“MEN TO THE RESCUE” – THE INFLUENCE OF MALE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON BOYS’ LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

(Spine Title: THE INFLUENCE OF MALE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON BOYS’ LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT)
(Thesis Format: Monograph)

By

Margaret Anne Watson

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

© Anne Watson 2012

www.manaraa.com

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

Co-Supervisor

_____
Dr. Wayne Martino

Co-Supervisor

_____
Dr. Michael Kehler

Supervisory Committee

_____
Dr. Perry Klein

Examiners

_____
Dr. Donna E. Alvermann

_____
Dr. Jason Brown

_____
Dr. Alison Lee

_____
Dr. Goli M. Rezai-Rashti

The thesis by

Margaret Anne Watson

entitled:

"MEN TO THE RESCUE" – THE INFLUENCE OF MALE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON BOYS' LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Date_____

_____
Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

www.manaraa.com

Abstract

In light of current debates and media-generated concerns about the impact of feminization on boys' literacy achievement and in particular the call for male teachers to address this problem, this thesis investigates the influence of male teachers in terms of their capacity to influence positively boys' literacy achievement. This Ontario study created "spaces" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 23) for secondary-school male English teachers and their male students to speak about the multiple and complex contextual and pedagogical factors (i.e., teacher knowledge, socioeconomics, streaming) influencing their experiences in the secondary-school English classroom. By drawing on feminist poststructural, Foucauldian and critical masculinities frameworks, this research examines the nature of particular truth claims about the influence of male English teachers in terms of their capacity to influence boys' literacy achievement in their classrooms.

Given the regime of accountability, driven by a neoliberal agenda, which relies on a single measure (high-stakes test scores) to determine boys' disadvantage, a qualitative case-study approach has been adopted to gather more nuanced context-specific and school-related data. Unlike the quantitative data as reported by educational bodies such and the EQAO, this research does not seek to make generalizable claims about male English teachers and boys as homogeneous groups. Instead, its research design and its guiding questions create an opportunity for "widening" what counts as evidence in boys' literacy debates (Luke et al., 2010).

This research found that the majority of boys who participated (twenty-five out of twenty-nine) indicated that their literacy achievement cannot be reduced to the singularity of the teacher's gender. These boys pointed to their own experiences with particular teachers, both male and female, to identify a number of gender non-specific factors to account for their

www.manaraa.com

connections or disconnections with their teachers and the potentiality of such pedagogical relations to influence their literacy achievement. This research also found that the male English teacher participants embody multiple masculinities. Their individual histories, biographies, geographical locals, teaching contexts, masculinity politics and philosophies as English teachers are intertwined and complex, calling into question essentialist claims in which teacher effectiveness or influence is reduced to a biological basis of male embodiment. In particular, this research draws attention to the pedagogical practices of teachers which are influenced by multiple and complex factors. These practices are understood to be critical factors for boys' engagement and achievement in secondary-school English language arts.

This research makes a significant contribution in that it crosses a number of fields: boys' education and policy, English language arts education and critical sociology of masculinities. It provides a lens to rethink assumptions that underpin the call for male English teachers as a remediation strategy for improving boys' literacy achievement.

KEY WORDS: male teachers; boys' literacy underachievement; secondary school English; masculinities

www.manaraa.com

Dedication

To Larry and Kurt
who remind me every day that
boys are *not* just boys.

www.manaraa.com

Acknowledgements

Although my name stands alone on the cover of this dissertation, it would not have come to fruition without the help of many people. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the teachers and boys who gave of their time and shared their voices. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Wayne Martino and Dr. Michael Kehler. I could not have asked for more knowledgeable, supportive and patient advisors. Their commitment to my growth as an academic and the time they dedicated to this research are much appreciated. When I look back on my days as a graduate student, I will always think of them and smile. Thank you for always believing in me.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Perry Klein. His feedback always reminded me to question the assumptions I make and to look at my work through a different lens. Carol-Ann Lane should also be recognized for her willingness to help with the finishing touches and Wendy Crocker for sharing in my journey; I will always treasure our friendship.

