Curiosity and Critical Thinking: Educators' Experiences with Inquiry-Based Learning in the English Classroom

By

Christina Kompson

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Abstract

This study explored Ontario educators' understands of and beliefs about inquiry-based methods in English classrooms. The data was collected through this qualitative, semi-structured, constructivist interviews with two English Language Arts educators practicing in Ontario. Themes emerged from the data that suggested the educators shared similar perceptions about the important resources and planning structures needed for implementing inquiry-based learning in English classes.

Key words: inquiry-based learning; curiosity; critical thinking; student-centered; open assessment

Acknowledgements

This study is my first step down a path of pedagogical inquiry and engagement. I would like to begin by thanking the educators who have questioned, probed, adapted, and shared their understandings of education with me over the past two years. Most special thanks to the participants who gave their time to participate in this study, including Jia, the rouge sample whose sage words unfortunately reached beyond the scope of the present study. Your collective influences on my life and education have been unfathomable.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their unfailing encouragement and support for this study. Your care and feedback gave me a foundation from which to grow as a researcher and teacher. Dad, thank you for pushing curiosity and critical thinking to the forefront of my informal education – I think you did a pretty good job with it.

Finally, I would like to thank all the students and teachers I have had the pleasure of working with thus far. You have taught me more than you would ever guess, and your energy sustains mine.

Table of Contents

Page

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

When students start learning by way of a question, their own power of thought and curiosity will dictate the answer. In my experience, inquiry-based learning in the English classroom is a rare sight, even when great questions are being asked and answered. The rigid underlying framework of curricula, time tables, available resources, and standardization framework for schools potentially blockade students from asking and answering meaningful questions. A colleague of mine once noted that teaching is like leading a horse to water, in that we can offer students cognitive tools but cannot make them think. I challenge that educators ought to reframe the issue at hand: we can lead students to develop thought processes to let the river flow, and because the water is so delicious they quench their thirst for answering deep, personal questions, inadvertently building tools along the way.

This pedagogy is echoed in the Ontario's Ministry of Education curricular and policy documents. The ideas are grounded in years of educational research and philosophical theory, arguably the most important of whom is John Dewey "who believed that education begins with the curiosity of the learner. Inquiry-based learning is a student-centered, active learning approach focused on questioning, critical thinking, and problem solving" (Savery, 2006, p. 11). Despite the prevalence of Dewey's theories in teacher education programs and education research, I spent the first year of my Masters in Teaching simply trying to find educators in the social sciences and humanities who deeply understand the inquiry process, let alone how to teach it. This struggle was only exacerbated as I created my literature review and found a plethora of research on inquiry in the sciences, math, and specific components of inquiry in isolation, but a

very limited body of empirical research in a holistic, inquiry approach for English Language Arts classrooms. Without a professional network of teachers who self-identified as inquiry practitioners and a body of literature to ground the research in, by the start of the second year of the program I was flabbergasted at my own topic: what *was* inquiry in English and *how* do I ensure the students deeply engage with critical thinking for self-sufficient learning?

As a student teacher grappling with inquiry-based learning as a pedagogical foundation for my own practice, I perceived a number of barriers to implementing inquiry in English classes and will discuss these in greater detail within Chapter Two. However, most striking during the initial stages of this study, however, were the negative consequences of North America's standardized testing culture on instructional strategies that inhibit inquiry in English. Arlo Kempf's (2016) study of diverse teacher experiences with standardized testing in the United States and Canada clearly expresses this stalemate between the traditional and progressive pedagogies: "As one New York City teacher explains,

> I value project-based learning and critical inquiry, but you won't find these on standardized tests. They don't measure most of what matters— the ability to work in groups, problem-solving, argumentation, or developing and revising critical analysis of ideas. So we don't teach it." This, she suggests, can harm students who, "struggle more with written expression of ideas than with verbal expression...Tests don't look at real-world skills, such as team work and problem solving (p. 79).

At its most basic level, inquiry-based learning is pedagogy based on the concept that questions, ideas, and observations are central to the learning experience and the curriculum; it "organizes learning around…complex tasks" (Thomas, 2000, p. 8), distinctly different from the complex

tasks required on standardized tests in Ontario like the EQAO and OSSLT. Thomas' (2000) definition of inquiry-based learning implies educators are constantly "establishing a culture where ideas are respectfully challenged, tested, redefined and viewed as improvable, moving children from a position of wondering to a position of enacted understanding and further questioning" (Scardamalia, 2002, qtd. in Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2013, p. 2). A significant aspect of the literature on inquiry identifies these aspects of classroom culture and problem-posing procedures are missing from a standardized view of literacy learning.

A "good" English class according to Harste (2003) is "comprised of three components—meaning making, language study, and inquiry-based learning" (p. 8). The three are deeply interconnected, and much of the research surrounding inquiry-based learning in English and Language Arts reflects these connections (Brown, 2004; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015; Rekrut, 2002). However, the scope of this study limits a review of the literature that is specific to inquiry-based learning and teacher understandings of and beliefs about its use in English classrooms. As such, the review is limited to those components of inquiry that were described in the literature as foundational to practitioner understandings of inquiry-based learning, as opposed to a holistic overview of *learning* in English classrooms that may have encapsulated many of the same components.

The Ministry's *Capacity Building Series* (2013) explains the crucial concepts of inquiry-based learning and describes it as a "creative approach" to pedagogy as it blends methods of instruction "in an attempt to build on students' interests and ideas, ultimately moving students forward in their paths of intellectual curiosity and understanding" (p. 2). The emphasis on enacted understanding required further explanation because in 2016, 42% of Canadian adults

between 16 and 65 had low literacy skills (Canadian Literacy and Learning Network). This statistic is troubling if educators accept the notion that "literacy supports critical thinking and enables informed actions and responses," effectively giving students "the keys to a healthy democracy…[and] civic participation" (Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2012). Literacy as an educational goal must be centered on fostering student engagement with the world around them. Authenticity and curiosity, then, may be gateways to student literacy.

In one of the few book length studies on inquiry-based learning in English Language Arts, Richard Beach and Jamie Myers (2001) wrote *Inquiry-Based English Instruction: Engaging Students in Life and Literature* to explore this pedagogy as a model for engaging students in social worlds. While built from experiences in a U.S. context, it can be interpreted within the context of the 9-12 Ontario English curriculum, which describes its purpose as building "knowledge and skills required for effective listening and speaking, reading, writing, viewing and representing" that make all students "effective communicators" (OME, 2007, p. 12). Framing problems in students' social worlds can offer students academic activities that help them navigate those worlds, building tools for the "sustained analysis" of philosophical or moral dilemmas they are bound to encounter in literature (Barrow, 2011, p.7). Beach and Myers (2001) describe their underlying views about teaching literacy through students' personal experiences and environments:

> Social worlds share particular constructive processes in which social activities produce and use texts in systematic ways that create conventions, discourses, and codes, to accomplish valued identities and purposes for activity. We talk about these systematic ways of using symbols as literacy practices and discourses" (p. 17).

This view of the purpose of an English curriculum is in my opinion a catalyst for reformation around the way students, parents, and teachers view the discipline. Inquiry-based pedagogy's insistence on "enacted understanding" of content is, as Beach and Myers argue, more accessible if the class itself is grounded in understanding and deconstructing the "systemic" use of texts and language. Inquiry-based English classes may offer a space for students to explore varieties of voices and experiences, ultimately shaping their communication skills from the exemplar writers under examination. This may increase student literacy skills independent from standardized testing practices, potentially defusing the tension described in Kempf's (2016) study of teacher experiences with the "harmful" methods.

In a chapter of a theoretical-based resource book for teachers, Gilchrist and Cunningham (2015) describe the ways students can build information literacy skills as a part of the push for 21st century education. Information literacy skills include digital competencies, research skills, and transferring skills from one context to another (Gilchrist & Cunningham, 2015). Critical thinking and problem solving skills are often examined together as approaches to incorporating higher-order thinking skills development in daily classroom activities, especially through authentic writing activities (Bush & Zuidema, 2011). John W. Saye and Thomas Brush (2002) synthesize a number of scholars' findings on using "ill-structured problems as a way to engage students": "Numerous challenges complicate efforts to develop thoughtful problem solvers. These include obstacles originating within organizational structures of the learning environment (Cuban, 1984; Linn, 1995; Onosko, 1991), teachers (Doyle & Ponder, 1977; Saye, 1998), and learners (Brush & Saye, 2000; Land, 2000) (p. 77)". It is within the complex contexts of student-

centered learning, critical thinking development, and increased curricular focus on literacy that this study explores inquiry-based learning as pedagogy for English instruction.

1.1 Research Problem

Although inquiry-based learning appeared deeply embedded in the curriculum on paper, there was no clear focus in the literature as to its implementation in day-to-day classrooms (Blumenfeld, et al., 1991). However, inquiry as a teaching concept passed down through Ministry's policies and supporting material for teachers is a distinct process with generally agreed-upon criteria. The English curriculum at all grade levels was designed to "develop a range of essential skills in the four interrelated areas of Reading, Writing, Oral Communication and Media Studies; build a solid foundation of knowledge of the conventions of standard English; and incorporate the use of analytical, critical, and metacognitive thinking skills" (OME, 2007, p. 14). These goals are "interdependent and complementary" (OME, 2007, p. 14), which very clearly mirrors the reality of classrooms in that there are blended expectations and learning activities that can build a range of skills and knowledge.

An article published in *Language Arts* argued that while "inquiry is a current 'in' term among educators," without sustained teacher inquiry into their practice teachers may only be "put[ting] a new label on what we are already doing" (Burke, 1994, p. 97). Transferable skills learned through the English curriculum have been newly identified as Information Literacy skills, the digital, cognitive, and research skills are precisely the "skills, strategies, attitudes, and conceptions of information that are necessary to effectively use information in any setting" (Gilchrist & Cunningham, 2015, p. 255). The emphasis in education research on building skills and literacy is supported through numerous programs and documents, such as the Ontario Skills

Passport (OSP). The OSP's presence in Ontarian high schools is indicative of the importance of mastering a variety of skills such as "reading texts, writing, document use, computer use, oral communication, job task planning and organizing, decision making, problem solving, finding information, and critical thinking" (OME, 2017). Building these skills is fundamental to achieving success at any level of secondary English studies but may seem daunting to teachers.

Beach and Myers (2001) suggest that by "thinking of skills as consequences of prolonged and engaged participation in symbolic activity, rather than as prerequisites or targets of instruction," teachers and students can use an inquiry-based approach to effectively meet the success criteria outlined in curriculums (p. 22). The Ontario Ministry of Education's push for inquiry in policy, curriculum, and teacher-resources may indicate a growing body of educators interested in making classes more student-centered.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

In light of this problem, this study will explore two Ontario educators' experiences with inquiry-based approaches in teaching English. By gathering teacher narratives and perceptions of their use of inquiry-based learning, I aim to articulate the relevance of inquiry-based learning to the Ontario English curriculum. This study is designed to examine the depth to which teachers reportedly bring interdependent and complementary teaching methods, texts, and inquiry instructional methods into their classrooms.

