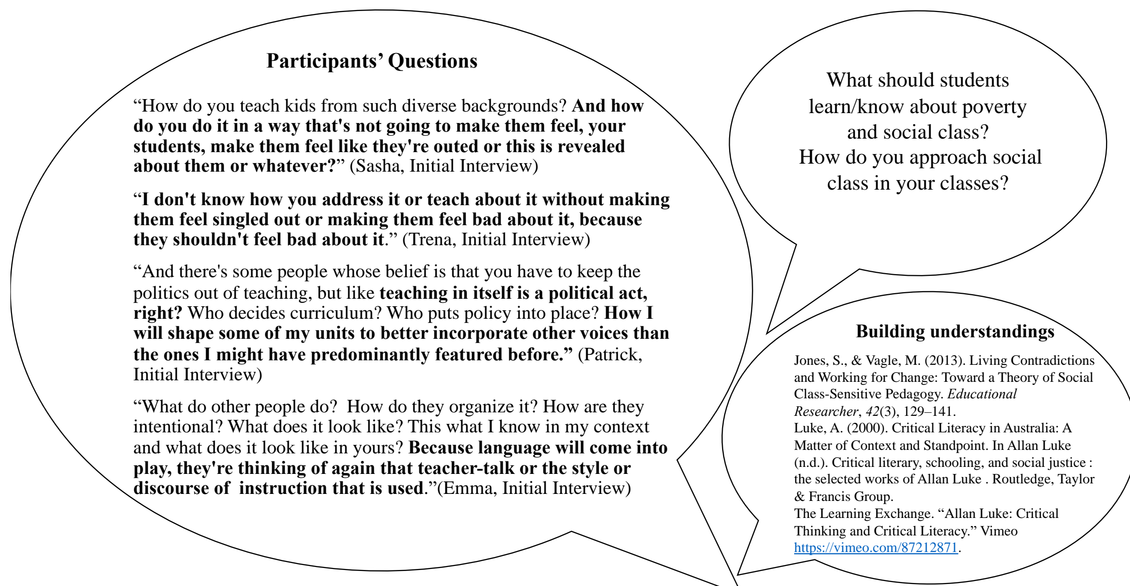
The Second Meeting

There were two second meetings. One of them happened on July 28, 2020, with Emma, Margaret, Sasha, and Trena. The other meeting was on August 4, 2020, as Patrick and Kay had written to me saying that they could not be present on July 28 meeting. Consequently, we arranged a different date to meet separately. I felt more excited and less anxious for the second meeting, mainly because all the participants in the first meeting wanted to continue the conversation. The second meeting was aimed at exploring critical literacies as a lens to inform texts and discussions. I suggested the article "Living Contradictions and Working for Change: Toward a Theory of Class-Sensitive Pedagogy," written by Jones and Vagle (2013), because it presents a class-sensitive pedagogy that encompassed theory and practice. My second suggestion was the article "Critical literacy in Australia: A matter of context and standpoint," by Luke (2000), as it explores how language works to convince readers while regarding critical awareness through the analysis of the context of text production and the context of the reader. As part of the preparation for this meeting, I also asked the participants to watch a video by Luke (2013) before we met. In this video, the author clarifies the difference between critical thinking and critical literacy. I found this video in the resource list of the ELA curriculum under the practice of language as power and agency in the section called "Further Reading, Viewing, and Researching" (Manitoba Education, 2020, p.

48). I relied on our initial interviews and the first meeting as guides to organize the second meeting around several of the participants' questions (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Guiding Questions and References for the Second Meeting

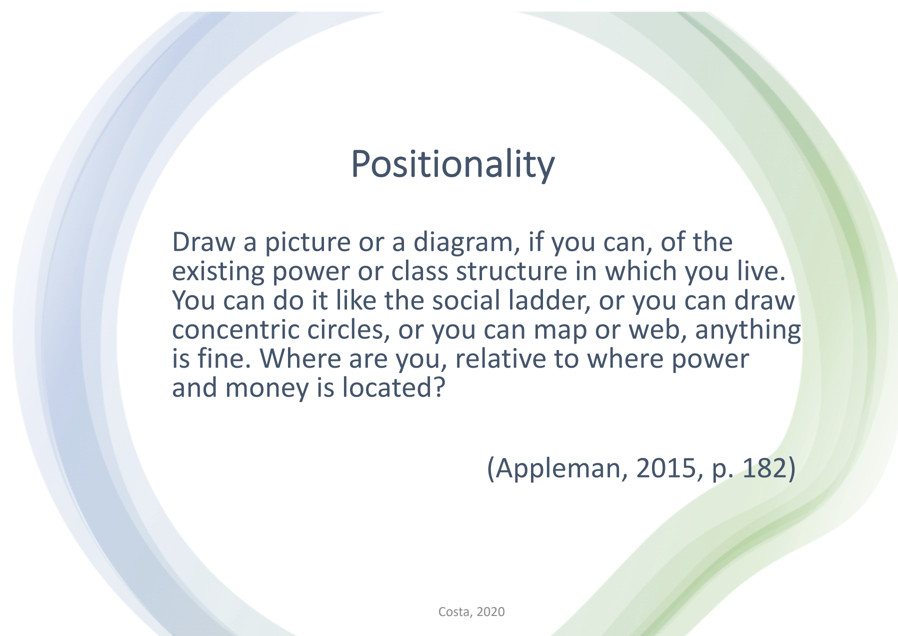


Becoming Aware: Classism, Classist Discourses, Privileges and Politics

In the context of this study, to think about one's positionality is considered a stimulus to become more conscious about social positions and how they influence readings of the world. Moreover, "knowing or naming the position from which one speaks is an important part of being able to speak from another position regardless of whether that is a counter position or complimentary position" (Vasquez et al., 2013, p. 62). The initial exercise I designed for Meeting 2 was aimed at creating an opportunity to name positions and reflect on what they represented and how they influenced interpretations of their teaching contexts. Drawing on Appleman (2015), I invited the participants to think about their positionality concerning money and power (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Positionality Exercise Slide

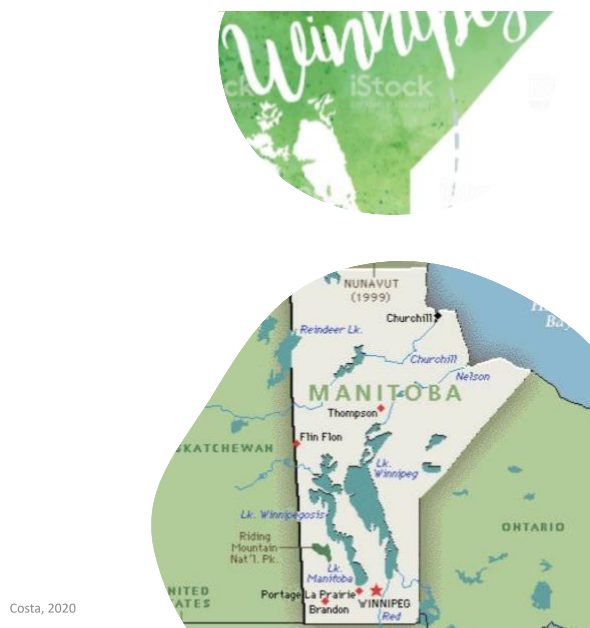


I also had a follow-up question I asked them to consider the implications of their social class location in reading their teaching context (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Contextualizing Positionality Slide

To what degree do you think your social class location affects your reading of your teaching context?



I told the teachers that they had the choice to share or not their drawings with the group, and they individually chose not to show their visuals. The participants talked about how successful they felt in terms of money and positioned themselves as middle-class or upper-middle-class. Some of them also mentioned the role of their race and gender in supporting or hindering their climbing of the ladder of success:

> **Sasha:** I get to change my social ladder. I was trying to put myself somewhere, and I'm writing all these demographic points: political influence, I have white, male, wealthy connected. And then I had a struggle because I was like, okay, wait, I'm a woman. And if somebody is a male, who is a person of color and still wealthier than me, the woman thing makes me look historically—if you were a woman and there was somebody who was a person of color, you were above anyway.
>
> **Emma:** I think as a white, heterosexual female. I think my positionality, I have a fluctuating positionality which in itself, I think it is a privilege in some ways. Because while my husband and I, with our four kids, we've certainly gone up and down that ladder as a family, and there's been times where I don't think we've ever really been in the red. And so, there would be some times where you think: "Oh my gosh, this is really hard." But I think looking back on it now, I'm realizing that even though you might have moved up and down the social ladder, I think I always realized we had this safety net of kind of being like a white, middle-class family.
>
> **Margaret:** My mom was a single mom in the 70s, when it wasn't really accepted to be a divorced woman. I always thought that I didn't grow up with a lot of privilege. But then looking at it now in 2020 and looking back, yeah, I didn't have any trouble getting into university. I knew the path to take, the

> doors, like you were saying, the doors were there, and I knew it wasn't terribly difficult.

Speaking from privileged positions, the teachers shared how their positionalities provided more opportunities and choices, often easing their efforts to overcome barriers. They pondered about their standpoints and privileges, especially when talking about their positions in relation to power and accomplishments. When analyzing these excerpts, I noticed how their experiences, coming from a quite homogeneous background in terms of positionalities, reinforced meritocratic discourses and some questions emerged, for me: What issues would not be there if the group were more diverse? How could I question the way they talked about their privilege? Should we start by recognizing our privileges?

In the meeting with Kay and Patrick, they talked about their standpoints and focused on their family support:

> **Patrick:** And where I kind of position myself in the ladder, if you will, is towards the upper-middle section. But in reading some of the articles and it was interesting to consider that this answer kind of also answers the question on the slide of "How does it affect the reading of my teaching context?" 'Cause I was adopted from birth, and so I know that if I had not been adopted, my life would've been very different. I think even forcing yourself to consider your positionality is a very beneficial exercise to consider how it affects the reading of your teaching context, 'cause I know as a result of thinking through that and knowing how my life would've been really different (…) And I having not been adopted, I don't know if I would be participating in this conversation here because I wouldn't have had access to family, access to connections that would have allowed me to go to university and finish a couple of degrees, and go back

to university and do a post bac [post baccalaureate] and find a job, and learn French.

While Patrick recognized how his life would be different if he had not been adopted, Kay also reflected on how the educational system is not neutral and had implications for the way she reflected on her positions:

Kay: Yeah, I would agree too, kind of without the family and support that I had, I wouldn't be where I am today. There were a few quotes that stood out to me in some of the readings that I did, but one that really affected me was, "There is no such thing as a neutral education process", right? The process that we went through ourselves was not neutral, and the process that we're engaging in now is not neutral. If you're thinking of all of that hierarchy of government of institutions, we're really a cog in that machine. Either the education can serve to support that system or break down that system. We're seeing a lot of that in the news today, and some of the movements today are that some of our institutions are not neutral. They're a part of this system that we're living inside. When I see my position now, and as I grew up, you have to kind of take all of that into account, and they're kind of affected my thinking about it, really.

Kay and Patrick analyzed how their families had a central role in their positionality through the connections and opportunities to which they had access.

It was interesting to see how "positioning and identity are key dimensions of agency and hence key elements of what it means to take on a critical stance" (Vasquez et al., 2013, p. 69). When reflecting on positions in relation to money and power, identity markers naturally became part of the conversation. These identity markers also led to critical reflections on meritocracy and the classist discourses and practices that teachers might reproduce in their teaching contexts without being aware of them.

Moreover, the exercise showed how naming our positions contributed to critical perspectives in terms of being part of the conversation, raising observations on how the participants recognized the forms that privilege might take in their pedagogical practices, as for example, in their choices of what to teach and which conversations to engage with in their classrooms.

While they explored their standpoints, the teachers also shared readings of their contexts:

> **Trena:** I think I mentioned at the last minute that one school that I was at was one of the more have-schools in the division that I was working at, and I moved to a school that is one level down. So, if you look at the layers and call them green, amber, and red schools based on student needs and poverty. I'm at the amber school now, but it's still like, I mean, like let's say it's a good school.

Trena talked about the classification of the schools according to color[16], and by mentioning that the school she worked at was "one level down," she said, "but it's still like, I mean, like let's say it's a good school." I took note of this comment during the meeting, as I considered it to be a classist comment about what good schools should look like and what characteristics a good school has. While she was talking, Trena did not question the impacts of the use of demographics of poverty for classifying and categorizing schools and how that might influence individual perceptions of the contexts.

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[16] When I asked for the document, Trena said that this was not a public document. According to the teacher, school divisions use colors to designate schools in terms of their needs over the years. These colors are related to breakfast programs, behaviors, academic, clinician involvement, students in foster care, how long students remain in that school (high rates of moving in or out of the catchments), and housing information. She also said that "this would then be used to cross reference with what schools are asking for—extra funding, extra support, more clinical support (services for students in need) and academic needs. It would also be used to plan for supports and programs."

Sasha went next, referred to the color classification mentioned by Trena, and explored the complexity of her positionality, adding layers to the discussion:

> **Sasha:** In terms of the teaching context, I was just thinking how awkward it feels right now. It's like having an amber background, I suppose, like my family as well. The way that my parents and everybody, I grew up. I was kind of the first person in my immediate family to go to university, and like my father was a trucker, which is something that would have resonated with like my previous school. And I was in it, and then, I was actually in a very wealthy position. My amber background would have been really weird for those kids, who were in the red zone that I was working in like two years ago. And now, I'm working in a school that's definitely green. And so, for me, it feels weird because I'm passing around in my Honda Civic from 2006 and then they're like these Land Rovers and stuff. It's odd because like I'm older, I'm educated, but these kids have so much influence. It's just a weird power dynamic. And it happened the same way but reversed when I was in that red school, and I was going to an amber position. I still very much felt the power dynamic, but it was more like I didn't want to say anything, and I didn't want to make assumptions about my kids because I knew it was such a different experience. It's like if you're not on the same level, it feels very awkward.

The educator talked about social class performances. She expressed her feelings in dealing with social class differences and how that affected her power dynamic as a teacher. The materiality of power and money is represented by the possessions and connections that people have in this society, and Sasha put in words the weird feelings that material differences produce. Also, Trena briefly talked about the colors to classify schools, and I reflected on how Sasha and Emma used the colors, probably taking for

granted that they had similar understandings, even though it was the first time they were seeing this classification. This attitude raises questions about how classifications might overly simplify complex situations and lead to generalizations and understandings that do not consider local and individual issues.

Emma connected to the emotional link that Sasha mentioned when talking about her school context:

> **Emma:** I feel it, I felt it a few times, that dissonance when I meet with families who are more vulnerable. And I'm very aware of just how to talk to them without being hopefully classist or elitist. I'm just very aware of it. I feel it when I meet with families. When I meet the families who are on par with my experiences, it's a lot easier, of course. But then again, you shift when you meet with families, who are perhaps more affluent, where absolutely if you have more or have different expectations for their children. Sometimes it's very emotional and a little tiring as you try to navigate. But I feel like this is the only way I can really explain that.

When exploring social class in her context, Emma emphasized how teachers needed to be aware of the use of elitist and classist language. She regarded dealing with social class differences as hard, and emotional work, which demands an awareness of the language teachers use with kids and parents. She also said, "But then again, you shift when you meet with families, who are perhaps more affluent, where absolutely if you have more or have different expectations for their children." This comment signaled the different expectations that teachers have according to students' backgrounds. Further, it prompts questions such as how these expectations influence teachers' views on what students are able to do, and what views of language teaching and learning inform these expectations.

Class impacts, class affects, class matters (hooks, 2010). When talking about social class, narratives of lived experiences showed how class might also be treated as a "complex affective experience" (Lindquist, 2004, p. 190). Emotions and effects emerged through stories that encompassed how Emma, Margaret, Sasha, and Trena felt in situations where social class differences became apparent. Through a critical language teaching perspective, Morgan et al. (2021) state that when feelings take the stage, "we might ask ourselves how we recognize and harness our own emotional and affective fragility in productive ways related to our teaching and research" (p. 345). By sharing their understandings of these differences, they reported feelings of anxiety about not knowing how to deal with classroom situations in which social class differences emerged. Interrogating these feelings might lead to pedagogical practices that consider the centrality of subjectivities and emotions in the classroom.

Teaching Choices: Difficult Conversations

Considerations of the challenges of teaching about sensitive topics and having difficult conversations with students from diverse backgrounds were a common thread during the meetings. Margaret connected perceptions of social class in her context with the material needs of students and talked about how conversations will vary depending on the group of students you have:

> **Margaret:** I'm in a big high school. We don't necessarily see who's got a lunch or who doesn't. And some of those kinds of things, so yeah, it's difficult sometimes. I was thinking about the readings too, and thinking about how the conversations we have with kids and how you want to be careful sometimes, or at least, become kind of more aware of that as our school has changed over the years. Just conversations like, "What are you going to do for the summer?" Some kids have all these plans, and they're travelling or whatever, and then

others maybe go to look for a summer job because they have to help support the family. So, you kind of don't want to have these conversations with the class as a whole because you don't want kids that don't have those opportunities feeling kind of stigmatized or whatever.

Margaret talked about how difficult it is to have conversations in groups of students with diverse backgrounds, especially when topics raise class differences. In this case, she highlighted the topic of summer activities, which was in one of the texts, and the classist answers that this topic might generate. She was concerned that these conversations might cause embarrassment. Silencing conversations in which differences become central might reflect care, but it might also impede critical reflections on differences.

Sasha shared her experience with kids in care:

Sasha: I remember a moment where I taught one of those kids, and I think he wrote some sort of like a gang sign on a piece of paper when I was doing a roundtable thing. And then I pulled him aside, and I'm like, hey. This was my first year as a teacher, I'm like, "Oh God! How do I navigate this? And I was kind of like, "Let's not do that." And some kids might not know what that means. Some kids do know what that means. Like, "Let's not put that on our papers in a public forum, right?" And then he said like he literally said, and I wrote, this will stick with me forever: "You do know where you're teaching, right?" And that was it. And I was like, that just hit me like really hard. Like, it was gonna be a struggle, and these kids are savvy like he was like: "You better just admit defeat now." And I was saying: "Oh, God! what am I in for?" That was a very rough position. I just kind of stood, let's try working together here kind of thing, and that's the best I could do. That was tough. I had a lot of

experiences like that. And it was just like these kids would take that and not have any aspirations, or feel like they can get out of that, or they just didn't want to or that they just, I don't know if that sort of thing just kind of they heard it all the time.

In another context, Sasha experienced a completely different reality in terms of students' backgrounds. By telling the story of the gang sign, she reflected on how her lack of teaching experience and knowledge about her context made her feel unable to deal with that situation. When the student said, "You know where you're teaching, right?" he challenged her and positioned himself as knowledgeable of his context. Sasha lacked knowledge of the context, she seemed to be stuck in her own assumptions about what students would be able to do and achieve.

Students' stories might be silenced due to teachers' fears about what to do with these stories (Dutro, 2011). In contexts marked by inequities, students might present narratives of trauma and vulnerability. When these stories come up, Dutro (2011) points out that literacy teachers should engage with them through *critical witnessing*, which is an alternative to draw on these stories with a learning and testifying attitude towards students' contexts, difficulties, and possibilities. According to the author, exploring how these narratives function for students and for teachers is a way of challenging privileged views on situations. Furthermore, the case of the gang sign creates opportunities to critically analyze images using social, historical, and cultural lenses.

In looking at the context of early years, Trena brought in many questions about engaging with teaching possibilities that might raise discussions on inequalities:

Trena: My school has emergency care. Kids will come for two or three months, and then they're gone. So when they arrive, we need a desk in this classroom and supplies for this child. And so, it's kind of throwing everything together last

> minute. They're not there with their preparations (…), and we talk about that being sensitive. Can we have a discussion about this as a class? I don't know. Is it going to put the child on the spot? I'm going to make this child feel bad because they're in foster care. Are they going to feel singled out? But those may be our conversations that you're saying that I want to have with you. Why is it you're drawing a gang signal? Why is that a rez kid? Where did that come from, and why are they internalizing it and speaking it back? So, are they using it as a fallback or a safety blanket? How do we then have a discussion with that child or a group discussion where we talk about those sensitive pieces? Because we want to break the cycle, but if you just kind of don't have the conversation, then the cycle continues, right? Because we, "Oh yeah, you're the best kid, you're right, okay? Well, don't give up, right?" And that's not the attitude you want to give them or to say to them, but how do you have that conversation without your own values popping in?

When Trena talked about the "emergency kid," she showed how challenging it was to engage with the kid's feelings, even though the student tried to share those in the classroom. Again, teachers' values, expectations, and feelings play a central role in which conversations will be continued in the classroom. Inquiries about this challenge might lead to understandings of how and whose feelings are treated at schools: Is the school a place for sharing feelings? Whose feelings are discussed in the classroom? Is there a place for sharing and talking about teachers' feelings at schools? Aware of the need to engage with these conversations, Trena reflected on teachers' values, which might suggest understandings that do not meet students' values, and the kind of values that surface when dealing with students from difficult backgrounds. Deficit views create deficit discourses and vice-versa. Trena, as an experienced teacher—she had been

teaching for 17 years—and Sasha, as a first-year teacher, brought in similar dilemmas when dealing with students' stories in the classroom context.

Sasha shared how overwhelmed she was as a result of the disparities with which she had to deal as a first-year teacher:

> **Sasha:** It was tough, and I wish I had more experience at that point to be able to navigate that situation in a positive way. But at the time, I was panicking, like I didn't know how to. It was my first year, and I was like, "Oh my God, I don't know what to do." I feel like crying every day because I was such a disparity of my own experience seeing what the kids were experiencing and seeing this kind of life that they were dealing with. That was just emotionally draining and exhausting.

Sasha's views on their reality might have prevented her from having a positive and prompt response towards her students' needs. Emma, another experienced teacher in the group, joined the conversation with the addition of several points:

> **Emma:** Listening to everything, again I was writing questions as people were talking and just one of them was: What do children need from us? Invitations to try on different identities? But then, as a teacher, you're in a particular position of power. How can I encourage children to try on different narratives but start with where they're at? So, honoring the experience they do bring. What I might assume might be a better narrative for this child may not be what's appropriate for them. And how do you support them [by] developing a more gentle stance, but starting with where they're at? That's always the tricky part, but then thinking about where we're coming from and just Sasha's self-awareness of that moment—and like, "Oh my gosh!"— I think that in a sense, I think our own

> circles of that dissonance, though. That's just dissonance. I think that without that experience that you can't really move forward.

In taking an inquiry stance towards the stories, Emma noted some questions and reminded the group to start "with where [students] are at." Her questions experimented with a way of diminishing deficit discourses while considering children's understandings of their identities. As Emma reminded teachers of the importance of classroom experiences in which we become aware of "dissonances," she considered such moments as opportunities to open up conversations that consider teachers' and students' stances. As I analyzed Emma's invitation, I wondered what stories help in advancing discussions for English language teaching that approach identities, feelings, and pedagogical perspectives as always "in the making" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 36).