I also feel fortunate to have received funding for this research in the form of a Doctoral Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Research Council. It enabled me to take time away from teaching to complete this degree, and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge this support.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family. First, my mom and dad for always believing in me and teaching me that anything is possible with a bit of hard work. Next, I must thank my partner Larry. I could not ask for a more supportive and loving husband. Thanks for keeping the house running while I was glued to my computer.

www.manaraa.com

Last but not least, I must acknowledge my son Kurt. He is my inspiration. As I watch him grow as a reader, an athlete and a young man, he reminds me to challenge the norms that limit the way we think and reaffirms my belief that anything is possible. Thank you.

www.manaraa.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Title …..	**i**
Certificate of Examination…….	**ii**
Abstract……	**iii**
Dedication……	**v**
Acknowledgements…… ……	**vi**
Table of Contents ……	**viii**
List of Appendices ..……	**xii**
Chapter One – Introduction ……..	1
Research Problem and Questions ……	2
Thesis Overview	3
The Political Contexts Underlying this Research	5
Neoliberal Accountability and High Stakes Testing.....	5
Evidence of Boys' Disadvantage	10
Dominant Discourses and the Framing of Boys' Underachievement.....	13
Boys are essentially different than girls	13
Boys as victims of feminization	15
Schools need to be boy-friendly	17
Beyond Gender as an Explanatory Framework	21
English Language Arts Education	24
Teaching English in the Ontario Context.....	31
Why this Research Now?.....	33
A Reflexive Narrative to Situate my Voice as Researcher	39
Conclusion	41
Chapter Two – Theoretical Framework	42
Feminist Poststructuralist Theory	43
Interrogating essentialist mindsets.....	44
Interrogating discourses.....	46
Understanding power.....	48
Foucault's Conception of Power Relations, Subjectivity, Normalization & Discourse...	49
Power relations and subjectivity	50
Norms as regulatory apparatus.....	52
Discourse.....	55
Discursive formations and practices	56
Continuities.....	59
Theory of Masculinities	62
Rejecting sex role models	62
Embracing multiple masculinities.....	64
In Summary.....	66

www.manaraa.com

Chapter Three – Reviewing the Literature 67

Feminization of Teaching 67
English as a "soft" or Feminine Subject 71
Male Teachers and Boys' Literacy Achievement 75
Male Teachers as Role Models for Boys 80
Conclusion 90

Chapter Four – Methodology 92

Qualitative Inquiry 94
Qualitative Case Study Design 97
The Participants 98
Data Collection 101
Data Analysis 106
Ethical Considerations 112
Conclusion 114

Chapter Five – Male English Teachers 115

A Brief Overview of the Teacher Participants 117
The Case of Mr. Polonius 119
Context – Upwardly mobile school 119
His philosophy as an English teacher 120
Heteronormative privilege 124
Ideology versus evidence 128
The Case of Mr. Denver 131
"My Caribbean background as a man" 131
His authorized practice 132
His performance of masculinity 137
The Case of Mr. Andrews 140
Context – Downtown Core School 140
His philosophy and practice as an English teacher 140
The Case of Mr. Baker 148
Context – Community School 148
A male English teacher as mentor 149
Factors informing his practice 152
The Case of Mr. Parker 157
Context – Academia School 157
Acknowledging his biography 160
His pedagogy 163
Embodiment of complexities 167
Conclusion 169

www.manaraa.com

Chapter Six – The Boys **171**

Boys who say that Gender is Not an Influential Factor for their Achievement 174
Joel 176
Elton 181
Border Walkers 184
Ivan 187
Steve and Ross 191
Boys who indicated that Gender has a Positive Influence on their Achievement 197
Kent 197
Devin 201
Abdul 203
Moe 205
Conclusion 208