I hope this study will create a dialogue between theoreticians and practitioners by providing actionable suggestions for implementing inquiry-based learning in English classrooms across Ontario. The semi-structured interviews gave the participants in this study space to reflect on the major grey areas in inquiry research: their own academic backgrounds; their beliefs and

understandings of inquiry methods; their beliefs about open assessment as a planning tool for inquiry in English; and their perceptions of available support for inquiry in the classroom. Chapter Three will describe how the methodological procedures reflected the purpose of the study in greater detail. The overall purpose of this study was to identify aspects of English lesson and unit structures that were built on understandings of inquiry. I hope to learn what motivates teachers, as well as students, to sustain skill development and collaborative projects successfully in such an open-ended curricular space as Ontario 9-12 English classrooms.

1.3 Research Questions

The central question for this study is: What are Ontario educators' understandings of and beliefs about inquiry-based learning in English classrooms? I understand 'inquiry-based learning' to mean the use of critical thinking, problem solving, and metacognition skills as integral to student learning. The research objects that guided my research, specifically while developing the semi-structured interview (Appendix B), included:

- Teacher definitions and understandings of inquiry-based learning and how it looks when enacted;
- Teacher opinions of different forms of inquiry-based learning, including student-based vs. teacher-based approaches;
- Teacher reports of assigning inquiry-based projects or using inquiry methods;
- Teacher reports of available resources, lesson plans and other supports for inquiry-based learning in the English classroom

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

My adventurous and academic background has led me to become passionate about inquiry and its role in student-centered curriculum development, but I have come to realize through the course of writing this paper that inquiry in its most potent form is also a mindset. For all the buzzwords that float in the ether of the 'teachersphere,' inquiry is one of the few I can grab with my hands and bring with me anywhere. I say this because inquiry, as I have grown to understand it, is synonymous with curiosity. Upon reflection, the individualized material, discussions, and recommendations my teachers gave to me in middle and high schools were crucial to my development holistically. When students are treated as young adults who are capable of learning to follow their curiosity and challenge their thought processes, educators have the potential to give students confidence that can translate into academic success. I was encouraged to create my own topics for essays, choose my own books for supplementary readings, and incorporate different disciplines like Art, Psychology, and Philosophy in my exploration of literature. I learned to love learning, and my curiosity has not abated.

If inquiry-based learning is to be seen as a new, powerful pedagogy in Mathematics and Science that can enhance student literacy, knowledge, and skills, why has it not been brought to fruition in the English and Language Arts classrooms? My experiences led me to believe the Ontario curriculum's emphasis on skills and knowledge rather than distinct and predetermined content created a space conducive to engaging in inquiry-based learning. Furthermore, my assumptions about education challenged the normative belief that teaching engages students in activities to produce certain types of evidence of learning at the expense of others. I was only able to express this assumption, however, after being placed in a school implementing the internationally recognized Middle Years Program and International Baccalaureate curriculums,

which embed inquiry into courses at all grade levels. I was able to connect this experience with the graduate level Canadian History and Philosophy courses I was enrolled in, and feel at the end of my Masters in Teaching program indescribably more confident in and reflective on my developing pedagogy.

A community of learners who commit their energies to student-centered learning fostered the inquiry learning environment, one where the students work together with very little teacher intervention because they are explicitly trained to learn collaboratively and independently: learning from peers is just a valuable as learning from the teachers. This community promoted an inquiry mindset, where teachers created umbrella unit questions that trickled down into individual lesson questions, naturally guiding students through different avenues of inquiry while answering big-picture unit questions. It was guided learning, but not the guided scaffolding that is the norm in an English classroom, where prescribed learning is dressed up in inquiry designs. It required a reworking of the way teachers plan their entire year and units, and a release of perceived power that may be problematic. Researching inquiry in the English classroom required me to explicitly leave my habits and assumptions at the door while stepping into this new pedagogical space.

1.5 Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, semi-structured interview study is to explore how educators understand inquiry-based learning taking place in their Ontario secondary English classrooms and their beliefs about the power of inquiry in education. The research study is organized into five chapters: Chapter One offered a contextual framework for the research question and epistemological underpinnings of the investigation; Chapter Two consists of a

review of the literature on inquiry-based learning in secondary classrooms, focusing on teacher perceptions and understandings of inquiry-based methods in a variety of contexts; Chapter Three describes the research methodology and includes information about the participants, the sampling procedures, ethical and methodological considerations and the limitations of the study; Chapter Four describes the research findings and the places of convergence with educational literature; and Chapter Five discusses the implications of the findings and provides recommendations for future studies. Appendices and references are included at the end of the paper.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature in the areas of pedagogy related to inquiry-based learning in English Language Arts. I review themes such as self-regulation, curiosity, learning dispositions, and styles of learning as they are perceived by teachers to exist in their classrooms. I will give a brief review of major literature reviews on research in project- and problem-based learning before exploring the research conducted in the English and Language Arts curriculums in order to give a comparative view of the components of inquiry and student-centered instruction across a wide range of research contexts. The relevant research spans across countries and academic contexts. Using the search terms "inquiry*based learning," "problem*based learning," "secondary schools," "student*centered pedagogy," and "English classrooms" resulted in a wide breadth of empirical, anecdotal, and case studies from the United States of America, Canada, and Britain, as well as a number of literature reviews in various disciplines. However, few empirical studies have been conducted in English classrooms across those geographical areas.

The following sections of this literature will explore this complexity of the research fields influencing inquiry implementation in real classrooms, as well as construct a comprehensive view of the concepts potentially inherent in the participants' understandings of inquiry. The three major sections are address: the components of inquiry-based learning; inquiry connections to English Language Arts classrooms; and the literature's attention to teacher understandings therein.

2.1 Gaps in Literature on Inquiry in English

Inquiry, and student engagement in their own curiosity, is a slippery term used in education research to describe a variety of student-centered, procedural learning encounters. Several scholars have compiled literature reviews on problem-based and project-based learning, the most common structural design for inviting students into engagement with inquiry tools to learn. Thomas (2000) wrote a comprehensive review of project-based learning research, supported by the Autodesk Foundation, a corporate philanthropy foundation focused on supporting innovative, collaborative, scalable projects on a variety of social challenges. This fact points to the relevancy of the progressive pedagogies to current social endeavors. Cindy E. Hmelo-Silver's "Problem-Based Learning: What and How do Students Learn?" (2004) examined empirical research on problem-based learning and concluded that

> "Minimal research [had] been conducted outside medical and gifted education. Understanding how these goals are achieved with less skilled learners is an important part of a research agenda for PBL [problem-based learning]. The evidence suggests that PBL is an instructional approach that offers the potential to help students develop flexible understanding and lifelong learning skills" (p. 235).

This significant gap in inquiry literature highlights a key demographic of students that may benefit from inquiry-based instruction embedded in socially oriented secondary English classrooms. In addition to this, Savery's (2006) substantial literature review in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning* examined research on traditional and problem-based instruction to see if students' exposed to the latter had improved academic performance in a variety of classroom contexts. He found in his synthesis that problem-based learning:

> "Increased performance in adapting to and participating in change; dealing with problems and making reasoned decisions in unfamiliar situations; reasoning critically and creatively; adopting a more universal or holistic approach; practicing empathy, appreciating the other person's point of view; collaborating productively in groups or teams; and identifying one's own strengths and weaknesses and undertaking appropriate remediation (self-directed learning)" (p. 10-11).

Savery (2006) notes that the research analysis was hindered by a "lack of well-designed studies" (p. 11).

To substantiate this lack of empirical studies on inquiry-based learning, Shute's (2008) review, "Focus on Formative Feedback," found from the literature that "formative feedback types and timing have been discussed in relation to their effects on learning" and attempts to examine studies that included "other variables that may interact with feedback features, such as learner ability level, response certitude, goal orientation, and normative feedback" indicating the newness of this research in holistic terms (pp. 166-167). In a similar vein, English and Kitsantas (2013) authored another review in 2013 whose title encapsulates the focus of their study: "Supporting student Self-Regulated Learning in Problem- and Project- Based Learning". These four literature reviews offered an excellent starting place for researching the following examinations of the substantial components in inquiry instructional methods in English classrooms.

2.2 Components of Inquiry-Based Learning

Beach and Myers' (2006) outline of six meaningful inquiry strategies students engage in: "immersing, identifying, contextualizing, representing, critiquing, and transforming" social

worlds through texts (p. 18). Similarly, Kambler and Fine (2001) argue that teachers must help students "'relocate the personal,' by which they mean that once students have expressed what is on their minds, [teachers] need to help them see how 'the social'—meaning social, historical, and cultural forces—have been at play to position them in particular ways" (qt. in Harste, 2003, p. 9). The possible diverse entry points into literary content and guiding questions implicated in the above descriptions of inquiry-based learning are certainly exciting for a teacher interested in incorporating student voice and choice into the classroom structures.

While inquiry literature in the sciences centers around developing deeper knowledge and understanding of the content and common practices, inquiry literature in the humanities seems to focus on the connections students can make between the classroom and the social world around them. Gold et al. (2011) found five strategies for reconnecting disconnected youth in the six sample schools, including "personalization, physical environment, preparing for postsecondary opportunities, attention to absences, and community building and leadership opportunities" (p. 26). However, to paint a picture of inquiry-based learning in English classrooms, one must examine the scholarly work on the intersecting, but often isolated, nodes of inquiry: learner-centered studies, problem-solving studies, student skill development, collaboration, and feedback loops.

An exemplar for incorporating student identities and intersectionalities inherent in inquiry-based learning, Deakin Crick (2009) applied a learner-centered pedagogical model to "four different sets of learners: 16–19 year olds not in education, employment or training; young offenders in a secure unit; gifted and talented 16 year olds in a state comprehensive school; and 19–23 year olds on undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses" to examine the effectiveness

of inquiry methods on student achievement. The breadth of participants in Deakin Crick's study allowed for a conceptual analysis of inquiry's efficacy as "a complex, organic and participatory metaphor of learning" (p. 74).

2.2.1 Problem solving

Svihla and Reeve's (2016) study how on teachers support students who have been "underserved by traditional schooling" suggest that the underserved element is a process "less well understood" than problem solving processes themselves. Their data suggests that giving students an accessible and flexible problem, instruct on the process of solving the problem as an "iterative" one, and building student ownership of the problem helped them become motivated because of engagement with ideas in a "purposeful manner" (Discussion, para. 1).

Ren and Deakin Crick's (2013) analysis of empirical data found that "underachieving students were often unable to successfully generate questions and find the answers. They were passive in their orientation to new learning. Although some underachievers did talk about asking teachers questions, they reported negative experiences, which demonstrates the significant role a teacher plays in nurturing critical curiosity in their students" (p. 246).

[One more study addressed at a different student population, how problem solving and inquiry benefits them?]