Language as Power and Agency in the Curriculum: From Teachers' Understandings to Classroom Practices

In order to engage with difficult conversations through understandings of the practice of language as power and agency, as a final discussion for the meeting, I read a quote about language as power and agency from the ELA curriculum framework—"When learners practice using language as power and agency, they understand that all texts represent a particular way of thinking and that language can privilege some voices while silencing others. This understanding encourages them to question, interrogate, and reimagine meaningful texts" (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 42).

Furthermore, I projected two quotes that would shed light on critical literacies as lenses to inform our discussion (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Critical Literacies Framework

In the case of Trena, the practice of language as power and agency led the educator to think about the way she was teaching about poverty and community helpers to early years:

> **Trena:** How are we ensuring that we're opening that up and encouraging them to ask questions, and encouraging them to find out if they have a complete understanding of that? And how it works without our own personal biases coming in there? And us, only teaching our partial understanding of that concept, or that theme, especially when it comes to social class, and power, and how society works, and where we fit in? Like, I said we taught in kindergarten about community helpers. When I was teaching about community helpers, I was immediately thinking about those three parents, but I wasn't thinking broader, and that's my own, that's my own perspective, my own bias based on a curriculum that's laid out fairly open for us to follow along. That's my interpretation of it, and that's how I taught it without necessarily meaning to. But I did, right? I brought that into it without realizing it.

Becoming aware of biased interpretations, Trena had an “A-ha moment” in relation to her choices in teaching about community helpers, and then she engaged in inquiring about her selective process and pedagogical decisions. Despite asking about the openness of the curriculum as not providing her with enough direction, Trena did not mention other systems that informed her understanding of community helpers. However, she raised the issue of normalized responses that teachers might have in situations that reinforce the status quo due to not having had the opportunity to question social and power structures. As a result, teachers lack knowledge of other more inclusive and anti-oppressive possibilities that are not naturalized as the discriminatory ones are. Unawareness of how practices can be unintentionally discriminatory serves a society that produces and reinforces the ladder of success through the marginalization of differences and discourses and practices that maintain unequal social structures.

Emma connected the curriculum with some of her readings and talked about the need to create space for critical literacies:

> **Emma:** I’m thinking of Vivian Vasquez [(2013)]. I read her book a long time ago, and of course, it resonated. The one thing I took away was that you intentionally have to create that space for critical literacy, which is what I think this language as power and agency in the new ELA curriculum might do. And so, thinking then, kind of with all those articles that we’ve been looking at as well, and again going back to that awareness just not of our own narratives, but well, who wrote this that we use? And so again, I just always keep thinking of that idea of structure underpins meaning and just structures in our daily lives. So having new routines coming into play to make you think a little differently, and if those are available, then you know like this right now being able to talk about it and just to raise awareness that way. I’ve taught overseas, I’ve taught in

Canada, and I taught in lots of different schools, and so curriculum structures have been different. And the voices of those curriculum documents have been different. That just made me really think more too about that sort of systematic piece and building that intentionally, which may be why it's hard to make changes when you've had a dominant culture create those systems in the first place. That's my thinking at the moment.

Emma shared how her teaching experiences in other countries (Korea and New Zealand) had worked to increase her awareness of the systems that informed her practices, especially in terms of curriculum. She reflected on how curriculum is informed by dominant cultures and defined routines. Also, she showed how getting out of familiar contexts and living in a different culture broadened her views of what structures inform ways of being, doing, and knowing.

Sasha engaged with Emma, and referring to her background in history, she shared some transdisciplinary ideas for teaching and inquiring about dominant and silenced voices:

Sasha: Emma, I'm just looking at what you've said about, about like who wrote it? What voices are there? What's excluded? And then that ties them with that curriculum with the power and agency kind of lens, I suppose. Using it also like from the history background that I have. One of my favorite things is to have a teacher, who was my mentor, who has a whole bunch of textbooks that were written when he was in school, and then when his grandfather was in school, and he has all these old history textbooks, and I like bringing. I ask him to borrow them to bring them in, and you compare them to our current texts that we have, that are also problematic. I'm upset at the fact that this textbook has such a limited amount of covering those voices that are missing in our Canadian

histories, and so, I try to fill in that aspect as well. What are the underlying assumptions being made here, or whose voices do you see when you look at them? “Take a look at those textbooks out. How many old white dead guys do you see being remembered in this book?” Or when we talk about the Indigenous, how many chapters are on, we’re in Manitoba, we have a huge chapter on the Metis and the Red River rebellion, but then there’s no other mention of it pretty much anywhere else, except at the very beginning where there’s a very limited understanding of Indigenous histories and contact. I’m filling this stuff in with my own knowledge, with my own degree and stuff like that. And a lot of it has to do with social class and who’s the dominant culture, who’s the one that’s on the sidelines and who’s outside of that frame. And so that’s kind of interesting to me that you can use artifacts, as like artifacts of texts, or whatever you want to look at and you could do it with English, as well. You can do that with just like even looking at curriculum documents. It’s interesting to see whose voices are being silenced and whose aren’t.

While exploring what she had already been doing, Sasha also engaged with an idea for the early years:

Sasha: Maybe at an earlier level, you can talk about even just introducing them to the fact of like a visual picture frame and what's just outside that picture frame like, if you’re seeing these people standing in a line in this photo: “What’s just outside of those margins?” So, getting them to think about that and maybe filling that in. I’m not an early [years] teacher, but I imagine that would be an interesting way to start to introduce them to the concept of thinking outside the margins. It might help because then they start seeing it as being more

complicated than what you initially see.[Emma then took the turn to reply Sasha]

Emma: I love that visual. I think kids, even like young [kids], think outside the margins, if you give them the opportunity. And I think, I don't think everyone does, but I know sometimes young children, particularly their voices, are underestimated.

Emma emphasized how teachers need to be aware of engaging with kids' points of view as a way of recognizing the power and agency they have through language to think critically, and to understand positioning, perspective, and power. Through this interaction, the participants seemed to have built knowledge through what Orland-Barak (2006) calls "convergent dialogues." As the teachers commented on some challenges of teaching about social class and poverty, the participants engaged in problem-solving alternatives by sharing some ideas for their classrooms.

Margaret referred to the practice of language as power and agency as a space for telling stories:

Margaret: But when you get into a classroom situation, and that's the wonderful thing about teaching Language Arts, I think, is that we've got this space in our curriculum to have these discussions and conversations and to open things up and get kids telling their stories. And that's where they see there's more similarities than differences. That a lot of them have had the same experiences as newcomers regardless of where they've come from kind of thing. I think the new ELA curriculum is even more open to that with this emphasis on power and agency. I think I was saying last week that we've kind of gone away from teaching the canon because it just doesn't make sense in our context. Getting these kids from all over the world to teach this one set of books just

doesn't make sense. You want to bring books of different experiences. We've brought in a lot of books from Indigenous writers, for example, to try to open up those conversations. And I think that's one way of getting into those issues without necessarily having the conversations that might make a particular student feel centered out because of something they've said.

In Margaret's view, the practice of language as power and agency in the curriculum has helped English Language Arts teachers to explore more diverse texts, voices, and issues. The teacher mentioned how the conversation was expanding her views on engaging more thoughtfully with students' choices:

> **Margaret:** I'm making a lot of choices with kids, but it still comes back to that question about the power that you guys were talking about. My kids are reading lots of books and learning about different issues, but they're the books I've chosen. Even though I'm opening things up and getting beyond the canon, I'm always very aware that these are some of it is because the budget is limited. And I think what we've already got in our book room, and some of it is because I'm picking the books that I happen to have read. There's always that awareness that there is that level of control where I want to go next in trying to help the kids dig deeper into these issues. I'm giving lots of choices, which means they're doing a lot of independent reading, a lot of small group reading and discussing, but I need to find ways to pull it back to the whole group. We can dig deeper as a class into some of the issues.

Reflecting on the power and agency aspect raised questions about choice and decision-making. In thinking about the books that she selected to read with students, Margaret talked about how she would like to give more power to students in terms of choice and also what she could do to deepen discussions in her classes.

Kay explained what kind of pedagogical work critical literacies might foster:

> **Kay:** Just for me, this idea we've mentioned already today but just that education, it's either going to be an instrument that functions to integrate students into the present system and conform to it, or education can become the practice of freedom—the means by which students deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. That's what critical literacy needs to be. We need to give students the tools to unpack the text that they encounter from all institutions from across the board, online, in our classrooms. They have to be able to unpack those texts, argue with them, and then also understand that those texts are sitting inside these social institutions, right? Who owns the text? Where is it coming from? What is the social context there? What other cultural context is there? That's a lot for them to understand. How do we begin to do that? Because once they can unpack those texts, then they can start to critique these dominant ideologies that are present there.

As Kay posed questions informed by a critical literacies perspective, she shared the objective of preparing students to read texts and contexts through lenses that interrogated power. Still, she was concerned about the difficulties of having teachers and schools engaged in this kind of work:

> **Kay:** One person can't do that, right? That needs to be a team of people, and everybody needs to be engaged in this. You can't have one classroom trying to unpack these things and another one reinforcing them. Everything we've talked about today, like where this upward social mobility reinforces this idea. Students are given the message from the time they're very little that they need to succeed in school because they're going to get a good job, and they have the support to go to university or whatever it might be. That message is very strong. So,

they're not going to want to unpack it if their main concern is getting ahead of themselves. And I think that's where everybody kind of starts from. You know it's easy to say that black lives matter. But what are you going to do about it? Like, what are you actually going to do about it? Make a post online? Are we still going to support the system that is creating that conflict?

Researcher: That's the hard part. To really transform and act towards. To act towards change is not very easy because this system is strong. It influences our actions, too. And I was just thinking, Kay, that there will always be people working to comply with this system, but someone has to start resisting this system. So even though you say like everyone has to be doing that, but imagine if the ones who are willing to do that have to wait for the ones to find out?

Kay: Well, [laughs] we'll never get anywhere.

Acting, or transforming, is not easy in the middle of these systems. It "can be depressing and overwhelming in the sense of powerlessness we perceive" (Morgan et al., 2021, p. 349). While Patrick focused on teacher's agency, Kay shared an example of what happened when students took the lead in her school:

Kay: And students, too, like this idea of agency. I want my students to feel that they have agency. An example I can think of it this year, a group of black girls at my school decided that they were going to start the first Black History Month ever at my school, and none of us had never thought of this. We never, we never thought, "Oh hey, we have a black student population, and that's probably important to them or that it should be important to all of our students, right?" So it took a group of girls recognizing their own agency and saying, "Hey, why aren't we doing this? Why aren't we celebrating this?" And it was beautiful. They actually got the whole month of activities. They formed their own group

> that was going to do all this planning. They had poetry readings, wrote their own texts, and performed their own texts. It was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen a group of students do. And you know that again pointed out my ignorance and my privilege, how did I not see that? How did I not notice that we had this gaping hole?

This was such a beautiful example of agency. In looking back at this anecdote, I wondered how the school became a space where students took the initiative to organize such an event. What have they been doing to promote our students' agency? As Kay was surprised at the students'movement, I also interpreted how they used their own stories and privileges in a private school to engage in meaningful conversation about what was important for them. Through their choices and voices, they contributed to Kay's recognition (and maybe other members of the staff and the body of students at her school) of privileged views on issues of race.

In the second meeting, professional conversations were marked by reflections on personal beliefs— a characteristic of parallel dialogues (Orland-Barak, 2006). The participants used these spaces for "dialogues with themselves" to "discriminate and dispute their own ideologies and fixed assumptions" (Orland-Barak, 2006, p. 13). Triggered by questions, comments, and readings that invited them to revisit beliefs and practices, they reflected on their assumptions about community helpers (Trena); the questions they ask in the classroom (Margaret); their agency towards issues of social justice issues (Patrick and Kay); and the systems that inform their practices (Emma).

I finished both meetings reminding them about the readings for Meeting 3 and projecting three questions from the ELA curriculum: "How does what I hear, read, view influence what I think? How do I use language to influence others when I write,

represent, and speak? How do I decide what and whose stories to tell?" (Manitoba Education, 2020, p. 43).

The Second Meeting: Tracking Inquiries

In tracking some of the areas of dialogic inquiry that surfaced during the second meetings, I noticed that the participants' questions and observations encompassed positionalities and systems (see Table 6).

Table 6

Participants' Inquiries in the Second Meeting

Inquiring about positionalities and decision making	**Patrick:** It was interesting to consider that this answer kind of also answers the question on the slide of how does [my positionality] affect the reading of my teaching context? **Kay:** Older teachers, and a lot of the time, administrators and school leaders, are not aware of how they've benefited from these racist, classist structures, and they are not willing to engage in that kind of coming to know about it because they don't think it's a thing, right? And it's complaining or causing problems or whatnot when people do bring up those issues. And who is sitting at that table having that conversation, right? **Trena:** How are we ensuring that we're opening that up and encouraging them to ask questions, and encouraging [students] to find out if they have a complete understanding of that? And how it works without our own personal biases coming in there? And us, only teaching our partial understanding of that concept, or that theme, especially when it comes to social class, and power, and how society works, and where we fit in?
Inquiring about programs	**Kay:** And when I started looking at some of the units of study and really pulling them apart in the roots of where they come from, it's extremely colonial. But nobody ever talked about that, and when I would bring it up, there was a lot of resistance. And I would argue that there still is resistance even though some progress has been made. And why is that resistance present? Are people still unaware of how our programs are so limited? **Emma:** Going back to that awareness just not of our own narratives, but well, who wrote this [curriculum] that we use? So, I've taught overseas, I've taught in Canada, and I taught in lots of different schools, and so curriculum structures have been different. And the voices of those curriculum documents have been different. So, that just made me really think more too about that sort of systematic piece and building that intentionally, which may be why it's hard to make changes when you've had a dominant culture create those systems in the first place.

	Sasha: You can do that with, you know, just like even looking at curriculum documents, like it's interesting to see whose voices are being silenced and whose aren't.
Inquiring about systems	**Kay:** I've done a little bit of extra reading, aside from the stuff you said, just into this idea of oppressive systems, and how people, who are oppressed, need to examine their own situation and be a part of their own liberation, but also how the oppressors have a role in that as well, right? It's got me doing almost too much thinking. I'm becoming a very jaded, grumpy old teacher, I think. **Kay:** The process that we went through ourselves was not neutral, and the process that we're engaging in now is not neutral. If you're thinking of all of that hierarchy of government of institutions, we're really a cog in that machine. So, either the education can serve to support that system or break down that system. So, when I see my position now, and as I grew up, you have to kind of take all of that into account, and they're kind of affected my thinking about it, really. **Emma:** And so again, I just always keep thinking of that idea of structure underpins meaning and just structures in our daily lives.
Inquiring about teaching about students' stories	**Sasha:** I remember a moment where I taught one of those kids, and I think he wrote some sort of like a gang sign on a piece of paper when I was doing a roundtable thing. And then I pulled him aside, and I'm like, hey. Like, you know, this was my first year as a teacher, I'm like, "Oh God! How do I navigate this?" **Trena:** So, that child, she kind of opened the discussion of how she feels as a foster child, probably because she lives in an emergency. And then, when we say how do we have these discussions in class and how do we teach them? I keep thinking, it's so awkward. What do I do? What do I say? What can I say? What do I address? **Emma:** Listening to everything, again I was writing questions as people were talking and just one of them was: What do children need from us? Invitations to try on different identities? But then, as a teacher, you're in a particular position of power. How can I encourage children to try on different narratives but start with where they're at?
Inquiring about teaching about social inequities	**Trena:** How do we then have a discussion with that child or a group discussion where we talk about those sensitive pieces? Because we want to break the cycle, but if you just kind of don't have the conversation, then the cycle continues, right? But how do you have that conversation without your own values popping in? **Margaret:** So, I'm giving lots of choices, which means they're doing a lot of independent reading, a lot of small group reading and discussing, but I need to find ways to pull it back to the

	whole group. And so, we can dig deeper as a class into some of the issues. **Trena:** [Students] have to be able to unpack those texts, argue with them, and then also understand that those texts are sitting inside these social institutions, right? Like who owns the text? Where is it coming from? What is the social context there? What other cultural context is there? That's a lot for them to understand. So how do we begin to do that? Because once they can unpack those texts, then they can start to critique these dominant ideologies that are present there. **Kay:** You know it's easy to say that black lives matter. But what are you going to do about it? Like, what are you actually going to do about it? Make a post online? Are we still going to support the system that is creating that conflict?

The participants deepened conversations by reflecting on how their pedagogical decision-making was marked by systems, structures, power relations, and privilege. They questioned how institutional and social structures informed their positionalities and thinking, and consequently, their understandings of their contexts and teaching choices (Patrick). They recalled lived experiences such as teaching overseas (Emma), classroom experiences with students' stories (Trena, Sasha, and Margaret), and experiences recognizing the non-neutrality of every process in which teachers are involved (Trena and Kay). Moreover, their experiences, readings, and conversations as a group ignited dialogic inquiry about their agency through critical lenses. They interrogated who and what informed their performance as pedagogical agents and engaged with points of view and pedagogical choices that contributed to resisting or reinforcing inequalities in their contexts.

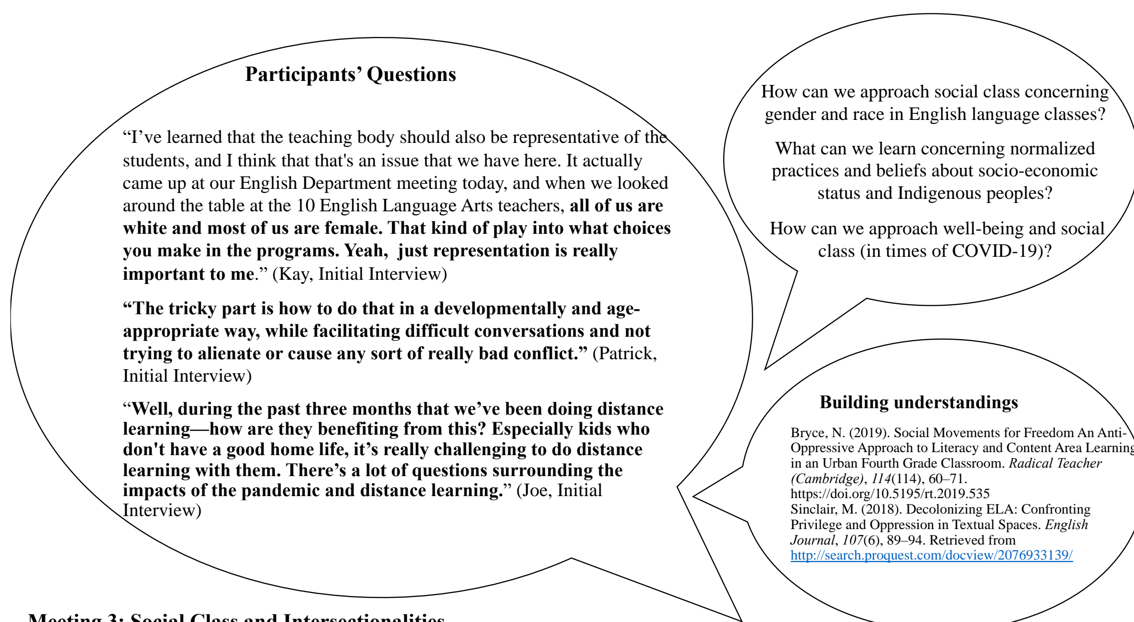
The Third Meeting

The third and last meeting happened on August 11, 2020. I started the meeting with a feeling of accomplishment as five participants were connected: Emma, Kay, Margaret, Patrick, and Trena. Sasha had told me she would not be able to come. As the participants had been talking about the intersections of their identity markers in producing their privileged positions, the intention was to engage more consciously with

discrimination, marginalization, and oppression as produced by intersections in context. For this meeting, I also suggested the reading of two texts. The first was the article "Social Movements for Freedom An Anti-Oppressive Approach to Literacy and Content Area Learning in an Urban Fourth Grade Classroom," written by Bryce (2019), which presents practical ideas to confront privilege and oppression in the context of a fourth-grade classroom. The second article was "Decolonizing ELA: Confronting Privilege and Oppression in Textual Spaces," by Sinclair (2018), which discusses possibilities that connect with choices of texts and questions how ELA teachers work with them through a decolonizing perspective. The idea for this third meeting was to open up critical conversations about intersections that mattered for their contexts and reflect on how these intersections were considered in their English language teaching practices (see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Guiding Questions and References for the Third Meeting



Opening Up Backpacks: Critically Engaging with Privilege Outside and Inside Schools

Inspired by Vasquez et al. (2013), I proposed the first exercise of the meeting with the aim to talk about our virtual schoolbags and question what there was there(see Figures 13 and 14).

Figure 13

Virtual School Bag

Virtual School Bag

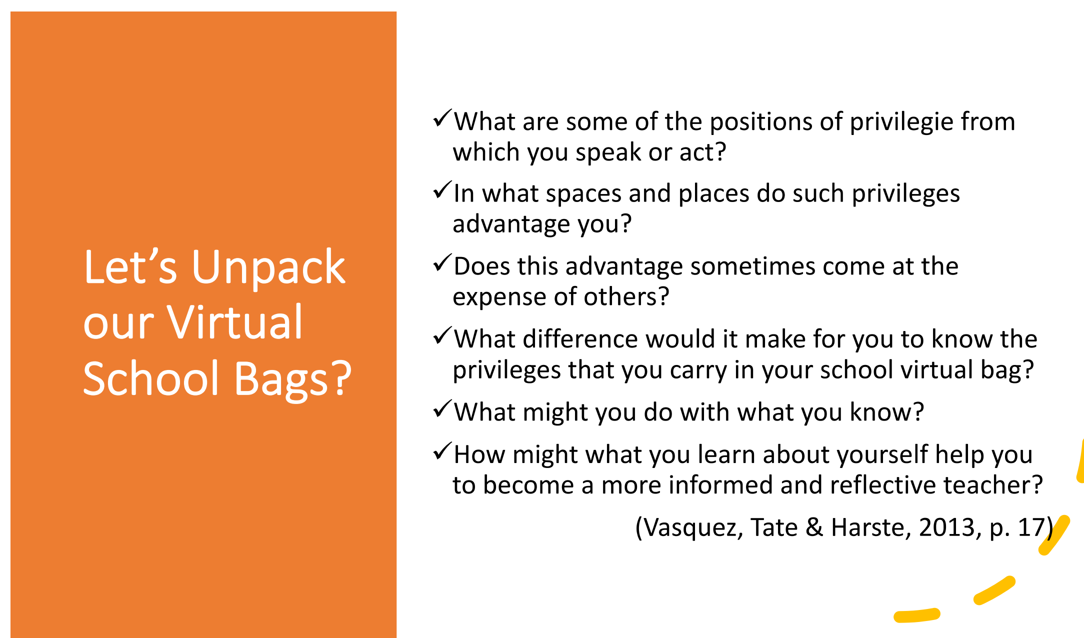
Notion of the "virtual school bag"(Thomson, 2002)

"All children enter school with a virtual school bag full of the things they've learned at home including their language(s), abilities, and past experiences."

