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# Literacy and Identity Investment in Secondary Drama Courses: Using narrative inquiry to investigate teacher perceptions of the affordances of secondary Drama courses in Ontario

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## Abstract

This study investigated the teacher perceptions in regard to the literacy learning and identity investment opportunities within their own Drama classrooms in Ontario. This study also addresses the challenges that were present within Drama classes when teachers tried to celebrate and incorporate cultural, linguistic, and semiotic diversity.

The theoretical tools of the study include theories on multiliteracies and identity investment. Data presented in this paper emerged from semi-structured interviews with five teacher participants.

Findings of this study show that teachers perceived that their Drama classes offered a variety of multimodal opportunities for literacy and identity investment. These opportunities did not isolate literacy or identity opportunities; rather often a single opportunity offered students a chance to engage in both literacy learning and identity investment simultaneously. This study offers suggestions regarding teacher training and on-going professional development for Drama teachers to further promote literacy and identity opportunities within Ontario secondary Drama courses.

## Keywords

Drama, Identity Investment, Intended Curriculum, Implemented Curriculum, Literacy, Multiliteracies, Multimodality, Narrative Inquiry

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# Chapter 1

## 1 Introduction

This study investigated the teacher perceptions in regards to the literacy learning and identity investment opportunities within their own drama classrooms. Existing research in Drama education can be difficult to decipher given the range of terminology used in the research to name Drama and the conflation between Drama and other subject areas (Doyle, 1993). It is not uncommon to see research discussing teacher perceptions of the application of Drama strategies in language arts classes, but there is a gap when it comes to teacher perceptions within standalone Drama courses. Further, the existing research surrounding identity and Drama does not use the terminology associated with identity investment (Cummins 2000, 2001, 2009). Studies linking Drama with identity and self-concept (Freeman, Sullivan & Fulton 2003, Roy & Ladwig 2015) often focus solely on the self-reflection benefits but not the literacy benefits that investing in student identities can create.

In my experience as a Drama teacher, I have witnessed how my students have brought in their own “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) and invested their identities in Drama courses in ways that are rooted in their own cultural, linguistic, and semiotic diversity. This led me to wanting to explore teacher perceptions of the affordances of Drama courses with regard to enabling literacy learning and identity investment. I also wanted to make sure to discuss the challenges that were present within Drama classes when teachers try to celebrate and incorporate cultural, linguistic, and semiotic diversity.

Bearing all this in mind, I wished to bring together and amplify teacher perceptions regarding the opportunities in standalone Drama courses. I further wished to see if they perceived those literacy and identity opportunities as being isolated from each other or if at times those benefits overlapped and interacted with each other.

## 1.1 Drama versus Theatre in the Ontario Classroom

There is an important difference in the research and professional literatures between Drama and Theatre, which has also been born out in my work as a Drama teacher. Drama focuses on process, not finished products, and by nature allows for student exploration that focuses on what is within, as opposed to students acquiring and assimilating what they lack (Gallagher, 2016; O’Neill, 2014). This view is in line with the idea that there is “an emphasis on process over product, an emphasis on originality viewed as novelty, and the downplaying of skills of the discipline and knowledge of dramatic tradition, all in the name of facilitating the emergence of the natural creativity within the individual” (Bailin, 2011, p. 209).

The traditional view of theatre is that “theatre is not questioned; instead, it appears as a given, traditional technique, in the sense of the ancient Greek *téchne*, as a competence, skill or craft” (Schonmann, 2011, p. 119). Perhaps most important in this definition is the idea that theatre is not questioned and the focus is on students learning traditional techniques. This definition implies that there is a right way and a wrong way, with the teacher determining what is valued and important. Moving away from these traditional views requires that educators engage “with cultural practices and images beyond the theatre, and with the underlying power relations and societal conditions that produce them. When this challenge meets with a progressive attitude, a broader concept of theatre and political involvement can be combined” (p. 122). This has large implications for teachers when they are working with marginalized groups, as “they move into a relationship of reciprocal exchange ... They consider themselves as learners” (p. 122).

It should also be noted that the word Theatre is never used in the Ontario Drama curriculum documents for Grades 9 and 10. The curriculum does note that “[t]hrough the process of taking on roles, students develop and express empathy for people in a wide range of situations” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 65). It is possible that this is the only course at the secondary level that specifically mentions developing and expressing empathy. The curriculum also repeatedly refers to students using the “creative process” (p. 65), naming it one of the overall expectations of the Drama courses. In delivering the Drama curriculum, I am also aware of its potential for helping students

develop transferable skills such as collaboration, public speaking, and creative thinking that students will be able to use in a variety of situations. Development of empathy related to identity investment, as the emphasis is not just on students being able to express themselves, but in learning to interact with others who are also taking advantage of identity investment opportunities. This addresses the implicit power imbalances that exist between teachers and students, by requiring that all involved be more aware of the thoughts and feelings of those around them. It places further emphasis on the fact that everyone has value and that their funds of knowledge also have value. Furthermore, a number of literacy learning opportunities can arise and be further facilitated by students among themselves as they interact and interpret assignments without a teacher hovering over their work.

While it is important to discuss the opportunities, I would be remiss if I did not also delve into the teachers' perceptions regarding the challenges they faced in their classrooms. In an ideal world, it is easy to meet the needs of every student every day, but the reality is that there will be barriers to that. Some barriers can be addressed, such as providing students with additional time or multiple modes to express their learning. However, some will be more difficult to address. For instance, what happened when classroom dynamics made it difficult for students to fully take advantage of the literacy and identity investment opportunities? Further, how did teacher participants address these inequalities? What caused these inequalities and was it something that was within the teachers' control?

## 1.2 Coming to the Question

I have a vested personal interest in my subject matter, both as a former student and now as a secondary school teacher. I completed my Bachelor's of Education in 2010 and hold qualifications in Drama, English, History, English as a Second Language, Guidance and Careers, and Special Education. Thus far the bulk of my teaching experience has been in secondary school Drama, which has allowed me to witness the impacts this course can have on students.

My elementary schooling offered little in the way of Drama, whether due to lack of interest and experience on the part of the teachers, lack of resources or any number of other reasons I do not know. However, upon reaching secondary school I finally experienced Drama as taught by a qualified teacher. Not only that, this teacher had professional Theatre experience. When I initially chose Drama as one of my grade 9 electives, I did so because students were, and still are, required to complete an Arts credit to earn their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, 1999). I, like so many others, chose Drama because it seemed easier than taking Instrumental Music or Visual Art. Yet, something instantly clicked upon entering that Drama classroom way back in February 2002, culminating in me becoming a Drama teacher.

Since 2002, I have witnessed how Dramatic Arts programs are shrinking, even with continued student interest, due to timetabling and budget constraints. Perhaps I take it personally, but it certainly feels as though there remains a hierarchy of subjects in schools, with Drama being shunted to the basement – quite literally in some cases when it comes to classroom assignments within the building. Twice I have arrived at my new teaching assignment to learn my classroom is in the basement of the school. On another occasion, I taught Drama at a small rural school, only for the school to eliminate Drama from the timetable the following year, despite having students sign up.

With the elimination of Grade 13, Ontario secondary students have lost a year for self-exploration in high school as they now have more required courses in a shorter amount of time. This has led to increased student stress and anxiety, as well as a general unpreparedness for post-secondary options (Tremblay, Garg, & Levin, 2007). I have seen how course selection further influenced by guidance counsellors, who are often in a position to influence student decisions regarding course selection. Furthermore, many schools have part-time guidance counsellors who often also teach electives, therefore meaning they have a vested interest in maintaining their own programs. When I was in grade 11, my guidance counsellor's bias showed in his surprise that a "smart student" like me had not registered in more math and science courses, because "Drama and history

won't get you a job." In speaking with students since becoming a teacher, my guidance counsellor is far from the only one to say such things.

Through my own experience as a Drama teacher, and in speaking with colleagues, it is clear that Drama offers different experiences for students than mandatory courses, such as English. While ultimately the student must show that they have achieved certain curriculum expectations, there are many ways they can demonstrate their knowledge and skills. This sort of curriculum re-defines what constitutes student success, as well as focusing on educating the whole child, not just grades, and allows for individuals to forge their own unique path instead of sticking to the prescribed map. The Ontario Arts curriculum places particular emphasis on this aspect as it "involves students intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically. Learning through the arts therefore fosters integration of students' cognitive, emotional, sensory, and motor capacities, and enables students with a wide variety of learning styles to increase their learning potential" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4). It seems that in writing the Arts curriculum, the Ontario Ministry of Education recognized that "each child was to be a custom job" (Eisner, 2002, p. 70) and furthermore "[w]hole here meant the child was to be seen as a social and emotional creature, not only as an academic or intellectual one" (p. 71). When Eisner's assertions are seen beside the Arts curriculum, it seems logical to conclude that the Ontario Drama curriculum allows for teachers to use their professional judgement as to what will best support students. This opens the door to the possibility that there will be differences between the intended and implemented curriculum.

Part of my desire to do more in depth research related to the affordances of Drama as a standalone course was because I have had to defend its importance to parents, teachers in other subject areas, and other school officials (such as administration, superintendents). This is a topic I address daily in my professional practice, so it is a natural leap to conducting formalized research.

### 1.3 Moving Forward

My professional experiences have taught me that Drama provides students with unique learning experiences. This is an observation that is reflected in the literature; for example,

arts based teaching strategies, particularly those used in Drama, are often used as tools in other subject areas (Albers & Harste, 2007), especially for elementary students (Lundy, 2002). Therefore, I wished to study Drama as a standalone subject at the secondary level, particularly when taught by a qualified teacher, to discern its particular affordances. Therefore, to what extent are learning opportunities provided in secondary school Drama classes in literacy learning and identity investment? To further expand on this question, I pose the following:

1. What are the affordances of Drama courses with regard to enabling students' literacy learning and identity investment?
2. What are the challenges in Drama courses with regard to enabling students' literacy learning and identity investment?

Given the scope of my thesis work, I have focused on the teacher perceptions regarding the literacy and identity options provided by the Drama course.

## 1.4 Overview of the Study

In Chapter 2, I present the full context for my study. I do this by giving a look at the literature exists regarding Drama Education and the gaps that currently exist. This context chapter also discusses the theories appropriate for my study. I discuss the curriculum by weaving it in with explanations of multiliteracies, multimodality, asset-orientated pedagogy, and identity investment theory.

In Chapter 3, I discuss my methodology and data collection methods, specifically the interviews and the use of narrative inquiry therein. I also describe my data analysis method and explain my data analysis procedures. I close this chapter by discussing the ethical considerations surrounding my data collection.

Chapter 4 provides summaries with direct quotes for each of the five participants. I focus on answering the two research questions, and offer some further insights in regards to specific data analysis for individuals.

In Chapter 5, I discuss key findings pertaining to teacher perceptions of student literacy learning and identity investment opportunities in secondary Drama courses. I also discuss the challenges teachers face in delivering these opportunities to their students.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the conclusions of this study. This includes conclusions of the study, recommendations, as well as the significance of this study.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Literature Review

To underpin this study, the literature from the following areas was reviewed: Drama education, multiliteracies, multimodality, intended and implemented curriculum, and identity investment.

#### 2.1 Defining Drama Education

There is a critical mass of research into Drama education, however, unearthing this research can be tricky given the range of terminology used in the research to name Drama and the conflation between Drama and other subject areas. Doyle (1993), for example argued that

An overview of the educational literature brings forth several drama terms that seem often to be used in interchangeable ways. These terms are: drama, theatre, educational drama, educational theatre, theatre arts, dramatic arts, creative arts, children's theatre, child drama, and drama in education. The literature further reveals that drama is found in a vast array of contrived arrangements with other subjects. The following represent some of the more common juxtapositions: speech and drama, speech and theatre, communications and drama, language arts and drama, debate and drama, speech communication and drama, poetry and theatre. This list, while not exhaustive, gives some sense of the ways drama is used in education. (p. 44-45)

Doyle may have been writing in 1993, but those words still ring true. The overlap between drama and other subject areas, such as language arts, is particularly notable. It is not uncommon to find a wealth of information on applying drama strategies to other subject areas (Rainer & Lewis, 2012), although it often focuses on the elementary school level (Poston-Anderson, 2012; Swartz & Nyman, 2010) and the preschool level (Szecsi, 2008; Wee, 2009). Using Drama strategies in other classes can be classified as Dramatic arts integration, where drama is linked with a content area for the purposes of reaching a deeper level of engagement, learning, and reflection. Drama in education has been recognized as a dynamic teaching methodology that allows students to reach academic, social, and personal goals (Anderson, 2012; Lundy, 2002; Macro, 2015).



Foundational to the methodology of Drama education is Dorothy Heathcote. It would be impossible to discuss Drama education without mentioning her as she is, arguably the pioneer of the entire idea. She stated that:

Classroom drama uses the elements of the art of theatre .... The difference between the theatre and the classroom is that in theatre everything is contrived so that the audience gets the kicks. In the classroom the participants get the kicks. However, the tools are the same: the elements of theatre craft (as cited in O'Neill, 2014, p. 40).

Heathcote laid out the various elements of Drama and also noted that the term drama itself was a blanket term that was not useful to teachers. Instead, she sought to explain the elements of drama that made it a learning tool. Drama demands cooperation, puts life experience to use, incorporates fiction and fantasy while making people more aware of reality, stresses an agreement among participants, makes people find precision in communication, stresses the use of reflection, and allows people to test crises, attitudes, and present capacities. She further discussed how learning through drama can be approached a variety of ways, with each way making a different kind of learning happen. Roles, mantle of the expert, analogy, text, dance forms, simulation, and games are all different forms of Drama that can be used in education. In short, Drama teaches students a number of transferable skills (e.g. cooperation and communication).

Mortimer (2000) wrote that the arts are a way of developing life skills and attitudes that are transferable across the curriculum. He contended that it was a way of “contextualizing other learning” (p. 3). The effects of the arts, such as Drama, were seen to be much broader than curriculum aims. Of particular note,

“teachers referred to pupils' personal development and self-awareness especially fostering self-esteem, self-confidence and developing the whole person .... This was mentioned more often than all the direct art form knowledge and technical skills ... put together. The second most frequently cited category was the perceived capacity of the arts to improve performance on other areas of the curriculum through the transfer of skills and knowledge acquired in the arts” (National Foundation for Educational Research, as cited in Mortimer, p. 3).

Despite this study, it is difficult to find academic research that explicitly refers to the transferable skills Drama as a standalone course teaches students. McLauchlan and Winters (2014) did focus on standalone Drama courses, but did not use the term

transferable skills. Instead they stated that “drama class enhances student growth across five broad learning categories” (p. 58), and proceed to list said areas. They noted that student growth occurred in: skills and concepts of performance and production; empathy and perspective taking; social and collaborative skills (with a note about leadership skills); confidence, communication and creativity; and success in other courses and interview preparation. I find it curious then that the term transferable skills is absent in this discussion.

Returning to Heathcote, her work is imminently practical and is regularly applied when it comes to first exposing students to Drama. When discussing how to introduce Drama to students she emphasized the importance of ensuring that students are part of the entire process. She wrote:

[F]irst, I want the children to recognize that I am putting the onus upon them to have ideas. Second, I want them to realize that I am prepared to accept their ideas and to use them and make them work. This decision-making, where children watch their own choices worked out in action, seems to me to be one of the important services which drama renders to education, where we are trying to encourage children to think for themselves. Third, I want the children to work from the very beginning within a true drama context, that is not a vitiated art form watered down for them but the real thing with the real disciplines which drama requires. (as cited in O’Neill, 2014, p. 48)

When prompted to consider what she wanted the dramatic input to do for the children, the learning area, and herself, Heathcote stressed that it could not be a general answer. She noted that it could usually be clearly named as a skill. Furthermore, she noted that she needed to be aware of her own voice in teaching, as well as noting that she did not need to know everything about the subject at hand before starting a lesson. Drama, therefore, opens the door for the teacher to step back and the students to step forward and direct the exploration within the classroom. As Heathcote noted, teachers can at times struggle with this aspect, as they can find it uncomfortable for a student to ask a question they do not know the answer to.

As previously mentioned, there exists research that explores why Drama strategies have been used for elementary children, particularly in areas such as Language Arts and Social Sciences (Lundy, 2002). There are also comprehensive guides for school improvement

through drama (Dickinson & Neelands, 2006; Hendrix, Eick, & Shannon, 2012). Yet, there appears to be a significant gap in the research relating to the affordances provided by standalone Drama courses at the secondary level. There is some information regarding literacy and Drama (Gallagher, 2013; McLauchlan, 2010), as well as a discussion of identity in Drama (Gallagher, 2011). However, this existing research does not specifically link the theory of identity investment and Drama. There is also little research regarding the multimodal affordances in secondary Drama courses.

There is, however, some research regarding multimodal literacy which can be applied to Drama, given Drama's inherent multimodal nature (e.g., Albers & Harste, 2007; Anderson, 2013; Berry & Cavallaro, 2014; Wohlwend, 2015). Multimodal perspectives of literacy address the idea that "meanings are made (as well as distributed, interpreted, and remade) through many representational and communicational resources, of which language is but one" (Jewitt, 2008, p. 246). Taking this a step forward, multimodality also incorporates "image, gesture, gaze, body posture, sound, writing, music, speech, and so on" (p. 246). If each of these ideas are viewed as modes, one can see how these modes are also inherently present in the Drama curriculum, which contains expectations such as, "A3.2 use a variety of expressive voice and movement techniques to support the depiction of character (e.g., use volume, tone, accent, pace, gesture, and facial expression to reveal character and/or intention)" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 69). Drama curriculum requires the use of multiple modes of literacy in order for students to demonstrate their learning.

Wohlwend (2015) specifically discusses popular media, discussing the profound influence it has on a child's life. Based on observations of my own students, this is particularly applicable in a Drama classroom, as popular media often influences how students create characters. Wohlwend also addressed the notion of transmedia (Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Robinson, & Weigel, 2006; Herr-Stephenson, Alper, Reilly, Jenkins, 2013). Transmedia is the use of storytelling that uses a single narrative or experience across a variety of platforms and formats, remaking the meanings of objects, and play as a way for children to participate within imagined communities (Wohlwend, 2015). These aspects of transmedia are also present in Drama classrooms, notably

throughout the creative process, when students brainstorm, rehearse, refine, and perform their ideas. In fact, the Ontario Drama curriculum uses similar terminology, “By communicating in both their real and imagined worlds, students acquire proficiency in listening, speaking, questioning, and problem solving” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 65). Student imagination, therefore, is important to student learning.

Three characteristics of play are discussed by Wohlwend (2015) when determining its potential for creative cultural production: “[p]lay narratives are embodied ... Player roles and actions are continually negotiated and improvised collaboratively ... [and] Contexts – such as play scenarios – are relocated into an immediate space” (Wohlwend, p. 549). Therefore I intended to investigate whether teachers perceived these characteristics to be present within Drama classrooms. I was curious to know whether the teachers thought that they provided opportunities for students to negotiate with each other throughout the rehearsal process and even during final summative performances. This may be present in discussion of their roles, as well as when it comes to determining the script and artistic direction of each piece.