2.2.2 Student skill development

The literature surrounding inquiry-based learning addresses the theories of metacognition and self-regulation, tools with which teachers can enhance student academic success. Metacognition is the "ability to think about our own thinking through knowledge control and cognitive control" and "encompasses both self-understanding and self-regulation" (Gilchrist &

Cunningham, 2015, pp. 258-259). Developing the self-awareness necessary for metacognitive thinking "requires structured support, or scaffolding, from educators" but should be "strategically designed to fade as students progressively internalize knowledge of themselves as learners" (Gilchrist & Cunningham, 2015, p. 259). Once students internalize the thinking processes necessary for metacognition, they will be able to grasp "the full transformative benefit of inquiry-based learning as their own learning becomes transparent to them" (Gilchrist & Cunningham, 2015, p. 259). However, engaging students in metacognitive processes is a double-edged sword in that there are significant difficulties and obstacles teachers face before seeing the benefits of their endeavours if students are not prepared to engage in the cognitive endeavour.

Postholm's (2010) data revealed "the teachers found that the pupils had learned the strategies and also developed a metacognitive knowledge about the tasks they were going to work on and which strategies were suitable for the task at hand. Learning to use strategies is part of the pupils' metacognitive processes and research shows that these processes can sustain the pupils' learning…the teachers stated that they found that the pupils had managed to use strategies and that this had positively affected their learning of content knowledge. They were convinced that the use of strategies and their facilitation of the use of them had helped the pupils to improve their test results" (p. 501). [**BLOCK QUOTE]**

Ren and Crick's (2013) analysis of a mixed methods case study of "two state-funded and two independent schools in the same town lasted for 18 months. Methods of data collection were the ELLI [Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory] questionnaires, school information systems, focus groups and narrative interviews" (p. 241). They found "both student groups [over achieving and under achieving] thought that it was important for the student to enjoy learning.

The difference lay in the way they dealt with boredom in the learning process. They also demonstrated a strong sense of agency and the skills of changing and learning as well as resilience. Underachieving students, on the other hand, are being "done to" rather than making their own meaningful choices and therefore lack ownership and responsibility for their learning. Being more strategically aware makes the overachievers more able to engage: interestingly, however, they reported being stressed under the circumstances that the underachievers described as boring" (p. 245-246).

2.2.3 Student collaboration

Gold et al. (2011) found that teachers believed classroom talk and collaborative group work" to be especially useful for engaging low-level literacy students, who struggle with reading and writing. Similarly, many teachers believed that collaborative group work enabled students to "own" their learning and be more active in the classroom (Gold et al., 2011). Students benefitted, they reported, because they could fill each others' "gaps" and learn from each other. Some teachers also believed that collaborative group work helped to build communities because group work encouraged students who might not be familiar with each other to become acquainted. Overall, collaborative group work, like classroom talk, was believed by teachers to be "a good engagement strategy" (p. 20), in regards to collaboration.

In addition, Marx et al. (1994) found that teachers may have difficulty understanding that "effective collaboration among students requires more than involvement, it requires exchanging ideas and negotiating meaning" (p. 525; see Nystrand, 1990). Choi et al. (2005) found in their study investigating the influence of online scaffolding designed to facilitate students' adaptive questioning strategies that peer support in the form of online feedback "seems to positively affect

the frequency of questions gradually over the third, fourth, and fifth successive discussion sessions" (p. 496).

2.1.4 Writing feedback loops

In a study conducted in New Zealand classrooms, Irving, Harris and Peterson (2011) found teachers identified three types of assessment, "formative, classroom teacher–controlled summative and external summative" with three distinct purposes "improvement, reporting and compliance, irrelevance" (p. 413). This study also found that teachers appeared committed to assessment for learning, but "there was still disagreement amongst teachers as to what practices could be deemed formative and how to best implement these types of assessment" (Irving, et. al, 2011, p. 413). Furthermore, teacher feedback on student work was "seen as being about learning, grades and marks, or behaviour and effort; these types served the same purposes as assessment with the addition of an encouragement purpose" (p. 413).

Krajcik, McNeill, and Reiser (2007) find "the iterative use of the learning-goals-driven design model coupled with the analysis of multiple data sources informed our revision of the curriculum materials, resulting in substantial student learning gains for the targeted science content and scientific inquiry learning goals" (p. 2) Additionally, "although it is impossible to single out the effects of any one aspect of a design process, three aspects of the learning-goals-driven design model have proven useful in identifying design issues and in guiding solutions to these issues: (1) unpacking standards from a learning perspective, (2) learning performances as a way to specify knowledge in use, and (3) the repeated effort to align learning goals with tasks and assessments" (p. 23). **[BLOCK QUOTE-unpack and explain]**

Choi et al. find "the obstacles students perceived in coming up with questions were "associated with limited domain knowledge, limited complexity in the essay questions, and peers' late responses," and "three out of four interviewees indicated difficulties to generate questions when they were faced with a high-quality initial answer" on the essay. Participants indicated that "when they received quality questions, which were personalized to their initial answers, they were prompted to more deeply evaluate and articulate their own understanding" (p. 501).

The descriptions of complex learning environments created from inquiry-based instructional practices described above indicated a seemingly cohesive view in the literature reviews and empirical research reviewed that positions inquiry as fundamentally beneficial for students; however, dissent within the educational community is apparent. "Why Minimal Guidance During Instruction Does Not Work" is a comprehensive and articulate exploration of the literature that diverges: "In so far as there is any evidence from controlled studies, it almost uniformly supports direct, strong instructional guidance rather than constructivist-based minimal guidance during the instruction of novice to intermediate learners. Even for students with considerable prior knowledge, strong guidance while learning is most often found to be equally effective as un- guided approaches. Not only is unguided instruction normally less effective; there is also evidence that it may have negative results when students acquire misconceptions or incomplete or disorganized knowledge" (pp. 83-84). **[BLOCK QUOTE]**

2.2 English and Language Arts

Levy, Thomas, Drago, and Rex's (2013) interdisciplinary study identifies some opportunities and challenges for implementing inquiry in English education. They stated that

"unlike in science or history education, *inquiry* is not robustly defined in the secondary English curriculum or in secondary English teacher education as a whole" (p.397) "Thus, it seems that the meaning of inquiry in English language arts has shifted over time from inquiry as writing and critical thinking to inquiry as research. When scholars and practitioners use the term *inquiry* in ELA, they are usually referring to facilitating preservice and experienced English teachers' professional self-study as they critique, select, apply, and conduct research on their own practice, or guide their students through research-oriented lessons and activities (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Fecho, 2000; Gere, Aull, Dickinson, McBee-Orzulak, & Thomas, 2007; Hillocks, 1987)" (p. 397). **[PARAPHRASE]**

The literature also articulates the iterative cycle the inquiry process takes shape in. In an anecdotal essay published in the *English Journal*, Hoff (1994) offers a reconceptualization of the English classroom that lends itself to inquiry-based learning. Students enter the classroom with the mindset of an artist in an artists' studio, where they work "each day on various projects…develop[ing] portfolios of ongoing work demonstrating their progress" (Hoff, 1994, p. 43). In this model, a student's portfolio is "never closed…[but] opened again and again to re-examine the progress and quality of one's work" (Hoff, 1994, p. 43). Hoff's vision of inquiry in English privileges writing in a way fundamentally challenging to common views of teaching writing.

The literature reviews in this study suggest while teachers and students may see inquiry methods as an intuitive way to increase literacy, there is reluctance to implement large-scale inquiry practices because of the strenuous emphasis on test scores and higher education (Thomas, 2000; Savery, 2006). Peck, Peck, Sentz, and Zasa (1998) conducted a qualitative study

of high school students participating in a humanities course using a project-based structure. The researchers found that students "perceived that they learned literacy skills from participation in the course such as using multiple texts, revisiting texts, and evaluating information" (Peck, et al, 1998, p.96). In addition, Lawrence, Rabinowitz, and Perna (2009) find "the balanced literacy approach in class [helped] students [to] provide more detail about the stories they read in class and they could talk about how they were using reading comprehension strategies to make sense of the text" (p. 55). The balanced approach to literature used a variety of instructional methods, content, and metacognitive activities to improve student learning (Lawrence, et al., 2009).

In the context of an iterative academic writing model targeted at English Language Learners, Eckstien et al. (2011) studied "if the iterative model resulted in better writing scores than a traditional model. The result of this analysis showed that the iterative group scored significantly higher than the control group on end-of-semester portfolio writing scores," (p. 168). They found that "content, organization, and grammar" improved with the iterative method of writing, although "vocabulary and academic referencing" did not (p. 168). Furthermore, "the continual collaboration, revision, and reworking of ideas lends itself to the particular needs of ESL students and allows them to improve their content and organization scores" so as to suggest the iterative model "promotes a more holistic communication environment" (pp. 168-169).

One of the most recent studies utilized multiple sets of interviews with six Canadian and American teachers identify the holistic quality of inquiry classroom practices. Oppong-Nuako, Shore, Saunders-Steward, and Gyles (2015) offers a current snapshot of "inquiry items" six teachers of fourteen secondary classes have incorporated into their practice, and is one of the few qualitative studies that explicitly illuminates the inquiry process in English classrooms. They use

brief teacher interviews and data gathered from a 25-point 'Inquiry Criteria Checklist' to measure the inquiry level of the classes, based on teacher reports of their instruction techniques, classroom environment and stated student learning goals. Their analysis of the data indicates that that:

> The three Most Inquiry teachers (A, B, C) taught seven classes including applied research, English, and English literature and composition. They mentioned most or all of the 25 criterion items for these classes…All three teachers referred to helping students understand connections among concepts by learning from a conceptual framework or the "big-picture" (215).

The specificity of criteria on their checklist, including "student-centered curriculum and role diversification," "focus on the relationships among concepts," "extend inquiry beyond the classroom," and "develop personal skills" are all supported by extensive research provided by the authors (Oppong-Nuako, 2015, 216). Practitioners looking for a guideline of techniques for incorporating inquiry into their classroom can look to the McGill Classroom Level of Inquiry Checklist used in the study. These criteria are significant for educators parsing out the different compents of inquiry and their individual role in student learning.

This type of learning can open the door for Culturally Relevant Pedagogies in English Language Arts to become the tools of instruction. In "Signs, symbols and metaphor: linking self with text in inquiry-based learning" Deakin Crick and Gurshka (2009) examine the role of symbol and metaphor in the development of student self-awareness and engagement in the process of learning in an Indigenous learning centre in New South Wales, Australia. The authors found that "developing a rich and local language for learning, that links to the collective

consciousness of a community through metaphors and symbols, is a crucial prerequisite for inquiry-based learning" (p. 447). This gateway for student engagement with their historically oppressed cultures is still a fairly new educational trend, however, and a lack of similar studies indicates a unique space for further investigations into inquiry and language learning.

2.3 Teacher Understanding and Use of Inquiry-Based Learning

There is discussion throughout the literature reviews cited in this study on the teacher-student roles in relation to the learning outcomes and in relation to one another. English and Kitsantas (2013) provide a succinct summary of the literature's explanation of the teacher and student roles in an inquiry-based classroom:

> Students work together in groups to conduct research, apply logic and reasoning, and devise solutions to complex problems. The teacher's primary role…is to structure activities to stimulate motivation and encourage reflection, and to facilitate learning through scaffolding, feedback, guidance, and prompts for thinking. The student's role…is to take responsibility for their learning and make meaning of the knowledge and concepts the encounter (p. 131).