(Vasquez, Tate & Harste, 2013, p. 17)

Figure 14

Unpacking our Virtual School Bags



This exercise made participants engage with their privilege as white, middle-class, English speakers, and the opportunities they had in the Canadian context. For example, Kay recognized the benefits of having a family that provided her with material, social, cultural, and emotional support. In exposing advantages that she had at the expense of others, she mentioned the Indigenous lands she lived on, which signaled personal reflections on power as exerted over her family. Being a daughter of Ukrainian immigrants, Trena recalled her mother's experience as a kindergarten student and the physical violence children would suffer for not speaking English in the classroom at that time. This fact has influenced her perceptions of non-English speakers at school. She also told us brother's story, who has cerebral palsy, epilepsy, and ADHD, to show how a member of the family can raise awareness of differences and advocacy. She recognized her lived experiences as a privilege and emphasized the fact of having

educated and white parents advocating for her brother's needs and being successful in their demands.

While sharing his virtual backpack, Patrick raised some critical perceptions of identity:

> **Patrick:** I wrote down that I'm white, middle-class, able-bodied, cisgender male, but I'm also gay. The interesting thing about that is that when you have so many identifying characteristics that are privileged, you can pass quite easily. But you always are faced with that question when entering a group, or when meeting new people or whatever the case may be: Is this safe, and can I actually be who I am? Or is there something that I need to hide? And so, looking at the other questions on the list here, you know, looking at my own life through that perspective, that makes me realize that students often will also have those sorts of identifiers that they're bringing into a classroom, that they can turn off, but they might have to turn down. Because it's not a privileged or accepted identifier, or whatever the case may be, based on the sense that they're getting from the school or the classroom, with their peers, or the teacher. And so, you can't unthink, or you can't avoid thinking about these things once you're aware of them. And so, I think for people who do have that privilege, I think being able to recognize it is so important to even begin seeing how students or some of our students might see their world.
>
> [silent pause (10 seconds)]

Patrick explored how other privileged markers could hide the fact that a group would react differently when getting to know he was gay. His response to the exercise showed the central role that identity plays on the way people respond to texts (Janks, 2018). His critical stance led Patrick to think about how non-privileged markers may

influence the way a person interacts with and ways they may hide/reveal markers in a group. By referring to feelings of safety that permeate interactions in a classroom, Patrick reflected on how students perform their identities and the responses they get when non-privileged identity markers come to light. Teachers and peers play a role in how much students feel safe to share or not their identities. After the teacher spoke, there was a silent pause of about ten seconds. And then, Emma shared her personal story about her son, who was transitioning:

> **Emma:** Yes, I was just listening to Patrick, and when you talked about it in the past, I was thinking of that is as a source of privilege in itself: “I fit most of these criteria, but I don't have these criteria, and I can still pass.” I just wonder about that because our son is transgender transitioning. And that’s one of the things that resonated with this. And I know for him, he talks about how wanting to look more masculine than he does, and so now he was able to pass. I just thought you know you don’t think about those things. When it’s so, yes, when you have it so much.

As Emma told her story, and it resonated with Patrick’s narrative, she reflected on the way privilege works in relation to identity. That was when Kay had an “A-ha moment”:

> **Kay:** And I agree with that a hundred percent because I laughed as soon as Patrick started talking. I didn’t have white or straight on my list and that’s the definition of privilege, because I don’t even have to think about it. I don’t have to think about my race because [it is] not an issue; I don’t have to think about my gender or my sexuality because they’re part of the norms that we live in. So, I should have had those things on my list, but because I’m so privileged, it

didn't even come to mind, right? And that's the situation that your son is in. He has to be thinking about that all the time.

Emma: Well, which makes me think, and that's always my first question when he goes like: "Is it safe?" And he just: "I get to look." And I think too as a teacher, and maybe this is because I, and maybe because when you work typically with, the term is at rescue or at-risk children and for whenever a variety of factors. Maybe that makes you more aware as well when they come into school.

When Kay talked about not mentioning she was straight and white, she realized how some identity markers might demand that a person be "be thinking about that all the time." This could also be interpreted as understanding privilege as a discourse, but it has real, material implications.

This interaction raised critical and reflective conversations about privilege based on the participants' lived experiences. In sharing what was in their backpack, they showed a feeling of trust and confidence in the group while reflectively engaging with their stories. As they talked about gender differences and whiteness, the teachers explored relational and contingent understandings of positionality (Mukherjee, 2017), which troubled their views on positionalities. As a group, we could think more deeply about the implications of identity in producing interactions, assumptions, and privileged standpoints that are not usually problematized.

The backpack metaphor reminded Emma of another metaphor—school as a funnel:

Emma: And I'm trying to think of—I guess cultural capital, you know, what's in there, what's in their backpack isn't matching up with what the school would expect to see in the backpack. And so, I'm always aware that these children

> come with something. It just might not be something prized by the school as an institution. And I just always think of that. I like that image of the backpack. If you imagine a funnel at the top is wide, and they come in with all their experiences, all home experiences, all sources of language, and as they come into the school system, this funnel starts to narrow because they have to fit with that school life. And so then, as teachers, I think, well then, how can we open the funnel back up so that we can recognize somewhat what they're bringing? And yeah, so that idea to the virtual school bag and then this funnel as well, it just makes me think how children bring what they have and how we can value that. Then, help support the transition into that school way of life because that is going to be part of their life. But then how can schools support, how can schools, I guess, open up to recognize more?

In associating the school system with a funnel, Emma was thinking about teachers' responsibilities and also about schools as a cultural filter (Goldthorpe, 2007) informing what and whose knowledge is valued and should be valued in educational contexts. In line with the concept of interpellation proposed by Althusser (1971/2006), the funnel metaphor represents the role that neoliberal ideology plays in schools' contexts and teachers' work. Becoming aware of how this ideology informs our ways of thinking, knowing, and doing school is part of the pedagogical work of questioning how educational institutions define and reproduce capitalist attitudes, values, feelings, and behaviors as seemingly natural. In thinking with Emma about recognizing what students bring in their virtual backpacks, I asked:

> **Researcher:** I was just wondering about the privileges that we have and what we can choose to talk about. What do we silence because we don't know how to talk about, or we are afraid of talking about, or just because we didn't live that

experience? So, these are like burning questions for me. Living abroad, I became more aware of how race can give you privilege. So, when we don't experience that, we might not touch on those things, or talk about them or create spaces in our classrooms for these kinds of conversations. And also, how do we react when we face these non-privileged situations?

[silent pause (10 seconds)]

Trena: And so, I think sometimes, we're not aware of our privileges and how they are at the expense of others. You don't even realize it is a privilege until you experience something. I'm sure I don't, I have no idea, but half of my privileges are because I have not experienced that barrier. I mean I'm living in Canada, I went to school every day rightly. If you just don't notice it and it's these kinds of discussions that kind of makes you go: "Oh, really." And you really have to think about and compare your experience with others. We just, we don't realize that some of our privileges are—at what expense it comes out. I think that's a really hard question to answer without someone pointing it out. At least for me.

[silent pause (10 seconds)]

Trena talked about how unaware we are of our privileges and how we might need experiences or "someone pointing it out" to notice the benefits that come at the expense of others. While analyzing what Trena said, I thought of students' identities and how teachers' perceptions of barriers (or the lack of these perceptions) impact children's views of themselves and their family struggles, and consequently, their language learning processes.

According to hooks (2010), the dominant culture forced "education to be the tool of mass colonization" (p. 30). Accordinly, school knowledge often reinforces the

status quo of a “white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2010, p. 29). Along with the need for educational policies and curriculum changes, discontinuing this reproduction demands that teachers understand education as never neutral (Freire, 1992/2013). Teachers need opportunities to identify and reflect on their biases while observing the “political nature of education” (Freire, 1992/2013, p. 66) and its power on educational agents in making room for them to exclude or legitimize lived experiences that have been historically marginalized.

This line of inquiry drew the participants into dialogue about privilege. Shor and Freire (1987) state that dialogic inquiry calls people “to exercise their own powers of reconstruction” (p. 16). The schoolbag provided an opportunity for the teachers to revisit their past, their stories, and the proposed questions pushed them to reflect on the content of their backpacks through critical lenses. By “think[ing] *from* each other’s location and *with* each other” (Menezes de Souza & Monte Mór, 2018, p. 450, emphasis in original), participants pulled threads which led them to inquire and redesign their interpretations (Janks, 2018).

Intersectionality: Reflecting on Dismantling Systems of Oppression

To reflect on oppression caused by the systems in which we live in, I started by projecting a slide with a visual representation of intersectionality (see Figure 15).

Figure 15

Intersectionality: A Fun Guide (Dobson, 2013/2020)

Note: An infographic of intersectionality. From *Art Possible Ohio*, by M. Dobson (2013/2020) (https://artpossibleohio.org/intersectionality/). Copyright 2013 by Miriam Dobson. Reprinted with permission.

Then I posed the following questions: What is to truly dismantle “systems of oppression” in our classrooms? What is to truly dismantle “systems of oppression” in our lives? Then I used the quote “We must actively use our curriculum and pedagogy to name systems of oppression” (Sinclair, 2018, p. 91) to pose another question: Which

systems of oppression can we name? In response, Kay shared a thoughtful narrative about teaching at a Catholic school:

> **Kay:** It reminds me of the first article for this meeting about preparing children for critical and capable citizenship or participation in democracy. It talked about the pedagogy of hope, a pedagogy of possibility. It said, "one that is not yet but could be if we engage in the simultaneous struggle to change both our circumstances and ourselves" [(Simon, 1987, p. 382, as cited in Bryce, 2019, p. 65)]. He talked about an examination of the curriculum in showing that our curriculum is kind of limited as not everybody engages in this kind of transformative project, where students are taught about movements throughout history. Then they can choose which one they want to study more and understand why it's important and how they're a part of that. So, I found that project-based learning really interesting. It can transform a classroom. It shows you the real power of education, and then some of the thoughts I had too were, how far can we dig into those topics? Working at a Catholic school, we have a unity club, but it has to operate under certain restrictions that some of the other clubs don't have to operate under. When I see the LGBTQ+ stuff, I always have to approach it in a tentative way, which is really not what you want to do when you're digging into these issues. It kind of starts to point out the privilege and the ignorance of some of our institutions and systems. And how we as educators need to think about that and find ways to engage in this critical literacy, as it gives students some agency as well.

Kay talked about religion as a system of beliefs that guided institutional and pedagogical choices in a Catholic school and how that constrained what could be addressed in their conversations. She reflected on applying critical literacies lenses to

motivate students' critical inquiries, reflections, agency, and transformation. As she shared her story, she posed a burning question: "How far can we dig into those topics?" Then, in referring to systems, I asked:

> **Researcher:** And then, how can we resist this system? It's not very easy, yeah? Like, it's not just a teacher's decision.
>
> **Kay:** Certainly not in my system because I don't have a union or anybody to [help me with job security]. If they want to fire me, it literally says in my contract they can fire me at any time, for any reason, or no reason at all. So, you have to minor [take it down a notch] that a little bit, but I would still like to challenge the system in ways that are safe for me to do so. It's kind of like gentle prodding, and teachers at my school are constantly gently prodding things forward, which I think is really important, really.

According to Kay, teachers take risks when challenging the system. Working in a private context, one of the biggest risks is losing their job. However, she seemed to feel safer in taking these risks as other teachers have been "gently prodding things forward." As a group, the teachers at her school are using the cracks in the system to bring about change. Framed by critical literacies theories, Duboc (2015) uses the term cracks, *brechas* in Portuguese, to talk about the possibility of transformation when teachers explore "encounters with difference" (Jordão, 2010, p. 439) as "emergent opportunities in the pedagogical practice" (Duboc, 2015, p. 106). The author explains that classrooms are places where these cracks emerge, and they depend on the teacher's curricular attitude to be enabled as "critical agency of all subjects involved in that learning space" (Duboc, 2015, p. 107). In other words, Duboc (2015) emphasizes that transformation does not need to wait for "totalitarian revolutionary pedagogies" (p. 106). However, transformation demands a reflective stance (Duboc, 2015; Jordão,

2010). The questions that continue to circulate are: How do teachers keep a reflective stance, which leads to a curricular attitude that challenges systems of oppression in their contexts? What risks are teachers willing to take?

Emma contextualized the question for the classroom and talked about dominant and less dominant voices:

> **Emma:** I was looking at the Sinclair [(2018)] article, and there's a phrase in it that popped out. It's just to consider the voices, and it's talking about considering the voices that dominate. But then, I just was thinking, well, maybe that's, I mean, you can't, I don't know if you'd ever dismantle systems of oppression, I think. But if you consider the voices that are out there and you engage in a conversation, at the very least, hopefully, you would get a better understanding of the other sides. What about thinking that, you were saying Trena, like there's this, and maybe that, but what if you only recognize this? And so, I think going back to that idea of considering the voices and the ones that are dominant, the ones that aren't dominant, because if you start to consider all voices, then you're going to start to notice. You know, those less dominant ones and then putting a name to that which then will make it more noticeable. So, I don't know it's just that I'm thinking of that first question and just that line considers the voices, Oh wow! Having an opportunity to discuss and think and share, but again it also has to be safe because as soon as you try to switch your mindset, it might shut down. But then, how do you create a space to have a thoughtful conversation? I was thinking.

Emma raised a central point to think about whose voices they considered less dominant. There was food for thought on naming and including voices that become

marginalized in the English Language Arts classroom. However, Margaret questioned students' attitudes towards engaging in meaningful conversation:

> **Margaret:** So, you want to have these real authentic and meaningful conversations, but you've got a lot of the kids that are just very focused on playing the game of school and what do I need to do to get the marks. Kids will plagiarize assignments rather than kind of putting their own thoughts and feelings into them, and then beyond that, I was thinking about the distance learning situation and how that was a system that really disadvantaged so many. Many of our kids are EAL speakers and kids that didn't have computers at home, and so on. So, I think there were a lot of systemic things that we have to fight against as teachers.

Just like educators, students are implicated in educational systems, and they suffer the consequences of grade and achievement systems. An evaluation system that focuses on the product rather than on processes might reinforce students' habitus towards learning opportunities. Margaret shared that students' school experiences created a habitus that impeded her from promoting meaningful conversations, as there were students did not feel like engaging in these conversations. This situation goes back to motivation, grades, and what it means to "do" school. Moreover, she mentioned other systemic problems, such as the lack of technology during pandemic school closures. By bringing in these systemic barriers, I imagine that Margaret wanted to show that it is not easy to include non-dominant voices. Nonetheless, it is important to think about the approaches and the questions that teachers ask in order to engage students.

Patrick recalled the concept of "the nice white teacher," perhaps to indicate a possibility to try to break systemic barriers and focus on what teachers should do with texts in the classroom:

> **Patrick:** I think the questions in the article, the Sinclair [(2018)] article, the essential questions the author proposes are really helpful to consider. I think that those questions about how do we actually look through the lens of social class and privilege and oppression at texts, that we're probably doing a better job at naming these systems of oppression than if we're just simply putting diverse books, right? That way we start to recognize binaries, and we start to recognize issues that we might not critique otherwise in the books for reading. Now that I'm more aware of class and how that appears in our classrooms, I see this whole other level of critical literacy that we can get to from day one. It's just shaping our questions a bit differently and using the results of conversations like these to guide us.

Patrick shared how these conversations about class added dimensions through which to explore the texts with his students. His comment and suggestions indicated that the proposed readings, along with the group conversations, supplied him with more lenses to explore texts that resist, interrogate, and challenge inequalities produced in textual spaces and teaching contexts. His insights suggest that he is fostering critical engagement with "ideological and hegemonic functions of texts" (Luke, 2012, p. 8). His take on critical literacies in informing dialogue through inquiries of gender and class relations also brings in intersectionality as a lens to expand understandings. Yet, through dialogue and inquiring, "traditional authority and epistemic knowledge relations of teachers and student shift" (Luke, 2012, p. 7). Teachers learn from and with students, and "students become teachers of their understandings" (Luke, 2012, p. 7) by sharing stories and engaging in inquiry as stance in the contingent learning opportunities that emerge from context.

Learning about Brave Spaces

In this study, learning about brave spaces with Patrick was enabled through inquiry. It is not new that difficult conversations need spaces in which participants feel confident to speak, and throughout our meeting, the term “safe spaces” often came up. So, I felt the need to question what participants understood by safe spaces. According to Emma:

> **Emma:** That openness. I think to be able to ask a question, and I’m kind of thinking more of my own experiences wherein speaking with people who are in positions of higher authority, and when I was younger, I would never ask questions. And it’s just like what you want to do, whereas now I am genuinely interested in kind of the rationales behind decisions. Then, it’s more just because you’re wanting to find out why, and sometimes I find when I’m not in sort of that community, and I’m in another community where maybe you don’t question. I have to almost preface it with, I’m just interested, I’m just wondering, can you tell me more about it? But again, how do you frame the question so that it doesn’t sound rude? And so, I don’t know does that make it safe and just do your own awareness of how to ask or interact without coming across as confrontation. I just mean maybe that’s because as the shy kid looking for the book on how to interact with people, I’m very aware of that. I’m thinking about that, dismantling the systems of oppression is, you need a way in.

While Emma was explaining her understanding of safe spaces, she recognized how her shyness prevented her from having more interactions with her friends. She characterized safe spaces as places where people are attentive to how they say things and are open to listening to everyone. Aware of situations in which people might feel

uncomfortable, Emma talked about action and reaction. However, Patrick challenged all of the group by questioning safe spaces and offering a different concept:

> **Patrick:** I think the whole idea of a safe space is one that merits a little of criticism because I think that often or sometimes we hear spaces designated as being safe and then that said like, “Oh, this is a safe space.” And what can sometimes happen, I’ve seen, is that that gives participants, or whether it is students, other teachers almost carte blanche to say and do whatever they want because it’s safe, and they’re learning. But that often comes at the cost of these students or the participants who are marginalized and who might have those, you know, social location factors that are not the norm. And by establishing a safe space where you can say whatever in the spirit of learning, sometimes that’s very traumatic. And so, I’m kind of critical, to begin with, the whole idea of safe space. I know there’s been some work done around brave space, instead. And the notion there is the construction of norms and working through as a group. And not diving headfirst into this work as many of you have said, but taking time to really ensure that we do have an understanding, and we are approaching the contradiction in a respectful and open way, and understanding things like the difference between intent and impact. For instance, I know my grade 8 students often don’t have a good understanding of that and feel that when they say, “Well, you know I didn’t mean”, or “I was just trying to do these” or “Don't be so sensitive.” That is not a safe space. But I think that with a lot of those comments, we’ll hear spaces that will be designated as such. I’m really conscious of not calling something a safe space unless we’ve done the work as a group, not as the facilitator, or not as the teacher, but we need to do the work as a group first of all in order to establish that.

As Patrick introduced the idea of brave spaces, the participants asked for more information and suggestions of readings on the topic. The concept of safe spaces has been a terms widely used, and Patrick helped us start questioning this term and its underlying assumptions. In this sense, he shed light on how social positions affect interactions.

As she tried to justify her point of view, Emma took a turn:

> **Emma:** I was just thinking of a continuum, right. And I never ever thought about that. So, thank you, Patrick, for that idea. You can't just have a safe space, and there is a procedure to get there. Even just being aware of that, and again, the power of the word, all right? It reminds us to be mindfully working towards that and the importance of that. Thank you, actually, and I would love to read more about where you found that.

Emma felt that what she said was questioned and also wanted to learn more. Therefore, she adopted a positive learning attitude. Then Patrick gave more details about safe spaces:

> **Patrick:** Just to share a little bit more, and I'll definitely share the articles and things I saw with Karla. But I know for me when I enter a space, and it's been designated as safe by the facilitator, and we haven't had a chance to come together and actually work through that, all I'm doing in the entire time is waiting for the facilitator to say something that proves that it's truly not safe. I think that anyone who has a social location factor that's not the norm might also be looking at it through the same sort of lens. You're just waiting for someone to trip up to reinforce the idea. I think unless you've heard that experience from other people, you wouldn't necessarily know that that's how it's being perceived.

I interpreted this moment as a learning moment entailed by inquiring. As a facilitator, I made use of a crack (Duboc, 2015) that emerged in the dialogue and inquired about "safe spaces." Meaning-making was produced through a dissensus moment of dissensus that prompted a divergent dialogue (Orland-Barak, 2006): As Emma shared her views, Patrick critically engaged with the term through his own experience, and introduced the term "brave spaces," helping us, as a group, to think about the oppressive consequences of not considering intersectionality in context, especially in dialogic opportunities. Later, he shared the text, and I added it to the folder that was created and shared with the participants as part of this study.

Implications for Teaching English Language Arts

In trying to take a decolonial stance, I decided to raise reflections on how we, as English language teachers, are implicated in educational systems and the ways we choose to question and act towards these implications:

> **Researcher:** What are the responsibilities and the possibilities of English Language Arts as a discipline in relation to isms? What does it mean to decolonize English Language Arts as a discipline?

As teachers were talking, they revisited moments from the previous meetings in connection with the texts that we read and their own comments:

> **Trena:** As I said when I was teaching social studies in kindergarten, and we were doing community helper, I ended with the nurse, the dental hygienist and then the police officer. Why did I not invite in other parents who had other jobs in the community? Because that was my view, and so it's going back and questioning and going know "Jeez, what am I using? What am I presenting? How am I presenting it? What is it offering my students, and how are they benefiting from it?" It's something big, I, we really need to look into it and have

these kinds of discussions like the things that Margaret, Patrick, Kay, and Emma have mentioned have made me start thinking about some of my practices. And you don't have that opportunity to have these kinds of great discussions and think about it and hear other people's views. Then, you just kind of keep going on doing the same old thing and perpetuating the same problem, right?

Trena recalled an "A-ha moment" she had about a teaching experience and shared the questions she was thinking about because she took part in the study. As her pedagogical choice was informed by views of success reinforced by neoliberal understandings, she made me think that in order to decolonize language teaching in this context, we need to discuss with teachers how economic systems manipulate and naturalize understandings that are a-critically reproduced in language classrooms. The teachers that took part in this research also saw a way to decolonize ELA through the practice of language as power and agency.