Chapter Seven – The Case of Mr. Alonzo **210**

Small Town School 214
Mr. Alonzo 217
His pedagogy 217
His views on role modelling 224
Student achievement 228
The Boys 232
Berk and Jack 235
Berk's and Jack's teacher 235
Capital and achievement 238
Michael 240
Michael's English teachers 241
Essential discourses 243
Aaron 247
Aaron's English teachers 249
Control is a necessity 250
Jason 251
Jason's English teachers 252
The impact of streaming 253
Evan 257
The qualities of a good teacher 257
Conclusion 259

Chapter Eight – Conclusion **262**

Research Questions 263
Research Findings 265
Boys' understandings of their teachers' gender as a source of influence 265
Male English teachers' subjectivities and practice 266

www.manaraa.com

The importance of context-specific data to inform education policy 268
Research Significance and Implications 269
Limitations 272
Research Opportunities 274
Final Thoughts 275

References 277
Appendices 312
Curriculum Vitae 327

www.manaraa.com

List of Appendices

Appendix A - Letter of Information and Consent Form for Teachers …….. 312

Appendix B - Letter of Information and Consent Form for Students 316

Appendix C- Sample Interview Questions for the Teachers and Students 320

Appendix D- Approval for Ph.D. Thesis Proposal and UWO Ethics Approval 323

Appendix E- Curriculum Vitae..... 326

www.manaraa.com

Chapter One

Introduction

"It is important to have men in teaching because, like the father in a home, a male influence is important in life. And I think they are essential at every age."

(A Windsor student, Ontario College of Teachers, 2004, p. 15)

The recruitment of male teachers as role models is discursively recognized above as a "common sense" approach to addressing boys' underachievement in school. Discourses, such as this, establish men, on the basis of their sex, as better able than women to provide the "influence" boys need. The implication is that the biological make-up of men and women positions them as binaries, challenging the ability of female teachers to "truly" understand boys' nature as learners. Assumptions exist concerning boys and girls as different kinds of learners (Millard, 1997). These assumptions, which are aligned with notions of biological determinism, often go unquestioned and are presented as scientific "truth" (Foucault, 1984). Such discourses, although appealing because of their simplicity, conflate sex and gender, perpetuate hierarchies and gender binaries and impede reforms that look beyond gender to a consideration of other critical contributing factors such as social class, race and the nature of pedagogy.

This dissertation focuses specifically on secondary-school male English teachers' influence on boys' literacy achievement. In light of current debates and media-generated concerns about the impact of feminization on boys' literacy achievement and the particular call for male teachers to address this problem (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004), I am interested to investigate the viewpoint that male teachers influence positively boys' literacy achievement. I draw on specific analytic frameworks for investigating this topic that are informed by feminist poststructuralist, Foucauldian and critical masculinities perspectives. Such analytic frameworks provide me with conceptual tools for addressing the nature of particular "truth" claims and the

www.manaraa.com

regimes of practice in which they are implicated. Given the importance of secondary-school English in relation to preparing students for high-stakes test such as the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), this research focuses specifically on the secondary-school English classroom (see Ruggles Gere & Berebitsky, 2009). Colarusso (2010) also points out, "In practice, English teachers bear the brunt of responsibility for preparing students to take standardized tests …" (436). Thus, this research aims to provide more of an empirical basis for the proliferation of truth claims about the capacity of male English teachers as role models to influence positively boys' literacy achievement. In short, my aim is to provide a more detailed and theoretically-informed research-base for investigating such claims.