The teacher's role in this environment is to "offer guidance and keep out distracting influences" while letting students take control of the learning process (Kirby, 1991, np.). Successful inquiry-based learning has been found to rest on "students' abilities to thoughtfully, logically, and critically plan and pursue their inquiry" and a "scholarly investigation in an authentic manner" will not occur if students are "confused and overwhelmed with information" (Gilchrist & Cunningham, 2015, pp. 254-255).

Teachers' roles in deciding which type of inquiry tasks to assign can determine the success or failure of knowledge and skill acquisition; by assigning "concerns, issues, or dilemmas, students may simply perceive them as 'school' or 'teacher' issues" and self-motivation and inquiry will falter (Beach & Myers, 2001, p. 22). This solution may help fundamentally change the discipline's reliance on content, which "emphasizes the great ideas of the world as determined by experts," to a more open, student-centered model which "privileges whatever the student thinks is important about the world" (Beach & Myers, 2001, p. 22). Gold et al. (2011) found "in focus groups with teachers we learned that even though teachers often were familiar with the JFF Framework, and may have started to use one or more strategies, few were thinking of them as a set of strategies that reinforced one another. Few realized that the theory behind the framework was that if the strategies were, used together, and by staff in all subject areas, they would help students unlock the meaning of text and express their thoughts – orally and in writing – with greater clarity" (p. 21).

2.4 Barriers to Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-based learning is a pedagogical endeavour that requires work from both the teacher and the student. There are many perceived obstacles to implementation in terms of student engagement and ability. Savery (2006) asserts, "the widespread adoption of the PBL instructional approach by different disciplines, for different age levels, and in different content domains has produced some misapplications and misconceptions of PBL" (p. 11). As a result of the numerous variables affecting student learning, "certain practices that are called PBL may fail to achieve the anticipated learning outcomes for a variety of reasons," (p. 11) making teacher identification of the barrier to learning difficult to ascertain.

Furthermore, Lawrence, Rabinowitz, and Perna (2009) found the "high-school students were unable to understand text because they stumbled on unknown words and had difficulty responding to text beyond the literal level. However, [the teacher] observed that when she used a balanced literacy curriculum, students answered questions from a more critical point of view, no longer focused on the words but used phonic skills and rules, and often read for meaning and tried to understand the texts on a deeper level by using comprehension strategies" (p. 57). The findings indicate that when teachers use a wide variety of instructional strategies to teach reading, students engage in a wide array of literacy practices. [**UNCLEAR]** The students interact with different types of texts, engage in critical discussions about authentic literature, and use reading comprehension strategies that help them feel empowered as readers and self- directed learners. Most teachers report using multiple approaches for reading instruction in their secondary ELA classrooms" (p. 59). These procedures are arguably commonplace in English classrooms, but are a source of contention when discussed in terms of standardized testing and governmental standards (Rekrut, 2002). Rekrut (2002) explains that "because school districts have come to regard standards as a bootstrap for poorer, often urban, schools and as the Holy Grail of literacy, English teachers are under tremendous pressure" to teach to the test and explicitly focus on meeting literacy standards (p. 371).

This is a contentious issue when taken in the context of high school as preparation for higher education because "high school students learn to follow a specific set of rules; college students learn that there are no rules—or, better, that the rules change daily" (Fanetti et al., 2010, p. 78). The perception of skills needed to be successful in the future are changing to a skills based outlook rather than simply performance. The teacher-based approaches in English tend to

ignore writing as a process, or a simplified process: "[o]f all the interviewees teaching at the secondary level, only one teacher described a real, unadulterated commitment to the writing process, and he described himself as a 'rebel' and something of a curricular loner" (Fanetti et al., 2010, p. 80). The authors believe that to engage students in the skills necessary for success, we need a "rethinking [of] the purpose of high school entirely. It is no longer the end point of a student's formal education; even students who might not attend four-year institutions are increasingly likely to continue their education at community colleges" (p. 83).

Crick (2009) adds "an outstanding challenge" to researching active inquiry in classrooms may be the "requirements of a regular examination system – how the learning guide might frame and shape the process in such a way that the learner comes to the 'predefined content' from a different starting point – that of internal, personal meaning-making rather than external demands" (p. 87). Gold et al. state "while engagement with reading and writing is widely discussed in the research on adolescent and young adult literacy, the accelerated high schools faced a particularly daunting task – the need to engage youth who, in many cases, were low-level readers and had experienced failure previously" (p. 34). They found at the schools that "rekindling interest in learning and literacy was a major challenge to staff" and found six methods for engaging students with literacy and learning: developing relevant content; making learning enjoyable; grouping students; offering incentives; designated time for reading; addressing learning gaps (p. 35).

Lawrence, Rabinowitz, and Perna (2009) state that their "findings also provide insights about students' perceptions of the instructional strategies used by the teacher. Students were more engaged during literature-based discussions in small groups than when they were taught

skills in isolation. All of the discussion-based activities provided opportunities for students to brainstorm their preexisting ideas about themes before they read the book and to talk about the text while they were reading the book. Effective instructional strategies used by the teacher helped students who once struggled to comprehend text begin to enjoy reading and to demonstrate more proficient literacy practices through their use of metacognitive reading strategies" (p. 60).

Furthermore, practical obstacles can occur during enactment of inquiry-based learning because there is "often a poor fit between the activities that form the day-to-day tasks of the project and the underlying subject matter concepts that gave rise to the project" (Blumenfeld et al., 1991, p. 392). Inquiry projects may run astray from the main path of inquiry; teachers and students sometimes follow "questions that are peripheral to the subject matter of interest" (p. 381). Blumenfeld et al. (1991) and Barron et al. (1998) believe this can be stopped if teachers develop "learning appropriate goals" for each project, such as "'driving questions,' questions that will ensure that students encounter and struggle with complex concepts and principles," or by including "explicit design requirements within the problem or project that prompt students to generate and pursue productive questions" (qtd. in Thomas, 2000, p. 27).

2.4. Conclusion

In this literature review I examined the relevant research in inquiry-based learning. I gave a brief overview of research in social sciences and humanities, and ultimately, there is a wide range of research throughout the disciplines, which results in a highly convoluted field of literature. Many researchers have outlined the benefits of inquiry-based learning practices demonstrated in a variety of classroom settings, but because of the specificity and lack of large-

scale studies, there is no consensus as to generalizable benefits or limitations to inquiry-based learning in English classrooms.

I also reviewed the literature that includes teacher understandings, perceived obstacles, and roles in implementing inquiry-based learning. The literature is much more conclusive on these themes, and indicated that teachers need to be reflective and research-oriented in their practice. Furthermore, the literature indicated that an environment of co-inquiry, in which the teacher and student hold equal responsibility for learning, can take the onus off teachers to juggle all aspects of inquiry methods and instead focus on the guiding the students' inquiry process.

This research study is situated within the existing literature surrounding teacher perceptions and roles in the classroom: by interviewing current teachers, this study will add to that body of research with the added specificity of English classrooms that is lacking in the general research on inquiry-based education in the disciplines. Chapter Three will explain and justify the methodological considerations for the present study, which explores inquiry-based learning in Ontario secondary English classrooms. In light of the research problem, context, and literature, it will attempt to justify the qualitative procedures and data collection instruments used. Following this, Chapter Three will offer a description of the educators who participated in this study and the methodological considerations under which they were chosen. Additionally, descriptions of the data analysis methods, ethical reviews undertaken, and the methodological limitations and strengths will guide concluding comments on the methodology of this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0. Introduction

In this chapter I will identify and justify the methodological procedures I use in this study. I will discuss the research approach and procedure, and will describe how I collect my data. I will then identify the participants of the study, list the sampling criteria, and describe my sampling procedures. I will also introduce the participants using their brief biographies. I will then describe the procedures for data analysis and address the relevant ethical issues to this study. Lastly, I will conclude the chapter with a description of the methodological limitations and strengths of this study on inquiry-based learning in English classrooms.

3.1. Research Approach and Procedures

There are a number of methodological procedures and considerations that affected this qualitative study. Merriam (2002) describes two approaches a qualitative researcher may take: an interpretive approach, which involves "learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world [and] the meaning it has for them," and a critical approach, which involves investigating "how larger contextual factors affect the ways in which individuals construct reality" (p. 4). Flick (2007) adds to this definition that "qualitative research uses text as empirical material (instead of numbers), starts from the notion of the social construction of realities under study, is interested in the perspectives of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study" (p. 3). The label 'qualitative research' is used as an umbrella term for a series of approaches to the research in the social sciences (Flick, 2007). Patton (1985) argues that this type of research aims to "understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context" and the "understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not

attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting" (qtd. in Merriam, 2002, p. 5). To this end, a significant characteristic of qualitative research is that "researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience" the issue or activity being studied (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). While depth of engagement in the physical spaces studied is valuable, the scope of this study did not allow for researcher-participation in classrooms or active sites of learning.

In light of this understanding of qualitative research, this study is grounded in interpretive methodological procedures, as "the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon" (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). This approach allowed the participants to describe their understanding of inquiry-based learning in the classroom while simultaneously shaping that understanding throughout the interview. Merriam (2002) states that qualitative research rests on the "idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction[s] with their world" and that "there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context" (Merriam, 2002, pp. 3-4). The dynamic nature of student- and teacher-learning in an inquiry classroom necessitates a methodology grounded in changing realities, as the purpose of this study is to understand how two educators make meaning of these inquiry experiences in English classrooms.

Furthermore, this research was conducted in the context of a complicated and nuanced field of research that is rapidly expanding. It is exactly the "flux" of understanding Merriam (2002) points to that is of interest to this research. However, there is not "a paradigmatic core of

what qualitative research is" in part because there are "different research programs" (Flick, 2007, p. 5; Merriam, 2002). The lack of methodological coherency in the literature on inquiry certainly described in the previous chapter reflects the relevance of these different programs and indicates a possible limitation of research on inquiry conducted thus far. With the interdisciplinary nature of inquiry learning, consistent research objects and participants may be difficult to synthesize because, as Flick (2007) posits, "discourse about qualitative research changes in different disciplines" (p. 5). Merriam summarizes a number of ways to distinguish among the types of qualitative research, but argues that the intention behind the research is often the same: "to change the issue under study or to produce knowledge that is practically relevant—which means relevant for producing or promoting solutions to practical problems" (Flick, 2007, p. 9). As Chapter Two indicated, a plethora of scholars from a variety of backgrounds and research methods investigated inquiry-based learning as a solution to practical classroom problems. This study falls neatly in line with those qualitative researchers.