Kay talked about how the provincial exams were opening space for the critical side of literacies:

Kay: Yeah, I think the provincial exam reinforces what you're saying. I've worked a lot with the provincial exam, and they do need to know those things in order to navigate that exam. But I do also think that the province has been starting to put more critical literacy into the provincial exam at grade twelve.

Kay seemed to mean that critical literacies, in her context, were starting to be implemented because it was demanded in the provincial examination. Her point leads to reflections on the assessment system as an authority defining what needs to be taught. However, Patrick contested the goals of the curriculum and the accountability system:

Patrick: I think that's where it's like scary, though, too. Because yes, the new English curriculum does have language as power and agency as a practice, and

> that does give us lots of possibilities, but also like the civil servants who have created this wonderful curriculum, the actual government seems very focused on accountability and basics. And I think of what happened over the past few weeks in Alberta, where they scrapped their new curriculum essentially in favor of something very traditional. All it takes is a government who wants to not really focus on any of these isms to take that away, especially because the curriculum is so broad. I believe in the first meeting, we talked about how ELA is great because you can almost do anything, and Trena talked about how sometimes that's a good thing and sometimes it's not, because it gives you leeway to perhaps continue what you've been doing without any sort of growth. It's a double-edged sword. We can do so much, but then the message from the top is accountability, standards, achievement. The fact that they're called achievement tests, and all of that sort of thing really enforces that whole neoliberalism, the capitalist view that you were talking about, Karla. There's so many possibilities, but you're always kind of just waiting around. Okay, well, great, can I truly do this? Yeah, I know the curriculum says that I can, but can I?

Patrick questioned the power of the curriculum when creating possibilities that challenge the system. Using Alberta as an example, Patrick questioned how governments use official documents to reinforce neoliberal and capitalist systems. In a recent article, Morgan et al. (2021) reflected on educational reforms in responding to crisis and pointed out that "in both Canada and Brazil, politicians can't resist manufacturing educational 'crises,' which can serve as an excuse to impose greater policy control and/or neoliberal economic rigor over teachers and curricula (e.g., Duboc & Ferraz, 2020)" (p. 346). In Manitoba, one year after the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, local authorities introduced Bill 64—The Education Modernization Act, that

aimed at reforming education. However, there was an anti-bill movement that, among other factors, pointed out the silencing of local voices in educational decisions, and how poverty impacts the educational system across the province (Sala, 2021). In early September 2021, recognizing the strong anti-bill movement, Premier Kelvin Goertzen announced that Bill 64 would not be moving forward (Unger, 2021).

Emma talked about systems as well:

Emma: Thinking of systems and how systems really underpin meaning, and now hearing about Alberta, it just makes me think Manitoba now has this piece, this language as power and agency embedded in the curriculum, and so does that give us then that opportunity to address in all those isms at all ages? And so, what will that look like for the early years? And correct me if I'm wrong, I'm just thinking like at the high school level, it's also built-in more of how that could look. In the earlier years, Trena was talking too. We're sort of more focused on helping children develop those literacy skills and processes, to be able then to kind of deeply reflect on books. But then, how do you address bigger issues at the same time? And again, what kind of materials do we have that lend to it? I love writing with children because they always have something to say. And just that power of building understanding what I say I can write, and what I write I can read, and I have a voice. But it was just kind of listening to everybody, I thought, what are the structures already there that we can use to address some of those deeper or bigger ideas? And then, how does something like our Manitoba curriculum now, the ELA curriculum with this specific section on agency and power, how will that now promote even deeper reflection all across the years? How the systems are put in certain places depends on the persons in power, which is a little scary and pretty interesting.

In focusing on early years' students, Emma reflected on the practice of language as power and agency in the curriculum. Her questions aimed at how having this practice stated in the curriculum would impact teaching practices throughout school years, and especially in the early years. Although she did not share any practical ideas, I interpreted that the fact of questioning systems, practices, and materials would be the first step in thinking otherwise about practices that enhanced critical and decolonial options for younger students.

While Trena missed opportunities to have conversations like the ones we were having at her school, she celebrated her learning process through our conversations.

> **Trena:** But definitely, I strongly believe, I think that these conversations where these questions are being asked, and we're asking each other questions that we're sharing: "Oh, I have an example of that or, but I made a mistake when I did this," that's where the learning comes in. We were able to become better teachers because we're more empowered, we're more knowledgeable, and as such, we're able to grow, as Patrick said. We just need to get together and meet and talk about how can I use it? And what are you using? And that's where that growth is happening now.

Trena's comment reaffirmed that "ways of knowing expressed in conversations are what draw listeners in and provide them with intellectual nourishment" (hooks, 2010, p. 47).

As we were coming to the end, I wanted to close the meeting:

> **Researcher:** So, we have five minutes. I think it was Margaret who said: "I see that idea of privilege playing different ways—people who recognize it and people who don't really." In recognizing privileges, what are the questions we could be asking ourselves as teachers? Just for you to think, okay? And keep

asking questions. We look for solutions, but we need to be asking ourselves questions, how do we navigate these systems, these isms in such a plural, diverse society? Yes, especially here in Manitoba, I see this super-diversity in many classrooms. Many different school bags in these schools. At schools, how do we unpack those school bags? And how do we unpack our own school bags? I think it was Margaret who mentioned today, too, to keep a reflexive positionality. It's not very easy, but what do we do with the things that we take out of our bags?

I also projected two quotes as critical reminders (see Figure 16).

Figure 16

Final Reminders of the Third Meeting

Some Reminders

"Education is never neutral."(Paulo Freire, 1970)

"Literacy can be taught as a tool of critical inquiry or of passive transmission. It can be a vehicle for posing and solving important social problems or for accepting oficial explanations and solutions."
(Vasquez, Tate & Harste, 2013, p. 20)

Researcher: As literacy teachers, I think that it's good to have those reminders with us. Any comments? Questions, suggestions?

Kay: I really enjoyed this process. Karla, I'm so happy that I got to be a part of it. I didn't plan on doing any PD this summer, but if I was going to do any kind of professional development, it would be around these topics.

Trena: I would agree too, and what a great group, too. Lots of different ideas and views. I've got a book that Patrick mentioned that I'm ordering, a book that Emma mentioned that I just ordered. And I think that you're definitely helping us to do that just through these discussions. You know for me, certainly, things that I wasn't really thinking about before, and know that gave me the opportunity to reflect on some of my practices. So, thank you for the great discussions from everybody and great topics.

Margaret: I think for me, it is the questions since I have done a lot of work around getting more diverse texts into my classroom and having kids discuss them. But I need to dig deeper and bring essential questions to the kids. So, they're not the only ones bringing their backpacks, but that they've got some more questions to get them digging deeper into what they're reading. So, thank you.

Emma: I've got lots of new and thinking of that idea of a brave space that really resonated, and the concept of intersectionality, and the idea of all these different looking, like a social location factor.

Patrick: All the same, like everyone, said, this has been a great experience.

Researcher: Thank you, thank you. I have no words to thank you for your participation in these group meetings. It was a great pleasure to be with you. I hope we can keep in touch. So, our next step is the final interviews. People, thank you so much. I'll also be sharing our link from Google Docs with some suggestions, and please be free to add anything you want. Thank you so much, people. Bye, bye. See you.

This final interaction—as participants spontaneously started sharing what they thought about the research process—got me excited about the final interviews.

The Third Meeting: Tracking Inquiries

The last and third meeting became a space for inquiring about the teachers' privileges concerning their positionalities, their responsibilities with their students' stories, and their complicities with systems of oppression (see Table 7).

Table 7

Participants' Questions and Areas of Dialogic Inquiry in the Third Meeting

Inquiring about privilege	**Patrick:** I wrote down that I'm white, middle-class, able-bodied, cisgender male, but I'm also gay. The interesting thing about that is that when you have so many identifying characteristics that are privileged, you can pass quite easily. But you always are faced with that question when entering a group, or when meeting new people or whatever the case may be: Is this safe, and can I actually be who I am? Or is there something that I need to hide? **Kay:** I didn't have white or straight on my list. And that's the definition of privilege because I don't even have to think about it. I have to think about my race because [it is] not an issue; I don't have to think about my gender or my sexuality because they're part of the norms that we live in. So, I should have had those things on my list, but because I'm so privileged, it didn't even come to mind, right? **Trena:** The one question you have there: Does this advantage sometimes come at the expense of others? And I think it is Kay who said that she didn't even write down that she was white. And so, I think sometimes, we're not aware of our privileges and how they are at the expense of others.
Inquiring about teachers' responsibilities towards students' identifiers and stories	**Emma:** So, if you imagine a funnel at the top is wide, and they come in with all their experiences, all home experiences, all sources of language, and as they come into the school system, this funnel starts to narrow because they have to fit with that school life. And so then, as teachers, I think, well then, how can we open the funnel back up so that we can recognize somewhat what they're bringing? How can schools support, how can schools, I guess, open up to recognize more?
Inquiring about teachers' agency towards systems of oppression	**Kay:** I found that project-based learning really interesting. It can transform a classroom. It shows you the real power of education, and then some of the thoughts I had too were, how far can we dig into those topics? Working at a Catholic school, we have a unity club, but it has to operate under certain restrictions that some of the other clubs don't have to operate under. So, when I see the LGBTQ+ stuff, I always have to approach it in a tentative way, which is really not what you want to do when you're digging into these issues. It kind of starts to point out the privilege and the ignorance of some of our institutions and systems. And how we as educators need to think about that and

	find ways to engage in this critical literacy as it gives students some agency as well. **Trena:** How do you dismantle [systems of oppression] if you're not aware of how you dismantle? **Emma:** I think going back to that idea of considering the voices and the ones that are dominant, the ones that aren't dominant, because if you start to consider all voices, then you're going to start to notice those less dominant ones. And then, putting a name to that which then will make it more noticeable. **Patrick:** And so, I think that those questions about how do we actually look through the lens of social class and privilege and oppression at texts, that we're probably doing a better job at naming these systems of oppression than if we're just simply putting diverse books, right? **Emma:** Thinking of systems and how systems really underpin meaning, and now hearing about Alberta, it just makes me think Manitoba now has this piece, this language as power and agency embedded in the curriculum, and so does that give us then that opportunity to address in all those isms at all ages? And so, what will that look like for the early years?
Inquiring about teachers' complicities with systems of oppression	**Trena:** As I said when I was teaching social studies in kindergarten, and we were doing community helper, I ended with the nurse, the dental hygienist and then the police officer. Why did I not invite in other parents who had other jobs in the community? Because that was my view, and so it's going back and questioning and going know "Jeez, what am I using? What am I presenting? How am I presenting it? What is it offering my students, and how are they benefiting from it?" **Patrick:** We can do so much, but then the message from the top is accountability, standards, achievement. The fact that they're called achievement tests, and all of that sort of thing really enforces that whole neoliberalism, the capitalist view that you were talking about, Karla. So yeah, there's so many possibilities, but you're always kind of just waiting around. Okay, well, great, can I truly do this? Yeah, I know the curriculum says that I can, but can I?
Inquiring about feelings of safety in spaces	**Emma:** Well, which makes me think, and that's always my first question when [my transitioning son] goes like: "Is it safe?" And he just: "I get to look." And I think too as a teacher, and maybe this is because I, and maybe because when you work typically with, the term is at rescue or at-risk children and for whenever a variety of factors. Maybe that makes you more aware as well when they come into school. **Patrick:** I think the whole idea of a safe space is one that merits a little of criticism. And what can sometimes happen, I've seen, is that that [safe spaces] gives participants, or whether it is students, other teachers, almost carte blanche to say and do

	whatever they want because it's safe, and they're learning. But that often comes at the cost of these students or the participants who are marginalized and who might have those social location factors that are not the norm. And by establishing a safe space where you can say whatever in the spirit of learning, sometimes that's very traumatic. I know there's been some work done around brave space, instead.

An analysis of the participants' questions and areas of dialogic inquiry in this third meeting showed that they engaged in self-reflection on their positionalities, responsibilities, and complicities within/against these systems, acknowledging that at times, their privilege made it harder for them to identify and name systems of oppression (Trena and Kay). They shared the tensions of resisting systems by inquiring about the limitations imposed by educational structures to address sensitive topics (Kay) or to work with perspectives that would not be valued by achievement tests informed by neoliberal ideologies (Patrick). During the meeting, participants frequently raised questions about identifying and resisting systems, power relations, and intersections that kept dominant voices and bodies safe. The analysis showed that they engaged in a learning partnership through dialogue (De Jong et al., 2021; hooks, 2010; Orland-Barak, 2006, 2009; Shor & Freire, 1987). Therefore, the participants revisited their practices and beliefs and built collective meaning-making and awareness through a dialogic, reflective, and inquiry stance.

The Meetings: An Overview

Throughout the meetings, the teachers enriched the process by sharing their personal and professional lived experiences and understandings. They explored privileges and margins and how they affected perceptions and interactions in these contexts. With this in mind, the educators reflected on the voices that might become more or less dominant in the classroom. Critical literacies, intersectionality, and decolonial lenses contributed to reflections on systems of oppression and to realizations

that we are all implicated in these systems. Readings expanded concepts, broadened understandings, and presented practical ideas.

Talking about systems of oppression was complex. At the same time that it was enlightening to become aware of them, the teachers expressed how tiring, frustrating, and demotivating it can be to try to change them. Becoming aware of how systems influence, silence, and reproduce inequalities is intimidating and brings to light how we all have internalized colonial thoughts and attitudes. In this study, reasons such as the fear of losing a job, the power of educational systems through boards and administration, or the belief that the system will never change, worked as real and intimidating factors that have implications in raising critical reflections in the ELA classroom.

At the end of the third meeting, the participants started talking about how they had enjoyed the conversations. There was a feeling of wanting to stay and continue the conversation. These comments made me feel excited for the last phase of the research: the final interviews. The next chapter will explore the data from the final interviews, with the analysis of their feedback and my perceptions of the research process.

Chapter VI. Professional Learning: Design, Meaningful Learning Moments, and Implications for Pedagogical Thinking

During this final phase of the study, my aim was to navigate the participants' perspectives on this experience and gather their thoughts on social class, privilege, language as power and agency, and ELA teaching. Final interviews were the primary source to answer the question: *What are the unfoldings of an online professional learning opportunity for English language teachers, in which social class and language are addressed as power and agency?* Through this analysis, I compiled the teachers' answers into three main topics: the design, meaningful learning moments, and implications about the participants' pedagogical thinking for ELA. The design refers to their observations on the overall organization of the study and the advantages and constraints of having professional conversations as a learning community in an online setting. The meaningful learning moments are related to what the teachers mentioned that they have taken from this experience in terms of collective meaning-making, inquiring, reflections, and feelings. The implications about the educators' pedagogical thinking pertains to their understandings of ELA as a discipline and comments on their teaching practices. Throughout this analysis, I also spotlighted tensions and suggestions for changes in the research process.

About the Design

Designing this project involved deciding when, what, and how to collect data. This study proposed the creation of a professional learning community that would inquire and discuss social class, privilege, and power and agency under the scope of English Language Arts, informed by critical theories in an online setting during summer break of 2020. In relation to the design, the participants mentioned that they had enjoyed the overall research process while sharing views about the arrangements:

> I think it is a very accessible research plan and organization. It was helpful for me because I can do that because it seems helpful, it had an impact, and people came up with really good conversation. I think it went really well, and I liked the process. (Sasha, Final Interview)

> I remember what Kay said this was kind of like a PD. It was like professional development for me in the summer. When we had those discussions, when we were talking about things, we were able to relate, and that's something I wouldn't change. That was really interesting for me. If you wanna call it my opinion, or my understanding, or my view is being shaped, being remodeled. It's malleable, right? And the opportunity to do that with others who had read similar articles, then I was able to understand what they were referring to. Then they brought in their own professional books or things that they had read. (Trena, Final Interview)

> It gave me motivation, if anything I have to say about taking away from it. I have done a lot of work in my classroom already, but the conversations left me feeling more motivated and stronger in my own beliefs. (Kay, Final Interview)

> So, overall, the whole process was great. And somehow, you took us from one point to where we needed to go and then closed it off, all within two hours. So, it was really quite remarkable to watch. (Patrick, Final Interview)

Sasha, Trena, Kay, and Patrick had positive comments about the overall process. Some of the aspects that they highlighted were: the organization of the whole design (Sasha), the role that the conversations played in their thinking (Trena) and feelings (Kay), and the structure of the meetings (Patrick). As I tried to see more specific details that the educators mentioned about the design, some common threads emerged: readings and guiding questions, the structure of the conversations, and our engagement

as a learning community in an online setting. Concerning these threads, I organized this section with the analysis of what the participants said that they had enjoyed, and what could have been done differently throughout the study.

The Readings and Guiding Questions

One common observation about the research process among the teachers was that they appreciated having received readings and guiding questions in advance:

> I liked that it wasn't just conversation, that you grounded the conversation in the readings, which I think is always important. The articles were a good jumping-off point, but your discussions didn't just focus on the articles. You had us do a lot of reflective thinking around ourselves and the positions we were in, and so on. (Margaret, Final Interview)
>
> I think the readings beforehand were important. I think that was interesting because it helped us have talking points and have a common language moving forward, which was important. And I think having the guided kind of points. You had the power points of certain times to keep the conversations guided, which was helpful, too. So, people weren't always going off into their own worlds. So that was good too. (Sasha, Final Interview)
>
> I really did enjoy how you gave us readings and questions in advance because other studies I've done before haven't been as theoretical as this one. They were more practical. And it was really helpful to have those readings to ground our conversations, not only because it gave us things to talk about but also it gently guided us toward what we should be talking about, as well. Because with the concept of like social class and understanding of it, I think in the first meeting, when we started, it was clear that we didn't necessarily all have the same understanding of what that meant, myself included. And so, the readings guided

> us there gently, without you having to say this is what it is. I really did enjoy it there, and I really enjoyed the complexity of questions you had and how each of the sessions was facilitated, as well. How you had a really great opening, and stimulus went somehow [happened], I don't know, because we talked about it a lot [laughs]. (Patrick, Final Interview)

> You had guiding questions, which I mean helps me because I always need an outer structure to frame my thinking. Otherwise, I go everywhere. But there was such a freedom to kind of talk to where it led you, and so I really appreciated the readings that you provided us. I appreciated knowing the kind of our theme, our emphasis. (Emma, Final Interview)

> So, having the questions as a guide and having the readings as a guide before meetings was really helpful for a person like me. I'm a really nervous, anxious person. (Kay, Final Interview)

> But I definitely do feel that I really enjoyed that there were articles for us to read, professional articles you found. Certainly, just reading the articles and thinking about them opened my mind to different things. (Trena, Final Interview)

It was unanimous that readings and guiding questions contributed to reflect and sustain conversations. These led the participants' to ask their own questions and share their points of view. However, two observations on the readings raised reflections on my choices. First, as Sasha complimented the use of suggested readings to inform our discussions, she raised a sharp point about the articles:

> I wonder, does it, like I am thinking about bias in selecting materials and making conscious choices of things and then giving it to your participants, does that pigeonhole them? Does that make them see things from your perspective? At the

> get-go, when you initially gave them out or is it more of a “This is a beneficial thing because my participants need to know and have a common definition of what social class is, and they need to see what is out there and what the literature is saying about that first.” (Sasha, Final Interview)

Sasha’s questions highlighted the fact that a researcher’s choices influence results. The readings revealed my point of view, and she helped me reflect on how much my selection would be biased. At the same time, she highlighted an essential point to this study, and the fact that disagreeing was part of the process:

> I can see that there are benefits for both sides of doing that, but I think in this case I think it was really helpful to have that because then we were able to say, “I agree with that or I don't agree with that.” So, people were still very much open to discussing the literature, and you would start it off with discussing the literature, which was helpful because then people could just say and kind of critique if they needed to know what was going on and so. I don’t think it stopped anybody from saying what they wanted to say or saying that they agreed or disagreed. So, I think it worked out well in this case, but I always wonder that if I was gonna do a study, I would probably be hawing about it for a while. So, I don’t know what the best option would be. (Sasha, Final Interview)

I interpreted that Sasha felt that the group could show different understandings and disagree with the selected texts. In analyzing how the participants reacted to the readings, I thought about the power of written texts in informing our understandings and discussions. Considerations in relation to what texts do to us (Luke, 2000) prompted me to reflect on what questions promoted critical engagement and redesign of texts (Janks, 2019; Turner & Griffin, 2019).

Trena's comments made me think about being implicated in colonial systems of knowledge:

> And a lot of articles that you had referred to the States and again there is that [piece] of America here and there in here which made me laugh [laughs] (Trena, Final Interview)

At the same time that I understood Trena's comment on the lack of context-based texts as a critical observation informed by her reflection process, I immediately thought about my difficulty in finding texts about social class, privilege, and language as power and agency in the context of Canada. This difficulty might represent the newness of this work in this context. However, as most of my references were taken from the University of Manitoba online library databases and Google Scholar, I also inquired about what and whose texts were primarily offered to me in my searches. Considering the university library as a system of knowledge and the framing of the search options, I recalled the pervasiveness of colonial structures in higher education (Patel, 2014; Rosiek et al., 2020), and "how educational policies, practices and discourses have been informed by modernity and have been reproducing social disparities, epistemic racism and abyssal lines; as a consequence, we tend to reproduce and reinforce inequalities in our contexts and experiences" (Jordão & Martinez, 2020, p. 598). Trena's comment highlighted how researchers' choices are implicated in colonial knowledge systems and how hard it is to break this cycle. In referring to their own experience with decolonial perspectives, Stein et al. (2020) observed that efforts to decolonize often involve "a significant gap between one's stated intentions and actual actions in efforts to decolonize" (p. 47). They explain that "merely articulating or aligning with an intellectual critique of colonization does not immunize one from reproducing modern/colonial desires and habits of being" (Stein et al., 2020, p. 54), and

this happens due to our socialization into these systems. In this case, I recognized that I was looking for articles that explored issues of social class, privilege, and power and agency through critical lenses that contributed to questioning colonial ways of being and knowing. However, it was hard to disrupt searches that led me to texts produced by and in the Global North while looking for texts that were relevant to K-12 teachers, to the ELA curriculum (Manitoba Education, 2020), and to theoretical and conceptual coherence.

Conversations: Building Meanings Together

The conversations were highlighted by the participating teachers as central to their reflective and learning processes. Learning from each other was considered one of the most meaningful aspects of the study, as they indicated that conversations raised issues that mattered to them:

> I really enjoyed the conversations. The articles made me start to think about some things and some personal connections. And those discussions, I felt that they were very professional discussions with professionals who were relating to their classrooms. As we shared it, I thought of this, and I thought of that, it certainly allowed me to reflect on past teaching experiences as well as past personal experiences. I think I am still sort of processing and reflecting on it and thinking about it. (Trena, Final Interview)

Emma liked the possibility of getting out of her professional bubble:

> Just from the conversations I've had with others, not in that bubble, I get a sense of like when you say a word, when you say a term there's an immediate sort of, depending on who the person is, there are connotations that person will hold about that term. I think wanting to be able to talk about issues from another perspective, and I think this is what I'm looking for. (Emma, Final Interview)

Exchanging ideas with teachers from different backgrounds allowed Emma to revisit some terms and interpretations related to her Reading Recovery background and added perspectives to her repertoire. She brought out some aspects of her professional learning during conversations and demonstrated how teachers themselves—and meaningful dialogues with one another—are influential resources for teacher professional learning (Campbell, 2011; Little, 2002). Out of her professional bubble, Emma became attentive to the meaning-making of terms, while expanding her perspectives.