The creative process plays a large role in Drama courses and can manifest itself through the use of process drama, which was largely developed from the work of Dorothy Heathcote (O’Neill, 2014). Process drama is used to explore problems, situations, themes, or a series of related ideas through unscripted Drama. Alida Anderson (2012) addressed the influence of process drama on elementary students’ written language. Even more interesting was that the study contributed to the development of a literacy approach for students “with language-based learning disabilities (LD) and developmental disabilities (DD), as well as those with literacy failure due to limited economic resources or socioeconomic status (SES) and emotional-behavioral disabilities (EBD)” (p. 959). Anderson elaborated that presently there is an emphasis on arts-based learning “as a way to reach and teach all children, and drama-based interventions are being adopted by education practitioners in an effort to improve students’ literacy outcomes” (p. 960). The study was a response to the relationship between drama-based intervention and language-learning outcomes being underspecified. Yet, this study did not look at a specific drama course, but at applying drama strategies to a language arts course.

Valuable as Dramatic arts integration is, it does not cover the affordances of Drama as a standalone course at the secondary level. It is not uncommon for those researching Drama in education at the secondary level to similarly take the drama strategies and then use them in another course, such as Lewis and Rainer (2012), who offer examples of projects for a variety of themes students may explore, such as displaced people. What this research does offer though, is further assurances that Drama does indeed foster literacy. Drama has already been shown to foster literacy because:

it allows students of any age to become part of the learning process. ... Ultimately, the idea that drama is literacy is supported by the fact that it is: (1) a multimodal and embodied learning experience, (2) helps to reveal textual understanding, and (3) provides opportunities for deeper analysis and critical thinking about texts and concepts. (Macro, 2015, p. 338)

McLauchlan (2010) was one of the few specifically looking at what secondary school Drama courses are offering students. Her research directly relates to exploring the benefits of Drama as a standalone course at the secondary level. Through questionnaires, she uncovered student attitudes about school motivation, retention, and success. Her findings indicated that students specifically enjoyed Drama because of physical mobility, peer interaction, expression, and authentic, yet challenging and relevant learning tasks. Drama, for these students was more than just subject content, as they valued it as a source of personal and social growth. Her follow up work with Winters (2014) continued to make use of questionnaires, but also incorporates interviews to create a fuller picture. Importantly, her work also took place in Ontario classrooms, offering me a jumping off point with my own research. However, these two studies take on more of a case study approach compared with my approach of speaking with multiple teachers and asking them to reflect on their careers as a whole.

It is possible that the positive findings that MacLauchlan and Winters (2014) uncovered regarding school motivation, retention, success, and personal and social growth, are indicative of literacy success in standalone Drama courses. Students are more likely to learn if they are in a positive frame of mind, therefore, if Drama creates positive feelings in students, they become open to more learning opportunities and eventually seek out new opportunities for themselves. Their findings reported that Drama inherently promotes literacy learning. The students themselves often become aware such as when a

student is quoted as saying, “[Drama has] definitely shown me that I can write, I can read a play, I can analyze a play, I can act, I can get up there and communicate” (McLauchlan, 2010, p. 149). This informs my use of multimodality and asset-oriented pedagogy as my theories because even without explicitly using these terms, aspects of these theories emerge within the existing literature. Therefore, in explicitly applying these theories to research in Drama education, my research fills this gap.

The students’ choice of words regarding Drama class also stood out in the transcripts. McLauchlan (2010) noted that the word “fun” is interspersed throughout her interview transcripts, but the emotional engagement is paramount to the students. “[S]tudents found the demands of drama class emotionally challenging, and many vivid memories involved conquering various obstacles or fears. . . . Emotional attachment to their work deepened as students progressed throughout high school” (McLauchlan, p. 149). The role emotional connection plays can be linked to the idea that students are more engaged when the work is relevant. McLauchlan concluded that allowing secondary students the chance to play, enhances personal growth through creative exploration. The students themselves also are quick to explain that they enjoy Drama compared to other classes because of its kinesthetic nature, often comparing “the physicality of drama with the more inactive pupil role in other courses. ‘In other classes, you have to be quiet and just sit there and do your work’” (McLauchlan & Winters, 2014, p. 56). This is addressing the emotional connection students have with Drama class and how this leads to higher engagement, which ultimately leads to students successfully obtaining credit in the course. In addressing the emotional connection students have with Drama class, it is possible to see students having higher levels of engagement with their studies. A higher level of engagement ultimately leads to more successful students. In fact, “students attached the highest value to drama’s capacity for enhancing personal growth” (p. 59).

Most relevant to my own research, the students interviewed in these previous studies were able to articulate the impacts Drama had on their overall educational experience. The aforementioned studies have shown the impacts Drama has on students in terms of their personal growth, something education is continually preoccupied with. The students saw the value in what they are learning and can apply it in a variety of other areas

(McLauchlan & Winters, 2014). If the students themselves are able to make these connections and express them, it speaks to the importance of Drama.. It is important to amplify the voice of teachers to show yet another perspective when it comes to the affordances of Drama courses.

There are studies in Drama Education that discuss identity, but do not specifically use the term identity investment (the investment in the student's own social identity). Identity is also more than what appears in the classroom, just as education in general extends beyond the classroom. Drama is seen by the students as a class in which they are free to express themselves. Drama is also an inherently collective endeavor that involves each member of the class and it involves more than the present. Students are more than a single moment, bringing all aspects of their lives in the classroom. The teacher, while directly involved in portions of the creative process, is able to observe these creative interactions. Kathleen Gallagher (2013) has touched on this, stating that,

The extraordinary thing about drama class is that life beyond the walls of the school matters; it matters in a way that is unlike most other classrooms. It matters because communication is at the heart of the collective creative process. And how we communicate, how we speak and are heard, is in direct relationship to how we are perceived in our communities. (p. 8)

Gallagher further discussed how Drama students never create in a vacuum. The broader social and political context is inescapable. When important moments happen in a cultural context, she asserted that they will make their way into a drama classroom, “especially one headed by a teacher who believes in the significance of social identity to any learning process” (p. 8). Her interviews have touched on how students chart out who they want to be in the classroom and how they want to work with others. Gallagher also discussed the “paradox of the danger and the importance of naming race and articulating discourses of identity in the often-fraught contexts of urban classrooms” (p. 8). One teacher she interviewed noted that,

“if we're doing writing pieces, there's students that are willing to explore their own culture and questions about their own culture, but you'd never push them to do that, because sometimes students just don't want to do that. ... You can't assume that they're in a place where they want to be doing that. If the students feel that they can – that they're safe enough to explore those issues – then that's great, then you can respect that. (p. 9)

This links nicely with identity investment, even if it does not name it specifically. In a sense, it dances around the idea, focusing on offering students the opportunity for self-exploration with a teacher who recognizes the importance of social identity to the learning process.

Gallagher (2015) provided some interesting insight into the place of Drama in the formal curriculum in Ontario. She noted that it is:

de rigueur in education to demand that subjects like drama justify their contribution to young people's learning, and to reflect the values of the system of education of which they are a part. The times are difficult for all subjects perceived to be outside the mainstream, extraneous to the 'basics' of literacy and numeracy, or the zeitgeist of the age of technology. (p. 20)

This is precisely the feeling I have, which has pushed me towards conducting formal research into the benefits Drama has on student learning. Despite the existing literature, there continues to be a gap when it comes to discussing the affordances of standalone, secondary school Drama courses. Furthermore, teachers were not included in the discussion to the extent that one might expect them to be. Teachers on the frontlines see what is happening and as professionals offer valuable insight regarding Drama education. Existent literature focuses on the students and their perceptions, therefore it is valuable to talk to teachers themselves because their voices should be heard to inform the policies and practice. This thesis seeks to build upon this previous research by focusing on the teacher perceptions of the literacy learning and identity investment present in Drama classrooms.

While some of the literature discusses accessing student funds of knowledge (the cultural and concepts that students bring to literacy) (Cummins, 2000, 2001, 2009), more interviews with teachers to ascertain their perceptions in regards to the identity investment and its connections to literacy development are needed to fully realize the benefits that standalone Drama courses have on student learning.

Existent literature on identity investment has primarily focused on English Language Learners (Cummins, 2000, 2001, 2009). Identity investment discusses the amount of power teachers have over students, focusing on the need for students to be able to express themselves culturally and linguistically in the classroom. Teachers, therefore, need to be



culturally aware in order to best support their students in the classroom. By encouraging students of diverse backgrounds to develop the language and culture they bring with them, teachers support students in building upon their prior experiences. Together, teachers and students also “challenge the perception in the broader society that these attributes are inferior or worthless” (Cummins, 2001, p.3). Teachers have choices in how they negotiate identities with students, such as

in how they interact with students; in how they engage them cognitively; in how they activate their prior knowledge; in how they use technology to amplify imagination; in how they involve parents in their children’s education; and in what they communicate to students regarding home language and culture (Cummins, 2009 p. 262).

In articulating the choices, there is a re-examination of the assumptions within the classroom that can constrict both identity options and academic engagement of culturally diverse students. These ideas require that teachers be self-reflective, a good professional practice for all teachers regardless of the demographics of the student population they serve.

In examining the existing literature regarding student identity and Drama, there are several studies that discuss identity within Drama (Freeman, Sullivan & Fulton, 2003; Hendrix & Shannon 2012; O’Neill, 2014; Rodericks, 2015), but none that specifically use the term identity investment. In some, such as Freeman, et al. used the term self-concept instead. “Identity and self-concept are often interchangeable terms in education” (Roy & Ladwig, 2015, p. 910). These studies often also focus more on Dramatic Arts integration, as opposed to a standalone secondary Drama course. Others (Gallagher, 2011; McLauchlan, 2010; McLauchlan & Winters, 2014), discuss identity, but are primarily focused on the literacy opportunities of Drama courses at the secondary level. They alluded to identity when they discussed aspects of student engagement, but again, do not use the term identity investment.

Drama activities are a combination of internal reflection and external representation, making them inclusive of “the cognitive, affective, aesthetic, and moral domains” (Freeman, 2003, p. 131). Drama ultimately contributes to “an improved self-concept by providing opportunities to gain personal confidence by working in an uncritical

atmosphere” (p. 132). Through overcoming self-consciousness, students gain more self-acceptance, as well as more personal awareness. Rodericks (2015) discussed the impact Drama Education can have on students in an increasingly connected and globalized world. He viewed Drama Education as a restorative, as “the drama space affords opportunities for participants to negotiate concepts of self, other, and the world both in and out of role” (p. 341). He noted that this negotiation provides a chance for minority students to find relief, as “taking on a role allows them to embrace their vulnerability, perform their experiences, and subvert a majoritarian narrative without fear of reprisal” (p. 341). It should be noted, that this idea of identity does appear centered on cultural and linguistic differences, but this emphasis on student identity and finding relief through embracing their vulnerability while taking on a role can also be applied to homogeneous student populations. Students may share similar socio-economic demographics, but they still have individual experiences that inform their identities.

When it comes to examples from standalone secondary Drama courses, students often begin their work from personal places (Gallagher, 2011, p. 325). There is a connection to be made between “validating students’ prior knowledge, their culture, community, language, and identity for literacy learning and deep understanding” (p. 326). The research suggests that when teaching practices activate the prior knowledge of students, building upon their personal and cultural narratives, students find classroom literacy practices more purposeful (Gallagher, 2011). David Booth (1998) made it clear that Drama makes it possible to hear students differently, both through the doing and through the reflection process.

An intriguing notion is the idea that identities “are in flux in drama” (Gallagher, 2011, p. 327). This is because the process surrounding a collective performance provides students with creative and critical opportunities to enter each other’s worlds. In sharing their ideas, students listen to each other, try different roles and identities, created new ones in response, and expressed those roles. They also “juxtaposed different ideas, worldviews, languages, and discourses in the context of an emerging piece of fiction in their creation” (p. 327). Taking this a step further, this process does not fix identities in place, but opens up further dialogues.

Roy and Ladwig (2015) examined the specific example of mask as a technique that furthers student identity. Masks allow for “identity exploration, self-awareness in developing good mental health, and in conjunction with academic achievement, self-confidence and societal responsibility” (p. 912). Mask can be freeing for students, as their body becomes separated from “the visual identifier of their face” (p. 908). Masks have played a variety of roles in society throughout history, including community ritual, performance, and aesthetics. Mask itself is “a representation of identity and exploration is still a fluid one” (p. 909). Adolescent identity is impacted by “what the individual does rather than what is done to the individual” (p. 910). This is particularly important in Drama because of the collective nature of the creative process.

Within Drama education, identity is understood “as a process of socially and collaboratively negotiated creation in the form of role making and role taking” (Walker, Martin & Gibson, 2015, p. 4). Reflection is usually undertaken individually, allowing for students to examine the implications of the identities they have formed. Student can also discuss how these identities interact with the identities of others. Students are given a chance to play with identity in “a relatively ‘penalty free zone’ to experiment with and manipulate different kinds of identities to understand the implications of the choices they make” (p. 4). The creativity within arts education can be seen as fundamental to identity formation. Consider the collaborative nature of the Drama classroom as discussed earlier, this lines up nicely with sociocultural approaches to identity formation, which “take the view that identity is a social construction which is shaped and formed through sociocultural, historical and institutional processes” (p. 5-6). In this regard, examining identity in Drama classes focuses on allowing students to play with new ideas. For my study, I was curious what the teacher perceptions were regarding their students experimentation with identity.

As noted previously, other studies discuss aspects of identity, but do not use the term of identity investment. It is also worth noting that in some instances, such as Walker, et al. (2015), discussion of identity is linked to transferable skills, such as collaboration. However, when students are given time to reflect, it is done individually. During interviews with my participants I began to by asking: would it perhaps be valuable to

have the reflection piece also done collaboratively at times? In addition, in focusing on creating, developing, or exploring new identities, does that detract from further exploration of oneself and run the risk of ignoring students' prior knowledge? In exploring these new identities, what is the role of the teacher and how do they perceive these explorations in identity? This is particularly important when remembering that students are still required to complete assessments and evaluations throughout the course and arrive at a final mark for each student. Where Walker, et al. seem to focus on new identities, some of the teachers I spoke with seemed more keen on facilitating students' exploration of their current identities. Some of the identity investment pieces seemed to focus on changing students by showing them new things, while the teachers I spoke to seem more interested in seeing what the students themselves already are and giving them the freedom to express that.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework Introduction

In this section, I present the theoretical framework that guided this study. I have chosen to use multiple theoretical tools for this study. I started with the differences between the intended and implemented curriculum (Eisner, 2002; Kriedal, 2010; Schwab, 1973), as my study specifically related to the Ontario Curriculum for ADA10 and ADA20 (Grade 9 and 10 Drama) and teachers' implementation of the curriculum. Building upon the ideas in intended and implemented curriculum, I chose to use multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) and identity investment (Cummins 2000, 2009) to make sense of the data. Multiliteracies is an apt fit for discussing the literacy benefits of Drama, notably the multimodal aspects (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2003). I am also incorporating asset-orientated multiliteracies pedagogy (Heydon & Bainbridge, 2015), which focuses on valuing what students have to offer. This links back to the identity investment piece, which focuses on providing students with opportunities for collaborative learning that embraces the cultural and linguistic capital of students.

### 2.2.1 Intended versus Implemented Curriculum

Before launching into further discussion regarding multiliteracies, some attention must be given to the curriculum. Curriculum development is at best contentious and at worst a

battleground. “Who influences curriculum decision making?” J. Arch Phillips Jr. and Richard Hawthorne (1978) asked, “Nearly any organization, at any level, that has a concern. Who controls curriculum decision making? No one” (p. 365). Even when a final decision is reached regarding the intended curriculum, the implemented curriculum may vary based on the school board, the individual school, the individual class, and any other number of variables. The intended curriculum is the set of objectives laid out in the formal curriculum plan, with established goals, specific purposes, and objectives to be accomplished (Kridel, 2010). According to Kridel, the implemented curriculum is “the unintended consequences of the curricular process employed, and development of plans to revise the intended curriculum to more fully meet needs and interests of learners” (p. 489).

Ben Levin (2008) wrote “Every education policy decision can be seen as being, in some sense, a political decision” (p. 8). He further asserted, “Policies govern just about every aspect of education – what schooling is provided, how, to whom, in what form, by whom, with what resources, and so on” (p. 8). Perhaps more importantly though, “Governments do attempt to shape as well as respond to public opinion” (p. 9). Further to that, a lot of what the government does is shaped by the individuals who hold particular positions. Politicians care more about what people believe to be true, than what is actually true. According to Levin, beliefs, not facts, are what often drive political action and voting intention. Before beginning my research, I was curious if Drama teachers have felt the weight of public opinion in their classrooms when it comes to selecting materials. Have they encountered resistance with particular plays that may be considered controversial? For those teachers that have been teaching longer, have they seen significant changes with each newly revised curriculum document and what impact this has had on existing lessons?

I disagree, however, with Levin’s (2008) conclusion regarding curriculum decisions, that is, “These dynamics tend to be poorly understood by most educators, who tend to believe that education policy choices can and should be made on the basis of educational expertise” (p. 22). My view is no doubt heavily influenced by my own role as a teacher, as I would argue that “Part of understanding curriculum change is therefore to understand

what problems there are to solve” (Calgren, as cited in Westbury, 2008, p. 51). Educational policy made without the benefit of educational expertise from teachers on the frontlines would be incomplete. The problems with curriculum that necessitate change often only become evident after the curriculum is implemented (Donaldson, 2014; Mutch, 2012). There are also often issues with efficiency being prioritized over ethics (Heydon & Wang, 2006). It stands to reason then that teachers on the frontlines will be the one to spot these difficulties. As a teacher, I often feel as though curriculum decisions are handed down without a true understanding of the practical realities of the classroom, particularly when it comes to available resources and technology. Therefore, I am keen to examine how other teachers feel supported (or unsupported) when it comes to implementing the curriculum. In understanding teacher perspectives, it is important to understand the curriculum that they use within their classrooms. It is also important to understand how the teachers’ interpretations of that curriculum has a profound influence on what occurs within their classroom.

Joseph Schwab (1973) noted that there needs to be a curriculum specialist who must work to help balance the four commonplaces of learners, teachers, subject matters, and milieus. “None of these can be omitted without omitting a vital factor in education thought and practice” (p. 509). When these discussions become dominated by a single commonplace at the expense of the others, it leads to “bandwagon” curriculum based on a singular theory, such as child development. Notably, Schwab wrote that, “The curriculum is not to conform to the material; the material is to be used in the service of the student” (p. 515).

Eisner’s (2002) approach to curriculum resonates with my research given that:

“...a school district or even a state might provide a framework for curriculum development, the primary responsibility for designing educational programs, often on the wing, resided with the teacher ... It is precisely the kind of intelligent pedagogical adaptability, this shifting of aims, that Dewey regarded as exemplifying what he called ‘flexible purposing’” (p. 71)

Eisner therefore repositions the teacher as a powerful decision maker in education. Adaptability is a key skill for all teachers, not only for days when things do not go as planned, but also for those instances when teachable moments arise. Eisner (2002) is

particularly relevant when it comes to Drama Curriculum given that he writes, “The development of intelligence – what Dewey called *growth* – does not emerge from biology or genetics alone, it requires the resources of culture” (p. 68). The Drama curriculum thrives on culture, “Since artistic activities involve intense engagement, students experience a sense of wonder and joy when learning through the arts, which can motivate them to participate more fully in cultural life and other educational opportunities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 3). In this vein, it is essential to explore whether Drama teachers are agentive in incorporating culture into their implemented curriculum.

Curriculum is ever changing at both the intended and implemented levels, and there should be continual feedback between teachers on the front lines and those making curriculum decisions at varying levels of respective educational authorities. Schwab and Eisner’s works show the need for curriculum to be responsive to student needs and that the importance of teachers’ exercising of their professional judgement of how best to actualize the intended curriculum within their individual classrooms.