However, the parameters of the Master of Teaching Research Project required a small and cohesive sample. The use of this methodology was justified within the context of this study because the researcher does "not act as an invisible neutral in the field," but "observe[s]…[or] make[s] participants reflect their life and life history…which may lead the interviewees to new insights about their situations and the world around them" (Flick, 2007, p. 10). This is important for teachers in their practice because their ideas of pedagogy and teaching techniques change as they reflect. Additionally, my position as researcher could influence my own understandings of classroom realities as the participants articulated their use of inquiry. These insights bring about positive reflection on teaching practices and hopefully allow more teachers to engage in

pedagogy that works towards positive change in the world (Flick, 2007). Based on the understanding that collaborative dialogues are needed in this process, the following section will describe the considerations made about the semi-structured interview and participant sampling required by the MTRP ethical and procedural parameters.

3.2. Instruments of Data Collection

The constructivist nature of qualitative research required that the instruments of data collection illuminated how the participants make meaning of their experiences. Qualitative researchers rely on data collected from "examining documents, observing behaviour, and interviewing the participants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 38), and make use of a guide or protocol as the instrument for collecting data in interviews. Overall, the interview "has been the mainstay of, and 'gold standard' for, data collection in qualitative research (Silverman, 2000, qtd. in Sandelowski, 2002, p. 3). Furthermore, conducting interviews "is seen as a democratizing force not only for those being interviewed but for the interviewees themselves" because of its conversational tone "between equals" (Sandelowski, 2002, p. 4). This was a significant methodological aspect to my study because it allowed me to conduct a collegial, collaborative-style interview that helped both the interviewer and interviewee develop understandings of inquiry-based learning.

For this reason, the semi-structured interview was the instrument of data collection in this study. Sandelowski (2002) suggests "we tend to forget that observation is not confined to looking but, rather, encompasses all of a researcher's senses" (p. 9). To this end, "the Western cultural tendency to separate body from mind, and to elevate the mental over the corporeal, has trivialized the extent to which the 'body is the obvious point of departure for any processes of

knowing" (Rudberg, 1997, qtd. in Sandelowski, 2002). Several scholars (see Janesick, 1998, 2000; Sandelwood, 2002) have argued that in an interview-based qualitative research study, the researcher "is the key instrument in qualitative inquiry, moving through the field of research and using all of his or her senses to collect data" (Sandelowski, 2002, p. 9). The semi-structured interviews for this study allowed for this exact movement through the participants' experiences insofar as I was an active participant in the discussion and could pose questions based on the participants' physical expressions of excitement, surprise, or confusion. My structured questions on the educators' understandings of inquiry in English classrooms and on their perspectives of student-centered assessments allowed enough space to build off experiences which seemed to physically resonate in their retelling.

The research questions posed in this study were well suited for a qualitative study because they sought to "understand processes," "describe a phenomena" that is poorly researched in the English context, "understand differences between stated and implied policies or theories," and "discover thus far unspecified contextual variables" (Marshall & Rossman, qtd. in Merriam, 2002, p. 11). The contextual variables are of particular importance because the individual classroom and teacher idiosyncrasies may have impacts on inquiry in the classrooms. The next section will describe the participant sampling criteria, procedures, and biographies of the two educators who participated in this study.

3.3. Participants

Two educators participated in the semi-structured interviews from which data was collected. This section will explain the sampling criteria, sampling procedures, and describe the participants. While it can be acknowledged from the literature review in Chapter Two that

inquiry-based learning does occur with some growing frequency in English classrooms, the empirical research to date on inquiry's detailed use is small in scope and limited in context. This research contributes to the body of inquiry research in its' unique sample of participants and the resounding convergence with theoretical pedagogies and education research findings they espoused, as indicated in the data.

3.3.1. Sampling Criteria

The relative newness of inquiry pedagogies actively discussed in the English Language Arts context in research literature proved to be a barrier to maintaining a cohesive set of sampling criteria. Teachers researching and actively engaging in these pedagogies have written about the challenges with widespread integration of inquiry in classrooms. Additionally, given the ethical considerations granted under the MTRP guidelines this paper could not investigate into students' perception of their own learning, a key aspect of inquiry itself. Incorporating the pedagogy into daily life seems to require practitioners to piece together patches of research into their reflective practice. As such, the following sampling criteria were applied to locate teacher participants in Ontario:

1. Teachers are currently teaching secondary students in an English classroom
2. Teachers will have experience using inquiry-based learning methods in English classrooms
3. Teachers will have participated in professional development involving inquiry-based pedagogies

My research question focused on teacher experiences with and beliefs about inquiry-based learning in English classrooms; I essentially asked an open-ended question about asking open-

ended questions in English. The participants thus needed to be teaching in the discipline and incorporating components of inquiry into their daily classrooms. The presence of multiple high yielding instructional strategies present in inquiry classrooms (Oppong-Nuako et al., 2015) indicated for me an understanding of current educational trends, most often learned from professional development. However, since I sampled outside of the public school system (which offers its teachers professional development throughout the school year) I understood professional development to mean any intellectual undertaking into developing one's practice using recognized educational literature and resources.

Reason for sampling outside the public system is that the purposive sampling process did not bear fruit in the timeline the program provided. I was required to open up the sample outside of the public system.

3.3.2. Sampling Procedures

This study made use of purposeful sampling. The sample size of two participants was small due to the scope of the project, and the interviews were between sixty and seventy-five minutes in length. In their overview of methodological components in qualitative research, Lee (2014) states there are

> no specific number of interviews or observations that should be conducted in a qualitative research, and researchers should remember that the aim of a qualitative study is not always to predict or to generalize study findings. In a qualitative study, more attention should be given to the quality of the dataset instead of the size of the sample (p. 95).

The purpose of this study was to understand the educators' depth of knowledge about inquiry practices in English classrooms. As such, the sampling procedure reflected a need for this

thorough understanding rather than a breadth of educator experiences that suggested more generalizable findings. While both participants reported having experience using inquiry-based learning methods, one participant was not OCT-certified, but as "qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants," I decided that having a wealth of experience in inquiry-based pedagogy was sufficient qualifications for this study (Merriam, 2002, p. 12).

Participants were located using the community of educators I have established through studying at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto as well as through completing my practicum placements. Networking and professional recommendations ultimately led me to the two English educators who self-identified as committed to using inquiry in their education practices. I contacted them via the telephone and electronic communication in order to set up face-to-face interviews outside of school hours at their convenience and conducted the interviews face-to-face and over video conferencing platforms.

3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Coby

Over the course of her twenty-year career as a teacher-researcher, Coby earned a Masters of Education with a focus of teacher librarianship, an Honors specialist in English, an Honors Specialist in Drama, and an Honors Specialist in Librarian. Coby's current E-learning ENG4C course, in its fourth iteration, "runs with the traditional semester…but [her] students are from all over Ontario as part of the Ontario E-learning Consortium. She communicates with them daily and "expect[s] them to check in with [her] almost daily." She describes a lifelong inquiry investigation into good practice, being "fascinated with how understanding and developing that

perfect question can open up the room for discussion and inquiry" and claiming "at the same time its something 20 years in I'm still, I'm not comfortable with this yet but I know more now and I know how important it is."

Logan

Logan is an avid reader and a life-long learner who earned his Ph.D. in History. Logan holds two positions in the world of education: he has been a lecturer at a leading Canadian university for six years, specializing in the History of Schooling in Ontario; he is also the founder, director, and curriculum creator for an enrichment education program. In its second official year, he facilitates lessons with small groups of students and works with his teachers, who have their own small classes, regularly. Logan says of the curriculum he created: "a cross disciplinary approach a liberal arts approach which is very inquiry-based and some people call it Philosophy for Children" but he says he also is inclined "to incorporate literature, history, science, and use that for a kind of inquiry-based and collaborative learning."

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data can be yielded by many different data collection methods, including interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) suggests that qualitative researchers "build their patterns, categories, and themes from the 'bottom-up,' by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information" (p. 38). The data collected from the two participant interviews was systematically coded and categorized. A "comprehensive set of themes" emerged from analyzing the transcripts of the interviews and, inductively "working back and forth between the themes" and transcripts (Creswell, 2007, p. 38).

Furthermore, as qualitative researchers must "keep a focus on learning the meaning that

the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers from the literature" (Creswell, 2007, p. 39), I framed my analysis around this study's main research question: what are educator's experiences with and beliefs about inquiry-based learning in English classrooms.

3.5. Ethical Review Procedures

When describing conditions under which "ethically capable" researchers hone their interview skills, Brinkman and Kvale (2005) articulate their belief that "generalizations, as found in formal ethical guidelines, should not blind us to the crucial particularities encountered in the research situation" (p. 178). This research paper is interested in how teachers express their understandings of student learning in inquiry contexts through examples and extrapolations of observations they have accumulated over the years. As such, they bring "crucial particularities" about students from whom they themselves have learned about the learning process. Brinkman and Kvale (2005) continue to explain that, "as qualitative researchers are involved in concrete issues with particular people at particular places and times, they need to master an understanding of these concrete particulars in order to be morally proficient" (p. 178). They argue that, "at its worst, qualitative interviewing can negatively reflect and reinforce "social forms of domination in Western consumer societies" (p. 158). Inquiry-based learning is an inherently social educational and academic endeavour. The academic and professional learning context under which this project was conducted leads me to be cognizant of the social, political, and economic contexts influencing all aspects of the study. I sought to avoid these issues accounting for the deep personal learning that occurred through my participation as researcher in the interviews. I attempted to ensure that the internal and external validity remain as realistic as possible and maintained commitment to equity and fairness in my questioning and analysis of the data.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Thomas Diefenbach (2008) gives a comprehensive list of common concerns surrounding the efficacy and validity of qualitative research, including: "weaknesses and limits of methods and theories;" "the selection of units of investigation, interviewees and other data sources;" and "the relation between social sciences and social practices" (p. 876). The first concern

- Our interpretations as the researcher getting into their wording: they said this, let me analyze it in this way.
- We cannot generalize our sample size to all English Language Arts' teachers employing inquiry ***and their*** understandings of it
- Are we transparent enough with participants?
- Strength: build relationships with participants (cannot/hard to do in quantitative questionnaires)

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodological considerations underpinning this study of teacher perceptions of inquiry-based learning methods in the Ontario English secondary classroom. The use of semi-structured, face-to-face interviewing will constitute this study's data collection. Participants were determined through purposive sampling, using the abovementioned sampling criteria. [Participant experiences include…] The ethical considerations were also addressed, [drawing attention to…]. [Add limitations and strengths of qualitative interviews.] Next, in chapter four, I report the research findings based on qual. Interviews.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

4.0 Introduction

Chapters One presented the context for this study on Ontario educators' understandings of and beliefs about inquiry-based learning in English classrooms. Chapter Two identified theoretical and research-based discussions for using inquiry-based learning in English classrooms, including scholars' investigations into: curriculum and inquiry; critical pedagogies and inquiry; student-teacher relationships and classroom environments. Chapter Three described the methodology used to qualitatively investigate two diverse educators' reported experiences with inquiry in the Ontarian context. The current chapter, Chapter Four, reports the analysis of data collected during two semi-structured interviews with a teacher-librarian, Coby, and a professor/enrichment educator, Logan. The data indicate three themes that emerged from Coby and Logan's reported experiences using inquiry-based learning in their respective classrooms and instructional courses. The themes that emerged from the data are as follows:

4.1 Educators Perceive Time and Professional Development as Required Resources for Inquiry in English

4.2 Educators Perceive Enrichment, Diversity, and Metacognition as Vital to Inquiry-Based Learning in the English Classroom

4.3 Educators Report Inquiry-Based Learning to Be an Iterative Pedagogy

In the following sections, I will be substantiating these theme statements which detail the main findings from the collected data, an explanation of the data and its convergence or divergence with the literature described in Chapter Two, and discuss the significance of the themes to my research question and sub-questions. A summary of the findings will follow the discussion.