Having the participants engage as a group was a big concern for me as a facilitator. Their trust in the process, the group, and me as a facilitator would impact their involvement and participation and what they would share in our conversations. However, as the teachers talked to me in the final interviews about their feelings and experiences related to the group conversations, they confirmed my interpretations of their attitudes during the study. From my position as a researcher, I noticed how committed they were to the process. Evidence of their commitment included: having read the articles before coming to the meetings; critically reflecting on personal and professional attitudes during the conversations; telling me in advance that they would not be able to come to a meeting; connecting during their vacation time from wherever they were; taking risks and/or being vulnerable somehow; and challenging each other's perceptions.

The educators also shared perceptions and feelings about how we engaged as a learning community. When referring to the group, positive comments about participants' stances towards conversations were frequent:

> Everyone was really willing to share, I got the sense, and I never really felt anyone was holding back from any of their personal experiences. I think the

> group came together really quickly, and I don't think there were any really difficult or uncomfortable moments. (Patrick, Final Interview)
>
> Everybody was sharing their own unique experiences, and it seemed like a very progressive group. I think our discussions were meaningful just because of that relationship building and the conversations that we were having. But I'd say that's also the most difficult part because you kind of put yourself in the line a little bit when you have a genuine conversation, and when you open up to people who you are and where you come from. And beyond that, where you are working and where the problems are in your institution, these are really difficult conversations to have, and you feel like you can do that. That was both the struggle, but it was also what made it more meaningful for me. Everybody invested time on it, and that was obvious. (Kay, Final Interview)

According to Patrick and Kay, the relationship building of the group was a fast and growing process that contributed to the richness of the conversations. Both mentioned how the other teachers were open to having honest conversations, while Kay emphasized how people devoted time to this project.

Observations about the content and the number of meetings raised considerations for future studies. Patrick talked about the complexity of the theme and wondered if we could have more time for conversations: "Aside for the fact that we were limited by time, right?" (Final Interview). In his view, he thought that we would benefit from one more meeting as a group: "I wouldn't change anything other than perhaps meeting a few more times, because I know it felt so fast. It's over" (Final Interview). He suggested that we could have at least one more meeting as "not a goodbye but a final thought kind of thing" (Patrick, Final Interview). Another point observed was about expectations on the content of the conversations. Margaret talked

about teaching practices: “Ah, yeah, because I had entered into it thinking that I would get a lot more practical ideas from what people are doing in other classes, yeah, I didn’t get a lot of that, but that’s okay” (Final Interview). Margaret was expecting to get ‘more practical ideas’ from other participants, which might be connected to understandings of “best practices mantras” (Lytle, 2008, p. 379). Although the teachers shared some practical ideas, in thinking with Margaret, I saw that a future research study could propose more time to plan activities together based on the discussions we had, while supporting a “teacher’s right to articulate their knowledge of practice” (Lytle, 2008, p. 379) in context-specific ways.

The Online Setting

The online setting became mandatory for this study as a result of pandemic restrictions, and the participants pointed out the advantages and disadvantages in this setting. For example, Sasha praised the fact that online exchanges granted flexibility:

> I loved that it was flexible with the online scheduling of interviews. I think that really helped out. I don’t know if it is a common thing or if it was a COVID thing. I think that was really accessible for people, and that was good. (Sasha, Final Interview)

Similarly, as a researcher, I recognized the flexibility of the online setting, as Emma and Margaret could connect with the group in the middle of vacation trips. I interpreted that there was a will to participate in the meetings, and there was also a privileged situation in terms of technology access, which allowed them to be present during the whole process.

Further, Patrick felt that interaction increased meeting after meeting, even in an online setting:

> I found that as the meetings went on, you know, the second meeting was just Kay and me, but the third meeting, it felt like a group, people were taking turns, people were reflecting back on what others have said. I was surprised actually how well that went in an online setting, where you never meet the person face-to-face. It was kind of—yeah, it was surprising. (Patrick, Final Interview)

Kay's observations might explain why interaction was enhanced in the online environment:

> I think it might make people feel a little bit more comfortable, you know. Perhaps if you are in your own space, and you know—if you are a person like me, you can choose to have your camera off, or someone who doesn't mind, you can have your camera on. That's helpful, and also this whole idea of muting mics and turning them on and off is also kind of helpful because people can take turns speaking, and you can tell really clearly who is speaking, and once in a while we interrupted each other—but, overall, we go very smoothly. I do know on Zoom there is a raised hand, and I don't know if Blue Jeans had. But in my Zoom classrooms, kids can press a button that shows that their hand is up. So, I think that's a really cool feature as well for this school online world that we are moving to. (Kay, Final Interview)

Emma also had a suggestion for people to feel even more comfortable for taking a turn:

> I guess one thing I've noticed through this year of COVID and teaching, a lot of our PD went online. We would have whole group discussions, but sometimes there would be opportunities where they would put you into breakout rooms, and so there would be a little group of you. That was helpful in some ways because then you had almost a different dynamic. I appreciate having the chance to meet

with small groups to talk about things and then to come back, and I don't know if it freed people up more. (Emma, Final Interview)

Kay talked about the possibilities that the online setting amplified by providing resources that increased the comfortability and quality of interactions. Patrick also commented on the sequence of who was supposed to speak, "Sometimes people, myself included, might have had something to say and was not sure who was going to speak next, you know? Again, not there was any problem at any point" (Final Interview). As I listened to them, I reflected on how online environments require continuous learning about tools, resources, and possibilities to facilitate and enhance interactions.

There were those who would have preferred to meet in person. Margaret said that "these are conversations that are better had in person than you know trying to do them over video chats and things" (Final Interview). She believed that "It would be much better in person" (Final Interview). I regret not having asked why she had this opinion. Being more specific about the constraints of the online setting, Patrick alluded to body language issues, "If we were all in a room together, I think body language—we would be able to read" (Final Interview). There is no doubt that body language plays a central role in communication, and in online settings. In exploring communication behind the screen, Dhawan (2021) uses the term "digital body language" to explain the "new signals and cues that have replaced traditional body language across genders, generations, and culture" (para. 2). It is clear that the online setting is demanding new conceptualizations and understandings of what is implicated in communication.

Despite some desire to have the participants in person in this study, the virtual meeting technology was a valuable tool, as it allowed this study to be done during pandemic times and offered various resources and possibilities. Furthermore, the synchronous connection afforded the opportunity to come together for critical dialogue

and guided conversations around the readings, to engage in reflective exercises and discussions, to pursue individual and collective inquiries, and to participate in professional learning (in the summer). Their willingness to participate might be related to these three main points: a clear and informative recruitment process, their interest in the topic, and individual and group commitment to the process. It is also important to note that the technology worked effectively and consistently. All the teachers could connect and interact as they did not have any technical or knowledge issues with technology that prevented their participation.

About Meaningful Learning Moments

Meaningful moments were connected to learning opportunities, “A-ha” moments, and tensions. The participants remarked on topics, ideas, values, beliefs, possibilities, and constraints that they started considering as a consequence of their participation in this study:

> I thought a lot about my own program and how I can affect that, but what about the bigger picture, right? What about the bigger picture of my school? I don’t know how much power and agency I have in that, but it's something that I'm thinking about now. *Something I wasn't thinking about before, and I'm thinking about right now*. (Kay, Final Interview)
>
> I would never ask that question: who was that text written for, and who is going to read that text? *I think I would never ask that question before, and that is a powerful question*. (Trena, Final Interview)
>
> *I will position the texts differently than if I had not participated in the study*. (Patrick, Final Interview)
>
> I really have started thinking more broadly about the barriers that affect others, and I think how the ELA curriculum even with just choices and whose voices do

we read about, and which lens we are using to examine this book. *It was just really kind of made me go: "Oh, I haven't thought of that piece"*. (Emma, Final Interview)

A lot of my thinking around social justice was making kids aware and making them empathetic, but I think it has to go beyond that [emphasis added], you know. Who are we? Where do we fit into this big puzzle? (Margaret, Final Interview)

I think what I got out of it was that I wasn't alone in those feelings. It was common that teachers, no matter how old they were or how far in their career they were, are all going through that same kind of growing pains of discussing this. And it is interesting that no matter what grade level it is, we still have that struggle. *I think that was helpful to me to just even if there are not so solid answers just yet, and it just helps to know what other people are understanding and having the same kind of challenges*. (Sasha, Final Interview)

Conversations about social class, privilege, power and agency in the context of ELA teaching became opportunities for the participants to start inquiring about teachers' roles in school systems (Kay), asking different questions (Trena), engaging with texts in a different way (Patrick and Emma), revisiting purposes of working with issues of social justice (Margaret), and sharing feelings about the demanding situations and decisions that teachers face (Sasha). As the educators shared these singular meaningful moments, I interpreted them as enactments of the uniqueness of this project in this context. As I zoom in on their answers, the following section will tackle some of their "A-ha moments" during this process.

Reflecting on Positionalities

The participants drew our attention to some specific moments during the research in which they had the chance to become aware of positions, thoughts, and practices that supported the reproductions of inequalities in their contexts. Margaret mentioned that she was thinking more about her privileged position in relation to her students' backgrounds:

> Some of your questions around getting us to look at our own positionality in all of this have been important to me. Again, focusing on where does my privilege put me in terms of the students I am interacting with? Those are things that I'm focusing on and thinking about. (Margaret, Final Interview)

As she mentioned prompts that led her to think critically about her positionality in context, Kay talked about reflecting on privilege and its implications for her work as an English teacher:

> When I was drawing a picture of my society, and when I was drawing a picture of myself, I left off important details. And then when someone said sexuality, and I was like, because of course me being straight is a factor in my intersectionality. Of course, me being straight is an advantage. Why didn't I even think about it? Because I don't have to think about that. I'm privileged in that area, so if we can get a better variety of people at that table looking at the program, I think it makes a bigger difference, you know. (Kay, Final Interview)

In being called to think of her sexuality as a privilege, Kay reflected on the power of conversations in which the participants talked about differences. This specific moment made her think about teaching programs and how diversity should be considered and represented. Concerning possible changes in her context, she emphasized the need for an advisory board constituted by diverse social locations.

Therefore, she believed that decisions made at different levels in these hierarchies in the school system would offer more perspectives and representativeness to school contexts.

Regarding positionalities and choices, Trena built on her understandings of social class and how they influenced her teaching practices when it came to addressing jobs in the classroom, which was a topic present in the school program:

> I was talking about when I taught kindergarten, and I did social studies, and who did I invite in from my community helpers? (…) So many pieces in there without realizing that I was teaching and sharing my values with those students. And so, I was thinking I didn't even connect, and I didn't even think about it. I didn't even think that it was my interpretation. So, after our discussions, I went, jeez, that was very fixed, very fixed-minded. Why did I do that? (Trena, Final Interview)

Trena shared how a specific reading helped her in thinking about her positionality and its influences on some of the normalized understandings that informed her pedagogical choices, in this case, understandings of community helpers. Finally, reflecting on one of the readings, Trena recognized how her teaching choices were imbued with strong beliefs about the jobs she valued, which reproduced inequalities informed by understandings of social class positions. Margaret, Kay, and Trena observed how this study worked as a professional learning community that opened up opportunities for them to address issues of social inequity in a way that "may be the first time they considered their identities or the consequences for them" (Verduzco-Baker, 2018, p. 588). These lenses led them to think about their positionalities not as a static performed position but as performances of dynamic relations of power.

Inquiring About Systems

Inquiring about systems generated deep reflections on their impacts on teachers' choices. Leaving this study with questions such as, "Am I part of that system that is becoming a barrier to others?" (Trena, Final Interview) and "Am I perpetuating something here?" (Sasha, Final Interview) showed an initial step in the direction of taking responsibility in the reproduction of inequalities. Becoming more aware of the implications of the school as a system and the role of teachers in that structure were two points that Margaret mentioned:

> It gets me thinking as a teacher in the educational system, and we were thinking about how all this is very systemic. You are part of the system, right? So, what is my role in trying to, I think, deepen the conversation? A lot of my thinking around social justice was making kids aware and making them empathetic, but I think it has to go beyond that. Who are we? Where do we fit into this big puzzle? (Margaret, Final Interview, p. 2)

In a similar way, Sasha talked about inquiring into herself and how some of her school activities were aimed at developing empathy and disrupting teachers' roles in perpetuating systems of oppression:

> Yeah, interesting to know about systems of oppression within your own kind of environment. I have kids in my high school that mentor kids in another school in Winnipeg's downtown city center. (…) then my colleague was like, "Isn't it kind of weird because it is a little bit like the white savior complex?" And I was like, "Oh boy, I think you are right, that's really damaging. You have a whole bunch of rich kids helping kids who aren't so well off, savior mentoring them, and bringing them to the school that has an ice rink and all the stuff." And then it, you feel "Oh boy, what am I doing with this thing? Oh, no! I'm making more

> damage than I thought." And then at the same time, "Well, I don't know if the kids see it that way, or I think the kids see it like I'm helping out, and I'm mentoring a kid and I'm playing dodgeball with this kid." So, but at the same time, from the outside, it might look really, really bad. And so, it just got me thinking about systems of oppression. "Am I perpetuating something here?" I am still trying to navigate that myself and try to figure out what is the proper approach here. I think it does more good than it does damage, but at the same time I can see how that would be a critique of it. I am still trying to figure that one out. (Sasha, Final Interview)

Sasha reflected on the role of schools and teachers in volunteer programs. Her colleague's inquiry: "Isn't it kind of weird because it is a little bit like the white savior complex?", along with the discussions with the group, raised questions about the activities, their implications for the students' lives, and her role in this process. She wondered, "Am I perpetuating something here?" Although she saw the good side of promoting these kinds of programs, she became unsure about their potential harm.

In referring to civic pedagogies, Ellsworth (2005) explains that they "ask us to suspend who we think we are and to open to outside others as a means of converting difference from the threat that leads to violent enforcement of domination to the productive irritation that alters both 'us' and 'them'" (p. 90). In reading Sasha's excerpt with Ellsworth's ideas about working with difference through civic pedagogies, I believe that Sasha had a suspicion of what working as a volunteer meant/represented. In analyzing the activities that she mentioned in this part of the interview, it seemed that kids from privileged backgrounds were positioned as the ones who knew (mentors), while the kids from non-privileged backgrounds were positioned as learners. The suspicion in the conceptualization of her volunteer role created doubt about what to do,

as there was a concern about the kinds of activities that should be promoted and what kind of citizens they helped to create. Her notions of “us” and “them” became blurred as feelings of superiority conveyed by the “white savior complex” took over fixed understandings of the benefits of the proposed volunteer work. This “irritation” led her to inquire about the consequences promoted by work informed by an unquestioned framework that could reproduce an oppressive system.

In a similar context, Kay shared that the study helped her to reflect more on the school as a system and to imagine possibilities for action:

> It just got me thinking more about structural change overall in schools. We talk a lot about programs. So, I can have an effect on the ELA program in my school, but aside from the ELA program in my school, it kept me thinking about my school in general, right? Like I brought things like we had never had a Black History Month before this year, and that disgusted me because no one has ever thought of it. After all, we don't have any black teachers. Come on, and now we have black students. How did we not think about that? So, it just made me think like yeah—I thought a lot about my own program and how I can affect that, but what about the bigger picture? What about the bigger picture of my school? I don’t know how much power and agency I have in that, but it’s something that I’m thinking about now. Something I wasn’t thinking about before, and I’m thinking about right now. (Kay, Final Interview)

Thinking about the school structure, Kay talked about how teachers, as individuals, might challenge educational systems and influence changes in their contexts. Patrick, meanwhile, zoomed in on the classroom and wanted to invite students to think more critically about systems:

> I think a lot of what I want to keep learning is how to look at oppression, how to look at oppressive systems and how I can use ELA to show my students that those are in play and to allow them to look more critically at a text. And I'm using the broad definition of text here, not just books and written word but media, online, all the different kind of new digital literacies. (Patrick, Final Interview).

Understandings of systems raised questions and views on the roles that each of us played in reproducing or resisting systems of oppression. Then, as teachers, the group reflected on ways of analyzing some of these systems with students:

> There is always difference. The struggles that I think are important to highlight to students to see that there is a difference here, and there is a spectrum of social class. There are systems that are in place that keep people where they are. As one of our participants in the very first meeting, right? He was saying that there are systems that keep the poor poor and maintain that. I'm seeing more of that now that I am looking for it. So, I think that really helped. And I think that is important to highlight in a social studies background: Okay, we are here now, and how did we get here? How is it the system that is still prevalent? That's important to look at. (Sasha, Final Interview)

Sasha commented on "systems that keep the poor poor," which kept her thinking about the role of systems in society and how to explore that with students. She recognized how a comment made her more attentive to consider inquiries about systems that oppress people. Nonetheless, she referred to questions and related to a Social Studies background, which might speak for understandings of disciplines. In analyzing this piece, I also interrogated if these questions would be present in her ELA classes.

Another aspect that the participants pointed out in inquiring about systems was the way they viewed intersectionality as a critical frame to approach systems. While Patrick talked about intersectionality as a lens to problematize social locations, Margaret referred to it as a lens to look at systems in broader perspectives:

> And the whole notion of intersectionality is really pertinent because it is really difficult to look at many of those social location factors without the kind of looking at the big picture, right? It is hard to narrow it down to just one and look at that. (Patrick, Final Interview)
>
> I do feel I got a better awareness of social class as an issue, and I think previous to this, I was focusing on like I do these book clubs with kids. So, I was focusing on finding books about Black Lives Matter, about Indigenous issues, sort of compartmentalizing all of this. I think the big take for me is the notion of intersectionality and how all of these issues play into one another. You can't just look at them individually. I jotted some notes down here. I think to the whole systemic piece and not just knowing these are issues, but how Canadian society is continuing to perpetuate them. They're not things that we left in the past; you know, moving forward, we need to see ourselves as people that need to make a change. It's not, we cannot just say I'm not a racist, but if you are living in a society that has systemic racism and you do have a role to play, you need to step back and say, "I am aware of this." I think that has been a great part of it. (Margaret, Final Interview)

Inquiring about systems was central to this study. I interpreted through these excerpts that the teachers left this study looking more attentively at the big picture—oppressive systems, systemic racism, structural change, and educational systems.

Finally, there was a will to spread the word and have similar conversations with colleagues at school:

> I wanna keep talking to everybody. (Trena, Final Interview)
>
> I thought of myself as a lone wolf, you know. No one else cares about this, so I'm just gonna fix my program, and my students will have this program. It will be better. And in my mind, I thought maybe that's enough, but I don't really think it is. These are conversations that I need to have more with other teachers—not to say that I haven't. I can't just let it go if you put something on the table and it doesn't go anywhere. Sometimes you give up a little bit. I think I can do that, and I was happy to hear other people sitting at the table saying the same thing. So, I don't know. I just feel a little bit more invigorated. I can keep fighting against that system and keep working towards that structural change that needs to happen. (Kay, Final Interview)

Trena and Kay were willing to continue conversations that challenge systems of oppression in their contexts. Although Kay was already involved with critical perspectives on school programs and systems before this study, she revealed that she felt she had taken steps forward and backward. Kay emphasized how she felt excited to engage in work that would promote changes in her context after participating in this study. hooks (2010) reminds us that "we would all have fared better in our struggles to end racism, sexism and class exploitation if we had learned that liberation is an ongoing process" (p. 26). Liberation should be present in our professional dialogues, programs, and practices in educational contexts.

Feelings in a Professional Learning Community

From the perspective of an early career teacher, Sasha mentioned her feelings about pedagogical practices:

> I think a lot of what I got out of it was this kind of solidarity that I was feeling similarly with other teachers, who are in [a] position [that] might be different from mine, but at the same time that challenging and awkwardness, the challenge of trying to discuss these issues with kids. We face bumps as teachers consistently, no matter where we are in our profession, about discussing social class and trying to help students to understand their own positioning, but also understanding opportunity. And there is that awkward, how far do I push, or is it appropriate for me to tell a student, or to push them in that way, or to make it transparent, or how do I do it in a way that provides that student's agency? I think what I got out of it was that I wasn't alone in those feelings. (Sasha, Final Interview)

As the teachers shared their doubts, mistakes, and (mis)understandings in different moments of their careers, Sasha felt the solidarity and saw similar questions that accompanied the educators who decided to participate in the meetings. Sasha's feeling of solidarity was a sign of the collegial support built in this study, and evidence of collaborative inquiry that is based on "an exploration of one's thinking in a non-threatening way" (Orland-Brak & Tillema, 2006, p. 10). Sasha's excerpt might reveal that even though there is solidarity, more experienced teachers might still lack opportunities for conversations around sensitive themes (e.g., social class). Experienced teachers also need chances to explore the feelings that emerge with these discussions and how they affect teachers and their pedagogical work throughout their professional careers.