### 2.2.2 Literacy or Multiliteracies

Multiliteracies is an apt frame for this study on drama as it seeks to broaden the understanding of literacy teaching and learning. Two key aspects that the multiliteracies framework highlights are: cultural and linguistic diversity and multimodal forms of expression and representation. The former is because of culturally and linguistically diverse societies that have emerged in a globalized world, while the latter is a direct response to the explosion of information and multimedia technologies with plethora of additional applications. The New London Group’s (1996) objective was to create “the learning conditions for full social participation” (p. 61) and as such “the issue of differences becomes critically important. How do we ensure that differences of culture, language, and gender are not barriers to success? And what are the implications of these differences for literacy pedagogy?” (p. 61). The terminology used in explaining multiliteracies is similar to the terminology used when discussing identity investment, which invites teachers to participate in a reciprocal exchange of ideas with their students (Cummins, 2001). The focus of the terminology is on diversity and accepting the need to be culturally aware within globalized classrooms.

Research in New Literacy Studies (NLS) finds it problematic to simply use the term “literacy” as their object of study, as it comes with many ideological assumptions (as cited in Street, 2006). This makes it difficult to do ethnographic studies regarding the variety of literacies in various contexts.

The traditional view of literacy held that it was a set of skills or a “technology of the mind” (Good, 1968, 1977, as cited in Street, 2006, p.1). However, the new approach views literacy as a social practice that relies on context. Brian Street (2006) makes two important distinctions: autonomous versus ideological models of literacy; and literacy events versus literacy practices. The autonomous model focused on literacy as a skill, where the ideological model focuses on literacy as a social practice. Street argues against the autonomous model by saying that it:

overstates the significance that can be attributed to literacy in itself; understands the qualities of oral communication; sets up unhelpful and untestable polarities...’ lends authority to a language for describing literacy practices that often contradicts [its] own stated disclaimers ...; polarizes the difference between oral and literate modes of communication (2006, p. 3).

Moving to literacy practices, the focus is on the everyday uses and meanings of literacy. The concept of literacy practices “attempts to handle the events and the patterns of activity around literacy events but to link them to something broader of a cultural and social kind” (Street, 2006, p. 5). Literacy practices can refer to “the broader cultural conception regarding particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (Street, 2006, p. 5).

A literacy event is an occasion during which a person “attempts to comprehend graphic signs” (Anderson, as cited in Street, 2006, p. 4). Shirley Brice Heath (1982) characterized literacy events as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (as cited in Street, 2006, p. 5). Street’s version of literacy practices focuses on “social practices and conceptions of reading and writing...later elaborated the term to take account both of ‘events’ in Heath’s sense and of the social models of literacy that participants bring to bear upon those events and that give meaning to them” (2006, p. 5). This has resulted in the distinction between literacy events and literacy practices. Defining literacy events and literacy practices



explains the relationships between literacy and communities of practice. Human social interaction may appear to be based on spoken language, but most of our interactions double as literacy events, as these interactions revolve around written texts.

Much spoken language is in the presence of texts and a large amount of spoken language makes reference to texts. The existence of these mediating texts changes what is said and how it is said. Ordinary everyday spoken interaction which is usually referred to as face-to-face and somehow viewed as ‘natural’ and unmediated is in fact highly mediated, most often by texts but also by other artefacts, and there is no real distinction between face-to-face and mediated (Barton & Hamilton, 2005, p. 3).

Street suggested that his working distinction between literacy events and literacy practices is “helpful for both research and in teaching situations” (2006, p. 4). He preferred to champion the ideological model, which suggests that literacy varies from one context to another. This means that the effects of different literacies in different conditions also vary. This model offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices and proposes that literacy at its core is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill. Literacy is intrinsically embedded in socially constructed principles and practices, much like that is created within a Drama classroom. Students are expected to work together to create something new, often bringing in their own understanding and experiences. Drama is inherently collaborative, making it a social practice, and allowing students the chance to experiment with a variety of principles and practices without having to worry about real world consequences.

Literacy goes beyond the standard reading and writing and incorporating cultural contexts is a key component of that. Drama, given it provides the social practice aspect of literacy, provides a number of different contexts for students to interact in. Literacy learning is also active, just as Drama is active; the student is not a passive observer, but something they participate in.

Drama classes allow for a great deal of exploration by the students, but in my experience, many of their ideas are based on pre-existing ideas. However, does Drama offer the chance for students to manipulate these texts in their own ways, as well as modify their own literacy practices? If this does happen, how does it happen? What units offer students these literacy opportunities? Are the students aware of where their inspiration

comes from and do they view it as relating to literacy? These questions became part of the conversations I had with the Drama teachers I interviewed.

In examining literacy events and practices, it is important to note that “specific events are made up of more general practices, that there are distinct, coherent configurations of practices which can be identified and named. These are often associated with specific areas of life” (Barton & Hamilton, 2005, p. 4). However, “[i]n real life, such practices are hybrid and overlapping, with blurred edges, and people apply practices learned in one situation in new situations. This means that boundaries themselves are significant, generative spaces where resources may be combined in new ways or for new purposes” (p. 4). Furthermore, literacy practices are dynamic requiring that people be active participants as they have a point and a purpose. “It is immediately apparent that literacy simultaneously serves both individual and social purposes and, in fact, there can be multiple and conflicting purposes involved” (p. 6). Literacy practices also remain continually fluid and change is important to their evolution so that they remain relevant to our daily lives.

In examining the foundations of multiliteracies and relating it to Drama education, it is important to note that “a literacy practice, like any social practice, exists not in isolation but rather is intimately connected to a field” (Bloom & Green, 2015, p. 20). Bloom and Green noted that if one insists on teaching literacy by using the autonomous model as opposed to the ideological model, they run the risk of isolating literacy from its context. The autonomous model does not create the learning conditions necessary to facilitate the full social participation of students. Literacy relies on context, meaning:

[L]iteracy practices, therefore, are realized in literacy events, as the actual embodiment, engagement, and interaction among people in real time as they make their everyday lives within institutional, social, cultural, and economic contexts. Within a literacy event, a literacy practice is adapted to the in situ circumstances in which people find themselves. (pp. 20-21)

Drama courses may have the potential to display a wide variety of literacy practices and events that are embedded in the circumstances of the given situation. This means that teacher perceptions of the affordances within Drama courses for meaning making may vary widely and be germane. Hence, why it is important to speak with those involved directly. The curriculum notes that students will “identify ways in which dramatic

exploration contributes to their understanding of diverse cultures and traditions” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 78). Therefore, my study addressed how teachers addressed this curriculum expectation in the classroom?

Literacy is all encompassing, going well beyond the idea of “schooled” literacy, wherein literacy is taught only as a skill. In fact the learning of literacy can be better characterized as “the teaching and learning of a set of literacy practices and the cultural ideologies and fields that a particular set of literacy practices index” (Bloom & Green, 2015, p. 21).

Literacy teaching of the past was a tool in which to impose particular literacy practices, and by default social practices. In acknowledging the cultural bias that is inherent in traditional teaching methods, teachers become more aware that teaching and learning that crosses cultural boundaries may involve “the attempted imposition of a set of literacy practices by one group upon another” (p. 21). Based on my interpretation of the Ontario Drama curriculum documents, we have moved beyond the old ways of teaching literacy. Instead of imposing our own set of literacy practices, the idea is to have students explore a number of literacy practices and develop their own. For example:

A1.3 use role play to explore, develop, and represent themes, ideas, characters, feelings, and beliefs in producing drama works (e.g., use improvisation exercises to explore how they might think, feel, and act in specific real-life situations; write in role as a character who is reflecting on the people, events, and relationships affected by a personal, social, or environmental issue) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 68).

However, I am curious if other teachers feel the same way. Have we truly moved forward, or do we continue to use literacy to impose particular literacy practices upon students?

Expanding further, it is important to also look at the influence space has on literacy learning. Spatial approaches to literacy are able to address:

equity and the distribution of literacy practices, and spatial patterns of marginalisation and domination in relation to literacy practices and societal structures. For example, some social spaces, such as schools, libraries, and workplaces, provide homogenising contexts from certain literacy practices, permitting some practices and excluding others. (Mills & Comber, 2015, p. 92)

The politics of space and power relations (economic, political, social, cultural, and gendered), influence the social stratification of space in society. In acknowledging the

need for multiliteracies, it becomes easier to address these disparities. Compulsory schooling can be seen as “a form of moral and political discipline” (Mills & Comber, 2015, p. 92). When viewed this way it is easy to see how schooling and literacy training were used as ways to impose one cultural view upon another. This reinforcement of behaviour is seen in the curriculum expectations with reference to audience etiquette in particular. C3.3 demonstrate an understanding of theatre and audience etiquette, in both classroom and formal performance contexts (e.g., listen attentively during school performances and assemblies) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 73).

The influence of the politics of space and power relations continually plays out within Drama classrooms, both for students in and out of role. While teachers aim to eliminate disparities (e.g., socioeconomic status and academic achievement) between students, when it comes to some areas there will continue to be imbalances. This becomes glaringly obvious in open level courses, such as Drama, where it is possible to have students who consistently achieve high marks in academic courses alongside students who struggle to complete work in essentials level courses. There could also be significant language barriers between English language learners (ELL) who are in sheltered content courses for their language learning, but mainstreamed for some electives. There may also be students from Developmental Education programs, who are not working towards achieving a OSSD, but are at times integrated into mainstream classrooms where possible. These imbalances may be mitigated, but students will continue to explore such imbalances while in role as they negotiate their characters with each other.

Beyond monitoring and reinforcing appropriate student behaviour, what is the role of the teacher in the Drama classroom? Julie Dunn (2011) notes that one approach involves introducing children to aesthetically charged materials. The next step is that the teacher must support what is happening by creating “a shared understanding of the roles, situations, tasks and materials relevant to the materials presented or experiences offered. This shared understanding is needed so that players are able to collaborate in the construction of shared dramatic worlds” (Dunn, 2011, p. 31). Teachers must model various drama strategies, but ultimately it is up to the students to “use the creative process and a variety of sources and forms, both individually and collaboratively, to design and

develop drama works” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.75). This once again plays into the ideas of multiliteracies, which place a great deal of emphasis on versatile literacy learning can be, particularly when students are given a more active role.

Multiliteracies, specifically multimodality, is inherently present in the Dramatic Arts curriculum from the Ontario Ministry of Education. Whether intentional or not, multiliteracies theory pervades the curriculum document,

By communicating in both their real and imagined worlds, students acquire proficiency in listening, speaking, questioning, and problem solving. Through the process of taking on roles, students develop and express empathy for people in a wide range of situations. They develop the ability to interpret and comment on a range of drama works and activities and evaluate their own and others’ creative work (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 65).

This further showcases both the applicability of the theory to professional practice and the ability of the Dramatic Arts to foster literacy learning. However, Drama, unlike English, has always been the type of subject to embrace different modes and learning styles based on my teaching experience.

Wohlwend’s chapter in *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies*, “Making, remaking, and reimagining the everyday: play, creativity, and popular media” (2015, p. 548), is particularly applicable when examining the benefits of Drama in regards to student literacy. Making meaning from the everyday is a cornerstone of the Drama curriculum, as seen in curriculum expectations like “B3.2 identify skills they have developed through drama activities and explain how they can be useful in work and other social contexts” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 78). Wohlwend’s chapter challenges “commonplace conceptions of children’s play as innocent amusement, creativity as talent, and popular media as harmful and inappropriate for children” (2015, p. 548). Play and creativity are redefined through the application of multimodality and the New Literacy Studies with play seen as a “literacy of possibilities” (2015, p. 548) thereby changing the meanings of everyday items and reimagining social participation. Creativity moves away from being defined as talent, into “collective social imagination that enables new possibilities” (p. 548), as children are able to challenge, alter, reimagine, recreate, and change what they encounter. This aligns with the creative process seen in

Drama courses. The creative process within Drama allows students to revisit ideas throughout the classroom activities or through the rehearsal process for larger, summative assignments.

Multiliteracies informs my research into Drama as it allows for students to redefine their own learning. In moving away from the traditional view of literacy, teachers are able to better facilitate student learning in ways that allow them to shine. Drama courses embody the fact that literacy is more than reading and writing, as it can be seen in gestures and body language. Students are free to explore a variety of different literacy practices within the Drama classroom.

Asset-orientated multiliteracies pedagogy and identity investment are closely related, and are often applied to English Language Learners (ELLs). The central goals of asset-orientated multiliteracies pedagogy are to foster communication options and opportunities that will develop positive identities among students. Learners are seen as bringing their own funds of knowledge to the classroom (Heydon & Bainbridge, 2015). Identity investment is focused on how ensuring that students are listened to, valued, and respected based on who they are will lead to more student engagement, which will ultimately lead to higher student achievement (Cummins 2001).

While diversity in the classroom is often praised:

some forms of human diversity have been mistakenly pathologized. The process of pathologizing in education happens when learners belonging to one group (e.g. ELLs) are seen by another, more powerful group (e.g. the school) as deviating from a supposed norm (e.g. the English speakers) and therefore in need of “fixing” to bring them (closer) to the norm (e.g., replace their first language with English). (Heydon & Bainbridge, 2015, p. 335)

Cases in which this pathologizing occurs demonstrate how learners’ “funds of knowledge” (i.e., linguistic, epistemic, and cultural resources, and the like as per Moll, et al., 1992), behaviours, families, or homes are perceived as deficient by school curriculums and policies. Subsequent programming then focuses on these supposed deficiencies” (Heydon & Bainbridge, 2015, p. 336). In not achieving the standard established by the school, the deficiencies are seen as being an aspect of the child’s lived experience, not in the education system. How then does this feeling impact a child’s self-

worth? If they are not valued in the class, how could they be expected to participate in identity investment activities? What other impacts might this have on student learning? These are the types of questions that my teacher participants posed when they discussed the importance of building self confidence in their students.

Previous studies (Cummins, 2001; Heydon & Bainbridge, 2015) have applied asset-orientated multiliteracies pedagogy and identity investment to ELLs, however, viewing a student as having deficiencies is not unique to ELL students and this is where my research can fill the gap. These theories can, and should be applied not only to ELL students, but to all students. It is important to focus on asset-oriented multiliteracies pedagogies, as it challenges the notions of at-risk and typical students. This places the onus on the education system to be responsive to learners, instead of it being the responsibility of the learners “to live up to a fabricated norm. Educators can orient themselves to learners’ assets by recognizing their funds of knowledge and identifying and reflecting critically on their own biases and preconceptions about learners and what constitutes literacy” (Heydon & Bainbridge, 2015, p. 336). Drama class is unique in that it involves delving into our own experience and emotions, meaning every student can contribute by sharing their own experiences. Teachers have a unique view as they watch their students grow, therefore their perceptions of observing a number of students over the course of their career is invaluable when it comes to explaining the importance of this.

It is important to consider how we work to engage students who are on the margins and Sean Turner (2014) examines just that. His research looked at teachers working at a secure detention center who “decided to take on a challenge and explore ways in which a new pedagogy for student identity and learning could be implemented within the classroom” (p. 169). They also wanted to examine ways that “the arts and technology could change the landscape that situated most of their students as antisocial, illiterate, or unmotivated” (p. 169). Their initial project using Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Suzan Lori Park’s *Top Dog Underdog* ultimately led to a comprehensive performing and visual arts program. The program’s structure allowed the students to “share their insight and perspectives about the struggles of urban youth by writing original plays about their own

struggles and then producing and performing those plays within a multimodal theatrical production entitled *Through Our Eyes*” (p. 169).

In order for the process to work, Turner said that the teachers subscribed to four critical principles. First, teachers and students were expected to work collectively, with the hierarchy between teacher and student blurred so that everyone in the room was viewed equally. Second, a safe space to create was developed so that everyone could be viewed as a creator. Third, students would need to design a framework that would allow for insights into their battles. Fourth, students would take ownership over production and needed to be given multimodal tools necessary to accomplish their creative vision (Turner, p. 170). Ultimately, Turner’s discussion moves away from the question of whether marginalized students are willing to participate, as the experiences he articulated show that students are motivated to participate in activities that are meaningful and purposeful to their lives. Instead, the question becomes whether educational stakeholders are willing to support these types of learning and think openly about their students’ multiliteracies. The focus is on teachers being flexible and open to student ideas, as well as repackaging and recontextualizing texts.

The teacher in Ontario is expected to provide students with a “variety of sources and forms” so that they incorporate a “variety of perspectives” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 75). While some classrooms will see the majority, or even all, of these sources selected by the teachers, the emphasis on variety should ensure that teachers are in tune with student needs and desires. The curriculum expectations further note that students shall “identify ways in which dramatic exploration contributes to their understanding of diverse cultures and traditions” (p. 78). My interpretation of this section of the curriculum is that if a teacher is teaching these ideas of cultural diversity, then they themselves should be culturally aware. This idea is also present when discussing identity investment, because of the need for teachers to have a good understanding of what their students are bringing to the classroom.

Other subject areas often rely directly on new textbooks and technology, leaving them vulnerable to the fact that:



Schools and teachers cannot update their teaching faster than once every ten or so years, and the cycle for change, including new political decisions on a one-size-fits-all curriculum makes the process even slower. The failure to take account of students' own individual and group interests, to leverage the effectiveness of cross-age teaching and learning, and above all to situate learning in the context of meaningful activity beyond the school, makes this old and tired model of education unusable for the human future. (Lemke & van Helden, 2015, p. 325)

I have been unable to find scholarly research where Drama teachers have been interviewed about whether they focus on asset-oriented pedagogy and tailor individual courses based upon the students who have signed up. This is why my study is needed. In connecting these theories, I am examining the perspectives of Drama teachers through a new viewpoint that combines multiliteracies, multimodality, asset-orientated pedagogy, and identity investment. In my view, there is a distinct need for the voices of Drama teachers to be elevated to show what their classes offer students when it comes to literacy and identity investment affordances.

### 2.2.3 Identity Investment

All this leads into identity investment, which discusses the amount of power teachers have over their students and how to invite students to be contributors in the classroom. Ultimately, if students are not valued, but instead find their own cultural and linguistic capital suppressed their growth will be limited. By contrast, students in collaborative learning environments that facilitate identity investment, achieve more. As mentioned previously, the majority of the literature seems to focus on ELLs (Cummins 2000, 2009), regarding how teachers need to be more culturally aware and address this in their teaching. This makes sense, given the links between language and power. Cummins also references the devaluation of other “community languages” (2009) such as American Sign Language in the case of the Deaf community.

Cummins (2001) noted that teachers’ “best experiences were when they connected with students and were able to help them in some way. However, they also reported that they did not always understand students who are culturally different from themselves” (p. 1). Throughout the course of my teaching experience, it has been hammered home to me that education is the business of relationships. “The interactions that take place between

students and teachers and among students are more central to student success than any method for teaching literacy” (p. 1). Looking at how I develop relationships with my own students, I often find it easier to do in Drama classes. As I conducted my interviews, I discovered I was not alone in that feeling.

Identity investment opens up new opportunities for students and their teachers to participate in a reciprocal exchange of ideas.