Research Problem and Questions

In this dissertation, I investigate claims about the capacity of male English teachers in the secondary-school context to influence positively boys' achievement in English. Although reform initiatives targeting male English teachers exist, the empirical basis for such an approach is unclear (See Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Carrington, Tymms, & Merrell, 2008; Francis, Skelton, Carrington, Hutchings, Read, & Hall, 2008; Francis, 2008; Jones, 2006, 2007; Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004; Ontario College of Teachers, 2004; Pepperell & Smedley, 1998; Skelton, 2002, 2007). This approach fails to explicitly illustrate the regime of truth for framing and setting the limits for thinking about how male English teachers influence boys' literacy achievement (Foucault, 1984; also see Sternod, 201l). Because male teachers are presented as naturally better suited to relate to boys, the recruitment of male teachers as a reform strategy often goes unquestioned (Sternod, 2011). The research questions for this study, therefore, have been designed to address the empirical basis for such claims. In so doing, this dissertation seeks to incorporate the triangulated perspectives and voices of both male

www.manaraa.com

teachers and the boys in their classrooms as a source of "depth" (Patton, 2002, p. 14) in these literacy debates. Through their voices, we have an opportunity to "understand the world as seen by the respondents" and to gain some insight into their ontological perspectives of the phenomenon of boys' literacy under-achievement (Patton, 2002, p. 21). The following questions position such voices at the centre of this research:

1. What evidence exists to support or challenge the claims that male teachers influence positively boys' achievement as literacy learners?
2. What can we learn from boys themselves about the influence of male teachers in terms of their capacity to improve their literacy achievement? For example, do high achieving boys attribute their literacy achievement to the influence of a teacher on the basis of gender affiliation? How do low achieving boys explain the factors that contribute to their underachievement?
3. What are the factors that influence male English teachers' pedagogy?
4. How do male English teachers understand their capacity for influence concerning boys' achievement in English?
5. What can be learned through a detailed case analysis of one male English teacher and the boys in his class about the significant factors contributing to boys' underachievement in English language arts?

Thesis Overview

The research problem is explored in eight chapters. In chapter one, I introduce the topic and outline the research questions that guided my inquiry. I also provide a context for this research by describing the politics of neoliberalism and high-stakes testing and outlining dominant discourses that position boys as biologically-determined, victims of feminism,

www.manaraa.com

grounded in backlash politics and in need of a more boy-friendly learning environment (see Mills, 2003). Given the mandates of two policy-informing documents: *Narrowing the Gap: Attracting Men to Teaching* and *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (see Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a) in the Ontario context, I argue that this research is both timely and salient. In addition, I discuss my decision to focus on the English classroom in the secondary-school context, again given the understanding that literacy instruction ultimately falls in the hands of English teachers in the secondary-school context and that boys' literacy underachievement is often linked to discourses, which identify English language arts as feminine (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Foster, Kimmel & Skelton, 2001; Martino, 1997; Pirie, 2002). Finally, I have devoted some space to positioning myself reflexively within this research. In chapter two, I identify and discuss the theoretical frameworks that inform this research. Chapter three is the literature review. It provides an overview of the relevant and significant empirical research that has been conducted in the field under the following headings: *Feminization of teaching, English as a "soft" or feminine subject, Male teachers and boys' literacy achievement* and *Male teachers as role models for boys*. This literature review points to current gaps in the literature and provides a justification for both the focus and the methodology used for this study. Chapter four details and provides justification for the methodology and methods used for this research. Chapter five concentrates on the male English teacher participants. In this chapter, I examine how male English teachers perceive themselves as educators and the discourses that inform their practices. Chapter six focuses on the data collected during my interviews with the boys who participated in this research. In particular, it unpacks their responses to my question: Do you think your teacher's gender has any influence on your interest and achievement in English language arts? Chapter seven focuses on the case of Mr. Alonzo to enable a more in-

www.manaraa.com

depth understanding of a particular male English teacher in context (see Anderson, 2006; Keddie & Mills, 2007). In the final chapter, the conclusion, I reiterate the aims of this research, synthesize its findings, draw attention to the study's limitations and discuss its significance and implications as policy-informing evidence (see Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a) before providing my concluding thoughts.