As Emma described an uncomfortable moment, "I just remember talking, I'd said the word or talked about safe space. And then Patrick spoke, and he talked about, kind of debunked that, and that was uncomfortable" (Emma, Final Interview). She

emphasized how this represented an opportunity for learning with and from one another:

> I had a moment, and I thought this was what it was about. This is why I am doing for and so, but I had that moment. I think of just sort of like, and that was not as it was a slap on the wrist, but that was the closest I can think about it. But then I thought, "No! But that is exactly it. And that's why we have this, having opportunities in engaging in thoughtful dialogue, but there are still those old habits, isn't there? (Emma, Final Interview)

As Emma disclosed her discomfort by having had her understandings of safe spaces challenged by Patrick, she recognized the need for dialogue that promoted opportunities to reflect on pedagogical decisions, discourses and situations that we might be uninformed about, and what they demand depending on one's positionality. Emma also pointed out her willingness to be disturbed (Wheatley, 2002), when she stated that one of the reasons to be participating in this kind of study was to engage in "thoughtful dialogue." Wheatley (2002) explains that "as we work together to restore hope to the future, we need to include a new and strange ally—our willingness to be disturbed. Our willingness to have our beliefs and ideas challenged by what others think" (p. 1). Emma confirmed that there was a will to learn about, with, and from different perspectives. She was brave to share this feeling during the final interview and made room for this analysis to consider what happens when our certainties are contested. Emma recalled the moment:

> Patrick talked about those brave spaces, and he shared that personal story that he doesn't talk until he knows that it's a safe space. Just that idea that oh, and have I been? You call, even the language of calling things like a safe space, and I would say that too when I work with teachers and say that's a safe space to share

> your wonders. And I totally mentioned it, but then I thought, but then I would have teachers who are very quiet and would not talk. And I thought when hearing Patrick yes, of course, I can't just say it's going to be this, and then thinking of my power and own privilege in sort of that role as a facilitator. You can't just talk. You have to engage in this together. (Emma, Final Interview)

Emma revealed how Patrick led her to think about some concepts and their implications by sharing a personal anecdote, his feelings, and bringing in a different approach to safe spaces. Despite feeling disturbed, she viewed this event as a learning opportunity, a moment that Ellsworth (2005) describes as the crisis that is learning:

> that moment of letting go of a former sense of self in order to re-identify with an emerging and different self that is still in transition. It is that moment in which what will emerge from transition is still in the making and as yet unclear. In the crisis that is learning, I am suspended in the space between losing myself and finding myself caught up with different knowledges and other people. In the moment of learning, I am simultaneously me and not me. (p. 89)

Emma described the clash of having her certainties challenged, and identified it as a learning moment. An example, which is related to Ellsworth's words, is when she contested her 'old habits' as a facilitator and teacher and questioned her beliefs about safe spaces. Emma showed how having an understanding challenged also made our online discussions become a space that enhanced mutual trust and respect (Huijboom et al., 2020), and individual and collective professional learning (De Jong et. al., 2021).

About the Implications for the Participants' Pedagogical Thinking

Their final interviews provided data about some of the implications of this study for the participants' pedagogical thinking. The analysis pointed out that this inquiry

process seemed to have played a role in their reflective processes, and consequently, their pedagogical thinking and ideas for their classrooms.

Nourishing a Reflective Stance

According to the teachers, reflective processes took place before, during, and after the meetings. While the suggested readings and questions motivated them to get involved with reflective processes, the meetings offered opportunities the educators to engage themselves in discussions with the group, which led them to further reflections. They shared how they saw their attitude towards the process and after ir:

> I thought the articles were really helpful in getting me to think about the ideas that were presented there. I also did a lot of writing during our meetings and after trying just to capture some of the things, the big themes and ideas that were coming up to me. Just do more thinking about that, and then I've sat down in the last few weeks thinking about my courses for the next year and, yeah, what changes do I wanna make? How do I wanna frame those essential questions? A lot of thinking about the bigger issues, but then trying to think really practically about how I might take those issues into the classroom. (Margaret, Final Interview)
>
> I spent a lot of time talking to a friend after, who is a grad student, and that was really helpful because he also is very immersed in this work. Sharing kind of the results of some of the conversations has been helpful. About now, what do I do? This point was made, and that point was made and now how do I use to change my classroom? It was just nice to have kind of a sounding board as my reflection. Thinking it over from time to time while doing the readings and doing other readings that I've been doing in summer. This all kind of comes together quite nicely. (Patrick, Final Interview)

I take a lot of time to process things. So, normally, what I would do is take a look at the questions and the readings and chip away the readings a little bit, and I keep a journal. I jot some things down that come to mind, and I try to make a few notes before the meetings of things that were on my mind. And then, of course, hearing the other person talking too caused my process to go more smoothly because I think hearing their stories added to my own, and hearing ideas of things they are doing at their own schools also helped. (Kay, Final Interview)

I did choose a couple of books to read before this related to language and literacy to read through the summer, and I am almost done with them. Here is one on children's language as I was reading this and was reading the articles, we were having our discussions, you know, I was thinking about a lot of different things. (Trena, Final Interview)

I think I'm a pretty naturally reflective person because I'm very self-critical [laughs]. I think I am starting to realize that "Hey, it is actually a good thing to be a teacher and to be critical" because it's what we do, and that's how we get better. But I think it was nice because I would talk not like specifics or anything, but I'd like to say, "Oh yeah, we had a conversation about this," and then I kind of talk with my colleagues and my partner, and then he kind of pointed out certain things and that kind of helped me get more out of the experience as well. But also, I think even during the meetings, there were moments where, especially the last one, I felt I was being very open with my own experiences, and other teachers were kind of seeing that and kind of comforting and validating that by saying: "Look, I was there too," so I think that was helpful.

> Not with the new teacher thing, but also with this is a hard topic to discuss, and it is something we’re all gonna make mistakes about. (Sasha, Final Interview)

The participants’ comments showed how they engaged in reflective processes and professional learning, enhanced by different factors. Readings, questions, and conversations promoted different starting points that led them to deepen their understandings. They kept a reflective stance by spending extra time writing notes and journaling, talking to colleagues, reading more texts, connecting with each other’s stories, telling their own stories, and becoming thoughtful about their practice. As the teachers shared that participating in the study intensified their thinking process, the conversations were a space where their ongoing reflections emerged, re-entered, and advanced while generating more inquiries and possibilities.

Exploring ELA Pedagogical Understanding

In this analysis, I aimed to identify the educators’ understandings of ELA as a discipline and if the process caused any changes in their perspectives. Patrick noted the role of the curriculum in specifying what was expected of the discipline:

> It’s now with the new curriculum—with language as power and agency [a practice in the curriculum]—, it’s literally in there that we are supposed to look at inequities and bias. If anything, it is reaffirmed that this is important work and needs to be done, and it's in the curriculum for a reason, and we're being asked to do that [look at inequities and bias, explore social class, and other social locations] for a reason. We have a calling to do this through ELA, because looking at inequities, bias, you know, often people will say that it's a social studies skill, and that’s [a] kind of social studies thing. But I think now we are coming into an understanding that ELA is more than just language as a system [a practice in the curriculum], and there is so much more to it and how we can use

literacies to engage with the world critically so. I wouldn't say that it's really changed my perspective; it just reaffirmed and strengthened my view that this needs to happen. We need to do this work. (Patrick, Final Interview)

According to this excerpt, Patrick explained that the research process and the curriculum played a role in reaffirming the need for work that engaged with examining bias and inequities in ELA classrooms. Similarly, Emma observed that the process was an opportunity to expand her views on ways of addressing social class:

> I don't know if it's changed so much as enhanced and deepened. I think having the chance to go through this study provided me with, I think, the language, really the language and other ideas to kind of be more aware of it [social class]. So, it certainly deepened. I feel now that even with readings just being more aware of it, and more aware of the different ways it might show itself. (Emma, Final Interview)

Emma and Patrick mentioned the intersection of identity markers and language as power and agency as important elements in our discussions:

> I think learning to find my own voice, through my own experiences and my training, then helping others, but then also realizing that people come with others, might not be that they are shy. It just might be that they are not white, low income, and so there are barriers there. I think it's staying aware. I really have started thinking more broadly about the barriers that affect others, and I think how the ELA curriculum, even with just choices and whose voices we read about, and which lens we are using to examine this book. It just really kind of made me go: "Oh, I haven't thought of that piece." (Emma, Final Interview)

> We are supposed to look at these bigger ideas. Whereas before, it wasn't specifically stated, and you could kind of do anything you wanted with ELA

> before. That's still true now, but now with this lens or the practice of language of power and agency, I think the teacher absolutely has a role in exploring social class in ELA and all the other, all those social location factors. (Patrick, Final Interview)

Emma's words show how she started noticing the work of social positions in creating constraints and possibilities for students' engagement. At the same time, for her, having discussions about voices and lenses offered pedagogical possibilities to realize and to challenge these constraints. Also referring to the practice of language as power and agency in the curriculum and social positions, Patrick looked at teachers' responsibility to engage students in conversations that critically approached "inequities and bias." Their comments point to the development of a "critical consciousness" (Dei, 2019). An awareness of welcoming difference in ways that resist oppressive pedagogical practices, while questioning a "colonial matrix of power" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) in ELA as a discipline. The teachers acknowledged the need for a vigilant attitude of considering and including students' and teachers' voices, positionalities, places, contexts, and histories (Dei, 2019) in language teaching.

In the next section, I will explore how the teachers conceived ELA practices.

Figuring ELA Practices

In terms of ELA practices, the teachers shared some of the ideas and possibilities they could think for their classrooms. Margaret brought up the intention of exploring the issues in more situated ways:

> I think again, like before I got into this focus group, it was mostly about raising awareness of the issues that the world is facing, and our society is facing. Now I think I got some of a more nuanced understanding of how complex this all is and help kids explore those complexities—and again, not just looking at individual

issues. You had us thinking about our positions and our identities. Getting the kids also [to] look at who they are and what their identity is in relationship to the rest of the society, and how they can take action and move forward to try to solve some of these issues. It's the idea of not looking not at the individual issues, but looking at the systemic nature of things and where the students see themselves in that situation. (Margaret, Final Interview)

Similarly, Sasha acknowledged her intention to work with students' positionalities:

> It's like if students don't understand where they are positioned or how it came to be, then they might not really understand where to go from where they are. If they want to find better opportunities or if they wanna help others like, I think it's an important thing to kind of recognize and to make more emphasized in my teaching. I think that's what may change. I'm kind of more purposeful with how I would have to go about this in my teaching now. (Sasha, Final Interview)

Patrick mentioned his plans to work with texts, avoid "big words," and make this meaningful to his students:

> I feel like I am leaving this study with many questions and many different ways to do this in my classroom. My academic year will be different, and I will position the texts differently than if I had not participated in the study. I am thinking about how I can guarantee that I am not inadvertently oppressing through my choice of text or what exactly we do with different texts. So, broader things like that. And teaching high school, the other question I have is, "How to approach this subject?" or "How can I frame it in a way that my school students will understand and find relevant?" Because you can play all the big words you

want, but this is not going to be a way for them to understand what's going on. (Patrick, Final Interview)

Patrick talked about how texts would gain a different perspective in his classes and brought in a hyper self-reflective attitude (Kapoor, 2004; Kubota & Miller, 2017) by saying, "I am thinking about how I can guarantee that I am not inadvertently oppressing through my choice of text or what exactly we do with different texts." As he acknowledged the possibility of being complicity with pedagogical choices that contribute to oppress, he engaged in reflexivity about how power relations happen. He also seems to be reflecting on ways "to reframe, appropriate, or replace the existing systems" (Kubota & Miller, 2017, p. 145) that oppress or contribute to oppress.

Trena mentioned pedagogical possibilities that she imagined for her young kids:

> They can look at it and look at their own situation and decide where they are and how it relates. They can start to make some of those kinds of those connections. And there is that big piece that talks about not judging them, right? Really listening and opening up the discourse and the conversation, and then, why do you think that? Yeah, you can start when they are young. (Trena, Final Interview)

At the same time that Trena seemed to be motivated to have difficult conversations with her younger students, she was concerned about some of the consequences:

> Sort of my take away, you know, having those dialogues and those conversations with students, which I'm still very nervous about having them. Because you don't want to put in too much of your own thoughts, you know, possibly upset parents, but at the same time, kids are very capable of making connections. Whether it's a connection that a six-year-old kid makes or an eight-

> year-old or a ten-year-old, a twelve-year-old will be a bit different based on their experiences and what they've done so far. But they can make connections and start those dialogues. There is a lot of really good examples. (Trena, Final Interview)

When she said, "Because you don't want to put in too much of your own thoughts, you know, possibly upset parents," Trena might have assumed that her thoughts would be different from the kids' parents. I interpreted this comment as showing that before the study, this kind of conversation already generated mixed feelings for her. Now, she might be more aware of the need for difficult conversations in which kids have the opportunity to make associations and develop critical literacy practices from an early age:

> I think we kind of touch on that a bit, but I do think that social class can be explored a little bit more in the early years. I definitely think that literature is a great way to open up the conversation for students, but really having more of the dialogic question, I think it's called or where you really give the students the opportunity to learn how to ask questions, to have a discussion and to dig deeper into why they have that perspective, their perspective. (Trena, Final Interview)

Trena's response reveals that this process contributed to her process of *conscientização* about pedagogical choices that do not critically explore social inequities. Moreover, her answer also confirms that there are different levels of *concientização*, which means that intellectual acceptance does not guarantee a change in practice and that doing differently results from emotional, political, and existential acceptance (Freire, 1985).

The topic of brave spaces was recalled by Kay and Emma as an idea to be put into practice:

> So, there is some valid fear [in] talking about these difficult conversations. So when we were talking about safe spaces and Patrick brought up the idea of brave spaces, my mind just kind of bloomed open because I think, of course, we are constantly saying to our students: this classroom is a safe space, and you can share in here, but that is not necessarily true. I think I would look more into that brave space idea and see how you can communicate to students that you wanna have a brave space, and then we'll together make it a safe space. (Kay, Final Interview)

> I think even just working with the teachers in the sense of working with them, and again going back to that creating a brave space, moving to a safe space. You know, really thinking about my interaction and, "How do I get the teachers to interact?" (Emma, Final Interview)

The topic of brave spaces ignited deep reflections on engaging students and teachers in difficult conversations. The promotion of difficult conversations requires the construction of an environment where participants can share their doubts, assumptions, and vulnerabilities. Kay and Emma talked about their plans to nurture brave spaces in their contexts by considering and including diverse social locations in more intersectional approaches.

Another aspect that could be translated to future ELA practices is that there was some interest in taking part in this study to learn how to conduct research. Enrolled as graduate students, Patrick and Trena commented on this opportunity for them to consider ideas and topics in their future studies:

> And I find this very helpful in particular given that I'm starting my grad studies. To have this kind of warm-up to start thinking about some of these bigger ideas and how they affect our education system was a really good practice. I think that

> there is that formal learning that I'm going to undertake, that I was planning to do anyway, but now it gives me more a bit of sense of the things I actually want to study in my master's program and then the informal learning, as well, right? (Patrick, Final Interview)

> As I had mentioned, I'm starting my masters. As I registered for my courses just a couple of days ago, which are mainly diagnostic in reading and writing, I was in the back of my head wondering if any of my courses will cover some of the current issues in education. Well, my focus may be very narrow on language and literacy and reading books in the classroom. It does relate to other issues, social issues, and socioeconomic status because those critical literacies, those um pieces of language and the books that we use, whether they are diverse in perspective, whether whom they are written for, are related to language and literacy. So, while I might be in the end, my masters really focused on getting around a specific learning challenge. There are other pieces that are very related to it. And it's neat to see how they all interrelate. (Trena, Final Interview)

Patrick and Trena spotlighted the role of this study as a learning opportunity for their future studies in their master's courses. It seemed that they expanded their views about educational contexts and language and literacy research, as they observed the influences of social issues on educational systems (Patrick), and showed a will to relate language learning and teaching to contemporary issues (Trena). In this direction, their participation in this project collaborated to deepen their reflections on their future graduate studies and research choices.

Summary

The participants' answers indicated that this study contributed to their pedagogical thinking, inquiring processes, and hyper self-reflectivity (Kapoor, 2004;

Kubota & Miller, 2017). Furthermore, through the analysis of their comments, a highlight of this process was the opportunity to learn from and with each other through professional conversations where personal stories were embedded. At the same time that the educators shared some of the teaching practices that they considered successful, they also talked about their doubts and vulnerabilities. This sharing marked this study as a space for collaborative learning. Their answers recalled specific moments, stories, reflections, and tensions. They showed that inquiring, thinking, and discussing social class, privilege, and power and agency in the context of ELA through critical lenses, posed and will continue to pose pedagogical challenges and possibilities. Furthermore, their answers highlight the importance for teachers and researchers to be attentive to the dynamic relations in educational settings marked by difference, uncertainty, and unpredictability.

In considering the outcomes, challenges, and future possibilities of this process, the next chapter will explore the final considerations for this study.

Chapter VII. Final Considerations

Educational responses are never neutral (Biesta, 2013; Dyches et al., 2021; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1985), and therefore, education must be considered an "*interested* endeavor" which sees "the human being as a subject of action and responsibility" (Biesta, 2013, p. 742, emphasis in original). Thus, to think of this research as an "*interested* endeavor" involved reflecting on educative actions and responsibilities that the participants (including myself) took to engage in dialogic inquiry and raise possibilities for resisting inequalities through English Language Arts as a discipline.

Considering that "disciplines act as 'regimes of truth' (Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2016) that privilege and marginalize certain knowledges, stories, bodies, and perspectives" (Dyches et al., 2020, p. 368), this study was aimed at creating professional learning that could lead to a process of dialogic inquiry about the status quo, dominant systems, beliefs, and bias informed by colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal discourses. This study also encouraged the educators to reflect on pedagogical practices and roles as English language teachers. As I write the final considerations, these are some of the questions surrounding my thinking:

· My learning: What have I learned? What was I surprised at?

· The implications of this study: Why was this research necessary? Will the teachers' participation prompt any ongoing interests in these areas for them? What differences, if any, does such a project have in Manitoba's broader context of education?

· The limitations of this study: What could I have done differently?

· Future research: What future research and teaching possibilities stem from this study?

As I connect with these inquiries and reflect on the research process, I must say that I am not sure if I will have the answers to all of them. Indeed, one of the points that this process confirmed is the existence (and persistence) of inequalities in local and global networked contexts in which we are situated and the need for "responsible educative responses" (Biesta, 2013, p. 743). In seeking to get some of these responses throughout this process, this chapter explores my reflections on this research process, the main contributions of this study, a visual of this reflective learning process, some considerations about teaching English Language Arts through critical perspectives, and future possibilities for English language teaching and research connected to this project.

Reflections on the Research Process

My reflections encompassed the comfortable and confident moments as well as the doubts and uncertainties of my choices in this process. These reflections also led me to analyze how this research entailed a "movement away from established places of knowing, […] whereby [I was] confounded and dislocated, where there [were] no easy answers" (herising, 2005, p. 148). In addition, it also helped me to think about this process as a "way to find out things" (Kovach, 2005, p. 33) through research and a learning opportunity for me.

I recall having mixed feelings about my positionality as a researcher throughout this experience. On the one hand, I felt I was in a powerful position as I researched with a neat plan and the goal of having difficult conversations. I also counted on my experience as a teacher educator in Brazil. I considered the context quite familiar, as I had previously had some experience with Manitoba ELA teachers via a research assistant opportunity. On the other hand, I was an international student who also faced an unfamiliar context, as I had no experience teaching at public or private schools in Canada. Moreover, in Brazil, I taught English as an additional language.

As I have interacted with the field in this betweener position (Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Milligan, 2016), this whole process has been a meaningful and deep learning experience. As a researcher, I focused on building honest relationships by enacting with the group through a dialogic space, where transformation and knowledge production stimulated multiple ways of thinking. Through dialogue, I learned with and from the teachers about the Canadian educational system in the context of Manitoba. This included, for instance, insights about French Immersion schools and public and private schools in Manitoba and details about the work of Reading Recovery teachers. Learning about brave spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013) and what they encompass was another remarkable moment in this process. It was rewarding to see that we built a brave space that "foster[ed] a learning environment that support[ed the] participants in the challenging work of authentic engagement with regard to issues of identity, oppression, power and privilege" (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p. 139). Accordingly, it was remarkable to see how the educators engaged with gender, ableism, and social class positions in personal and honest ways.

As I go back to the data and how they were generated, I look more attentively at the group of participants, and I consider how the recruitment process influenced the group's profile. I looked for English Language Arts teachers from Manitoba's public and private K-12 school system who taught students from diverse economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. I also tried to recruit teachers with a range of professional and personal backgrounds from schools and communities in Manitoba. Recruiting ELA teachers might have influenced the group's profile in terms of some identity markers, such as being white, middle-class, and native speakers of English. The group had participants who already tried to engage in practices that considered different lenses and questioned systems, and our conversations helped sustain their motivation. Having

similar interests in working with critical perspectives was a substantial factor for inquiring about inequalities. However, the homogeneity of the group's interests and some identity markers might have prevented us from digging deeper into issues of difference that involved intersections of race and plurilingualism in English language classes. I also remind myself of the privilege of conducting this research in Canada with a group of privileged teachers. As I question the recruitment part of my research, I ask: How did these voices become dominant in my research? From a decolonial point of view, what kind of dialogue and thinking did I promote? What topics were silenced due to the group profile? How was my voice heard as an international student coming from Brazil?

Finally, this study also allowed me to have meaningful conversations with teachers interested in critical literacies and issues of social justice and who were "willing to be disturbed" (Wheatley, 2002, p. 38). Their sharing of ideas, questions, and readings enriched the process. I must also highlight the essential role that inquiring has in raising difficult and "critical conversations" (Dyches et al., 2021) while building "brave spaces" (Arao & Clemens, 2013). Bringing up essential and critical questions, seeking multiple perspectives to answer these questions, analyzing why we gravitate towards specific answers and having difficult conversations are at the heart of this kind of inquiry process. Conducting a study through these lenses was an opportunity to internationally investigate and deepen knowledge about language teacher learning and teaching. It was also a way to experience the challenging function of teacher learning spaces in exploring issues, problems, and ideas critical to living in a diverse world and learning in educational contexts.

Answering Research Questions

In understanding teachers as designers and learners, the proposed project created a space for professional teacher learning and collaborative critical inquiry into notions of social class in language and literacy classrooms in Winnipeg, a diverse urban context. Through these conversations, the aim was to build knowledge about (1) teachers' understandings of socio-historical contexts as well as institutional and societal discourses on power, agency, social class, and privilege in English language education; (2) teachers' professional inquiries into social class, privilege, and language as power and agency; and (3) teacher learning related to social class and its intersectionalities informed by critical perspectives in an online setting. The objective was to understand what happens when educators are invited to critically engage with texts, concepts, and their own experiences related to power, agency, privilege, and social class. The following answers to the research questions emerged from this process.

1. How do eight teachers articulate their understandings of power, agency, social class, and privilege in English language education before being given focused readings on these matters and discussing them with peers?

During the initial interviews, the participants engaged with lived experiences, interpretations and situated perspectives and explored perceptions of privileges and margins in social and educational contexts in Manitoba. As they conceptualized social class, the teachers shared understandings of economic materiality and raised observations about meritocracy, privilege, opportunities, and barriers created by the interplay of other identity categories. Their comments focused on the heterogeneity of students' identities when looking at their educational contexts. They highlighted the challenges, complexities, and difficulties that Indigenous students and immigrant and refugee students face in their everyday lives.

Teachers recognized their privileges in terms of social class position, race, gender. and family support in Canada. Although some of them talked about ongoing government initiatives to reduce differences, they also identified the difficulties of some groups of people, for example, Indigenous students and immigrant and refugee students, concerning the English language, job opportunities and social class positions. Some used meritocracy discourses to tackle on being successful in this society, while others questioned the power of structures and systems to differentiate opportunities for groups of people. Being a teacher was considered a privilege, and some participants talked about the roles of teachers in interrogating school programs, as well as staff's and students' perspectives on privilege.