4.1 Educators Perceive Time and Professional Development as Required Resources for Inquiry in English

Throughout the data Logan and Coby frequently shared their perception of time and professional development as necessary resources for inquiry in English classrooms. Both practitioners agreed that "time" was the most valuable resource that students needed to build the skills for inquiry. Logan expressed the need for a core of reading and writing activities in his "highly compact, highly productive" classes, but also reported creating the program to allow time for the inquiry process to take full course: "the kids may be going down the wrong path, and you just let them go, because then they'll have to do the process of self-correction and come back." Through integration of reading, writing, and the iterative inquiry cycle, Logan reportedly structured student work so they have time to incorporate new learning into their written work, a technique that converges with Yang's (2010) findings that reflection on feedback allows students to "employ different strategies appropriately" when armed with "the connection between prior and newly acquired knowledge" (p. 1209). Logan reported using time in class for peer feedback, student-teacher conferencing, and metacognitive activities in relation to writing, indicated his perception of time as a valuable resource for practicing inquiry.

Similarly, Coby reported emphasizing for both the class design and her dialogues with students the importance of time to successful inquiry projects; to illustrate her point, she described how lack of parameters and check-ins may lead to problems when "suddenly [students'] inability to manage time or to make a pathway for themselves snowballs into something that is hard for them to recover from within the given timeline." Both educators

perceive inquiry in English requires time for students to make mistakes and learn from them within the context of the project itself.

Both educators also reported on the importance of structuring units and class time for the incorporation of frequent, small tasks that helped students learn and internalize skills over the course of a learning period. For example, Coby reported time for students to "start with some smaller things and gradually" take "total control over…what they're going to study and how they're going to work at it" as an important factor in the backwards design of the course. Coby demonstrated the scaffolding technique in terms of assessment when she talked about reusing rubrics and reincorporating expectations throughout multiple iterations of activities because "if you repeat the rubric and you repeat the experiences and they can see that they themselves are making progress" through metacognitive responses on evaluations.

Coby and Logan reported through their discussions on classroom resources a shared perception that students need time to work out their goals for learning. Joham and Clarke's (2012) findings suggest that educators "can smooth the learning process by ensuring that courses are carefully *structured* and appropriately *supported*" and that "PBL courses will be more effective if they are incorporated into an overall programme structure that encourages self-directed rather than instructor-directed learning" (p. 84, emphasis in original). Coby expressed a direct materialization of what "carefully structure" means in high school classrooms when she lamented that a "really hard part about inquiry, and I just think were starting to get to the heart of the matter here, is the evaluation cycle doesn't always suit a natural flow for inquiry." Both educators reported using backwards design scaffolding to build student skills related to self-directed learning.

Just as structuring the course to allow time for student development in inquiry, using multiple teaching methods learned through professional development is reported by the participants to be a significant part of implementing inquiry in English. Coby expresses her perception of this as a current barrier to inquiry in English because

> it's not a brand new idea, but the fact that people are becoming more comfortable enough [with it], with teachers coming around and saying maybe the textbook isn't the most important thing, the content it not the most important thing… it's the process that we use to get there and the skills involved that are important.

This description of changing teaching methods reflected a belief of the valuable classroom time used engaging the diversity of thought students can bring to inquiry-based English classrooms.

While neither participant reported taking professional development designed specifically for inquiry, they both articulated the importance of incorporating new, student-centered teaching methods and techniques into their practice. Logan reported using educational literature as his main source of professional development for inquiry practice, and cited colleague collaboration and summer institute courses as the next best way to engage in developing his practice. Lawrence et al. (2010) indicated that "when teachers use a wide variety of instructional strategies to teach reading, students engage in a wide array of literacy practices" and that "the authentic literacy practices reported in these secondary classrooms facilitate opportunities for students to become independent learners as they gradually master more strategies" (p. 60). Professional development can come from reflecting on an engagement with educational theory and other teachers' experiences.

4.2 Educators Perceive Enrichment, Diversity, and Metacognition as Vital to Inquiry-Based Learning in the English Classroom

During discussions about incorporating critical thinking and critical literacy into classroom discussions, the educators reported perceiving enrichment, diversity, and metacognition as vital to inquiry-based learning in the English classroom. Logan's perceptions about inquiry were closely tied with his perceptions of enrichment: "I was getting kids to think critically, not what to think but how to begin synthesizing things we're discussing, how to come up with these big questions, how to inquire, how to develop curiosity," which he reported to see in his classes as they developed a "mind of their own and kind of justifying what they believe and the reasons for it rather than just say, my teacher told me." Logan perceives depth of engagement with ideas to be inherent goals of his English class, rather than the consumption and retention of the text's content.

> Coby echoes this belief when she described a five-week inquiry project where the students choose their own texts and I give them some guidelines and they design their own assignment around that and then prove to me they have an understanding of what those things are by completing their own assignments and then mark their own assignments too, but always in a dialogue with me so I think I'm truly a guide on the side in that case.

By giving students choice in content and assessment criteria, Coby reports the perception that students feel "empowered" by the cyclical process of inquiry. Furthermore, the enrichment aspect of Coby's classroom structure is reported when she describes using digital tools to

purposefully help students move through what Vygotsky describes as their zone of proximal development and keep the online discourse active.

Both educators use the students' interests and strengths as the foundation for learning expectations in that learning goals are oriented to position every student to enrich their learning. Logan reports inquiry in English to be a student-centered pedagogical approach: "how to go about [inquiry] precisely is kind of a rough science, because it's a very holistic process, I don't think there's a kind of rigid way to do this to be quite honest with you um because if you think there is what you're not taking into account of is the diversity of the student's as well." Content, however, was not irrelevant in the conversations by any means. Logan expressed the belief that "literature is an excellent gate-way to doing this [i.e. inquiry]. I mean so many stories are philosophical and give you such a deep understanding of human nature and why people are doing the things they do." Coby reported a similar perspective on inquiry as a way to engage students in enriching discussions and deepening perspectives: "I keep challenging the design of text: text as a t-shirt, text as a Tweet, text as a book, text as whatever over and over again so that they can understand that everything is constructed with purpose, [and] appreciating texts from maybe a marketing point of view and the political point of view is something that is new to them." These findings converge with Gold et al.'s (2011) study on teaching literacy found that "teachers and administrators believed that student engagement in literacy was strengthened when students make personal connections during the learning process" (p. 35). Additionally, Lawrence et al.'s (2009) study of frequency and depth of specific inquiry activities observable in a class indicated that the teachers who use inquiry the most "report that they emphasized multiple strategies and activities for reading, the approaches the teachers used most frequently were

independent reading, whole class discussions, and strategy instruction" (p. 60). Coby's reported belief about the importance of critical and digital literacies points to an understanding of curricular content that extends beyond the traditionally taught Western canon. By exposing students to a variety of content, perspectives, and social and political contexts, both Logan and Coby perceived themselves as helping students enrich their understanding of the significance of texts they see daily (Beach & Myers, 2001).

Just as both educators reported believing diversity of literary content can lead to a more enriching inquiry learning environment, both also discussed inquiry in English as a possible pedagogical tool for attending to the diversity of students. For Logan, inquiry-based learning is a proactive response to the systemic inequities in education. He reports that the Ontario education system is

> still in this one size fits all model that was created in the 19th century for a certain social class, a type of middle class, which is fine, but I would argue that it was a very Anglo Saxon one too, and modern day Ontario we have many more ethnicities and we've always had different learners we've always had a diversity of learners but you just can't put one template onto all of these kids.

Counter to the "banking model" Logan alludes to above, in a study on problem framing in project-based learning classrooms Svihla and Reeve (2016) found that positioned students as owners of the problem, students were more purposeful in working through the different levels of inquiry. Coby perceived that "the culture of inquiry again lets the learner be the center of the focus of the topic of exploration" and that the inquiry environment is one in which student involvement in creating the topic allows them, through metacognitive activities and processes of

self-correction, to become a part of the investigation themselves, taking authentic ownership of their ideas and products. Cultivating students' perceived ownership of learning, as Coby articulated it, may help "students learn that they can trust themselves to develop their own learning path and to follow it through."

Student ownership of learning as a way of fostering student diversity reportedly can have positive ramifications for peer collaboration. Logan reported attempting in classes to "make it very collaborative and the discussions are very Socratic where everybody's contributing and challenging each other but also…being persuaded by others or at least listening to other's opinions." Logan's teaching technique of guiding dialogue in which students are the main contributors is congruent with Singaram et al.'s (2012) findings which suggested that contextualizing meaning within student tutorial groups helped students generate critical ideas and articulate a social or conceptual position on the work at hand (p. 161). Logan reported believing that "you have to let the students take it somewhere, because it is about them it isn't about you." The perceived release of power described here, and echoed in Coby's description of her students' collaborate work, resonated with Singaram et al.'s (2012) findings that "if students ask each other critical questions and motivate each other to contribute to the discussion, the overall group productivity is perceived as higher (p. 161).

Logan iterated throughout the data that "it is more about the thinking behind it for" him, voicing a shared perception that metacognition is crucial to student learning. Swanson (1990) found that "high metacognitive ability positively influences problem-solving performance" regardless of students' aptitude levels (pp. 311-312). Logan reports the repetitive feedback necessary before students understand, accept, and internalize teacher feedback because "you

know of course it's not magic." Coby echoed Logan's sentiment through their reported perception that

> to build a culture of that they have to have a feeling that they can take a chance and fail and still have enough time to get to the level that they want to, but it doesn't always have to be time as long as we emphasize the product even the failures as part of a successful project, that's part of an inquiry-based project.

Yang (2010) studied reflection on feedback during the writing process and found that "reflecting on the processes of self-correction and peer review contributes to students' text revision and improvement" (p. 1209). Coby reports using these processes because "in English, I try to put a lot of evaluation on their ability to be honest with themselves and to reflect and I'd say that more so than any other skill that's the thing that I think I can achieve as their teacher in an online place." Her final exam is structured around metacognition, asking students to "write one paragraph for each of the ten questions, and each one is one based on their own portfolio and what they've succeeded in that semester, or what they failed at, or what they learned or what they'd like to do next, what they wish they had more time for, you know things like that." In a study on the relationship between high school students' levels of achievement and learning dispositions, Ren and Deakin Crick's (DATE) data showed "when faced with an exam-oriented pedagogy, underachievers are likely to feel more fragile and dependent than their overachieving colleagues" (p. 248). By taking student learning habits and dispositions into account when planning assessment, Coby demonstrated her belief that all students are capable of success and teachers can use pedagogical tools to help every student based on their needs.