When educators encourage culturally diverse students to develop the language and culture they bring from home and build on their prior experiences, they, together with their students, challenge the perception in the broader society that these attributes are inferior or worthless. (Cummins, 2001, p. 3)

There is a great deal of focus on English Language Learners when it comes to identity investment research, however, these principles can be applied to all students. Even if students share the same language, they are coming from diverse backgrounds. There is also an emphasis on “collaborative relations of power” (Cummins, 2001), that works on the assumption that power is not fixed, rather power can be “generated in interpersonal and intergroup relations” (p. 16). This emphasis on collaboration which is key to identity investment relates to several of the Drama curriculum expectations, such as “explain how dramatic exploration helps develop group skills and appreciation of communal values” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 71). Further, students are expected to “identify ways in which dramatic exploration promotes an appreciation of diverse cultures and traditions” (p. 71). Students may at times find it difficult to interact with each other. For example, if the teacher selects the groups or groups are created through randomization instead of through student selection and preferences. Teachers need to be aware not just of their own influence on these power relations, but also in how to mitigate potentially negative student interactions. Teachers can only control their own actions, not the actions of their students, so modeling and participating in the activities themselves can often set the tone for how students will behave with each other.

Another important aspect to consider when it comes to the power relations is the “complex and sometimes contradictory social identity, changing across time and space” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 25-26). Motivation is also not seen as a fixed personality trait, but arguably needs to be understood within the context of social relations of power.

Drama classes require that students be given the chance to be active participants in the learning process as, “Students will assume responsibility for decisions made in the creative and collaborative processes and will reflect on their experiences” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 74). This helps to empower students further, as it lessens the impact of teacher-centred transmission of information and skills. The classroom-based social research that is further elaborated on by Norton Peirce, which focuses on engaging the social identities of students in ways that will improve their language learning outside the classroom is similar to Drama activities. These activities help students understand how opportunities to speak are socially structured, again something that can be practiced within the Drama classroom through improvisation.

In summation, while there is some available research on Drama education, it is often convoluted and bogged down in differing terminology. Furthermore, there appears to be no research specifically linking literacy opportunities with identity investment, with the multimodal opportunities within secondary Drama classrooms. My research will offer some insight regarding the teacher perceptions of these affordances in the Drama classroom.

#### 2.2.4 Multimodality

Drama plays into multimodal perspectives of literacy, based on the idea that “meanings are made (as well as distributed, interpreted, and remade) through many representational and communicational resources, of which language is but one” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 246).

More importantly perhaps is the idea that:

Multimodality attends to meaning as it is made through the situated configurations across image, gesture, gaze, body posture, sound, writing, music, speech, and so on. From a multimodal perspective, image, action, and so forth are referred to as modes, as organized sets of semiotic resources for meaning making. (p. 246)

This idea that multimodality views literacy as more than the written word, which is an important aspect of learning in Drama classrooms. Furthermore, where certain aspects of multiliteracies focus on new technologies, Jewitt’s description of multimodality specifically notes the importance of things such as gesture, body posture, and speech. In fact “it is not possible to think about literacy solely as a linguistic accomplishment and

that the time for the habitual conjunction of language, print literacy, and learning is over” (p. 241). Based on my own teaching practices and understanding of the curriculum documents, Drama classroom, give students the chance to explore and use a variety of modes to demonstrate their learning. For example, by the end of the course students are expected to be able to “select and use appropriate forms to present identified issues from a variety of perspectives” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 75).

Multimodal texts and artifacts that students make can be viewed as one indication of their learning, or a “material trace of semiosis” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 259). Such student creations demonstrate their interests, their perception of audience, and their use of resources is influenced and shaped by social contexts. The way in which student interpret and present their learning is shaped through their engagement with “a range of modes, image, animation, hypertext, and layered multimodal texts” (Jewitt, p. 259). In addressing the presence of an audience, Jewitt opens up more connections to student literacy learning in Drama. Students are expected to “A3.1 identify and use a variety of techniques or methods for establishing a rapport between performer and audience” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 69). This audience awareness is important when creating the content to be performed, as well as the staging of the performance itself. While students are often instructed to write for a particular audience in English classes, performing live provides a unique experience wherein they perform and receive an immediate response. Based on my own experience Drama activities, be they full scale performances for an invited audience or smaller creations within the classroom, could provide students with the chance to consume a variety of ideas, as well as author and produce their own. Drama could, therefore, help move literacy from

a competence of the isolated individual, ... to distributed conception of literacies as embodied and practiced by people making meaning together (e.g., Andriessen & Jarvela 2013). From the view that literacy is a politically neutral skill, we have awakened to the role of literacies in re-making the world in the interest of all and not just for the few. (Lemke & van Helden, 2015, p. 322)

This type of learning has the potential to enable students to take on a more active role in the world around them. Literacy as something that is embodied and practiced, means that students can select a variety of different modes to express their learning. This also ties into student identity, as students may select particular modes because of their previous

experience. In some cases, they may even express an aversion to a particular mode because of a bad experience in the past. This allows students to be successful, despite previous negative experiences with learning.

When it comes to Drama students can choose how they share their learning, be it through performance, writing, or technical aspects. For example, students can use their own physicality in performance or they can create models for set designs. Through role-playing in my own Drama classes, students have the chance to explore literacy practices and events in a safe environment. In a sense, it is a rehearsal for the adult world. Over the course of my interviews, other teachers expressed that their classrooms had a similar focus.

Multimodality is about extending literacy beyond the written word; it incorporates aspects such as gesture, body posture, and speech. It offers students a chance to determine how to best represent their own learning and in some instances leave material artefacts of that learning. The focus on literacy as being embodied and practices allows for students to more actively engage in their literacy learning.

### 2.2.5 Bringing the Tools Together

The Ontario Curriculum for Grade 10 Drama (ADA2O) is littered with references to diversity. Notably, under the “Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing” stand is the following overall expectation: “B2. Drama and Society: demonstrate an understanding of how societies present and past use or have used drama, and of how creating and viewing drama can benefit individuals, groups, and communities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 77). The specific expectations that follow this overall expectation reference diversity, culture, society, and exploration, as well as an ever-present focus for the students to make connections to their own lives. Therefore, the curriculum itself is already celebrating the differences the class is expected to encounter, tying in nicely with the New London Group’s (1996) push to ensure that existing differences are not barriers. It also relates nicely to the idea of teachers and students participating in a collaborative exchange of ideas, as explained by identity investment. In other words, Drama is open to looking at multiple narratives and is not focused on a single story, the same way that

multiliteracies and identity investment theories encourage educators to move beyond the traditional status quo.

## 2.3 Chapter Summary

It is important to contextualize research in order that it may be fully understood. In the case of my research, the previous literature may at times be similar to what I wished to investigate, but no one had addressed it using the same combination of tools that I did. Further confusing the previous research is that certain terminology, such as Drama and Theatre, are at times used interchangeably.

A great deal has been written to explain the benefits of Drama strategies to other subject areas. It should also be noted that a lot of such research deals with elementary age students. There does exist some literature regarding the literacy benefits of standalone Drama courses at the secondary level, but nothing directly linking that with identity investment. What all this literature does show though is that Drama does provide students with a variety of opportunities for literacy development and for exploring aspects of identity.

In moving to link the existing literature to my study, it is clear to me that the discussions of multiliteracies and identity investment is applicable to Drama. This has then led to how I have chosen to frame my study by using several theoretical tools to build my framework; using multiliteracies as the base, I have then integrated multimodality and asset-oriented pedagogy into my framework, along with an emphasis on identity investment. In using this combination, I hope to expand upon the understanding of the affordances provided by standalone secondary Drama courses.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Methodology

This study explored the teacher perspectives regarding the literacy learning and identity investment in secondary school Drama classrooms. Teacher perspectives are valuable components to student education and it is crucial to understand how they are manifest in the Drama curriculum in Ontario. This study is unique because there is limited literature using the lenses of multiliteracies and multimodal literacies to view Drama classes with regards to learners' expanded literacy and identity options. This study delved into the challenges that are present within Drama classes when teachers try to celebrate and incorporate cultural, linguistic, and semiotic diversity.

This study employed a design of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016; Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011; Wells, 2011) to investigate teacher perspectives regarding the literacy and identity options within secondary Drama classes. In speaking with a variety of teachers, from a variety of different schools, I collected a number of perspectives and stories that show the diversity of secondary schools in Ontario. In engaging with the experiences of others, it is possible to compare and contrast the differences to consider 'two-way inquiry learning' (Hooley, 2009, p.157) between researcher and participant. This approach allows for our co-construction of meaning.

#### 3.1 Narrative Inquiry

Research into Drama Education lends itself to qualitative research methods, particularly narrative inquiry and case study. The Drama process already creates narratives, so it makes sense to use that aspect in order to conduct research. Each moment in a Drama classroom is unique and cannot be duplicated, and this is an important aspect of research into Drama. Each narrative offers a piece of a larger whole that can be woven together. Narrative inquiry "is increasingly used in studies of educational experience ... the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling

organisms who, individually and socially lead storied lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

Narrative focuses on the human experience, as does the Ontario Drama curriculum, as shown in curriculum expectations such as, “identify ways in which dramatic exploration contributes to their understanding of diverse cultures and traditions” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 78). Narrative inquiry “may also be sociologically concerned with groups and the formation of community” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative, like Drama, is focused “on experience and the qualities of life and education” (p. 3).

Given my focus on individual teacher perspectives, narrative inquiry makes sense as it allows for multiple perspectives to emerge through semi-structured interviews. By conducting these interviews one on one, the participants were able to speak freely regarding their own experience. Clandinin and Murphy (2009) noted that narrative allows participants the opportunity to express themselves in their own terms and words. Participants in this study were also given the chance to read through transcripts and make changes as they saw fit to their responses. This allowed their perspective to shine through in the most articulate way possible. In some instances, this also allowed for the preservation of anonymity via strategic editing. Some stories that participants shared would have made them immediately identifiable, such as if they referenced a particular school show by title or some of their background information. In addition, I have known some of the participants for quite some time, which leads to some reminiscing that would make the nature of my personal relationship with that individual obvious, thus making it possible to identify them.

My insider status as a Drama teacher, allowed me certain affordances when conducting interviews. With narrative inquiry, the researcher becomes a part of the process by observing and hearing what the participant is saying and then analyzing the data. (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). It is important that the researcher be aware of themselves and their own journey while interviewing the participants. I found that the interviews were immediately beneficial towards my own professional practice, as the challenges the participants have faced are the ones that I have also had to tackle in my career.



In assembling participant stories, researchers are gathering “knowledge from the past and not necessarily knowledge about the past” (Bockhner, 2007, p. 203). When participants recall previous events, they are recalling how they experienced those events more than they are recalling the events that were happening at the time. This was important for me to consider, particularly as I interviewed individuals who are used to telling stories for an audience. It is likely that some of the stories shared during the interviews are stories that have been retold multiple times, and in that re-telling participants have refined the story. This may have impacted the data that is collected.

This ability of participants to manipulate stories to suit the researcher or to reflect their own bias. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note, it is important to remember that there can be no “quest for certainty” (p. 245) when it comes to narrative inquiry. This is something that is present in all written text, as narratives are always partial and constructed. Engagement and the process of constructing the memories that are shared through narrative inquiry is also an important part of shared meaning-making. Experiences of all kinds provide us with different perspectives on subject matter, showing the value of narrative inquiry. Using narrative inquiry is a way to validate participant experiences.

### 3.2 Participant Selection

Following ethics approval, I used convenient sampling and contacted a number of Drama teachers via email. Being a qualified and experienced Drama teacher with an extended network of colleagues made it easy to reach out between school boards and within Ontario. The teachers approached received letters of information (Appendix A) and consent (Appendix B) to review prior to agreeing to the interview. Teachers were required taught either a Grade 9 (ADA1O) or a Grade 10 Drama course (ADA2O) within the most recent school year. The curriculums for ADA1O and ADA2O are almost identical given that each is an open level course without a prerequisite. Unlike Instrumental Music and Visual Art, where the Grade 10 courses require that the student have the Grade 9 prerequisite, the Grade 10 Drama does not. This means that ADA2O can have students with no formal Drama experience, as well as students who have taken ADA1O, meaning the resulting narratives could vary widely. However, the narratives

that could arise in ADA10 would likely also touch on the students' transition to the high school environment.

Ultimately, I interviewed five teachers from five different schools. Teacher participant profiles are provided in Table 1. To ensure that the school and the teacher identities are not traceable, participants were assigned pseudonyms.

**Table 1: Teacher Participants' Profile**

Pseudonyms	Years of Teaching Experience	Qualifications	Education Background
Diane	30	Intermediate and Senior English Intermediate and Senior Music – Instrumental Honour Specialist Music	Bachelor of Music Bachelor of Education
Lisa	10	Intermediate and Senior English Intermediate and Senior Drama English as a Second Language Part 1 Honour Specialist Dramatic Arts Special Education Part 1 Librarianship Part 1	Bachelor of Arts, Drama and English Bachelor of Education
Fiona	2	Intermediate and Senior Dramatic Arts Intermediate and Senior Mathematics Special Education Part 1 Guidance and Career Education Part 1	Bachelor of Arts, Drama and Math Bachelor of Education
Brianna	3	Intermediate and Senior Dramatic Arts Intermediate and Senior Mathematics	Bachelor of Arts, Drama and Math Bachelor of Education
Nick	28	Intermediate and Senior Music – Vocal & Instrumental Junior Division Special Education Part 1 Honour Specialist Music Religious Education Part 1 Principal's Qualification Program Part 1 & 2 Dramatic Arts Part 1	Bachelor of Music Bachelor of Education Master of Education Doctor of Philosophy

### 3.3 Data Collection

For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The questions (Appendix C) were shown to teachers prior to the start of the interview. They were given the chance to not respond to questions if they chose, as well as given a chance to review the transcripts of the interview to insure accuracy.

My insider status as a fellow Drama teacher helped me to successfully apply the principles of narrative inquiry, as narrative inquiry is a collaborative method of research that requires a relationship between the researcher and participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3-4). This allowed for a more conversational style interview, as opposed to traditional question and answer interviews. These interviews helped to “become part of the ongoing narrative record” (p. 5) and that was co-constructed by the interviewer and participants. Narrative explanation “derives from the whole” (p. 7), showing the need not to write narratives as overall generalizations, but to view participants and their narratives as unique and individual. This is where allowing participants to direct the conversations can come into play, given that they had ownership over their stories and how they viewed their journeys. Meaning did not arise from the questioning by the interview, but was assembled throughout the entire process.

During the interviews, it became clear that there remained a disconnect between the language used by professionals on the frontlines of education and the language used in academic discussions of education. The first problem arose with the term “identity investment.” This was where my role as both a researcher and a Drama teacher was particularly useful, as I was able to explain the terminology in more familiar terms.

I interviewed participants at mutually agreed upon locations. Three were interviewed in empty high school classrooms after school, one was interviewed in a meeting room at the Faculty of Education, and one was interviewed in their own home (at their request). The length of the interviews varied from about 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Interviews concentrated on the teachers’ experience teaching Drama in secondary schools over the course of their careers, focusing on their perceptions of the literacy and identity investment opportunities Drama offered students.

Given my use of convenient sampling, I already had a significant rapport with my participants. This naturally led to a relaxed interview process with many storytelling tangents emerging. These have been omitted from transcripts as necessary to eliminate potentially identifying information.

Among the participants, only two had been consistently teaching in their current schools for any length of time. The other three had experience teaching in a number of schools, expanding their perspectives regarding the impact of Drama. This also meant that a single participant, Lisa, had experience teaching in schools with populations as small as 500 and as large as 2000. She also had experience in rural and urban schools, making it possible for her to compare and contrast her own experiences.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

I transcribed all the interviews and took advantage of member checking. I used content analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). However, it should be noted that it can be concerning to use analysis that

treats words (e.g., participants' words in interview transcripts) as brute data waiting to be coded, labeled with other brute words (and even counted), perhaps entered into statistical programs to be manipulated by computers, and so on. In some cases, words are reduced to numbers. (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 715)

Given that I interviewed five teachers, it was possible to compare and contrast the perspectives across all participants for major themes. I made use of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) for the initial organization, before switching to selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Open coding allowed for the data to be inspected for commonalities that reflect particular categories and themes. This allowed me to determine the similarities and differences between the research participants before moving forward. From there I moved to selective coding, which allowed for the development of cohesive narrative that weaved the data together.

I generated categories that were derived from theories on multiliteracies, multimodality, and identity investment. For example, under the broad theme of "Identity Investment" I included several examples of teachers placing the focus on students, as opposed to

curriculum expectations. This led to subthemes such as “student-centred learning”, “asset-oriented pedagogy”, “student creativity”, and “student self-reflection”.

In addition, I noticed other themes emerging that did not quite fit under the aforementioned categories. Teachers often discussed the various challenges they faced in more general terms, a lack of resources or other challenges, with colleagues, students, or parents. The themes were divided and sub-divided, as seen in the table below.

**Table 2: Deductive Themes and Sub-Themes from the Data**

Major Deductive Themes	Multiliteracies	Identity Investment
Sub-Themes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Literacy Opportunities</li> <li>2. Curriculum</li> <li>3. Multimodality</li> <li>4. Differentiated Instruction</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Student-Centred Learning</li> <li>2. Asset-orientated pedagogy</li> <li>3. Student Creativity</li> <li>4. Student Self-Reflection</li> <li>5. Student Contributions &amp; Voice</li> </ol>

**Table 3: Inductive Themes from the Data**

Major Inductive Themes	Experiences
Sub-Themes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Successes</li> <li>2. Challenges</li> <li>3. Teacher Self-Reflection</li> <li>4. Influences</li> <li>5. Community</li> </ol>

When it came to determining what ideas fit which categories, I organized the data manually. I found this allowed me to see the patterns and overlaps between categories. This was also possible due to the number of participants I interviewed.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Qualitative work, such as narrative inquiry, leads to a great deal of examination of personal views and circumstances. Therefore, it was important to always be aware of protecting participants’ confidentiality, privacy, and rights throughout the research process.

My research was conducted after obtaining the approval from the research ethics boards. Ethical Approval notice is provided in Appendix D. Participants were assigned

pseudonyms, with the legend of which pseudonym belonged to which participant kept separate at all times.

All interviews were conducted in spaces that were mutually agreed upon by the teacher and myself. After the audio recordings from interviews were transcribed into written format, each participant was asked to review the transcripts. This allowed for further clarification and elaboration as needed. It also allowed participants to maintain ownership of their words. Transcripts were emailed to participants emails and sent back in the same way.

Data and analysis were kept on encrypted USBs that were stored in my home office, in a locked filing cabinet that only I had access to.

### 3.6 Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. The most glaring limitation is the small number of participants. I had aimed to interview 5-10 Drama teachers, but unfortunately some potential participants were unable to take part due to our conflicting schedules. More interviews with more participants would have added to the narratives regarding the literacy and identity investment affordances of secondary Drama courses.

Other limitations relate to the demographics of participants when it comes to gender. Four of the five participants are female, and one participant is male. A more extensive study should consider the impacts that gender might have on teachers' professional practices. The years of experience of teachers also present gaps. Brianna and Fiona are both in the first five years of their careers, Lisa is finishing her first decade, while Diane and Nick are both nearing retirement. Further study should include teachers in the midpoint of their career - 15-20 years experience - to see if that provides additional contrast during comparisons between teachers.

It would also be valuable to look at teachers with varied backgrounds, to see if there is a relationship between teachers with professional theatre experience and their approach to teaching. Examining teacher backgrounds, such as types of qualifications and university degrees, may also shed further light on teacher perspectives.

There is an additional limitation, as all five teachers came from two school boards. A more extensive study should consider interviewing teachers from a variety of school boards. Some of the challenges indicated by participants may not be present in all school boards, depending on the amount of funding and the type of professional development offered to teachers.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Findings

In this chapter I explain the approach to the data analysis. This data analysis includes: a summary of the transcriptions of the audio recordings of interviews, which ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length.