The Political Contexts Underlying this Research

Concerns about boys' literacy achievement have garnered significant attention since the 1990's (Epstein, Elwood, Hey & Maw, 1998). It has been well established that girls outperform boys on literacy benchmark or standardized tests such as the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). While boys' underachievement is not a new phenomenon (Cohen, 1998; Coulter & Greig, 2008), the current culture of "performativity" (Lingard, 2003) driven by neoliberal high-profile, high-stakes testing has been used to generate new concerns about boys' lack of achievement in school, in particular as literacy learners (see Keddie, 2007). Luke, Green and Kelly (2010) argue that this framing of what counts as evidence and equity is far too narrow. It is problematic not only because it relies on a single decontextualized measure (high stakes test scores), but also because the data, by focusing on the single category of gender, silences significant categories of influence such as class and race (also see Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012b).

Neoliberal Accountability and High Stakes Testing

According to Hursh (2007), neoliberalism has changed the way we "conceptualize the purpose of education" (p. 493; also see Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012b). More specifically, for the purposes of this study, it has determined what counts as evidence of boys' underachievement

www.manaraa.com

and is frequently the basis upon which calls for more male teachers are founded. According to Davies and Saltmarsh (2007), neoliberal accountability is rooted in a "'survival of the fittest' [belief system - it] unleashes competition among individuals, among institutions and among nations, freeing them from what are construed as the burdensome chains of social justice and social responsibility" (p. 3). By shifting the focus of education away from "developing political, ethical and aesthetic citizens" (Hursh, 2001) and positioning the logic of the market at the centre, we have come to understand the aim of education in terms of globalization, competition, efficiency, accountability and performance (also see Tabb, 2002). This language of marketization has become so intertwined with our conception of education that it is ostensibly presented as unavoidable or natural and often goes unquestioned, as if no other recourse exists (see Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007). Thus, the political agendas underpinning this conception are concealed. Rose (1999) contends that governments are continually seeking "a form of truth – establish a kind of ethical basis for its actions" (p. 27). In other words, they attempt to rationalize their principles, authority, and actions through language. Thus, neoliberalism is understood as "certain rationality … a way of linking up various tactics [and] integrating them in thought so that they appear to partake in coherent logic" (p. 27). In the case of neoliberalism, tactics or "strategies to create and sustain a 'market'" form a basis for its rationalization (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 199). As a result, education is recognized as essentially an economic activity.

During my teaching career (1989 – present), I have experienced first-hand the effects of the neoliberal mandate in the Ontario context. The Conservative government (1996 – 2003) under the banner of the "Common Sense Revolution" constructed a "useful crisis," as Minister of Education John Snobelen was recorded saying (see Brennan, 1995; Krueger, 1995), to enable significant restructuring to the province's education system. Claiming that our education system

www.manaraa.com

was broken (Gidney, 1999; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012b), this government reorganized educational management and governance, i.e., principals were removed from teacher unions, school boards were amalgamated and decision-making was centralized; assessment methods and reporting systems were restructured; standardization with the "New Curriculum" and high-stakes testing was increased; local funding cut; the privatization of public education was advocated, and plans were made to introduce teacher testing. In keeping with the new marketization of education, performance, efficiency and accountability became the dominant discourses in education.

In 1996, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was established, based on a recommendation by the Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning. Its mandate is as follows:

> The agency is dedicated to enhancing the quality and accountability of the education system in Ontario and to work with the education community. This will be achieved through student assessments that produce objective, reliable information, through the public release of this information and through the profiling of the value and use of EQAO data across the province (EQAO, 2012a).

In keeping with this mandate, the EQAO created the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), a province-wide test designed to assess the reading and writing skills of students in grade ten. Since 2001, the EQAO has been responsible for the design, administration and scoring of the OSSLT, a graduation requirement for all students in Ontario. As mentioned above, the EQAO is also responsible for the public dissemination of the results. This dissemination, by privileging gender as a significant marker of success or failure (see EQAO, 2010), has played a critical role in shaping public understanding of literacy achievement and created an acute

www.manaraa.com

awareness of a gender gap in favour of girls. Through the reporting of this single measurement, boys, as a homogeneous group, have gained a "legitimacy and visibility" as disadvantaged literacy learners (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012b, p. 7; also see Martino, 2011).