4.3 Teachers Report Inquiry-Based Learning to Be an Iterative Pedagogy

The educators reported that inquiry in English classes were successful when the cycles of inquiry were iterated multiple times over the course of the teaching period. The educators perceived that using inquiry methods might be a proactive solution for bridging the gap between student needs and student potential. The educators also reported that direct interventions such as co-creation of homework schedules and feedback loops, whether in direct interactions or online platforms, can be beneficial to the inquiry-based learning environment in and English classroom. In a variety of ways, Coby and Logan expressed the perceived importance of repetition and reflection on growth as inherent in inquiries within English classrooms.

Logan reported that his "main concern is mastery because over time with enough repetition…it's just going to leave a mark in their mind, this indelible mark." This notion converges with Eckstein, Chariton, and McCollum's study that shows the content, organization, and grammar in student writing improves when working with an "iterative model" of writing (P. 168). Logan reported not grading drafts of student writing pieces until they have a product both he and the student are happy with, but rather said that in written feedback "I won't tell them what to write I'll point out like here's what's wrong, this argument doesn't support this, fix it, and then if they don't fix it I'll say it still doesn't, or now it does," a process that often takes multiple attempts. Logan's use of feedback as formative assessment converges with research findings in Irving (2011) which report teachers perceive written and oral feedback "as fostering student improvement and positive affective consequences" (p. 424). Positive affective consequences were also reported through Logan's anecdotes of student's positive response to peer constructive criticisms and Coby's description of a semester long inquiry project she works with senior Physical Education students:

> we know they might hit a roadblock but instead of giving up we say well what do you think the problem is here and usually it's something like oh your scope is too limited or too wide, the question isn't deep enough so we work through that again and by that point there's so much research that they're starting to develop the patterns, and it sounds like a trick but really it's the iterative process over and over again"

Coby discusses the limitations of implementing tools in the classroom when teachers bring them in in a fragmented way because "rarely do they see them as a continuum" of interrelated tools. She reiterates this belief when discussing authentic assessment of students: "I'd have to be able to see over time and work with them in order to really express what it is that I'm looking for them to meet expectations that are at the level they want to achieve."

4.4 Conclusion

Through close analysis of the data described above, three significant themes emerged from Coby and Logan's descriptions of their diverse experiences with inquiry in English. Firstly, both educators reported their perception of time and professional development as necessary resources for inquiry in English classrooms. Secondly, they reported perceived enrichment, diversity, and metacognition as vital to inquiry-based learning in the English classroom. Thirdly, the educators reported that inquiry was successful when full inquiry process is repeated several times, allowing students to monitor their progress. As the scope of this study limited the sample to two participants, a larger sample size of educators would prove useful for a deeper investigation of inquiry in English Language Arts classes. However, this study contributes to body of literature that explores teacher and student learning goals and how they are manifested in classroom environments. In the following chapter, the implications of this research for students,

teachers, and administrators will be discussed. Additionally, recommendations for teachers, teacher-educators, and researchers will be articulated.

Chapter Five: Implications and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter explores how the participants' beliefs about inquiry-based learning may be significant for stakeholders in Ontario secondary school communities, specifically teachers, students, parents, and administrators. A brief overview of the data analysis conducted in previous chapter will give specific contexts for the broad and narrow implications that follow. Recommendations for the various stakeholders, and for future research, will be given before comments concluding the paper. The concluding comments will offer a reflection on the main research question and the findings' actionable applications.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

In the previous chapter, data was collected and analyzed from two semi-structured interviews with two Ontarian English educators. The three major themes that emerged from an analysis of the data were that: educators perceive time and professional development as required resources for inquiry in English; educators perceive enrichment, diversity, and metacognition as vital to inquiry-based learning the English classroom; and educators report inquiry-based learning to be an iterative pedagogy. The participants in this study, Coby and Logan, expressed a broad concern for bringing student-centered theoretical ideas into their classrooms.

The data suggested that bridging this gap between theory and practice requires teachers to reflect on their practice, on student intersectionalities, and on building authentic collaborative relationships. The perceived effectiveness of inquiry-based learning involves productive, trusting, and mutually beneficial relationships between students and teachers where accountability is upheld. The cycle of inquiry that teacher-researchers and student-researchers is

similar, and thus discussions of critical praxis in inquiry-based learning may be extremely beneficial. The following sections in this chapter will explore these implications and recommendations more thoroughly.

5.2 Implications

The research findings described above have implications for a variety of participants in school communities. This section explores how the experiences of the two educators in this study offer insights for helping teachers, administration, and students reap the perceived benefits of inquiry-based learning in secondary English classrooms across Ontario. The broad implications will focus specifically on the themes' significance for the three stakeholders stated above. The narrow implications of this research will focus the participant's insights on my own educational practice and philosophy.

5.2.1 Broad implications

The first theme that emerged from an analysis of the data is that educators perceive time and professional development as required resources for inquiry in English. The need for time implies a critical reimagining of the structures embedded into classrooms: how evaluations are organized; how time for students to reframe their questions during the learning process is given; what skills necessary for inquiry work are built on and assessed. The data imply that teachers should work collaboratively to answer questions posed from this line of inquiry, and *return* to them continuously as the year rolls on. Both Coby and Logan articulated an emphasis on building time for students to explore their abilities and ideas in an environment focused on personal growth. Logan's freedom from rigid examination and reporting schedules offered students time to develop ideas and skills thoroughly. Coby's suggestion that time is important for

students to recover from mistakes and develop their learning habits as integral to curricular design indicates a place of reflection for classroom teachers. They both imply the need for frequently repeated cognitive activities embedded into substantial collaborative projects. **[the next few paragraphs should continue to be your opinion: based on my data analysis and understanding, this is an implication. Coby & Logan's voices should stay in chapter four]**

Similarly, the perceived importance of these two resources implicates administration and other support staff in building a supportive, collaborative environment for teachers. The professional development both participants reported in their interviews was effective when embedded in and developed with their daily routines. Administrations, and other support staff such as counsellors or specialists, play an important role in building time during the school day for professional development grounded in teachers' classroom experiences. Time and space for these learning communities are thus implicitly required to promote a widespread change for student-centered classroom structures.

The longevity of projects reported during the interviews also gives students time to bear the fruits of their academic labour, making improvement a tangible process they can replicate. Coby and Logan relayed accounts of students explicitly using failures as starting points for future learning experiences. Part of the importance for iterative work is recognizing gains made by learning from past failures; students lose out insightful moments when their mistakes are not recognized as spaces for reflective improvement. The engaging nature of inquiry-based learning implies students need to give genuine and persistent effort to succeed.

The findings in Chapter Four, which indicate that enrichment, diversity, and metacognition should be bundled into an iterative inquiry process, have similar implications for

teachers and students. The iterative nature of inquiry in English allows students to return to ideas or works from different perspectives or theoretical lenses. The enriched nature of this essentially interdisciplinary work implies a commitment to engagement in all aspects of the classroom learning community. Implied throughout the interviews is the notion that teachers and students can co-create learning experiences by continued dialogue about the learning process itself. **[more about your perceptions, not about the interviews. That belongs in key findings]** Insofar as this occurs, every student brings their own diversity of thought and action as tools for communal growth.

5.2.2 Narrow implications

I entered the project looking for an explanation of pedagogy I thought could radically change students' ability to learn in English classrooms, and it became evident that many of my personal, positive learning experiences were reflected in Coby and Logan's inquiry practices. Extrapolating from their experiences, I recognize the necessity of a critical and theoretical language that allows educators to communicate how they facilitate holistic learning in students. The implication of this research for my professional practice is the need for this direct, relatable language to naturally build professional and classroom learning communities.

My beliefs about a teacher's role in a classroom developed with every stage of the paper. At the onset, I grappled with inquiry's place in a classroom built on pre-determined content and rigid examination schedules. Coby and Logan expressed using creative assessments and unit structures to work around these barriers, drawing attention to areas I can focus on in my own lesson planning. After more experience with open-ended evaluations, hearing Coby and Logan describe their students' learning experiences helped me develop the belief that teachers can

foster self-sufficiency and confidence in students given clear and flexible assessments. Once I was responsible for teaching in an environment that had full community support for student inquiry practice, I was able to see the power of time and professional development given to student-centered learning.

Furthermore, my experiences with private and public secondary schools, and my personal interest in anti-colonial, feminist philosophies of education, led me to conclude all schools are inherently political spaces. The knowledge that teachers choose to privilege should be reflected on in these contexts. I believe equitable education comes from students determining the direction of that education rather than squeezed into streams. The participants' utterances and the breadth of literature examined for this study implied for my practice a focus in curriculum design that begins time for students to explore ideas and voices outside of teacher chosen content.

5.3 Recommendations

[add a paragraph here about the stakeholders you will address (as in your 5.0 Introduction). It appears that your stakeholders are teachers to support students. Is there anyone else? Is EDUGAINS enough? What about OME / school boards providing teachers with the time for PD? You mentioned this earlier in Ch. One I believe]

One recommendation that emerges from this study is a continued engagement with a variety of professional development activities. Coby and Logan implied using creative engagement with policy documents and support materials as a tool for developing their use of inquiry. Available easily through websites such as *EduGAINS,* teachers can look to a variety of literacy and language-learning documents the Ontario Ministries of Education has published in the past decade. The *Capacity Building Series* in particular offers a starting point for bringing

inquiry-based methods in secondary classrooms. The introductory sections of the 9 – 12 English Curriculums also include extensive explanations of the student learning skills that are fundamental to the inquiry process. While most educators are fluent in their subject's curriculum, returning to this material during the unit and lesson design process may be useful for structuring student-centered class time.

In a student-centered classroom there is space for each individual to take responsibility for the direction of the class. The findings suggested that students succeed in an enriched and diverse classroom built around metacognitive activities. To the extent that students can determine their learning goals, a recommendation for students that emerged from this finding is the value of emphasizing processes where their ideas, opinions, and failures are continuously built upon. Receiving sustained and detailed feedback in a variety of formats may help students develop their rigor of thought. Allowing them to choose aspects of the content and skill sets undertaken may help engage student interest. In both cases, the inquiry cycle's iterative process allows for repeated cycles of feedback in familiar learning contexts. Co-creating learning goals with students has become a frequent practice in many Ontarian classrooms, and one recommendation this study suggests is for students to persist in a deep level of engagement with the direction of those goals.

5.4 Future Research

A significant area for future research on inquiry-based learning in English is in a comprehensive language for intersecting educational philosophies and instructional techniques. My personal pedagogy during the direct and indirect research for this study has been increasingly influenced by anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and care-based philosophies. Throughout this study I

have wondered the extent to which inquiry-based learning in English classrooms can be a catalyst for the educational change John Dewey, Paolo Freire, bell hooks, and policy documents such as *Growing Success* and *Learning for All* espouse. The increasing relevancy of student-centered teaching practices suggests future research target bringing educational philosophies into discourse with those on lesson planning, differentiation in classroom activities, and authentic assessments.