In conducting the interviews, the primary objective was to generate data that would answer my research questions:

1. What are the affordances of Drama courses with regard to enabling students' literacy learning and identity investment?
2. What are the challenges in Drama courses with regard to enabling students' literacy learning and identity investment?

#### 4.1 Summary of Participant Interviews

In order to better share the narratives of individual participants, the following summaries of each interview have been included prior to overall data analysis and findings. This also allows for the participants' voices to be heard more easily.

##### 4.1.1 Brianna's interview

Brianna's interview was completed on August 2, 2017. Brianna has been teaching for about three years and has experience in both provincially funded high schools, as well as a private school. She is the only one of the five to have private school experience. She completed the Concurrent Education program, meaning she worked on her Bachelor of Arts and her Bachelor of Education degrees simultaneously. She is qualified to teach Intermediate and Senior Dramatic Arts and Mathematics.

When asked why she chose to teach Drama, she discussed how throughout her own schooling she had loved all subjects. "I took senior sciences, math ... I had taken languages and music. But Drama was my passion and I loved it-and I loved what it did for me. And it gave me opportunity to try things." This question was the first of many



times Brianna mentioned the importance of community in the Drama classroom. This became a theme throughout the rest of her interview.

I don't know...there's something about drama... there was always community in our classes and that was something. And you can develop that in other classes to some degree but just the environment in Drama was different. You build these lifelong friendships and I wanted to be a part of that for students.

Interestingly enough, this was even after having a difficult relationship with her own high school Drama teacher. Part of the issue was the teacher had obvious favourites and “I guess he didn't like me for some reason and [...] that's really hard when you're a student to get that feeling from a teacher.” The impact this had was that she felt unsure about applying to Theatre programs at university, ultimately opting to apply for a Concurrent Education program in Drama instead, as it did not require an audition. When I asked if she had become a drama teacher as a reaction to this negative experience in an effort to prevent another student from experiencing what she experienced, she paused and replied simply, “Yes, it was.”

Bringing that anecdote full circle, Brianna now has a more positive relationship with her former teacher. She noted that once she began teaching and looked back on her own experience, she could see that perhaps some of the negative she had perceived was the result of her laziness as a student. Once she became a teacher, she found her former teacher to be helpful as they provided a number of resources.

It became clear over the course of the interview, that Brianna's teaching practices were driven by her desire to support students. When asked about the required aims and expectations of the Drama courses she taught, she reiterated the need for community and focusing on the needs of the students. Drama, for her, was about engaging students, “It wasn't necessarily super curriculum driven.” The conversation circled into defining the difference between Drama and Theatre, and she said that was what she liked about it.

It wasn't exactly the experience I got in high school. Mine was more conventions and do this a certain way. Mine was more theatre. So I like that the way I've seen it done now-and the way that I like to do it focuses more on the students.

In an effort to focus on students, Brianna uses an exercise called “Special Me”, where she would have everyone go around the circle and say something nice about a different person on different days. In doing this she discovered some students were unsure of how to handle the positive attention. She had one girl who asked not to go because she could not handle hearing positive things about herself. “And it was really interesting because I was able to see that these kids...that some of them were dying for this, like hungry for positive affirmation and some were scared of it.”

Brianna’s experience shows that whether we realize it or not, Drama class often becomes the class where students can receive the positive affirmation they so desperately need. Even something as simple as having classmates say positive things about them can do wonders when it comes to helping a teenager build self-confidence.

Moving forward in the interview, Brianna and I discussed specific literacy opportunities in Drama courses. “Just everything, you know?” she replied, “Everything has some kind of literacy to it. They’re always writing something. There’s so much analysis of text-any time they work with any kind of text they need to discuss it.” Literacy, in her view is an intrinsic part of the course itself. When we discussed jargon such as literacy, she referenced the desire to give me the right information for my research. She also indicated that the process reminded her of how she felt in job interviews.

Brianna observed that the obvious examples of literacy included anything to do with script work, particularly having students writing their own. She noted, however, that using scripts meant students were “looking for implications before they perform it” and tied it to the need for critical literacy in students. Upon hearing the word literacy, Brianna’s starting point was always something written. She also encouraged her students with ongoing blogging throughout the course. This gave her insight into not only students writing abilities, but their feelings about lessons, assignments, and even just their day. Brianna acknowledged that some students did not take the blogging as seriously as she would like, but it helped those that did and, “You can see their process and how much they grow which is amazing.” While starting with the written word, Brianna’s students still had a number of opportunities to present their learning using a variety of modes.

When it came to identity investment, Brianna observed that self-generated scripts were popular because students “like seeing their own work.” Brianna also had a specific unit for the beginning of her course called “Me, Myself, and I.” Students had to bring in something, present something, or perform something. She notes she left the assignment purposely vague, but that “it had to show us something about why you were here.” It allowed her to learn something about her students right at the beginning of the course. Typically after performances, Brianna uses the “Two Stars and Wish” model (two positives and a constructive criticism), but after these presentations “it’s only stars because it’s their first performance so we want to encourage them. So we talked about what was really powerful about each presentation. ... I like the idea of students coming into a class where they can be vulnerable.” Brianna discussed that it is risky for a teenager to give themselves to their peers, but this is why she emphasized the community and relationship building aspect.

Brianna is dedicated to furthering her own learning. She is unable to complete her specialist qualifications as of yet, but at some point hopes to do so. “It’s just kind of a no-brainer for me. I feel like I long for more development, more understanding and ideas. I actually enjoy the learning side of it.” Unfortunately, it can be difficult to carve out time and fund those types of opportunities. In place of that, at the moment she furthers her own learning by speaking with colleagues and participating in community theatre. She had found a lot of support among her colleagues, particularly in most recent LTO placement.

In terms of educational influences, she listed David Booth, Dorothy Heathcote, and Kathy Lundy because of their use of story and process drama. However, she expressed that while she enjoyed their work she finds “it hard to apply to a high school Drama class...It’s not a subject, it’s a tool to get a point across. So it can almost be a unit-like process Drama or teacher in role.”

Brianna expressed a great deal of admiration for her mentor, who has become a particularly important influence to her, both as a fellow teacher and through community theatre. She noted that her mentor was able to “balance drama and theatre so well” and

aspired to strike a similar tone in her own classes. Brianna further noted that this balance further enhanced the ability of students to obtain and refine their transferable skills. She expressed a great desire to become more involved in school shows if the opportunity were to present itself.

Being only a few years into her career, Brianna had some interesting observations regarding the challenges facing Drama teachers. We discussed how Drama was often fundamentally misunderstood by administration and guidance, with students sometimes being placed in Drama even if they have no desire to be there. As Brianna put it, “When it’s a dumping ground it totally invalidates everything and it changes the dynamic of your class.” Brianna further elaborated that she viewed part of the misunderstanding with Drama as being further compounded when Drama is not a standalone department, but combined with the other Arts class (Dance, Music, and Visual Art).

Brianna noted she felt supported by her Department Heads, but because they were not Drama teachers themselves, they gave the impression of “we just trust you to do what you’re going to do. Which was scary because as a young teacher I was sort of looking for like a department head that was going to tell me what to do.” Further discussions of challenges arose when we discussed how both of us had teachers who tried to steer us away from pursuing Drama for post-secondary. In Brianna’s case, she was told, “you’re really good at senior sciences-why are you pursuing Drama?”

When it came to challenges with students, Brianna noted attendance and the invasiveness of cellphones as more generic frustrations. She also noted a particular instance of parental interference that frustrated her:

“I had just given an assignment that I had done in school. I assigned a play review. ... I got a letter from a parent-a two-page letter-stating how on earth her son was supposed to see a show because we live in the middle of nowhere. And how he couldn’t miss his English or his accounting classes to “go see a play” because we provided three opportunities as field trips. And there it is-to go see a play. First of all, if you’re taking a gr. 12 university/college drama-getting a university/college credit for this. And you’re not allowing your child to go see a play and review it. Because they were all saying, “Can we just watch this movie?” and no-the whole idea is you’re going to go see a live performance to participate in it. But that was the whole thing-like you were saying-treating it like it’s just

some fun class that there's no writing expectation. Well actually, in the curriculum document about the critical analysis process and going to see a play and reviewing it....and that same kid then skipped the day of prom. But the biggest problem was getting parent and student buy in that this was important and valuable.”

Overall, despite some frustrations, Brianna is a teacher who seems very focused on the needs of her students. She routinely emphasized the importance of community and collaboration in her classroom, so that students feel comfortable sharing their own ideas. Despite never having heard the terms before, her teaching practices align with the principles of multiliteracies and identity investment. Yet, there was a disconnect between her conception of literacy and her practice in Drama classes.

#### 4.1.2 Fiona's Interview

Fiona's interview was completed on July 11, 2017. Fiona has been teaching for about two years and has experience in provincially funded high schools. She completed the Concurrent Education program, meaning she worked on her Bachelor of Arts and her Bachelor of Education degrees simultaneously. She is qualified to teach Intermediate and Senior Dramatic Arts and Mathematics. When asked why teaching, she replied:

“ever since I was in Grade one I wanted to be a teacher. Always for different reasons. It started with wanting to use the smelly markers. [laughter] And then as I went through I had a lot of influential teachers and it made me want to do that. I wanted to be there for people.”

As the conversation continued, Fiona explained that she had ultimately decided to teach Drama because she had always enjoyed being onstage. She had started in dance at the age of three and had also attended Drama camps. By the time she reached high school and started taking more formal Drama courses, she realized just how much she enjoyed acting and theatre. Her high school Drama teacher was particularly influential with their classes allowing Fiona to learn about herself and gain confidence. “I realized that being myself was more important,” Fiona stated within the first five minutes of the interview, “And I wanted to do that for students. I wanted to teach them those transferable skills so they would gain more confidence as well.” Fiona's drive to become a teacher was to provide

students with an experience similar to her own and continually references the influence of her Drama teacher, as well as the support he has given her over the years.

It became clear that Fiona was keen to build strong relationships with her students. She discussed the need to focus on basic techniques and elements of drama and acknowledged the need to use the curriculum documents when it comes to lesson planning. However, in her words the documents are the starting point before she chose “different creative ways by looking at the class and their interests for different ways to go about teaching them what it is they need to learn.” In discussing literacy opportunities, she emphasized that all scripts her grade 9 students performed were self-generated. Depending on the assignment, students wrote individually, in collaboration with others, in assigned groups, or in self-picked groupings. Fiona emphasized the need to provide students with a variety of experiences, as Drama is an ideal class for risk-taking. Her view of literacy in the classrooms seemed to be closely linked with offering students chances to express themselves whenever possible. She also reflected on the need to explain to students “why we’re doing what we’re doing.” This appears to one of the major lessons she learned while completing Bachelor of Education. Fiona also noted that she was keen to use the right “words” in her answers. She compared my interview of her with job interviews and emphasized her desire to explain herself clearly.

Of note, Fiona discussed how as a newer teacher walking into an established Drama program that placed such a huge emphasis on having the students write so much was drastically different from her own experience. She expressed particular concern that these activities might not be successful with students in every school. Fiona grew up in a school board that she felt did not value the Arts and that Drama in particular was just treated as, in her words “a bird course.” This contrasts with her experience as a teacher in her current board, where Drama was viewed as an academic course that required more effort.

During our discussion of identity investment opportunities in Drama class, Fiona excitedly discussed a final project she had given her grade 9 students called “Final Five.” Students were required to either learn a new skill or teach their classmates a skill they

already had. They had five minutes to do so, as well as deliver the reasoning behind their choice. It allowed students to be self-reflective and discover new things about themselves. She smiled a lot as she talked about one student in particular. “He was always really nervous about singing in front of people. So he taught himself a new song and he sang in front of us. Then he told us the story of why he always was scared or singing, why he's always wanted to do it.”

Fiona circled back to having her students performing self-generated scripts. “I'm not saying here is what you have to do. I'm saying these are the skills how you present it is up to you in your interests.” She clarified further that Drama did not always mean that the students want or need to be centre stage; students are also given the opportunity to do lighting, sound, and other aspects. “If that's what they like because that's who they are, they still get marks for and they're not getting more marks just because they're the lead.”

When it comes to feeling supported, Fiona noted that her colleagues have given her necessary outlines for their departments and offered support as needed. However, she had also been given the freedom to find her own path as a Drama teacher, allowing her to feel comfortable with what she has taught. In Fiona's words, “It helps knowing that if you hit a wall there's someone next door who can help.” There was one exception, where the department had been “a mess for awhile” due to constantly changing staff. In that situation she was able to do whatever she wanted, but there was limited support due to the departmental upheaval. The school board had yet to offer Fiona a chance to do anything specific, but her impression was that, in general they were supportive. However, she remained in the dark about what funding was available. We discussed how funding would likely vary between schools and how we both assumed our respective Department Heads over the years had more of an understanding of it.

One area where the school board did try to support her as a new teacher, was letting her participate in the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP). She was able to go through the initial stages as an LTO, but was not placed with a Drama teacher for her mentor. Instead, she was matched with a math teacher who was helpful, but at the time she was not teaching any math classes. All in all, it was not a satisfying experience, leaving her

skeptical of subject-specific support provided by the board. She talked about how she would continue to network on her own and when she had money available she would attend specific professional development for Drama. As with many young teachers, the challenges she faces partially stem from having to juggle teaching with additional part-time work to make ends meet. She expressed frustration at the lack of job security and how that stress could impact her teaching. Her own identity became invested into her classroom presence and could be impacted by outside forces. We also discussed how young teachers like ourselves had a tendency to over-extend themselves in an effort to try to be visible in schools. She discussed her wish to help with a school show if the opportunity were to present itself, but her lack of time. Volunteering within a school means visibility and visibility can lead to an administrator going to bat for teachers at a crucial moment to secure employment.

We returned to talking about her influences and programming and Fiona once again referenced her own experiences as a student. She also focused on the importance of the process in Drama. In fact, she used a progress rubric every day. Each day she chose five students at random and marked them for things such as teamwork, punctuality, preparedness, initiative, and the like. She did this because she felt, “the process is just as, or more, important than the product because the process helps you get the actual understanding of it.”

She also discussed the importance of life skills in her class, as students need to be able to do a presentation, think on the spot, and go on job interviews. For her, the successes were more about watching her students improve in their own ways.

“The majority of students aren’t going to go on to do stage, movies, TV...I tell them let’s take something from this that you’ll use in other courses, in real life. Building confidence, understanding who they are, understanding what that means—that’s always really important to me. It’s not about...it’s wonderful if you’re going to turn out to be an actor...great. But the rest of them who wouldn’t even say anything on the first day and now you won’t shut up like that’s a success for me and that’s what I want.”



### 4.1.3 Lisa's Interview

Lisa's interview was completed on June 12, 2017. Lisa had been teaching for about nine years. She completed her Bachelor of Arts with a double major in Drama and English, before completing a Bachelor of Education. She was qualified to teach Drama and English, and held additional qualifications in English as a Second Language, Special Education, and Librarianship. She also completed her Honours Specialist in Drama. With the exception of one year, she has taught Drama every year of her career. It took her a few years to obtain full time, permanent status, meaning she has taught in a variety of schools and departments. Of the five participants, she had taught in the most schools and had the most varied experiences. She, like Brianna and Fiona, also likened the interview process to job interviews. She also noted the use of jargon and wanting to make sure she used the right buzzwords. "You'd never say this sort of thing to a parent!" Lisa noted, "It doesn't make sense to them."

When asked about why she decided to become a teacher and why she chose Drama as her primary focus, Lisa's decision-making process seemed familiar to my own.

"I really enjoyed Drama, but was fairly level-headed. And I was talked to by my parents that maybe I wasn't going to be some kind of movie star. Maybe I should think of alternate options. I had been working with youth and children for a long time through high school, so by the end of high school I decided that I wanted to go into teaching."

Drama was Lisa's passion and had offered her a lot of skills that, even if she had not gone into teaching, would have proven valuable. It only made sense to pass on what she knew and she could not think of a better job to do "then to see kids flourish through drama."

When it comes to the required aims and expectations of the Drama courses she taught, Lisa noted that "you're trying to teach them some kind of performance skills", but quickly shifted to discussing the soft skills. Being able to "take direction and apply feedback, work in a group, be collaborative, be creative, have leadership skills, a sense of responsibility...and so many of those soft skills that you can apply to any profession and anything that you do in life." The creative process is a major part, but because that process is what helps develop the transferable skills that help "you grow as an individual.

That's where I like to see the growth in my students." Lisa noted that some larger Arts departments did shift to a much heavier emphasis on technical skills in the senior grades. However, "that's typical for any senior class."

In discussing the literacy opportunities available in Drama, Lisa noted that "you can get anybody in that room and not everybody wants to be there for the same thing." She noted the importance of making sure the course is "accessible to everybody." Some of her experience includes working in a high school with a heavy emphasis on the Performing Arts, but that did not mean that all the students in the junior level courses had any desire to pursue Drama at a senior level. As she put it, "On the one hand you have a kid who really wants to be there and is planning to pursue theatre at the post-secondary level and on the other you have a kid who does not want to be there at all." She noted that the students who were uninterested were often the ones who also struggled academically, making literacy focused activities more difficult. In those situations, it becomes more about the relationship and the engagement piece. "Literacy can happen in a lot of ways with Drama, it's not just about writing. You can see it through their performances and through their reflections. Sometimes those reflections are done orally during post-performance discussions as a class."

Lisa continually discussed how she tried to provide a number of different pathways for her students to be successful. She noted that, "not every student wants to get up on stage and express themselves in that way." Finding ways to reach those students can be more difficult, particularly when resources can be limited. "A student may express themselves through technical components," Lisa continued, "but if you don't have tech opportunities in your classroom like lighting and sound...you have to find something else."

When it comes to specific assignments that incorporate literacy, many of Lisa's examples stemmed from her time in ESL Drama courses, as those had more of a specific literacy focus than mainstream Drama. Drama tended to focus a great deal on oral communication, but Lisa had encountered difficulties when students have a very little command of English. Her usual voice unit, which already included articulation exercises, was expanded for the benefit of her ESL students. She also spent more time on

soundscapes, allowing students to experiment with their own ideas, before moving onto having students write down their experiments. Still, Lisa has had to adapt repeatedly to the abilities of her students. According to Lisa, it was not uncommon for Drama classes to use storyboarding activities and diagrams to draw out stage directions, but Lisa had taken these tools and modified them for her ESL students. This includes having students draw out initial brainstorming to better communicate amongst themselves when there was a language barrier.

Self-reflection was a critical piece of Lisa's Drama courses, but she was not afraid to modify it for students depending on their level. Traditionally, students would write their reflection, but for ESL students, they could complete portions of that reflection process orally. Others would create a mind map, and those that could would write a paragraph or a few pages. "Self-reflection is a major part of Drama courses," Lisa explains, "but since it's self-reflection it doesn't have to look the same for every student." While this could make assessment and evaluation more complicated, the rubrics used in Drama allowed students to express themselves using the creative process in a variety of ways. "It forces you not to default to directly comparing students," Lisa explains, "A lot of people think it's about talent in Drama, but it's not. It's the process, the hard work, the growth-all those sorts of things."

When it comes to identity investment, Lisa was quick to talk about student opportunities throughout her entire school. "Diversity Day" is a large piece of the school community, allowing students to show off themselves and their culture for a wider audience. She also had access to more technical aspects of theatre, so a student in Drama did not have to focus on being the one onstage, but could participate in the technical aspects behind the scenes which were equally important to the overall performance.