The educators referred to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement as impacting their teaching contexts and work. As schools responded differently to these events, the participants mentioned their students' differences in relation to technological resources, access, and knowledge when dealing with remote teaching and learning. In addition, the Black Lives Matter movement made teachers inquire about racism and tokenism at schools when dealing with marginalization issues.

Regarding language as power and agency, the participants talked about the ELA curriculum and the need and freedom to explore this practice through significant and current issues. Then, some shared their initiatives in teaching about poverty and social class through the lenses of language as power and agency. At the same time, some reported being afraid to hurt students' feelings through teacher talk and their positionalities during difficult conversations. Finally, this research question prompted inquiry that led to insights about the current and ongoing need to discuss normalized views on social class, privilege, and power and agency while thinking progressively about English language education in pluricultural contexts.

2. When critical theories inform conversations around English Language Arts education, how are these perspectives displayed through the teachers' dialogic inquiries?

The participants were invited to read and inquire through critical lenses throughout a series of three online meetings. By sharing their personal and professional lived experiences and understandings, they explored their positionalities, privilege, and its effect on their perceptions and interactions in educational contexts. These explorations led them into reflections on the more or less dominant voices in their curriculum and classrooms. In addition, critical literacies, intersectionality, and decolonial lenses contributed to understandings about systems of oppression and to realizations that we are all implicated in these systems.

As these critical lenses framed conversations, they raised questions and dialogues regarding classist beliefs, discourses, and practices that are informed by and comply with systems that reproduce a "culture of poverty" (Gorski, 2012). The educators' inquiries broadened the scope of this study as we also engaged in interrogating systems of oppression, their roles in maintaining these systems, and ways of resisting them. Understanding how systems influence, silence, and reproduce inequalities is intimidating and reveals how we all have internalized colonial thoughts and attitudes. The practical consequences of engaging in this kind of work were mentioned as the fear of losing a job, the power of educational systems wielded through boards and administration, and the belief that the system will never change. These factors, both real and intimidating, have implications for those who may pursue critical inquiries in and from the ELA classroom.

3. What are the unfoldings of an online professional learning opportunity for English language teachers, in which social class and language are addressed as power and agency?

The teachers' answers indicated that this study contributed to their pedagogical thinking, inquiring and reflective processes, and collaborative learning. Moreover, the participants considered the online setting as a helpful tool to engage in conversation in comfortable and flexible ways. However, some of them missed some features that face-to-face interaction provides, such as body language and more spontaneous interaction.

They shared the importance of having professional learning spaces that allow teachers to have difficult conversations. Thinking about social class raised observations about the power of an abstract idea and its material implications in everyone's lives. The analysis led to reflections on social class implications for pedagogical discourses and practices. It also showed the role of professional learning communities as places where teachers can recognize privilege, inquire about our complicities with systems that reproduce an unequal society, and imagine ways of resisting such systems.

Interpreting social class discourses and practices through intersectionality lenses highlighted the need to look at “an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations” (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2) and the importance of addressing the complexities that emerge with these interactions. Exploring positionalities contributed to raising pedagogical alternatives that support “an education that disrupts entrenched historical and social stratification” (Bryce, 2019, p. 69). Acknowledging educators’ and scholars’ responsibility to critically and continually inquire about what they have come to know and believe, due to social locations, can deepen discussions about pedagogical choices, and the citizens and the society they envision.

Organizing the key insights of the study in response to each research questions helped me in identifying the critical contributions of this process, which I turn to next.

The Study's Main Contributions

There was a prominent force informing the context of this study and the COVID-19 pandemic. It affected my plans for how and where the group would meet for our conversations. We thereby had to go online. The online setting opened possibilities for the teachers to participate in the study from wherever they were. My initial interviews with them began, and participants and we were very excited about the virtual environment. As we met via Blue Jeans, I recorded interviews and meetings and felt comfortable in that environment. There was good feedback about the online setting of the meetings, as the teachers reported that they felt there was engagement as individuals and as a group. Also, after the final interviews, I shared a folder via Google Drive with some extra readings selected according to the participants' comments on what they wanted to learn more about. In relation to educational settings, Fernandes and Gattolin (2021) state that "we have learned during this pandemic that we simply cannot pretend technology is not there anymore" (p. 537). The burning question is, what pedagogical choices are we making about technological resources and use?

New technologies have come to stay and influence the work of teachers, teacher-educators, and researchers. As Fernandes and Gattolin (2021) underline, we are living in a moment of crisis, and there is a call for educators to look at "this metaphoric invitation this COVID-19 pandemic has sent us to revisit our praxis" (p. 531). In connection to the teachers' experiences, as evident in this study, the need for online teaching raised old and new issues about teachers' and students' access and knowledge about technology. As the world became more virtual than in-person, inequities in all sectors of society became even more apparent and deepened. Moreover, children at home needed different

ways of thinking and doing education as access and engagement also depended on variables deeply connected with socio-economic conditions, the resources available to them, and family arrangements. Accordingly, now, more than ever, there is a need to talk about and act towards access, positions, privileges, and margins in educational contexts, along with epistemologies that voice and critically respond to students' onto-epistemologies.

In the analysis of teachers' comments, it was evident that a highlight of this process was the opportunity to learn with each other through professional conversations in which the participants entrusted one another with personal stories. At the same time that they shared some of the teaching practices that they considered successful, they also talked about their doubts and vulnerabilities. This sharing marked this study as a space for collaborative learning, and an attitude of hyper-reflexivity was shown when we tried to be attentive to epistemic sites of privilege (Andreotti, 2011a). Further, we reflected on our understandings through the lenses of locations and political commitments (Brown & Strega, 2005) and inquired about our complicities with hierarchies of power (Kapoor, 2004; Kubota & Miller, 2017).

Another important aspect of this study was that the participants knew in advance and detail what they were expected to do and how much time they would need to devote to this process. It was reflected in their responsible engagement with the process, for example, by reading texts beforehand, contacting me if they would not be present, and respecting one another in turn taking during the discussions in every meeting. The fact that there were a transparent description of the research activities in the letter of consent and clear conversation guidelines (agreed to by all) contributed to the participants' commitment to and engagement with the group.

In relation to the fluidity of conversations, I observed that the moments in which a participant shared a vulnerability, a misunderstanding, a barrier, or a social position, helped pull other participants into dialogue. Their answers recalled specific moments, stories, reflections, and tensions that forwarded interrogations, thoughts, and discussions about social class, privilege, and power and agency in the context of ELA, through critical lenses. Contexts marked by difference, uncertainty, unpredictability, and pluridiversity will continue to pose pedagogical challenges and possibilities. Professional conversations that respond to these contexts in critical and inclusive ways seek to understand, question, and reflect on the power and dynamic relations in which language teaching and learning are implicated. These processes invite teachers to become aware, learn, think, suspend, resist, and interrupt content, understandings, and practices that maintain the status quo, oppress and discriminate against difference, and generate new conversations and possibilities for more inclusive and democratic classrooms.

Furthermore, opportunities like this study might motivate graduate students to offer study groups that explore different themes, topics, and interests in informal learning environments. Understanding that genuine participation is always a personal choice, this kind of professional learning opportunity might pose less pressure for teachers to participate in dialogue. Time, meaningful and relevant topics, and agency in professional learning are also central for participants to engage more genuinely in discussions. This research might be seen as an interesting approach for universities and a possibility for partnerships with schools.

Main Contributions of this Study for English Language Teaching

By interrogating content, Freire (1992/2013) reminds us that

> the fundamental problem—a problem of a political nature, and colored by ideological hues—is who chooses the content, and in behalf of which persons and things the 'chooser's' teaching will be performed—in favor of whom, against whom, in favor of what, against what. (p. 94)

This study was aimed at looking at how teachers raise discussions about language as power and agency. Readings sparked conversations about understandings and practices, and as participants, we experienced reading as "a series of ever-emergent relations" (Boldt & Leander, 2020, p. 7). Drawing on Deleuzo-Guattarian-inspired theory of affect, Boldt and Leander consider reading as living on a plateau: a place of "unstable becomings—identities not yet made—the coming together of different things and movements in relation" (Boldt & Leander, 2020, p. 6). Then, the act of reading composes and is composed of intensities and multiplicities in the scene, and "we can never think about reading as a thing in itself with a discrete beginning and ending and discrete boundaries" (Boldt & Leander, 2020, p. 7). The participants, interpretations, the online setting, the inquiries, the pandemic moment, the way we organized ourselves as a group affected and were affected by the readings and these ever-emergent relations prompted reflections on what, who, and how that is considered (or not) in ELA teaching.

I encouraged educators to look more attentively and critically at their pedagogical choices through a critical literacies perspective. By exploring issues of poverty, social class and privilege, the teachers shared a fear of raising these topics, which led to a "discursive avoidance" (Dyches et al., 2021) of these themes in their classrooms. However, the conversations in which they explored their positionalities, contexts, and normalized beliefs informed by neoliberal understandings, opened up possibilities for considering students' identities and repertoires in more inclusive ways.

Given the implications of colonial boundaries in our thinking and performances, this study was intended to challenge the “colonial matrix” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) of ELA as a discipline. According to Todd and Robert (2018), “decolonization is an unfolding and ongoing process that happens on multiple levels, both personally, structurally and systematically” (p. 68). Decolonization is also a non-linear process in which our efforts might constantly identify and resist the colonial roots that inform our ways of living, producing knowledge, and learning. Coming from Latin America, I raised difficult conversations with a group of Canadian teachers who teach the English language. Nevertheless, it is an ongoing effort to engage in inquiries and collaboratively develop practices informed by decolonial perspectives on how we conceive English language teaching and learning. Concerning discussions on literacy, Duboc and Menezes de Souza (2021) assert that “one of the most intriguing questions in decolonial thought is to find ways for an ethical and genuine communication” (p. 560). In their view, decolonizing practices related to English language teaching and literacy might contribute to questioning the “conventional way of thinking communication” (Duboc & Menezes de Souza, 2021, p. 560). For the authors, while recognizing that intelligibility and appropriateness are central to conventional understandings of communication, we should interrogate how racialized bodies are considered in acts of communication. Duboc and Menezes de Souza (2021) explain that in “bringing back the body” (Veronelli, 2015), a decolonial perspective invites considerations on the opacity (Veronelli, 2016) and fracture (Mignolo, 2000) of every communicative encounter and advances discussions about the geo-body-politics of knowledge (Mignolo, 2000).

Manitoba is a context marked by immigration, a significant Indigenous population, and social inequities. Within this scenario, this study showed that professional learning for ELA teachers might enact more opportunities for pedagogical

reflections, discussions, and practices that consider identity, language, and cultural difference as a rule. For example, discussions might consider: What does it mean for learning to include a range of plurilingual repertoires effectively? What views of language learning inform teaching and assessment processes? What theories bring plurilingual perspectives? Whose repertoires have more value in English language teaching and evaluation processes? Why?

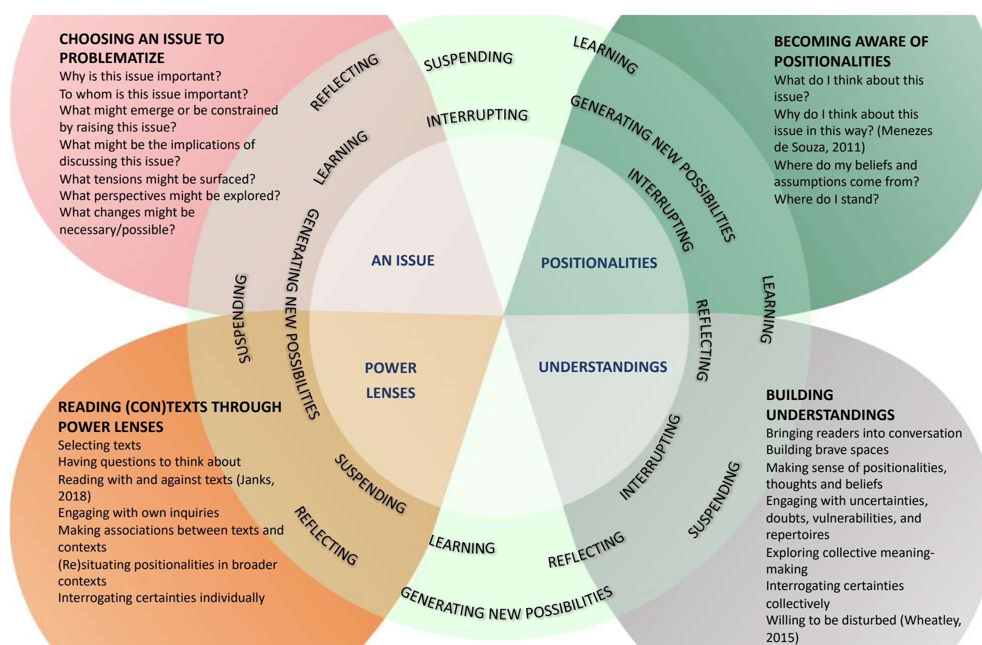
While our conversations became spaces for participants to share personal and professional ideas, practices, vulnerabilities, and doubts, this study also sustained the need for ongoing dialogue about the roots of our understandings and positionalities. hooks (2010) underscores that "the future of learning lies with the cultivation of conversations, of dialogue" (p. 44). In this context, informed by inquiries and texts that took a critical stance, dialogue as a "natural part of the process of knowing" (Freire, 1992/2013, p. 404) made us engage with our readings of the world, which is "a permanent movement back and forth between 'reading' reality and reading words—the spoken word, too" (Freire, 1992/2013, p. 404). As we zoomed in on social class, privilege, and language as power and agency through texts, our discussions allowed us to explore identity aspects and robust systems that complicated the big picture of inequities in society, educational settings, and the teachers' classrooms.

Designing Professional Learning Through Lenses of Power: A Visual

Considering the participants' comments and my perceptions as a researcher in this study, I transmediated this experience into a visual to represent the design of this professional learning process. This visual might help design future initiatives for professional learning opportunities.

Figure 17

Designing Meaningful Professional Learning



This graphic was generated through my analysis of what the process created and what emerged from this work. Based on this study, four significant moves seemed to have played key roles in this process: choosing meaningful issues to problematize, becoming aware of positionalities, reading texts and contexts through power lenses, and building understandings with other teachers. Each move involved asking questions and raising opportunities to act into deepening the inquiry experience. The questions and opportunities are represented in petal-like designs that expand outside the margins of the graphic. This expansion means there will always be questions, opportunities, and actions of which we are unaware. This expansion also suggests the openness of this process to future questions, opportunities, and actions. Reflecting, suspending, interrupting, learning, and generating new possibilities emerged from different moments and as a continuous process. They were ongoing and might have started before the meetings, during any proposed activity, at the junction of proposed activities, or after the meetings. I tried to represent this idea by placing them in a circular movement in different positions and diverse moments. In this sense, associations, insights, and "A-ha" moments happened at different times for different participants.

This study brought readers together to have conversations and invited them to take an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). *Choosing an issue to problematize* involved observing, interpreting, and interrogating the role of ELA teaching and learning in a diverse social, historical, and cultural context such as Manitoba. The guiding questions for "the choice" were related to reasons (why), power (who and what), implications, tensions, perspectives, and changes. We initially problematized issues of social class through power lenses and then expanded inquiries that were meaningful to our contexts. By considering understandings of social class and poverty as an issue that is critical to teaching and learning in ELA to further social justice and equity, this study was aimed at inquiring about what impeded or enabled educational efforts to address inequities in language and literacy education in the K-12 Manitoba school system.

In relation to *becoming aware of positionalities*, the participants were initially invited to explore their social positions, understandings, and beliefs within contexts (Vasquez et al., 2013), and to reflect on their standpoints. The guiding questions were: What do I think about this issue? Why do I think about this issue in this way? Where do my beliefs and assumptions come from? Where do I stand? The participants had opportunities to name positions and reflect on what they represented and how they influenced interpretations of their teaching contexts. For example, I encouraged them to think about their social class positionality concerning money and power and, later on, unpack their virtual schoolbags and think about their past stories. Suggested texts also raised their awareness, as the educators mentioned how they related their contexts and attitudes as professionals to some of the situations that the authors presented. Margaret, for instance, shared how one of the texts made her question herself about being the

"nice white teacher" and the role of schools, as an institutional power, in oppressing students.

By *reading (con)texts through power lenses*, the participants had the opportunity to access texts that introduced concepts, theories, practical ideas, and research. In the case of this study, the themes were social class, privilege, and language as power and agency. When selecting the texts, I chose articles that responded to some of the participants' initial questions, balanced theory and practice, and were informed by critical theories. I proposed questions to prompt the teachers' thinking and motivated them to read with and against texts (Janks, 2018). The readings were intended to have them engaging with their inquiries, making associations between texts and contexts, (re)situating positionalities in broader contexts, and interrogating certainties individually.

Building understandings show how the teachers produced meaning-making as individuals and as a group by reflecting on what informed their positionalities and contexts and sharing interpretations of texts and contexts during the meetings. Building understandings involved bringing readers into the conversation, building brave spaces by negotiating and establishing some conversation guidelines, and being responsible and respectful of each other's engagement with uncertainties, doubts, vulnerabilities, and repertoires. As the participants showed a willingness to be disturbed, they engaged in attentive listening, which consequently enhanced their trust in each other and the process. There were moments for them to connect with their understandings of social class, privilege, and language as power and agency, and build collective understandings of the topics and their relation to their contexts. As the participants started making some connections with the suggested readings, they made sense of positionalities, thoughts, and beliefs, and engaged with uncertainties, doubts, vulnerabilities, and repertoires. By

exploring collective meaning-making, they revisited and interrogated certainties collectively. Through our dialogue, we searched for and encouraged change informed by increased class-sensitive understandings of contexts and pedagogical decision-making and their impacts in the Manitoba school system. As a result, the dialogue contributed to ongoing reflections, suspensions, interruptions, and learning while generating new possibilities.

Limitations of the Study

As any other study, this research has some limitations. The first one is the number of meetings. The complexities of our discussions raised questions and issues that could have been pursued in more depth had we had more time. One participant suggested that another closing meeting would have been appreciated for them to engage with each other's meaningful moments and comments and suggestions about the process. Another meeting would also have allowed an opportunity to probe questions or ideas raised or shared that perhaps the participants would have liked to have spent more time revisiting and unpacking. The second limitation is related to the texts used for the meetings and the possibility of having more scholars from the South. Bringing in these authors would add perspectives for navigating discussions framed by critical lenses informed by contexts other than the North. A final limitation would be that potential individual insights and thinking were perhaps omitted, as I did not have access to teachers' artifacts for analysis, for example, their journals or any other visuals that were asked as part of the discussions.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research might consider reconnecting this group of teachers to reflect on the implications of this process for their practices. By inquiring about their pedagogical approach, a new project would deepen issues that were significant for them, plan

activities together, put them into practice, and reflect on students' and teachers' takes of this process.

Another future opportunity might be engaging in projects that support teacher learning in informal and transnational spaces. For example, inviting teachers from Brazil and Canada to join in online conversation and expanding the scope of conversations about teaching and learning English in different contexts. Also promoting spaces where teachers can get involved in their own inquiries through different lenses as a long-term project. This possibility would provide a space for dialogue with diverse representativeness.

This research also raised inquiries about using digital tools that offer more interactive possibilities for participants and the pedagogical decisions teachers make about technology in classrooms. Some of my questions now are: What else could I have explored via online media? What tools could help teachers keep learning about and making the best of digital opportunities? What digital and online tools and practices will contribute to understandings that transgress discourses of collaboration and adaptation and advance more inclusive and critical educational opportunities?

Closing Remarks

"We need to do this work." (Patrick, Final Interview)

"What I got out of it was that I wasn't alone in those feelings." (Sasha, Final Interview)

"Am I part of that system that is becoming a barrier to others?" (Trena, Final Interview)

"I thought a lot about my own program and how I can affect that, but what about the bigger picture of my school?" (Kay, Final Interview)

This work raised dialogic inquiries and reflections on what impeded or enabled educational efforts to address inequities in language and literacy education in the K-12

Manitoba school system. By analyzing social positions and interrogating social inequities through critical lenses, there was an effort for engaging with responsible educative inquiries and a search for "responsible educative responses" (Biesta, 2013, p. 743) in the context of English language teaching. Considering that English language teachers are implicated in systems of authority and knowledge informed by colonial understandings, this study advocates for continuous professional learning that critically and affectively explores positionalities, identities, places, and literacies that perform and are performed in dynamic relations of power. Engaging with texts, inquiries, examinations, and collective meaning-making through lenses of power become opportunities to suspend, interrupt, and respond otherwise to understandings, content, and practices not aligned with the intricacies of teachers' contexts.

Through her work, Ellsworth (2005) expects "to contribute to efforts to reconfigure educators' conversations and actions about pedagogy as the force through which we come to have surprising, incomplete knowings, ideas, and sensations that undo us and set us in motion toward an open future" (p. 18). In dialogue with her, I hope this work contributes to future professional conversations by generating ongoing reflections, investigations, and pedagogical possibilities for language and literacy teaching in contexts marked by uncertainties, complexities, and vulnerabilities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Initial Interview Guide

Initial Interview Guide

Thank you again for taking part in this study. You should have received an email inviting you to consider participating in two online interviews and three online group meetings for my study on *Inquiring about Social Class with English Language Arts Teachers in Manitoba*. The study is designed to better understand what impedes or enables educational efforts to address inequities in language and literacy education in the K-12 Manitoba school system while considering understandings of social class. More details about the study and your prticipation in the study are included in the letter of informed consent. This initial interview will take an hour. Also, I will be recording this interview and transcribing it for further analysis.

1. Could you tell me a little about your professional background: studies and working experience? How long have you been teaching? What fuels your passion currently?
2. How have your beliefs and practices changed over your career?
3. Why did you opt to be a part of this study? Why does this interest you?
4. How do you keep yourself updated in terms of professional development? What topics and questions are you grappling with professionally at this time?
5. In your view, what role does social class have in a person's identity construction?
6. Tell me a little bit about your observations on social class in the context in which you teach.
7. And, what role does social class have in your own identity formation and choice of job?
8. How would you define social class?

9. What relationships do you see between English Language Arts teaching and class?
10. How do you approach social class in your classes? What questions are you raising/would you like to raise about social class?
11. What are your views on social class and poverty? How do you teach about poverty?
12. What would you hope to learn and discuss through your participation in this group? What would be your questions?

Appendix B: Meeting Plan

The following tentative plan for the three meetings shows possible topics, questions, and themes to engage in what impedes or enables educational efforts to address inequities in language and literacy education in the K-12 Manitoba school system while considering understandings of social class. I believe some balance between my suggestions and participants' questions and ideas might mean modifying plans a bit, but these topics, readings, and questions are where I plan to begin.