Philosophical research needs to take place and make these connections. Depending on what you think inquiry is, if it's just student choice and student questions, it won't be as rich as if it were built with skill development and lifelong learning.

5.5 Conclusion

I began this study hoping to learn about a classroom structure that I thought intuitively led students on a path of life long learning. Students' natural curiosities may be stifled by the pre-determined learning goals attained through pre-determined texts. The themes imply a need for examination of classroom structure and resources on a collaborative level. Inquiry as a concept for classroom and curricular design needs to be brought in at the start rather than incorporated at the end of lesson planning projects. This way, time may be given to authentically examine diversity of voice and thought in an academic setting. Collaboration takes place in a number of different spaces in inquiry units which may be capitalized on by educators. Furthermore, the themes point to shifting the common belief that an academic understanding of English does not necessitate an exclusively literary understanding of English. There seems to be some contention about what an English classroom is and its purpose. This space of potential student growth ought to be examined by researchers in the future.

References

Applebee, Arthur N., & Langer, Judith A. (2003). Discussion-based approaches to developing understanding: classroom instruction and student performance in middle and high school English. *American Educational Research Journal, 40*(3), 685-730.

Barrow, R. (2011) Was Peters nearly right about education?" In Cuypers, S. & Martin, C. (Eds.), *Reading R.S. Peters Today: Analysis, Ethics, and the Aims of Education* (6-23). West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Beach, Richard, & Myers, Jamie. (2001). *Inquiry-based english instruction: engaging students in life and literature*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Blumenfeld, P. C., Soloway, E., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S. , Guzdial, M. & Palincsar, A. (1991). Motivating project-based learning: Sustaining the doing, supporting the learning. *Educational Psychologist, 26(3)*, 369-398, 10.1080/00461520.1991.9653139

Brinkmann, S. & Kvale, S. (2005). Confronting the ethics of qualitative research. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 18*(2), 157-181. 10.1080/10720530590914789

Burke, 1994, p. 97

Bush, J. & Zuidema, L. (Eds.). (2001). Professional writing in the english classroom. *English Journal, 101*(2), 93-96.

Canadian Literacy and Learning Network. (2012). Fact sheet: literacy & essential skills.

Choi, Ikseon, Land, Susan M., & Turgeon, Alfred J. (2005). Scaffolding peer-questioning strategies to facilitate metacognition during online small group discussion. *Instructional Science*, *33*(1)*,* 483-511.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches

(2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Deakin Crick, R. (2009). Inquiry-based learning: Reconciling the personal with the public in a democratic and archaeological pedagogy. *The Curriculum Journal, 20*(1), 73-92.

Deakin Crick, R. & Grushka, K. (2009). *The Curriculum Journal, 20*(4), 447-464.

Diefenbach, T. (2008). Are case studies more than sophisticated storytelling?: Methodological problems of qualitative empirical research mainly based on semi-structured interviews. *Qual Quant*, *43*(1), 875-894.

Eckstein, G., Chariton, J. & McCollum, R. M. (2011). *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 10*(1)*,* 162-172.

English, M. C. & Kitsantas, A. (2013). Supporting student self-regulated learning in problem- and project-based learning. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning, 7*(2), 128-150.

Eslinger, E., White, B., Frederiksen, J. & Brobst, J. (2008). Supporting inquiry processes with an interactive learning environment: Inquiry island. *J Sci Educ Technol, 17*(1), 610-617.

Flick, Uwe. (2007). What is qualitative research? *Designing Qualitative Research*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Gilchirst, Debra L. & Cunningham, April D. (2015). Chaos and order: Scaffolding students' exploration during inquiry-based learning. *Inquiry-Based Learning for Multidisciplinary Programs: A Conceptual and Practical Resource for Educators* ***issue or volume number***. 253-274.

Gillon, K. & Sotter, J. (2011). ****more, find original source.***

Gold, E., Edmunds, K., Maluk, H. & Reumann-Moore, R. (2011). Boosting adolescent and

young adult literacy: An examination of literacy teaching and learning in Philadelphia's ***accelerated high schools. Research for Action**(confused)***

Harste, J. C. (2003). What do we mean by literacy now? *Voices From the Middle, 10*(3), 8-13.

Hickey, D. T., Taasoobshirazi, G. & Cross, D. (2012). Assessment as learning: enhancing discourse, understanding, and achievement in innovative science curricula. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 49*(10), 1240-1270.

Hmelo-Silver, C. E. (2004). Problem-based learning: What and how do students learn? *Educational Psychology Review, 16*(3), 235-266.

Irving, S., Earl, H., Lois, R. & Peterson, E. R. (2011). 'One assessment doesn't serve all the purposes' or does it?: New Zealand teachers describe assessment and feedback. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 12*(1), 413-426.

Jeon, H. & Hmelo-Silver, C. E. (2010). Productive use of learning resources in an online problem-based learning environment. *Computers in Human Behavior, 26*(1), 84-99.

Joham, C. & Clarke, M. (2012). Teaching critical management skills: The role of problem-based learning. *Teaching in Higher Education, 17*(1), 75-88.

Kambler, B. & Fine, M. (2001). *Relocating the personal: A critical writing pedagogy.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Marx, R. W., Blumenfeld, P. C., Krajcik, J. S., Blunk, M., Crawford, B., Kelley, B. & Meyer, K. M. (1994). Enacting project-based science: Experiences of four middle grade teachers. *Elementary School Journal, 9*(1), 517-538.

Nystrand, M. (1990). On teaching writing as a verb rather than as a noun: research on

writing for high school english teachers. In Gail E. Hawisher and Anna O. Soter (Eds.), *On Literacy and its Teaching,* 144-157.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2013). *Capacity building series: Inquiry-based learning.* Retrieved from www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/ Queen's University Press

Thomas, J. W. (2000). *A Review of Research on Project-Based Learning*, San Rafael, CA: Autodesk Foundation.

Thomas, J. W. & Mergendoller, J. R. (2000). Managing project-based learning: Principles from the field. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date:

Dear _____,

My Name is Christina Kompson and I am a student in the Master of Teaching (MT) program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on teacher understanding and use of inquiry-based learning in the English classroom. I am interested in interviewing teachers who use inquiry-based learning methods in their current classrooms. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 60-75 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the non-anonymized research data will be myself and the MT program Research Coordinator Dr. Angela MacDonald Vemic. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Christina Kompson

Phone:

Email:

MT Program Contact: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic

Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Christina Kompson and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: _____

Name: (printed) _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Introductory Script (10 minutes):

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn your perceptions, understandings, and use of inquiry-based learning and open-ended assessments in the English classroom. This interview will last approximately 60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your inquiry-based teaching methods. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

START OF MEETING (10 minutes)

1. Introduce self
2. Present and discuss consent form (two copies, one for OISE's files and one for the participant to keep)
3. Do you have any questions about the project?
4. Test audio recorder; extra batteries
5. **Begin recording**
6. State date and time of interview – start interview!

- Do you have any questions before we begin?
- Can you please state your name for the recording?

Interview Questions (60 minutes):

Section A: Background Information

1. Can you please begin by describing your current position and the responsibilities it entails?
   a) How long have you been in this role?
2. Can you tell me a bit about your formal training: where you studied, when you got your degree and how long ago you completed your schooling?
3. What courses have you taught/are you teaching?

a) Which courses incorporate inquiry-based learning?
b) Do you incorporate your personal and academic interests into your teaching practice?

4. Have you participated in professional development that incorporated inquiry-based learning pedagogies? If yes, can you briefly describe the extent to which you've adopted what you were exposed to into your daily teaching practice?
5. Have you conducted academic research in the classroom regarding your practice?

Section B: Educator Understandings of Inquiry-Based Learning in English Language Arts

1. Could you please explain your understanding inquiry-based learning?
   a) What makes it different from other pedagogies?
   b) How would you describe your own pedagogy?
2. In your opinion, what is the purpose of an English/Language Arts course?
3. What do you call inquiry-based learning when describing it to office staff, administrators, or other teachers?
   a) Are they the same terms you use for parents and students?
4. Do you believe that inquiry-based learning can enhance student literacy?
5. To what extent do you teach writing as a cyclical process?
6. How do you distinguish inquiry from research?
7. What are your criteria for determining the successful implementation of inquiry-based learning? Can you please share specific examples of each?
   a) Does it include: Student motivation; Conceptual versus procedural knowledge; Basic reading/writing/communication skills; Presentation skills; Collaboration skills; Effective research skills; Problem solving

Section C: Educator Perspectives on Open-Ended, Student-Centered Assessment

1. Can you please describe your understanding of open-ended, student-centered assessment?
2. Does open-ended, student-centered assessments benefit students?
   a) Are there examples of inquiry-based projects/activities/units that, in your experience, are more effective than others?

b) Did students enjoy/engage in certain projects/activities/units more than others? Was this demonstrated in their assessments?
c) Are there situations in which a student may not benefit from open-ended assessments? Can you share some examples of students who struggled with these or inquiry-based learning more generally?

3. Does a teacher's own comfort with the topic affect the way they teach it?

Section D: Educator Reports of Using Inquiry-Based Methods

1. One barrier to implementation stated in the literature is the resistance to relinquishing control over the classroom. Do you feel comfortable with the classroom as a space for "co-inquiry" between teachers and students?
   a) What do you believe the teacher's main role in inquiry is?
   b) What are some methods for students to demonstrate their learning in this process?
2. What are some skills you think are important for students to gain in an English class?
3. Do you incorporate skill development into inquiry? If so, how and what skills specifically?
4. What types of problems do you pose to students?
5. If an inquiry-based project is not successful, what are some steps to ensure students still benefit from the assessment?
   a) Redirect questions/research; Peer conferences/workshops; Self-reflective practice

Section E: Educator Reports of Relevant Support

1. Can you please tell me how you prepared to run an inquiry-based lesson/unit/project?
   a) Were there specific resources you needed before/during/after?
   b) Did you work with other teachers to prepare?
   c) To what extent are other colleagues using inquiry in their classrooms?
2. What is challenging about doing inquiry-based learning in your school?
   a) Do you have colleague support for implementing this pedagogy?
   b) Do you have sufficient prep time to plan and reflect on the inquiry-based approaches?

3. Can you please tell me about any misconceptions or misapplications of inquiry that you have encountered? How did you handle them?
4. What are some barriers you see to successful implementation of inquiry-based learning in the English classroom?
5. Having stated those challenges, how can you support teachers who wish to adopt inquiry-based pedagogies?

Recorder OFF

Closing Script (5 minutes):

That concludes the interview! Thank you so much for your time and your insights into teaching. I particularly appreciate… Do you have any questions for me?

Reminder that your contact info and that of the UofT Research Ethics Board are on their copy of the letter (and leave them a copy!)