Another consideration was when it came to children's theatre. Depending on the school she had taught in, Lisa had experienced a great deal of diversity in her mainstream Drama courses. This means that certain discussions, such as fairytale archetypes, need to address that not everyone grew up hearing the same stories. "I ask students about what ones are from their cultures and that kind of stuff. Then I have them try to find little scripts for

those stories to share.” Once the initial exploration had occurred, students then created their own scripts, which might closely follow the original stories or take the stories in a new direction. “It’s better to let students manipulate text-if all they do is read it and present it as is, that’s not letting them own it,” Lisa says.

Exposing students to smaller works and examples was helpful to students, particularly as students could be inspired by the writing of others. However, junior courses, like ADA10 and ADA20, were more about creating and collaborating. “It’s easier for senior students who have some experience to work with pre-existing scripts,” Lisa said. “They can analyse the work and be creative without being overwhelmed. It’s more purposeful in those courses.”

One major unit that Lisa used to foster identity investment in her classroom was the Docudrama unit. Docudrama focused on the students exploring topics that they were interested in and the message they wanted to present. Students were responsible for finding things to incorporate and compile into a finished project. The project also linked back to literacy, as it required detailed research to support findings-students are expected to have “multiple and different types of sources so that their product is well rounded.” An important aspect of using the different sources is that students might come across things that would shock them, or at the very least “offer a different viewpoint than what they feel...the purpose of the docudrama is to show a variety of different opinions and allow the audience to conclude whatever they want.” Students were then required to confront their own biases and address them in their work.

When the conversation moves towards support in the workplace, Lisa made it clear she had experienced every level of support, or lack thereof. Lisa had also noticed that a lot depended on the individual school climates. At the start of her career she was in a culturally diverse school and very supported. “I was extremely supported, so I said yes to everything. I had all the hours in the day to create new stuff. So I did. And the department said yes to everything.” However, after that positive experience, she came up against some challenges in a different school. “I was not so much welcomed into the department because my colleague wanted to be the sole person in the department. So anything that I

wanted to do extracurricularly was shut down.” Ultimately, that conflict led her to transfer schools.

She made it clear that overall her current work situation was a positive one. There were a number of teachers with similar backgrounds and it was a large department. She was still feeling it out, but generally felt supported. The challenges, as she saw it, was that in some instances the people in charge of more administrative aspects-such as room assignments-did not understand the specific logistical concerns of a Drama class. “How do you teach Drama in a classroom with a class set of desks and chairs in it? With no access to the tech that is in the main Drama studio? It shortchanges the students’ experience.”

Overall, Lisa had had a number of professional development experiences, but she has had to fund them herself.” If you’re lucky they maybe cover part of it.” She had attended conferences, obtained her Honours Specialist, and various workshops put on by industry professionals, such as the Stratford Festival. Lisa noted that it would be beneficial to support new teachers by fully funding these opportunities.

Lisa applied her own experiences to her teaching, focusing on the process of Drama with junior grades over more technical skills. The curriculum documents could provide some ground rules when it comes to developing a program, but ultimately teachers had to see who walks in the door. She had a number of success stories that address that very idea.

“My first couple of years teacher there was this one student in my class. He was a phenomenal leader, just fantastic kid-couldn’t believe how lucky I was having him in my class.” Lisa continued, saying that she talked about the student in the staff room and other teachers were shocked and thought she must have the student confused with someone else. Another teacher informed her that he was heavily involved with the cops and had been arrested. “He was the nicest kid ever and yeah...the kid was pretty much a criminal and I didn’t know.” As the story progressed, she talked about how the student actively participated in her class, despite his troubles outside the classroom. More than that though, he set an example for others. “He would always partner up with the kid who nobody wanted to partner with.” At the same time, the student was struggling to find himself, telling Lisa not to phone his parents to talk about how he was involved in the

Arts because he “truly believed his parents would rather he go to jail than become an actor.” Ultimately, the student turned his life around because of his involvement in the arts and pursued theatre in college. “Every drama teacher has a story like that-where a kid finds themselves in your class.”

#### 4.1.4 Diane’s Interview

Diane interview was completed on June 26, 2017. Diane had been teaching about 30 years and the bulk of her teaching experience has been at one high school. She completed a Bachelor of Music degree, before completing a Bachelor of Education degree. She was qualified to teach Intermediate and Senior Music and English. However, she taught Drama for almost two decades.

When asked how she found herself in Drama, Diane laughed and noted that “it’s kind of a funny story.” She had spent some time working with the current Drama teachers through extracurriculars during the early years of her career. When an opening appeared, the principal approached and asked how she would feel about teaching Drama. He indicated that he had spoken with the Drama Department Head and they were confident she would do well. “It would never fly now unless you had your qualifications right on the paper,” she noted, “but by then it was by invitation of the principal.” Ultimately, Diane relied on her colleague and her own high school experience when she started in Drama, but over the years had settled into her role. She still shared the department with other Drama teachers which she continued to find helpful when it comes to developing an ever-evolving program to address student needs.

Diane also expressed that she hoped the information she was giving me was useful. As a Department Head, Diane was often present for job interviews. She commented on the changing terminology over the years, specifically noting the rise of differentiated instruction and assessment versus evaluation. She noted that a lot of the new theories relate to “things Drama teachers have already been doing for decades-it’s not new to us.” Overall, Diane expressed interest in the continuing evolution of education and her response might be a result of her school’s culture as well as her role as a Student Success Teacher.

As the conversation turned to the required curricular aims and expectations of her Drama courses, Diane discussed her emphasis on transferable skills and how those skills led to success in other courses. She noted that, “it’s rare for students to go on to be professional actors” and quickly listed off the handful she had had over her career. A select few had made it to stage and screen, but the reality was most students needed more practical skills. Instead she focused on teaching public speaking, teamwork, negotiation, interview skills, and time management. “Students struggle with that one a lot. You could be in an English class saying your speech is due the second week of May, but if you hand it out in February, May feels like next year.” In fact, if a student came out of high school Drama wanting to pursue acting-either professionally or at the community theatre level-“that’s a bonus” to Diane because “...you want them to learn things they can apply to their entire life.”

This emphasis on transferable skills helps explain the types of literacy learning opportunities Diane saw in her Drama classroom. As an English teacher, she was acutely aware of the OSSLT and the need for students to be able to develop their reading comprehension skills. She emphasized reading scripts, script writing, monologues, and editing. There was also a great deal of focus placed on plot structure and characters, which sometimes interacted with problem solving. “If you’ve only got four in the group but there are seven people in the story-what are you going to do?” The revision process and editing mixed well with the creative process, allowing students to develop and refine their own work. Diane was another teacher who preferred to have students generate their own scripts, with the length of scripts and the difficulty of the topics increasing with each grade.

In general, there were some more specific assignments Diane noted for literacy development. As she noted, “When I think about literacy, automatically my mind goes to the literacy tests and maybe that’s a good thing, maybe it’s a bad thing-but it’s what we have to do.” A key assignment was the play review assignment, where students must critique and analyze someone else’s work. However, they were expected to discuss their own opinion and feelings on the piece they were reviewing. Students also learned how to address the sub-text in scripts so that they could better understand character motivation.

This is done through re-reading pieces numerous times and through discussion with group members, the whole class, and the teacher.

Moving to identity investment opportunities in Drama courses, Diane discussed how the first few weeks of the course focused on community building. She had attended Tribes training through professional development in the past which she had found helpful. In fact, Tribes was a school-wide endeavour at her current school. It helped students “feel they belong so that they feel free to express their opinion. It’s important they have that sense of acceptance and inclusion in a group.” Furthermore, Diane was keen to offer her students a chance to explore their own experiences and ideas through playwriting.

At times Diane would offer students a choice between writing their own scenes or using a pre-existing scene. “I said I can give you guys scenes or you can write plays, which trust me is going to take a lot longer and be more work, but you can write the words that you want. You can write the character and the issues that you want.” In the weeks prior to the interview, her class had chosen to write their own and they chose issues they identified with, such as body image and mental health.

The mental health piece appeared in her Drama classroom regularly she said, with students opening up about their own struggles. A recent monologue involved anxiety and was written by a student who many other teachers perceived as simply being lazy, yet his monologue discussed the struggles he was experiencing. “I think it’s only natural when they’re writing that they’re going to base it on their life experience because that’s so much easier than creating something that’s out there. I think when they’re writing plays and developing characters it’s definitely a part of themselves or somebody that’s in their circle that they’re going to write about.” For Diane, identity investment was always a part of her planning in Drama. She used “I am Poems”, monologues, docudrama, self-generated scripts, and more. While these assignments started with brainstorming and writing on a page, ultimately they were also performed by the students who generated the ideas. “Drama doesn’t work if they don’t bring in their own ideas,” Diane noted.

In terms of the support Diane had received over the course of her career, she felt relatively supported by her administration, particularly when it comes to promoting the



program. Elective courses, like Drama, can struggle if schools do not invest in them from a promotional standpoint because “it becomes a numbers game. You need to have enough students to run a course.” However, the size of Diane’s school allowed them to offer everything and inter-departmental relations were good. In fact, the departments came together every year to put on a school show. Having shared projects helped the teachers work on the teambuilding skills they were so keen to develop in their students.

Diane had been able to participate in subject council, which helped her network with other Drama teachers. She would like to attend the CODE conference, but it was difficult to obtain funding for that sort of specialized professional development. She had come up against the same barrier for the professional development at the Stratford Festival. As a result the networking piece was a key part of developing her own skills and obtaining additional resources. The internet had also become an important resource in the latter half of her career. “It’s a lot easier to access new ideas now than it was when I started!” she laughed.

When it comes to major influences on her programming, her colleagues played an important role. The curriculum documents had their place, but her school had also been tinkering with their evaluations, moving towards focusing on the strands within the curriculum documents. This was where consistency throughout the school became important, as everyone must be on board in order for something like this to be effective. Diane was also keen to bring in industry professionals, particularly for more technical units such as stage fighting. It lent more gravitas to the program as a whole to have specialists visiting regularly to conduct workshops.

Unsurprisingly, when we moved on to discussing successes she had seen in her classroom, Diane had many students to talk about. One recent student was:

“the most negative kid I had ever met. You could go around the circle for an opening attendance question and say something like, “What’s your favourite candy?” and he would say, “I don’t eat candy.” And you would press, but couldn’t really get anywhere. But if I ever needed anything done around the room-something moved, something physical, he loved helping. ... I think he was bullied at some point so he made this hard shell for himself that manifested in the constant negativity. But, at the end of the year, he was in a group that was not

particularly academically strong. The bigger issue was they were prone to laziness. However, this boy stepped up and took on the leadership role. I would walk by that group and he's like come on we've got to get this done, just give me your ideas and I will type it up. You'd never have thought the first week he would turn out to be the leader."

Diane's success with this student seems to have been built on the individual relationship she had with the student. He did not want to make himself vulnerable, but at the same time was invested in what was happening in the classroom.

Other successes have been particularly heartfelt monologues where students discussed their own experience, or identified with someone they knew who had gone through a tough time. "I just love seeing stage confidence grow-they can get up there, they can look out, they can make eye contact, they can stay focused and not laugh. It's just great!" It was also a success when a student moved from a Drama class to participating in a school play, because you "get to see them shine." The extracurricular piece was a particularly important aspect for Diane, as it was a time to get to know the students outside the classroom which led to strong relationships.

Despite all the positives, there were still challenges that Diane must confront with her Drama classes. Student behaviour was an ongoing challenge, some years more than others. Cell phones were often a contributing factor to behavioural concerns. Timetabling and split classes were other logistical concerns, but at the end of the day "those sorts of frustrations are unavoidable." Diane's bigger concern at times was when it comes to forming groups within the class. Sometimes it was important to let students choose their own groups, but other times it was important for the teacher to step in. "But do you form groups based on academic ability? Do you dispense the strong students among the groups to try to lift up those that are weaker? Or do you let all the strong students work together?" Despite three decades of experience, Diane continued to ask herself these types of questions to better serve her students.

#### **4.1.5 Nick's Interview**

Nick's interview was completed on October 11, 2017. Nick had been teaching about 28 years, with the earliest years of his career in a different school board and city than his

current employer. He completed a Bachelor of Music Degree before completing a Bachelor of Education Degree, with his original qualifications being Intermediate and Senior Music (Vocal and Instrumental). He had since also completed a Master of Education and a Doctor of Philosophy, as well as several additional qualifications, notably his Principal's Qualifications and Music Specialist. He laughed about the fact that he had been teaching Drama for over two decades, thanks in large part to his professional experience, before he ever completed an official qualification to teach it. Overall, Nick's teaching experience was varied at the beginning of his career. He spent time in both elementary and high schools, with quite some time spent in music and special education.

To hear Nick tell it, he became a teacher out of sheer necessity. "I did a lot of shows in high school and during my undergrad, so I pursued acting professionally." During his time on the audition circuit, Nick worked as a substitute teacher to make ends meet. However, in discussing his background, it becomes clear that he was greatly influenced by his own teachers, who greatly inspired him. "I auditioned for the school show and I got a small part and I absolutely adored my director. She could say jump out a window and I would. She was tough. And I learned so much from her." By the end of his high school career he had the lead in the school show and in his words his director,

"invested a lot of time in me. She gave me tremendous confidence to get up and do something that-where I come from-was just frowned upon and not what you did, you know? There people are not very educated and to have this kind of thing...I got made fun of in school because of it."

Despite the outside forces, Nick persevered and continued with acting, only giving it up in order to have a family. It makes sense then that he would enjoy teaching Drama the most, as it was what he was more passionate about.

Discussing the curricular aims and expectations of his Drama courses, Nick's emphasis was on performance. He did not subscribe to the idea of having students write, he would rather have them do it. He took a cynical view of the need for jargon in education, saying it was "just rebranding-they need to say they're having us do new things to help students, but they don't give us the resources we need to do that." Nick's response seems to be a

direct result of his frustrations with the leadership in his school and his school board. The theories were not the issue, but the presentation to frontline staff was.

When asked about literacy, he noted that there was more to literacy than just reading and writing. Drama “makes them understand what they are reading. You can’t act something you don’t understand.” Nick pushed students to get up and move around as they read the scene, so that it was not static. He uses Stanislavski’s system in his classroom which focused on “the art of experiencing-they have to play with the character in rehearsal, otherwise it won’t work.” Nick liked having students apply Stanislavski to deconstruct language, as well as focusing on improvisation. His view of literacy was more focused on oral communication than the written word. When asked for specific units or lessons that purposely incorporate literacy, he responds with, “Everything. How can you do Drama without literacy? You can’t. It will always be there.”

Nick segued into the identity investment piece, tying it with the literacy by mentioning how each student has different levels of ability. He also stated that students, “bring their language.” It could be slang or even just how they interpreted the world around them. “Kids,” Nick elaborated, “come to the room with themselves.” They were not only bringing their experiences, but also what they had seen and observed. They were also bringing their fears, their anxieties, and the frustrations. “If they’ve just come from a math class where they had a big test, they might not be ready to jump into a character yet.”

Through the years, Nick has found different ways to incorporate different aspects of identity investment. Neutral scenes were a favourite, as every student had the same scene, but they interpret them very differently. Even just allowing students the chance to choose their own music for Tableaux assignments could be empowering if they were used to “always being told that there is a right way to do something.” There had also been students who were keen to write their own scenes or even full length plays. Nick liked to provide students with a chance to try as many things as possible and to work with as many people as possible. He also liked to do a number of full class performances, where

the students had him as a director. “They can offer their ideas, but this way I can model directing and the importance of having a plan-you can’t just wing it.”

Nick liked to find ways to feature students in school shows as well, selecting shows that he knew would have parts for specific individuals-the way his teacher did for him when he was a student. He did the same thing in his classroom, trying to feature different students in different units. “It really helps some of those shy kids come out of their shell-sometimes you have to push them.”

While Nick enjoyed a lot of control over his classroom and his program, in large part to having built the program in his current school from scratch, he noted that self-determination did not necessarily equal support. “It depends on who you have at any given time. The politics and the leadership-it changes.” At times, he had had to censor the material in his classroom and in school shows so that it toes the line of what others consider appropriate. “But that goes with the territory,” he shrugged. There had been many positive years, including large school products that had the support of a number of colleagues. However, in Nick’s words, “Those days are gone. People have either retired or been transferred and the current administration doesn’t care. It’s all about appearances now.” Part of the problem was the shrinking student population, but part of it was also that the replacements for those who had left were not as engaged. The result was Nick choosing to continue to provide for his students, but without the additional support with the logistics.

The school board, in his opinion, could do more to support the Arts, but he doubted it would change any time soon. When it comes to professional development there was nothing anymore. “We used to at least get some general PD that was useful, but we don’t even get much of that now. And anything subject specific for the Arts has always been on your own dime.” Everything Nick has added to his repertoire over the years had been on his own initiative-and was often influenced by student interests. Nick has been lucky that his annual school show regularly generated enough additional money that he can funnel it back into his classroom programming, allowing him to buy a number of new resources over the years.

Circling back to challenges, Nick noted that part of his frustrations with the lack of support he received could be because he was nearing the end of his career so he no longer had the patience for politics. “Not that I ever really did-it takes away from the job. I want to focus on the students.” The other major challenge was the invasiveness of phones-particularly Snapchat. “There’s no escaping it-kids spend their life staring at a screen. How do you compete for their attention with that instant gratification at their fingertips?”

Technology, student voice, and differentiated instruction had a major impact on Nick’s classroom and programming. “When I have a student who dances, I know that I can have them help me with choreography if we do a musical in class.” Nick constantly provided options for his students, even for full class performances. Some students would immediately jump into the rehearsal process and experiment, whereas others needed more time with activities to practice and develop particular skills before moving to the summative assignments. Ultimately, for Nick “it doesn’t matter what path they take. Some kids will take Drama every year, some only once.” This means it is important to address all those student needs in class, particularly at the junior level. “Transferable skills are important at that age and they need to do stuff-they can’t just sit still and read.”

Throughout his career, Nick concluded that, one way or another, “every success is literacy and identity investment.” He had had some students pursue theatre or music professionally, as well as several who he felt should have, but for one reason or another, did not. “Some of those former students did what I did. They started with ideas of acting professionally, but then went into teaching because they could still do Drama, but with more reasonable hours.”

When pressed for specifics, Nick quickly rattled off a number of students who have gone from barely speaking, to performing in school shows. He was also quick to talk about his successes when it comes to developmental students. One student in recent years had gone from showing a vague interest in Drama classes, to participating in the school shows. For Nick, that showed how accessible Drama could be, anyone could actively engage in their own way. “It builds confidence and it lets students show their best selves.”

## 4.2 Summary

Throughout the data collection process, it became clear that the participants shared a number of similarities. All participants felt that the process was as important as the final product when it came to activities and assignments in Drama classes. The data showed that all participants often provided examples from their teaching experience that merged both literacy development and identity investment. Furthermore, participants expressed a great interest in community building among their students. They continually linked a successful classroom environment that could facilitate successful learning experiences to a sense of belonging that would allow students to feel comfortable making themselves vulnerable.

In the following chapter I will further discuss and summarize the findings presented in this chapter. This will allow for a greater understanding of how opportunities for literacy learning and identity investment manifest within Drama courses.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Discussions

In moving towards focusing on the creative process, the existent literature says that Drama teachers have moved away from the more performance based aspects of traditional Theatre courses (Gallagher 2011, 2013; McLauchlan 2010; McLauchlan & Winters 2014; Mortimer 2000; O'Neill 2014). Drama, particularly at the grades 9 and 10 level, places equal or even more emphasis on the process than the finished product. This serves students by facilitating opportunities for self-exploration and discovery. These experiences also typify that benefits expressed by educational research in multiliteracies (Barton & Hamilton 2005; Bloom & Green 2015; New London Group 1996; Street 2006) and identity investment (Cummins 2000, 2001, 2009), which served as the major deductive themes for my research. Multiliteracies covered literacy opportunities, curriculum, multimodality, and differentiated instruction. Identity investment covered student-centred learning, asset-orientated pedagogy, student creativity, student self-reflection, and student contributions and voice. Each of these deductive themes has been given their own sections in below for further discussion and comparison.