Date	Plan
16/07	**Meeting 1: Social Class, Poverty & Contexts** How would you define social class? What are your views on social class and poverty? What are your observations of social class in the context you teach? What questions are you raising/would you like to raise about social class? **Building understandings** Hunt, C., & Seiver, M. (2018). Social class matters: class identities and discourses in educational contexts. *Educational Review*, *70*(3), 342–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1316240 Daniels, N. (2020, May 19). *How much has your zip code determined your opportunities?* New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/learning/how-much-has-your-zip-code-determined-your-opportunities.html
30/07	**Meeting 2: Language as Power and Agency: Approaching Social Class Through Critical Literacies** What should students learn/know about poverty and social class? How do you approach social class in your classes? **Building understandings** Jones, S., & Vagle, M. (2013). Living contradictions and working for change: Toward a theory of social class-sensitive pedagogy. *Educational Researcher*, *42*(3), 129–141. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X13481381 Luke, A. (2000). Critical literacy in Australia: A matter of context and standpoint. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 43*(5), 448–461. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40017081 Luke, A. (2013). *Allan Luke: Critical thinking and critical literacy* [Video]. Vimeo. https://vimeo.com/87212871
13/08	**Meeting 3: Social Class and Intersectionalities** How can we approach social class concerning gender and race in English language classes? What can we learn concerning normalized practices and beliefs about social class and Indigenous peoples? How can we approach social class in times of COVID-19? What intersectionalities would open up critical dialogues within your contexts of practice? **Building understandings** Bryce, N. (2019). Social movements for freedom an anti-oppressive approach to literacy and content area learning in an urban fourth grade classroom. *Radical Teacher*, *114*(114), 60–71. https://doi.org/10.5195/rt.2019.535 Sinclair, M. (2018). Decolonizing ELA: Confronting Privilege and Oppression in Textual Spaces. *English Journal*, *107*(6), 89–94. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/2076933139/

Appendix C: **Final Interview Guide**

University of Manitoba

Final Interview Guide

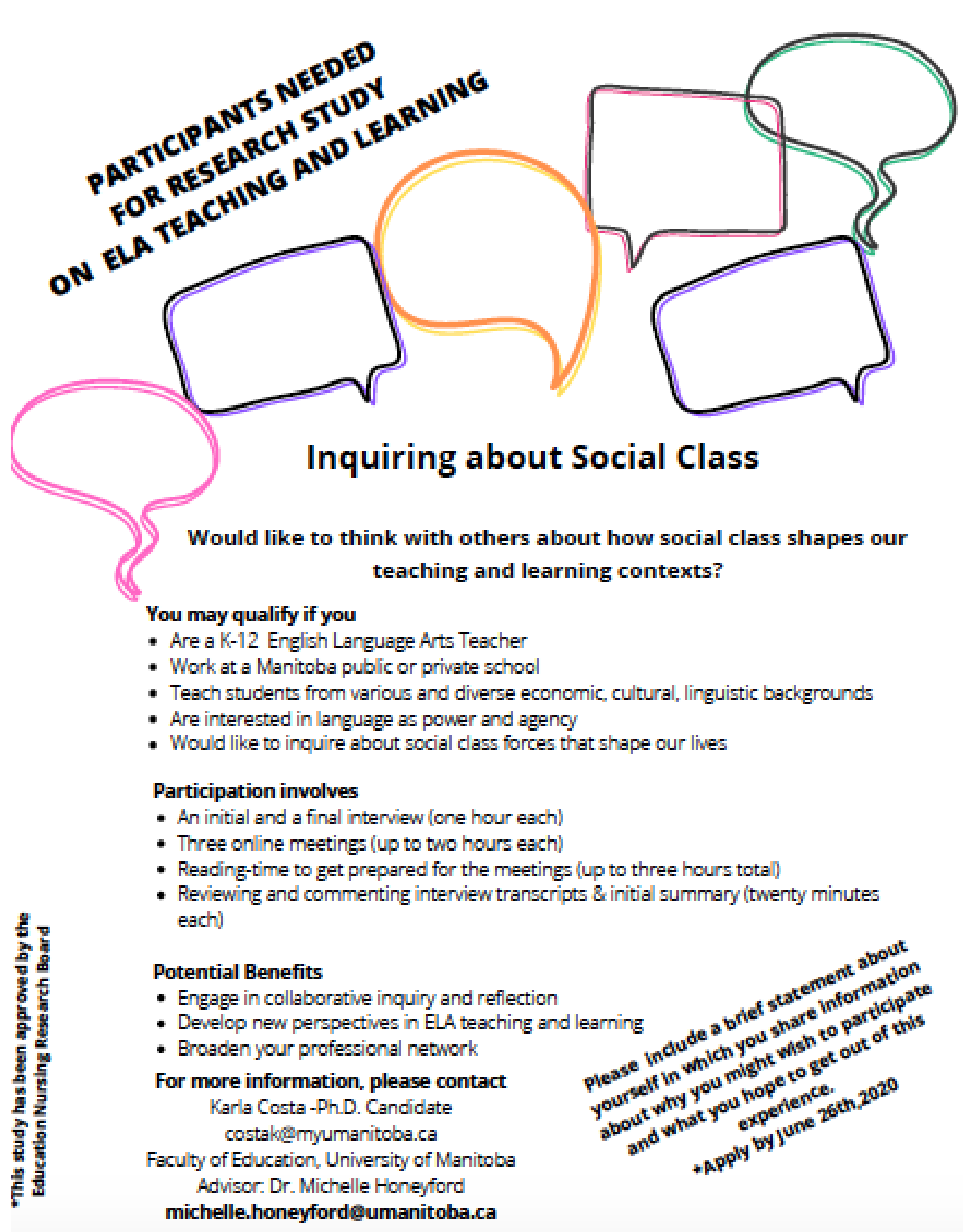
Thank you again for taking part in this study. This is our final interview, and it will take up to an hour. I will be recording this interview and transcribing it for further analysis. Participating in this study is voluntary. You have received a letter of informed consent about the study. I will remind you that the consent is ongoing. Do you have any questions?

You have received the question guide for the interview in your email. I do want to note that you can choose to end your participation in this study at any point without penalty. You are also free to “pass” on any of the questions you do not wish to answer, or any specific invitation you might get to chime in to the conversation.

Any questions? OKAY, then, let’s get started.

1. What did you hope to learn or better understand through participating in this study?
2. What were the most meaningful discussions and moments of our meetings for you? Why? What were the most difficult discussions and moments? Why?
3. What would you like to keep learning more about? How?
4. How do you see your role as a teacher in exploring social class in ELA classes? Has that changed in any way from what you might have said before this study began? How or why or why not?
5. How would you describe your process of reflection in this experience?
6. What comments or feedback do you have about the overall research process? What would you change? Why?

Appendix D: Recruitment Poster



Appendix E: First Meeting Summary

Date: July 14th
Time: 10 am -12 am
Research Study: Inquiring about Social Class with English Language Arts Teachers in Manitoba

First Meeting Summary

Social Class, Poverty & Contexts
How would you define social class? What are your views on social class and poverty? What are your observations of social class in the context you teach? What questions are you raising/would you like to raise about social class?
Suggested readings:
Hunt, C., & Seiver, M. (2018). Social class matters: class identities and discourses in educational contexts. Educational Review, 70(3), 342–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1316240
Daniels, N. (2020, May 19). *How much has your zip code determined your opportunities?* New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/learning/how-much-has-your-zip-code-determined-your-opportunities.html

Summary: Following the procedures required by ENREB, I started the meeting with the first meeting script and asked the participants to sign a confidentiality waiver. I shared some conversation guidelines, and we started talking about what social class means. The participants mentioned social class as economic divisions, in connection with race, culture, and other factors, how social class positions people in life and society, material, and visual pieces representing social class, and the opportunities we end up having in society. They also talked about social class as an identity marker and its influences on our ways of interacting in society. A comment was made about how the article helped them unpack the understanding of socioeconomic status, social class, and poverty, providing more language to talk about social class issues. The participants talked about tensions that come with understanding your social class positioning in the contexts in which you teach. Then, we started talking about home literacies, zip codes, and discussed understandings of the idea that "literacy is all about class" (Ritter, 2016, p. 53). The educators mentioned how their students engage in different literacy practices as they might or might not have access to technology and books at home. I raised some questions about struggling readers and where this idea comes from and how we respond to it. The teachers talked about expectations about reading levels, gaps, and the need to become aware of how these levels might perpetuate issues of social class. They raised the importance of meeting students where they are and supporting teachers in developing expertise to understand students' needs better. There was some discussion about whether we should access the IP or not before engaging in with students who need support in ELA classrooms and what we might assume about students' abilities. The participants also talked about the deficit discourses that emerge with kids being behind, especially when students return to schools after the pandemic. In talking about diversity, one of the participants mentioned how teachers are raising awareness about the authors' demographics of the readings they require from their kids and inquiring about alternatives for different books. The educators raised the complexities of working with diversity and asked about what teachers are doing with the diversity represented in the books. Next, I shared some data about poverty in Manitoba, and we talked about why people are poor. The participants mentioned how the society is structured to keep people poor and the cycle of poverty. There was an invitation to think about "how are we complicit in keeping poor people poor?" We also talked about stereotypes of poor people in Manitoba, and participants mentioned that people might say "poor people are lazy," for example. Another example was related to Indigenous peoples (due to the number of Indigenous Peoples in the province) and assuming that they are poor, drug users, and alcoholics. The teachers mentioned how people

assume that panhandlers are drug users. We briefly talked about where these ideas come from: "Who or what does this 'culture of poverty' protect? We know who they hurt, but who do they benefit?" (Gorski, 2012). The participants mentioned that many times these ideas are part of conversations with parents and family. Comments were made about how the environment plays a central role, too. I finished the meeting by inviting participants to think about the following questions:

- "To what degree do you think your social class location may have affected/affect your reading of" (Appleman, 2005, p. 183) your teaching context?
- What deficit views and discourses do we notice in our contexts?
- How are social class discourses reproduced and resisted within the K-12 educational system in Manitoba?

Next meeting: July 28th – 10 am-12 am

Appendix F: Second Meeting Summary A
Date: July 28th
Time: 10 am -12 am
Research Study: Inquiring about Social Class with English Language Arts Teachers in Manitoba

Second Meeting Summary

Meeting 2: Language as Power and Agency: Approaching Social Class Through Critical Literacies

What should students learn/know about poverty and social class? How do you approach social class in your classes?

Building understandings:

Jones, S., & Vagle, M. (2013). Living contradictions and working for change: Toward a theory of social class-sensitive pedagogy. Educational Researcher, 42(3), 129–141. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X13481381

Luke, A. (2000). Critical literacy in Australia: A matter of context and standpoint. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 43(5), 448–461. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40017081

Luke, A. (2013). *Allan Luke: Critical thinking and critical literacy* [Video]. Vimeo. https://vimeo.com/87212871

Summary: I started the meeting by reminding the group about the ongoing consent and confidentiality agreement and reviewing the conversation guidelines. Then, the participants drew a picture of the existing power or class structure in which they lived and placed themselves in the picture in relation to where power and money are located (Appleman, 2015). When talking about the pictures, they mentioned how social class and other identity markers influence how we read and position ourselves in our personal and teaching contexts. There was some conversation about the fluidity of positionalities. Some participants used the metaphor of the ladder of success and talked about barriers and differences in environments, and assumptions that we might make about the haves and have-nots of an individual. A comment was made about the way poverty looks like, how visual messages might influence our first impressions, and how it is not so obvious to identify poverty only by the way students present themselves or what they value. The participants also talked about the privilege of being white, middle-class, heterosexual, and teachers in a Canadian context. When talking about privilege, there was a reflection about how important it is to become aware of the opportunities and choices that are there for white middle-class Canadians. An inquiry was raised about what we do with our privileges when we become conscious of how privilege allows choices. The educators shared experiences of having opportunities for teaching in different school contexts and raised issues and feelings/emotions about connecting to students and families in more affluent and more vulnerable positions. There was an acknowledgement of the uncertainties of how to talk to families that come from different backgrounds and what classist discourses might emerge. The articipants talked about how to deal with feelings, emotions, and reactions to challenging situations involving students' backgrounds. A question was posed: "How do we then have the discussions with that child or group discussion where we talk about those sensitive pieces? Because we want to break the cycle, but if we do not have these conversations, then the cycle continues, right?" A highlight was made about the relation between the ways teachers read their teaching contexts and the different kinds of conversations that teachers might want to have and prioritize in their classrooms. As we turned our attention to deficit discourses, we talked about discourses concerning Indigenous students, on-reserve students, and students in care and what we can do to break the cycle. In talking about color-coded criteria used to categorize schools concerning data from the census in Manitoba, we problematized understandings of good schools, good teachers, and good students, and how we build these understandings inside a culture. After that, the teachers shared what they noticed and wondered about the articles. An observation was made about the focus on the American context and a need to translate it into the Canadian context. The participants pointed out that the articles provided room for exploring the value and importance of different kinds of jobs with kids and some food for thought on how we can build understandings that all work is valuable. The

readings contributed to remarks about the need for teachers to be reflective practitioners. There was motivation to find out that these kinds of conversations are happening elsewhere and to see that there is an ongoing concern about how to share assumptions of personal successes and failures and to raise awareness about systems and power. The articles informed inquiries about how we hear or listen to people's narratives. In connection with Vasquez's text, there was a comment on how we intentionally have to create space for language as power and agency in our classrooms and to build opportunities for different voices. An inquiry was made concerning language as power and agency: "How do we support students to develop an agentic stance starting where they are?" Possibilities of working with social class with a focus on language as power and agency involved giving more choices to students in terms of readings, the use of artifacts (e.g., old and new books), becoming aware of our own bias, narratives, students' narratives, and to the voices we are bringing to the classrooms. In thinking about the power dynamics of systems, an experience was shared about exploring dominant and non-dominant discourses, and its historical connections. There was a reflection on how structure underpins meanings and the importance of inquiring about who writes curriculum and looking at the document as a higher system that reminds what/whose stories to share. A commentary was made about the new ELA curriculum as a fairly open document and how the practice of language as power and agency invites teachers to build conversations about diverse issues. In challenging teachers' control over students' choices, there was a reflection on how to increase students' reading choices and group discussions address issues of social class and other topics related to it. Talking about young kids, questions were posed about how we teach kids to make links and connections since an early age and how to encourage kids to ask questions. A suggestion was given about the use of visual frames to discuss margins (inside X outside) with young kids and considerations were made about creating opportunities for validating young kids' voices.

Next meeting: August 11th – 10 am-12 am

Appendix G: Second Meeting Summary B

Date: August 3rd, 2020
Time: 2:30 pm - 4 pm
Research Study: Inquiring about Social Class with English Language Arts Teachers in Manitoba

Second Meeting Summary

Meeting 2: Language as Power and Agency: Approaching Social Class Through Critical Literacies
What should students learn/know about poverty and social class? How do you approach social class in your classes?
Building understandings:
Jones, S., & Vagle, M. (2013). Living contradictions and working for change: Toward a theory of social class-sensitive pedagogy. Educational Researcher, 42(3), 129–141. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X13481381
Luke, A. (2000). Critical literacy in Australia: A matter of context and standpoint. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 43(5), 448–461. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40017081
Luke, A. (2013). *Allan Luke: Critical thinking and critical literacy* [Video]. Vimeo. https://vimeo.com/87212871

Summary: I started the meeting by reminding the group about the ongoing consent and confidentiality agreement and reviewing the conversation guidelines. Then, the participants drew a picture of the existing power or class structure in which they lived and placed themselves in the picture in relation to where power and money are located (Appleman, 2015). When talking about the pictures, they shared how family connections/support access to resources and education informed their social class positionalities. After that, there was a comment about how education is not neutral and can contribute to reproducing or breaking down systems based on social class hierarchies. The participants talked about understandings of what makes education non-neutral and political and mentioned how text selection works as a political choice. There was some discussion about the non-neutrality of governmental and religious institutions of education and the way they force individuals to position themselves in terms of social class. A comment was made about teachers and students who are not aware of their social class positionalities, and the need to be careful about how we navigate those conversations with students. There was an observation about how privilege can blind people. In talking about educational systems, a highlight was made about the blindness in relation to colonial roots of educational programs. The participants mentioned that there is resistance to critically engage in conversations about classism at schools. When invited to think about why this happens, they talked about the privileged position of teachers who had access and could afford university to become a teacher, and how many teachers “don’t know what it means to climb up that ladder” of success. The teachers mentioned they did some extra readings about social mobility in Canada and the positionality of oppressed and oppressor people (Paulo Freire). There was a highlight on discourses of meritocracy and the need to stimulate pedagogical moments that consider how this myth is built. Inquiries were raised about what it means to be classist and how classism is built in our minds. In considering conversations about social class, classism, and elitism in educational settings, participants pointed out the importance of having these difficult conversations in Winnipeg and Manitoba. There was an observation on seeing younger teachers as more concerned about social justice issues, while “older” retiring teachers as more resistant. We discussed the role of universities in preparing younger teachers and how universities are engaging in difficult conversations and in changes that bring in more diverse voices to the academic setting (e.g., Indigenous voices). A question was posed about binary thinking in terms of how we might be positioning teachers in relation to awareness and willingness to raise inquiries and discussions about social justice issues. There was a comment on the vagueness of the curriculum and how language as power and agency open up possibilities for teachers’ choices in relation to the conversations they might want to

raise within their contexts. The participants shared that there is work to do in relation to classist and racist discourses when they return to schools in the fall. They see possibilities in raising discussions with their colleagues and students and mention how they need to be attentive to what they should prioritize as conversations proposed by administration, and how schools usually tend to be reactive to problems and demands that emerge in context. The teachers inquired about who should start such conversations regarding class in professional settings and the importance of considering the demographics of teachers and administrators that are sitting at the table. There was a comment about the need of a more diverse staff. We discussed the do-good mentality and some implications for school settings that are marked by diverse students' backgrounds in terms of socio-economic status. The participants commented on using critical literacies as an opportunity to engage in education for freedom and a class-sensitive pedagogy. A challenge was raised in relation to a "check the box" mindset and the tokenism it creates. The educators commented about the need for a shift of mindset that considers that "the end goal of liberation and freedom does not check the box" and the importance of giving students and teachers the tools to see situations from their standpoint and different standpoints. An inquiry was posed about how to balance education for freedom & liberation and assessment & measures. In talking about resisting systems, there was a highlight on how "as you are pulling down a system, you are building another one. You are never going to reach a point." An observation was made about the privilege teachers have and the need to use it to encourage conversations that resist classist discourses and practices.

Next meeting: August 11th – 10 am-12 am

Appendix H: Third Meeting Summary

Date: August 11th
Time: 10 am -12 am
Research Study: Inquiring about Social Class with English Language Arts Teachers in Manitoba

Third Meeting Summary

	Meeting 3: Social Class and Intersectionalities How can we approach social class concerning gender and race in English language classes? What can we learn concerning normalized practices and beliefs about social class and Indigenous peoples? How can we approach social class in times of COVID-19? What intersectionalities would open up critical dialogues with your contexts of practice? **Building understandings** Bryce, N. (2019). Social movements for freedom an anti-oppressive approach to literacy and content area learning in an urban fourth grade classroom. *Radical Teacher*, *114*(114), 60–71. https://doi.org/10.5195/rt.2019.535 Sinclair, M. (2018). Decolonizing ELA: Confronting Privilege and Oppression in Textual Spaces. *English Journal*, *107*(6), 89–94. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/2076933139/

Summary: I started the meeting by reminding the group about the ongoing consent and confidentiality agreement. Then, I presented the notion of virtual school bags (Thomson, 2002) and invited the participants to unpack their virtual school bags. A list of questions related to privilege (Vasquez, 2013) worked as a prompt for the exercise. As we shared our bags, we talked about privileges concerning being English speakers, having knowledge about dominant European norms, being white, being safe, having support, resources, community connections associated with middle-class backgrounds, being part of the mainstream society, having educated parents, and being able-bodied. We also talked about non-privileged experiences of poverty, gender, race, and learning and physical challenges. We inquired about the different sources of privilege and how they impact the perceptions and awareness of our privileges. We reflected on school systems, what school systems praise, how schools and teachers can open up to better recognize what students bring in their virtual school bags. When asked about the readings, there was a comment on the way texts reassured the possibility of critically looking at issues of oppression and social justice at different ages, especially with young students. The participants talked about engaging with students' voices, developing students' awareness of the power of their voices, and students' advocacy for themselves. The concept of "nice white teacher" was mentioned. There was a concern about the relation between institutional oppression and physical and psychological violence. There was a comment about the pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1994), pedagogy of possibility, the opportunities it presents to examine curriculum, and the limitations a document might create for transformative pedagogical practices. An observation was made about the use of project-based learning methodology and how it can activate the real power of education. There were inquiries about how far we can dig in those topics and how institutions, systems, and parents might raise barriers to engage in critical literacies work and enhance students' agency. An observation was made about tackling issues through critical lenses and the danger of losing a job because of institutions' and parents' positionalities and pressures. Yet, a will to challenge the system in safe(r) ways was shared. There was a concern on perpetuating myths and stereotypes because of restrictions imposed by institutions. During the discussion on systems of oppression, we highlighted the need to become aware of such systems, and how hard it is to dismantle them and figure out the roles intersectionality plays in them. There was an inquiry about how to engage in conversations that can offer a safe space for less dominant voices to participate. In defining what a safe space means, a comment about the value of openness to ask questions was made. There was some criticism about the idea of safe spaces concerning how facilitators and group members of "safe

spaces" deal with marginalized and oppressed voices and bodies, and the term "brave spaces" was suggested. Brave spaces were defined as spaces where members of a group build norms and feelings of safety together while considering and inquiring about unintentional impacts of discourses and interactions. There was a comment on the work that teachers already do in their classrooms through real and authentic conversations. Yet, there are systemic things teachers have to fight against, such as bias and inequities in provincial exams, grading, and achievement systems. The participants explored how these systems reproduce capitalist and neoliberal systems informed by "haves and have-nots", which lead some students to focus on having good grades/results and do things such as plagiarizing texts. A concern was raised about how these systems might impede more critical work with students. There was an observation about how important it is to have teachers working with more diverse authors and voices through texts, books, materials, and there was a call for teachers to deepen conversations and be attentive to how they might be shaping questions through different lenses, for example, social class, privilege, oppression, gender, among others. Some participants talked about the need to think about *isms* in the early years and choose materials that highlight kids' voices and develop students' understandings from an early age. I finished the meeting by sharing the following reminders:

"Education is never neutral." (Paulo Freire, 1970)

"Literacy can be taught as a tool of critical inquiry or of passive transmission. It can be a vehicle for posing and solving important social problems or for accepting official explanations and solutions." (Vasquez, Tate & Harste, 2013, p. 20)

Next Phase: Final Interviews