Past research has at times struggled to define the distinction between Drama and Theatre, as the terms can be used interchangeably throughout existing literature. Drama is commonly shown as an activity or a tool to be used in other subject areas. Drama in education is a dynamic teaching methodology, but it has still more to offer as a standalone course.

Understanding the culture and community that can develop within the Drama classroom is essential to understanding the benefits of it. While teachers may participate in classroom activities, the participants in this study all gave their students room to explore. They continually emphasized the need for students to generate their own ideas and rely on their own interpretations. Similar to the existent literature, all the teacher participants reported that they as Drama teachers were facilitators and coaches who recognized the need to look at students as individuals, but more importantly that success would be individualized. All my teacher participants concurred that their drama classes were not



about talent, but about the process and growth. Out of these discussions grew the major inductive theme of my research, which was experiences. Experiences as a theme covered teacher narratives about successes, challenges, teacher self-reflection, influences, and community.

## 5.1 Teacher Perceptions of Literacy Within Their Classrooms

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is some existent literature regarding literacy and Drama from the likes of Gallagher (2013) and MacLauchlan (2010). Throughout the course of the interviews it became clear that literacy was an easy and familiar topic for all five teachers. My teacher participants grappled with their desire to ensure the best literacy learning opportunities for their students, yet believing that Drama as a course inherently revolves around literacy. All participants were quick to discuss how they wanted to provide all students with opportunities, but were concerned that some students might still slip through the cracks when it came to literacy skills. Brianna perhaps put it best when she said, “Everything has some kind of literacy to it. They’re always writing something. There’s so much analysis of text-any time they work with any kind of text they need to discuss it.” A sentiment echoed by Nick when he said, “Everything. How can you do Drama without literacy? You can’t. It will always be there.” These ideas surrounding literacy echo Barton and Hamilton’s (2005) ideas about how spoken language makes references to texts. They discuss how “[t]he existence of these mediating texts changes what is said and how it is said ... there is no real distinction between face-to-face and mediated” (p. 3). In the case of Drama classrooms, students are constantly analyzing texts, meaning their interactions with others will be influenced by the very texts they are working with. This further leads into literacy practices and literacy events, as literacy events can be classified as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (as cited in Street, 2006, p. 5). For the activities teacher participants referenced, notably the co-creation of self-generated scripts, writing was often the starting point for the creation process for students.

Street's version of literacy practices focuses on "social practices and conceptions of reading and writing...later elaborated the term to take account both of 'events' in Heath's sense and of the social models of literacy that participants bring to bear upon those events and that give meaning to them" (2006, p. 5). This can be related to the fact that teacher participants communicated that in Drama classes, the process did not end with the written word, rather it evolved from it into a multimodal form of creation and performance for the students. The creative process in Drama perfectly aligns then with Bloom and Green's (2015) discussion of how literacy practices are "realized in literacy events" (p. 20). Through an "actual embodiment, engagement, and interaction among people in real time as they make their everyday lives within institutional, social, cultural, and economic contexts" (p. 20). These literacy events require that literacy practices are adapted to the circumstances people find themselves in. Through revising their work and collaborating with others, students are able to create their own literacy events.

None of the participants expressed any noticeable negativity towards the current Ontario curriculum. Most seemed relatively satisfied with it, but did acknowledge that they used it as a guideline. The teachers communicated that the curriculum allowed for them to utilize their professional judgement in determining how to implement it in their own classrooms. The assignments, activities, lessons, and units chosen for each class could vary under the curriculum. For example, all the teachers referenced voice units as foundational for Drama courses. Lisa referenced the need to focus on aspects of articulation with classes containing a number of English Language Learners. The curriculum allowed her freedom to address the specific needs of her students as needed as opposed to being constrained to specific benchmarks. Teacher participants viewed the students themselves as being active contributors to the direction of their own learning. In my view, this freedom to adapt to students and what they brought to the classroom recognizes that students are bringing their own funds of knowledge to the classroom (Heydon & Bainbridge, 2015).

In applying this to curriculum development, Fiona's discussion of how she explained to students "why we're doing what we're doing" stood out. This is something she learned during her teacher training, but other participants did not discuss this aspect explicitly.

Related to this, I discovered that all teacher participants at times struggled to articulate specifics about the affordances of Drama when it came to literacy learning and identity investment. They often seemed to group their ideas under the construct of transferable skills, rather than identifying them as literacy skills. This is not surprising, given that the curriculum documents outline “B3. Connections Beyond the Classroom: [Students will] identify knowledge and skills they have acquired through drama activities and ways in which they can apply this learning in personal, social, and career contexts” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.70). Teachers framed their responses in line with the way in which the curriculum itself is worded. Again, this emphasizes the differences between professional practice in education and educational research. In conversation, the Drama teachers interviewed discussed literacy with a specific focus, but often framed it as it related to other areas of their students’ education, such as the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). However, many skills that are grouped as literacy skills in educational research, particularly multimodal literacy, are viewed under the umbrella of transferable skills by Drama teachers.

All the participants had a tendency to fall into the trap of making generalizations when it came to literacy learning in particular. In their words, it is an intrinsic part of everything in the classroom, but when pushed for how, they often defaulted to examples involving reading and writing, such as journals and script writing. These were examples of literacy learning, but they aligned with the autonomous model of literacy development. This is interesting given that these same Drama teachers were often practicing the ideological model of literacy development through their focus on providing a variety of educational opportunities without realizing that these were also literacy opportunities. Teachers shared that they offered ESL students a chance to complete the self-reflection process orally, as opposed to through writing. It was also seen when students went from writing their own scripts to actively presenting and performing those scripts, giving them a chance to express themselves through movement and voice. This aligns with the work done by The New London Group. The New London Group’s (1996) objective was to create “the learning conditions for full social participation” (p. 61) and as such “the issue of differences becomes critically important. How do we ensure that differences of culture, language, and gender are not barriers to success? And what are the implications of these

differences for literacy pedagogy?” (p. 61). In being open to adapting assessment and evaluation, teachers are ensuring that culture, language, and gender are not barriers to success.

The participants conceptualized literacy in a variety of ways, with several defaulting to more traditional modes of literacy, such as reading and writing. Diane was particularly notable in her link to literacy and the written word. Lisa also relied heavily on writing in her classes, but did not shy away from adapting to the needs of her students. In Lisa’s case, her work with English Language Learners shows that she viewed literacy as more malleable than the written word alone and was willing to expand to different modes of communication. Brianna and Fiona also focused on writing, but emphasized the performance of that written work or the self-reflection piece. The writing in their classrooms carried strong connections to identity investment. Nick was the outlier in that he preferred to stay away from having students focus too much on writing. Instead, his emphasis was on performance the modes of communication therein. The implications of this point to the benefits of students having a physical outlet for their work when it comes to expressing themselves.

Moreover, in expanding upon the implications presented in existent literature regarding the literacy and identity affordances in Drama courses (Gallagher, 2011; McLauchlan, 2010; McLauchlan & Winters, 2014; Turner, 2014), it is clear that teacher perceptions of the benefits should be carefully considered. If teachers already see implicit benefits relating to literacy and identity, what are the possibilities that would exist if Drama teachers are specifically given the tools to explicitly add more literacy and identity opportunities within their classroom? Prior to participating in the interviews, none of the teacher participants had heard the terms “multiliteracies” or “identity investment”, yet they were able to quickly grasp the idea and relate it to their own professional practices. It stands to reason that it would then be beneficial to build academic-practitioner connections and provide teachers with information regarding these theories and specific examples of ideas to further integrate such opportunities explicitly into their programming. If the teachers are supported through such network, they are able to better

support their students, which in turn leads to more authentic and beneficial learning experiences for students.

Looking at specifics, all of the teacher participants shared similar ideas: student-generated scripts, reflections (written or oral), play reviews, research skills, proofreading skills, and analysis. Teacher participants reported that discussion and interpretation was paramount in any Drama unit, as well as vocabulary building. Foundational units allowed for students to build confidence and engagement, which led to more complex units where literacy skills could be further honed. Teachers acknowledged the importance of engagement when it came to facilitating literacy learning. They noted that students who were not interested in the topic, would not participate in it, which means a loss of opportunity. Literacy is never a specific unit, rather it is always considered by the teachers as part of each unit-whether it be tableaux or Shakespeare.

Diane and Lisa's experiences seem to have been heavily shaped by their backgrounds in teaching English, perhaps explaining why they defaulted to examples of reading and writing. Both made references to the OSSLT, with Diane being particularly focused on incorporating aspects from the test into written assignments. Lisa's discussion centred heavily on building literacy skills that would help English Language Learners to actively participate fully in the world around them. However, both discussed the need for oral communication to show a student literacy.

Teacher participants reported that students used different ways of demonstrating their learning, but did not frame this use of multimodality as a literacy learning opportunity. Brianna for example mentioned how she left some assignments "vague on purpose" which allowed students to use different modes to demonstrate their understanding. Other teachers, notably Fiona and Lisa, quickly mentioned students demonstrating their learning by exploring the technical side of Drama as opposed to through performance. They reported that their students participated in their learning "[t]hrough a variety of dramatic forms" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 65), with students expected to "select and use appropriate forms to suit specific purposes in drama works" (p. 68). This has keen implications for teacher education in ensuring they are comfortable offering

“vague” assignments that allow for more student choice, while still meeting the required curriculum expectations. It also shows the need for further research into how students choose to interpret such vague instructions and their perceptions of such assignments.

Nick’s explicit emphasis on not having students complete much written work makes his interview stand out. As the only participant with professional theatre experience, there appears to be a connection between his own life experience and his professional practice. Nick made more direct connections to the multimodal aspects of literacy in Drama, calling to mind Jewitt’s (2008) assertions that literacy extends beyond linguistic accomplishment, as it also encompasses aspects like gesture, body posture, and speech. It would be interesting to find more teachers with professional experience to compare with Nick’s teaching methods. This bears further research to examine the perceptions of teachers across a wide range of experiences, but specifically those with professional theatre experience to see if they differ from those whose theatre experience is limited to more academic or community settings and explore the ensuing implications for expanding students’ literacy and identity options in Drama classes.

It became clear that the teachers did not always directly connect literacy with their offering different modes of students to demonstrate their learning. Given that multimodality specifically addresses that “meanings are made (as well as distributed, interpreted, and remade) through many representational and communicational resources, of which language is but one” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 246), it is clear that by offering students multiple modes the teacher participants not only supported student learning, but did align with the ideological model of literacy learning. However, these teacher participants continued to conceptualize literacy based on the autonomous model. It would be beneficial then to ensure that teacher education focuses on educating teachers on the different literacy models so that they could assume agentic roles in making decisions about what transformative learning opportunities to provide in Drama classes.

When it comes to specific examples of student literacy learning, Brianna, Lisa, and Diane mentioned play review assignments. Play reviews focused on students being able to formulate an opinion while analyzing someone else’s work. Nick, on the other hand,

preferred to stay away from too much writing in the classroom. For him, literacy extended beyond the standard reading and writing that students did in other classes. Performance in Drama “makes [students] understand what they are reading. You can’t act something you don’t understand.” This aligns with the ideological model, which allows for students to direct their own meaning making through multimodality (Jewitt, 2008).

Over the course of the interviews it became apparent that a number of the assignments, activities, lessons, and units merged opportunities for student literacy learning and identity investment. Teachers specifically mentioned having students create their own scripts, an obvious mixture literacy (writing), and identity investment (freedom to use own ideas). Teachers observed that students expressed a great deal of pleasure at seeing their own work. Diane extended the creative process to include the revision process. In Diane’s view, learning how to edit their own work was a key transferable skill for students to develop. The creative process, particularly during revisions, allowed for students to practice their problem-solving skills as well. This connects with the idea that arts-based learning “as a way to reach and teach all children, and drama-based interventions are being adopted by education practitioners in an effort to improve students’ literacy outcomes” (Anderson, 2012, p. 960). However, Anderson’s study did not look specifically at Drama courses, but rather at applying Drama strategies to language arts courses. My interviews with Drama teachers provide insights into how these same positive results occur in standalone Drama courses. In looking to the possibilities of future research, a natural step would be to interview Drama students at various ages to see if their perceptions of standalone Drama courses also identify similar positives to the teacher perceptions.

This leads into the need to discuss how there remain challenges within standalone Drama courses. When it came to the challenges of providing students with literacy learning opportunities, the teacher participants varied in their responses. Some highlighted specific examples of assignments or challenges from their own experiences, while others were more concerned about their need to address preparing students for the OSSLT. Fiona indicated her fear of programming that relied heavily on self-generated scripts. “It worked in the school I was in, but that was a very academic school. I don’t think it would work as

well in all schools.” This fits with some of Lisa’s concerns in recognizing that not every student was taking Drama for the same reasons. Lisa noted that the course needed to be “accessible to everybody.” In Lisa’s view, using oral communication could offer students accommodations to show their literacy learning through discussions because literacy was about more than writing. However, even oral communication could be challenging with students who were English Language Learners.

Teacher perceptions support the idea that there were a number of literacy learning opportunities. Drama allows students to become more directly involved in the learning process. “Ultimately, the idea that drama is literacy is supported by the fact that it is: (1) a multimodal and embodied learning experience, (2) helps to reveal textual understanding, and (3) provides opportunities for deeper analysis and critical thinking about texts and concepts” (Macro, 2015, p. 338). Teachers’ observations of students in their classrooms support this idea, particularly when it comes to their focus on lived experiences that does not end when the students have finished reading or writing a script. Instead, the creative process within their Drama classrooms allowed students to revisit ideas multiple times over the course of days, weeks, or even months.

## 5.2 Teacher Perceptions of Identity Investment Within Their Classrooms

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the majority of literature regarding identity investment appears to focus on ELLs (Cummins, 2000, 2009). This is why Lisa’s experiences with ELLs in Drama courses were valuable when it came to applying the existing literature. However, the Ontario Curriculum itself instructs teachers to provide students with a “variety of sources and forms” so that they incorporate a “variety of perspectives” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 75). There exists some literature that discusses student identity and Drama (Freeman, Sullivan & Fulton, 2003; Hendrix & Shannon 2012; O’Neill, 2014; Rodericks, 2015), but none that specifically references identity investment. The teacher participants were quick to reference their desire to encourage students to feel comfortable sharing themselves in a variety of ways within the Drama classroom.



When it comes to identity investment opportunities, teachers again often defaulted to generalizations of how students were able to express themselves, with an emphasis on the creative process, the importance of relationships, and community building. The Ontario Drama curriculum specifically mentions that students will develop awareness and use elements of drama “to create drama works that are related to their personal interests and experiences” (p. 65). Opportunities for students to share aspects of themselves was reported by the teacher participants as a daily activity in Drama classrooms, even sometimes with something as simple as attendance check-in questions. With the exception of Nick, all teachers specifically mentioned having check-in questions with students on a regular or even daily basis during attendance. Teacher participants referenced specific opportunities where students were able to share aspects of themselves, such as Brianna’s opening unit, “Me, Myself, and I” which serves as a way for students to introduce themselves with their classmates. At the opposite end of that spectrum is Fiona’s concluding unit, “Final Five” where students shared something new they had learned or taught themselves.

All participations discussed a focus on collaboration. The focus on collaboration might seem counterproductive to individual identity investment, but it gave students a chance to share a part of themselves with each other. In fact, “collaborative relations of power” (Cummins, 2001), works on the assumption that power is not fixed, rather power can be “generated in interpersonal and intergroup relations” (p. 16). This emphasis on collaboration which is key to identity investment relates to several of the Drama curriculum expectations, such as “explain how dramatic exploration helps develop group skills and appreciation of communal values” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 71). Further, students are expected to “identify ways in which dramatic exploration promotes an appreciation of diverse cultures and traditions” (p. 71). The implications of this is that it promotes mutual understanding between students regardless of their backgrounds. The teacher is available to act as a guide as necessary, but it offers students a chance to take a more active role in the content within the classroom through self-determination. Supporting teachers by providing them with a variety of resources and examples of units, scripts, poems, stories, or contact with other professionals from other

backgrounds becomes essential to further their own understanding of how best to introduce new ideas to their students in an authentic manner.

Student choice was reported to be always present during the creative process, whether it was through topic or directorial choices. Teacher participants expressed ideas that aligned with Heathcote's ideals where she discussed wanting students to recognize that "the onus [was] upon them to have ideas" (as cited in O'Neill, 2014, p. 48). Perhaps more importantly though is ensuring students realize that the teacher is "prepared to accept their ideas and to use them and make them work" (p. 48). Drama places a great deal of emphasis on encouraging students to think for themselves. Together, teachers and students also "challenge the perception in the broader society that these attributes are inferior or worthless" (Cummins, 2001, p. 3).

Lisa emphasized the need to focus on students as individuals. In allowing for students to express themselves throughout the aforementioned creative process, "It forces you not to default to directly comparing students." This ability to look at students and evaluate based on individual growth, gave that freedom for students to explore different options. Several teachers, such as Lisa and Fiona noted that students were free to pursue the technical side of Drama instead of focusing on being onstage. Fiona specifically mentioned that she continually looked for "different creative ways by looking at the class and their interests for different ways to go about teaching them what it is they need to learn." This echoes the ideas discussed by Gallagher (2013) about how Drama students never create in a vacuum and that it is impossible to escape the broader social and political context. She asserted the need for teachers who believe "in the significance of social identity to any learning process" (p.8), something that Fiona's answers exemplified.

Teachers also viewed extracurricular options as a valuable identity investment opportunity for students. Nick provided his students with yearly opportunities for school musicals and plays. Initially, he had a number of colleagues to support him, but due to retirements and a shrinking student population that is no longer the case. Despite this, Nick expressed his belief that this was a vital opportunity that he wished to still provide

his students. Diane discussed her role as a support to another Drama teacher who spearheads the annual school show in her school. In her view, school shows provide the students from various grades a chance to collaborate together and create something beyond a typical classroom assignment.

Lisa's experience with school shows had been dependent on the school she was at in any given year. She discussed how early in her career she was very willing to take on the bulk of the work, but was currently happy as a support person in a larger program. Brianna and Fiona have not yet had the opportunity to help with a school show as a teacher, but discussed fond memories from their own high school years.

None of the research that I came across addressed teacher perceptions of the implications of extracurriculars such as school shows. This is something that should be addressed in future research, particularly as teachers combat a variety of challenges when it comes to mounting something as time consuming as a school show. School shows are similar to Drama courses, but are an entirely different format for student learning. School shows also remove the need for formal grading, yet they still have an audition process that by its very nature forces teachers to compare students. So why are Drama teachers compelled to provide additional opportunities beyond the classroom? Further, how does the experience change if the teacher is the one choosing the show being performed and directing it? Does this sort of experience align more with the traditional view of Theatre over Drama? All such questions merit further professional or academic explorations and refer to a way forward for myself as a Drama teacher and emerging scholar in the field.

### 5.3 Teacher Experiences Within Their Classroom

When comparing the participants, it should be noted that the sample size provided a surprising amount of diversity of experience. Often this diversity manifested itself in the challenges the teacher participants faced in providing literacy and identity investment opportunities. One of the largest factors for the diversity of experience was that the teachers had worked in a variety of schools. However, some of the similarities were striking and not what I had anticipated. I anticipated educational levels to be roughly the same; each participant had an Undergraduate Degree and a Bachelor of Education, with

Nick being the only one to have pursued further Graduate Studies. The two veteran teachers, Diane and Nick, both had Degrees in Music. Nick only recently completed his official additional qualification in Drama to appease administration. Nick, however, did have a great deal of professional and semi-professional theatre experience. Diane continued to teach Drama without an official qualification, but was in a department with other Drama teachers for support. Lisa, for all intents and purposes, was an outlier in terms of the number of years of experience. She split the difference between the veterans and the new teachers. The depth of her experiences was more in line with those of Nick and Diane, however, her transient nature was more in line with Brianna and Fiona's experiences. Her way of speaking and her use of literacy in her programming was similar to Diane, likely as a result of their shared experience as English teachers. They both referenced the need to prepare students for the OSSLT. Lisa also participated in community theatre like Brianna did.

Brianna and Fiona were similar not only in terms of years of experience, but also in that they shared the same odd combination of Drama and Math for teachables. However, Brianna was unique from the other participants thanks to her experience in a private school. They were both still navigating how to best serve their students and discussed their emphasis on community building so that students were comfortable being vulnerable in class. They were both heavily influenced by their own respective high school Drama teachers, choosing to approach their programming differently than what they had received but in different areas. Fiona noted that she placed more of an emphasis on literacy than her own Drama teacher had, specifically when it came to writing. Brianna noted that she placed more of an emphasis on community and relationship building between herself and her students. She did, however, draw on her Drama teacher's example for core written assignments, such as play reviews.

All five participants currently or had in the past worked in a program large enough to have multiple Drama teachers. Lisa was the only one who had had an overt negative experience with co-workers in the same subject when it came to sharing new ideas. All expressed a preference for working in a program large enough to necessitate more than one Drama teacher. In Fiona's words, "It helps knowing that if you hit a wall there's

someone next door who can help.” Teacher participants noted their desire to best serve their students, both in terms of literacy and identity options. Lisa discussed the need for support with literacy development from other teachers when it came to ELL students in particular. All teachers indicated the need to be aware of addressing student needs and, for the more experienced teachers, Diane and Nick, how those needs have shifted over the course of their career. Diane noted a particular emphasis in recent years on mental health awareness and how she has sought to incorporate that into her programming. Essentially, teachers were able to better support students and offer more literacy and identity opportunities when they were also supported by colleagues, administration, and their school board. The implications from this are that there needs to be on-going teacher training that is subject or course specific, not just focused on broader school or board-wide initiatives.

All participants viewed extracurriculars as a valuable identity investment option for student. Influences from high school teachers and participation in school shows also seemed to have been a defining aspect in the experiences of the five participants. Brianna and Fiona had not yet been in a position to help as a teacher with a school show, but expressed interest in doing so. For Nick and Diane, the school show had been a yearly ritual for quite some time, whereas Lisa’s experience had been dependent on the school she was at any given year. Implications regarding this shows young teachers are motivated, but not always in a position to take on something as time consuming and difficult as a school show on their own. There needs to be further mentorship among Drama teachers for these extracurriculars. It also speaks to the benefit of having multiple Drama teachers in the same building. It would be beneficial then to provide teacher training opportunities that would give a broad overview of the logistics that come with putting on a school show.

In looking at the challenges they faced when it came to literacy learning and identity investment, all teachers discussed the need for resources. They relied a great deal on networking with other Drama teachers. With the exception of Diane, the participants had, at one time or another, been the only Drama teacher in a school. This is a daunting task, particularly for newer teachers who may be struggling to build their own network.

Brianna, Fiona, and Lisa all made mention of returning to their own high school Drama teachers to gather resources when they entered teaching. Teacher participants indicated that teacher training was not always adequate in preparing teachers for the realities of the classroom. In the same way that the participants indicated they wanted their students to “do” in order to learn, teachers also needed to learn in order to do. Teacher participants often indicated that they sought out their own experiences to improve their teaching. For example, Brianna has sought out another, more experienced Drama teacher as a mentor and Lisa has sought out formal professional development sessions beyond her school board. As with students, teachers needed time for self-reflection with their peers. This can be difficult if you are the only teacher in a school with a particular subject.

All five teachers expressed a desire for further support when it came to subject specific professional development from their school boards. Those with the means to find their own had done so, but for newer teachers like Brianna and Fiona who were focused on trying to obtain a permanent position, it had proved more difficult to afford outside professional development. The implications of this are clear, young teachers who are motivated to improve their skills and further their education are not able to access opportunities. They require further support both during their Bachelor’s of Education and once hired by a school board. Such support should not only be available once they have a more permanent position, as that can sometimes take several years.

Many teachers expressed a great deal of frustration with how their classroom was impacted by outside influences, such as the invasiveness of cellphones. This could quickly create an atmosphere where students did not feel as safe to express themselves if they feared their performances being shared with a wider audience. This might have a negative impact on the identity investment opportunities, as students pull back when they did not feel comfortable.

While teachers preferred to focus on the positives, there was some discussion of how the classroom make-up could have a particularly negative impact. If students were there for the wrong reasons or refuse to participate it could make collaboration difficult. Diane specifically noted the frustration with student laziness.

Other teachers, such as Nick and Lisa, noted particular frustration with school or departmental politics. They noted that it detracted from the programs when they just wanted to focus on the students by providing them with every opportunity possible. Nick's negative experience was related to the lack of support and resources available to him, whereas Lisa's was specific to interference from colleagues when it came to departmental programming.

It is clear that future research is needed to further elicit teacher perceptions, particularly when it comes to the challenges to providing students with literacy and identity investment opportunities. The teachers themselves are able to identify the barriers they themselves face and it is often a lack of resources or an inability to access relevant and beneficial professional development until several years into their career. In some cases, it is simply the luck of the draw in regard to if a teacher has found themselves in a school that offers them support and mentorship from colleagues. Therefore, this becomes an issue that must be addressed at a board level to ensure that teachers are being supported so that they can deliver transformative learning opportunities for their students.

## 5.4 Summary

The teacher participants all clearly indicated that they felt their Drama classrooms offered a variety of literacy and identity opportunities for students. The teacher participants shared valuable insights into expansive literacy and identity options within Drama classrooms. An important aspect of this was the connection they made between activities, lessons, units, and assignments that merged literacy and identity investment opportunities. Teachers did not view literacy and identity investment opportunities as isolated from each other, instead felt that the best literacy opportunities arose out of offering students a chance to explore their own interests and who they were.

## Chapter 6

### 6 Conclusions

This chapter brings together the conclusions of this study regarding the teacher perceptions of literacy and identity investment opportunities in secondary school Drama courses. The focus is on the specific findings of the study and its implications, along with recommendations, before closing with the overall significance of this study.

#### 6.1 Conclusions of Findings

This study is an exploratory step in gathering further research on teacher perspectives regarding the literacy and identity investment opportunities within secondary Drama classrooms in Ontario. Throughout the course of this study, participants provided unique and insightful thoughts regarding the literacy and identity investment opportunities within their Drama classrooms. This reaffirmed the need to support and listen to in service teachers.

Throughout the course of this study it was clear that teacher perceptions support the idea that their Drama courses provided students with a variety of literacy learning and identity investment opportunities. These opportunities did not isolate literacy or identity opportunities; rather often a single opportunity offered students a chance to engage in both literacy learning and identity investment simultaneously. This was seen through the student choice with content and the mode in which students expressed their learning. Further, teachers viewed themselves as being adaptable to address the individual needs of their students. They recognized that their own experiences had a profound impact on their teaching and require constant self-reflection, something that they regularly encouraged in their students. Self-reflection was perhaps where it became obvious that these teacher participants practiced what they preached to their students.

Based on the findings of this study, I have identified a need for subject specific professional development supplied by the school board for Drama teachers. This would mean the teachers could network within their own community, but also receive professional training to improve their own skills. Young teachers, such as Brianna



expressed a hunger for furthering their own education to better support student learning. Chances for Drama teachers to experience and observe their colleagues' classrooms would also be beneficial. Fiona was failed by the New Teacher Induction Program when it came to furthering her knowledge of teaching Drama. Her mentor was a math teacher, during a semester she was exclusively teaching Drama. New teachers, such as Brianna and Fiona, were often forced to find their own mentors through networking and must do so on their own time. Board-supported professional development was also often limited to permanent, contract teachers, making it inaccessible to new, occasional teachers.

However, new teachers are not the only ones who need professional development. Teachers in this study discussed their continued need opportunities that support their own learning to be provided, funded, and supported by the school boards. It is difficult to attend professional development, such as that is offered by the Stratford Festival of Canada, as not only is there a cost to attend the workshops, they occur during the school year meaning teachers must find appropriate coverage for their classes. Professional development from industry professionals furthers teacher understanding of their subject matter and provides them with new experiences which can inform their professional practice.

Furthering the discussion of professional development, there needs to be more direct interaction between professional practice and education research. This requires board support, as well as an open dialogue between the two worlds. A shared vocabulary is a key element to facilitate conversation, in the same way that there needs to be an understanding of the difference between Drama and Theatre. During the data collection process, it became clear that terms such as multiliteracies and identity investment were unfamiliar to teacher participants. While their practices exhibit the aspects of the ideological model of literacy, their understanding of what literacy means is more in line with the autonomous model. It is therefore clear that teachers require additional support when it comes to continuing their own educations once they acquire their Bachelor's of Education and become licensed teachers.

It is clear that teacher participants I interviewed viewed secondary Drama courses as an authentic and meaningful way to provide students with literacy and identity investment opportunities. These teachers also often discussed classroom activities and assignments that offered literacy and identity investment opportunities simultaneously. This study also shows that there should be continued research relating to the connections between literacy and identity options and their impacts on student confidence. Teacher participants regularly referenced student growth, with a great deal of emphasis on students growing more self-confident in their abilities and in themselves. These opportunities also provided students with a deeper understanding and engagement with their learning, however, given the nature of this study there is no direct data relating to student grades. This is something that could be explored further in future studies.

Furthermore, this study has shown that it is important to speak directly with teachers in order to determine what they need in order to best support their students when it comes to providing those literacy and identity investment opportunities. While Drama teachers may still think of literacy using the autonomous model, their professional practice is more in line with the ideological model of literacy. In using the ideological model of literacy, teachers are also then addressing aspects of identity investment and view students as individuals with unique experiences and needs. It cannot be emphasized enough that all this indicates the pressing need to better support in service teachers with relevant and authentic professional development and mentorship. When teachers are supported and valued, they are then able to better support and value their students.

## 6.2 Recommendations

Based on this study, I have a number of recommendations. These recommendations focus primarily on supporting teachers, avenues for additional research, and connecting teachers with educational research.

From the interviews it is clear that Drama teachers prioritize their students and want to provide their students with the best opportunities possible. In order to do this, teachers require support and access to opportunities throughout their careers. Some participants like Fiona and Brianna referenced specific moments from their teacher education

programs that informed their professional practice. However, all teacher participants indicated that they wished they had received more practical opportunities during their initial teacher training. As current in-service teachers, the participants repeated again and again the on-going need for resources, mentorship, relevant professional development, and funding. This requires support from colleagues, administrators, school boards, and the provincial government.

I would recommend further research be conducted into the affordances provided in Drama classrooms in Ontario. Further research should focus on gathering more teacher perspectives, as well as exploring the perceptions of students and administrators. It would also be beneficial for researchers to conduct extended classroom observation of Drama classes.

This research also showed how vital it is for educational research and teachers to connect more regularly. There is a significant gap when it comes to the vocabulary used within educational research, compared to the vocabulary used in teachers and their professional practice. This is often exacerbated when teachers graduated from Education Faculties a couple decades previously, as seen among my own participants who were at varying points in their careers. Education Faculties and school boards must work together to create a common language in order to facilitate on-going professional development for teachers. Teachers should be readily encouraged to become researchers and to further their own education, as it will ultimately support their professional practice.

### **6.3 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in that it emphasizes that literacy and identity opportunities are not isolated in Drama classrooms. The teacher participants themselves quickly linked to examples that met the requirements of facilitating student literacy opportunities, as well as allowing students to invest in their own identities. Further, students themselves may experience these opportunities in different ways leading to a mosaic of stories that is best explored through the use of narrative inquiry. The Drama teachers interviewed were keenly aware of the need to address each student as individuals, as well as ensuring that each student receive the appropriate level of guidance and support. This study is a

starting point, which will hopefully lend itself to continuing research regarding the literacy and identity investment opportunities within secondary Drama courses.

The use of teacher perceptions in this study is also significant. As mentioned previously, there needs to be continued emphasis on building a stronger relationship between the worlds of educational professional practice and educational research. There also needs to be continued emphasis on listening to teachers in regards to the supports they need in the classroom. It is impossible to support classroom teachers fully without having an open and honest conversation with them. It is also important to recognize that individual schools and individual students will have different needs. There needs to be ongoing communication at all levels, with an emphasis on understanding that in-service teachers have the benefit of being in the classroom daily.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Letter of Information to Teachers

**Project Title:** Literacy and Identity Investment in Secondary Drama Courses: Using narrative inquiry to investigate teacher perceptions of the affordances of Secondary Drama courses in Ontario

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Zheng Zhang, Faculty of Education, Western University

### 1. Invitation to Participate

I would like to invite you to participate in this research study regarding the affordances of secondary school Drama courses. You are being invited to participate because you teach secondary school Drama, specifically ADA10 or ADA20.

### 2. Purpose of the Letter

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

### 3. Purpose of this Study

The purposes of this study are to explore the teacher's and students' perceptions of the affordances of Drama courses with regard to 1) enabling literacy learning and 2) enabling identity investment. It will also delve into the challenges that are present within Drama classes when teachers and students try to celebrate and incorporate cultural, linguistic, and semiotic diversity. Thus, it will have direct impact on how teachers can work to better differentiate instruction to reach students in Drama courses.

### 4. Inclusion Criteria

Individuals who have taught either ADA10 or ADA20 during the 2016-2017 school year. Teachers must also be using the Ontario Drama curriculum.

### 5. Exclusion Criteria

Individuals who have not taught ADA10 or ADA20 during the 2016-2017 school year are not eligible to participate in this study.

### 6. Study Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to join me in an interview which will last for approximately one hour. The interview will be conducted at a site that is mutually agreed upon between you and me. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed into written format. The interview must be recorded to ensure accurate data collection. In the interview,

you will be asked to talk about your experiences teaching Drama, particularly in regards to literacy learning and identity investment. You will also be asked to share your stories of challenges and successes from your own teaching experience. You will be invited to check the transcripts and offer clarification, elaboration, or any other feedback you deem pertinent. You will be able to remove parts of the interview. The review of the transcript might take half an hour.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to the tapes and transcripts. You may (or may not) be quoted directly in the research report, but once you are quoted, you will not be identified as the source of the quotation and any information that could identify you will be removed.

**7. Possible Risks and Harms**

There are no known risks to participating in this study. I will also ensure you anonymity as a respondent to your organization.

**8. Possible Benefits**

You may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to future Drama teachers and their students.

**9. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

**10. Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your status at your institution.

**11. Confidentiality**

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database.

The only Personal Information that will be recorded in initial data, will be the names of participants. There is no need to collect additional Personal Information, such as addresses or date of birth. At no point, will identifiable information be shared outside the study team. Participants will not be named in any reports, publications or presentations that may come from this study.

**12. Contacts for Further Information**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca). If you have any questions about this study, please contact Megan E. Johnston at XXX or my supervisor: Professor Zheng Zhang at XXX.

**13. Publication**

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact Megan E. Johnston at XXX.

**14. Consent**

You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by signing and returning the attached consent form.

*This letter is yours to keep for future reference.*

## **Appendix B: Interview Questions for Teachers**

1. Tell me about your background. How did you come to be a teacher? How long have you been teaching?
2. Why did you decide to teach Drama? How long have you been teaching Drama?
3. What are some of the required aims and expectations of the Drama courses you teach?
4. What literacy learning opportunities do Drama courses offer students (if any) and how?
5. What, if any, assignments, activities, units, lessons, etc. do you use to purposely incorporate literacy learning into your classroom?
6. What identity investment opportunities do Drama courses offer students (if any) and how?
7. What, if any, assignments, activities, units, lessons, etc. do you use to purposely incorporate identity investment into your classroom?
8. In what ways do you feel supported by your Department/School/School Board when it comes to what you're offering in Drama courses?
9. What sort of professional development have you been able to participate in that relates to secondary Drama courses? Was it covered by your school or school board?
10. What are the major influences on your classroom and your Drama programming? (e.g. policy documents, educational ideologies)
11. What are some of the successes you've had within your Drama classroom?  
Anything specific to literacy or identity investment?
12. What are some of the challenges you've faced within you Drama classroom?  
Anything specific to literacy or identity investment?

## **Appendix C: Email Script for Recruitment**

Greetings,

I am currently reaching out to my fellow Drama teachers to gather participants for my research. This research is for my Master's Thesis at Western University. I would like to invite you to participate in this research study regarding the affordances of secondary school Drama courses. You are being invited to participate because you teach secondary school Drama in Ontario, specifically ADA1O or ADA2O, using the Ontario curriculum.

Attached you will find a Letter of Information and a Consent Form. If you would like to be interviewed for this study, you can contact me by replying directly to this email or by telephone. Furthermore, should you know of any other Drama teachers who may be interested in participating in this study, please feel free to forward this information to them.

If you have any additional questions after reading the attached forms, please feel free to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Megan E. Johnston



## Appendix D: Ethics Approval



**Western  
Research**

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board  
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Zheng Zhang  
**Department & Institution:** Education, Western University

**NMREB File Number:** 109227  
**Study Title:** Literacy and Identity Investment in Secondary Drama Courses: Using narrative inquiry to investigate teacher perceptions of the affordances of secondary Drama courses in Ontario

**NMREB Initial Approval Date:** May 24, 2017  
**NMREB Expiry Date:** May 24, 2018

**Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:**

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Letter of Information & Consent		2017/05/14
Recruitment Items	Appendix 4: Email Script	2017/05/14
Instruments	Appendix 3 - Interview Questions for Teachers. Received April 5, 2017.	
Western University Protocol	Received May 17, 2017	

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.



## Appendix E: Ethics Continuing Approval



Western  
Research

**Date:** 30 April 2018

**To:** Dr. Zheng Zhang

**Project ID:** 109227

**Study Title:** Literacy and Identity Investment in Secondary Drama Courses: Using narrative inquiry to investigate teacher perceptions of the affordances of secondary Drama courses in Ontario

**Application Type:** Continuing Ethics Review (CER) Form

**Review Type:** Delegated

**Meeting Date:** May 4, 2018

**Date Approval Issued:** 30/Apr/2018

**REB Approval Expiry Date:** 24/May/2019

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Dear Dr. Zheng Zhang,

The Western University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the application. This study, including all currently approved documents, has been re-approved until the expiry date noted above.

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

*Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).*

# Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Megan E. Johnston

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** York University  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
2005-2009 B.A.

The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2009-2010 B.Ed.

The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2015-2018 M.A.

**Honours and Awards:** AER Graduate Scholarship for Literacy Studies in Education  
2015-2016

**Related Work Experience** Secondary School Arts & English Department Head  
Thames Valley District School Board  
2017-present

Secondary School Teacher  
Thames Valley District School Board  
2010-present

Secondary School Teacher  
London District Catholic School Board  
2014-2016