This political agenda and its marketization of education is critical to the context of this study, as it is understood as underpinning discourses of boys as the "new disadvantaged" (Epstein *et al.*, 1998: Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Martino, 2008a; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Rowan, Knobel, Bigum & Lankshear, 2002; Titus, 2004), driving reform initiatives designed to make school more "boy-friendly" of which male teachers are an important element (Lingard, Martino & Mills, 2009; Martino & Kehler, 2006; Sternod, 2011) and creating a platform for boys' education as an industry. Weaver-Hightower (2003) argues that the focus on boys' education is interconnected to the "processes of privatization and accountability" (p. 476; also see Froese-Germain, 2006). High-stakes testing, introduced as part of the neoliberal agenda, is used to rank schools through the publishing of test scores. This ranking becomes a marketing tool (schools compete with other schools for students), putting pressure on school administration and teachers to prepare students to be successful on such tests and therefore prioritize raising results. Weaver-Hightower (2003) points out that:

> Because boys outnumber girls in the lower test score ranks, funding will go disproportionately to them; moreover, advances in equalizing the curriculum, particularly in language arts, may be rolled back to better suit boys …educational reforms championed by the New Right have created a "structural backlash" … that operates to challenge feminist victories without having to engage in explicit antifeminist rhetoric (p. 477).

www.manaraa.com

Thus in this competitive environment, literacy test scores are used to draw attention to boys in ways that limit our understanding of equity (see Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007; Froese-Germain, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). It has also mobilized an entire industry of text, which Mills (2003) calls "backlash blockbusters," boy-friendly novels including graphic novels and teaching resources to cater to boys' interests. For example, a quick Google search generates a number of websites marketing novels (www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/boy-friendly; http://bostonpl.bibliocommons.com/list/show/81342249_pigspen/81665600_boy-friendly_books), books focusing on boy-friendly classrooms (www.boysproject.net/classrooms.html), and teaching resources (http://www.sch.im/boysachievement/Site/Home_files/BOY%20FRIENDLY%20UNITS%20FINAL.pdf and http://www.ascd.org/SearchResults.aspx?s=how%20to%20teach%20boys&c=1&n=10&p=0).

In this market economy, gender binaries are naturalized through discourses and literacy practices and "[t]he desirable subject of educational discourse is increasingly one whose gender performativity and literate practices are aligned to (and indeed, reproduce) normative versions of the idealized gendered economic subject" (see Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007, p. 8). Butler (2004) points out,

> If gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint (p. 1).

Thus, the way in which boys are understood to "do" gender is consistent with recognizable norms, which render all boys the same. In this way, strategies such as the implementation of boy-friendly curricula and the recruitment of more male teachers as role models are adopted to enable

www.manaraa.com

boys, who according to test scores are the lowest achievers, to be more competitive with their female counterparts, without acknowledging the differences among boys and among girls. By establishing this evidentiary basis about boys' disadvantage as part of a neoliberal political agenda, strategies are adopted to remasculinize the English classroom, as the source of the problem is considered to be related to the nature of schooling and English language arts as feminized domains. In fact, Weaver-Hightower (2003) suggests, that recuperative masculinity politics through the "*structure* [original emphasis] of its [neoliberalism] educational reforms, particularly the interconnected processes of privatization and accountability, have accomplished more than its antifeminist rhetoric ever could" (p. 476). The neoliberal agenda, through the reporting of test scores in terms of gender, has given claims about the need to remasculinize schools to address boys' learning needs legitimacy. Weaver-Hightower (2003) suggests that neoliberalism has been able to mobilize a backlash agenda more effectively than men's rights groups because it has quantitative data (test scores) to support its claims.

Evidence of Boys' Disadvantage

Despite the call for a "more nuanced analysis built on a disaggregation of performance data so that specific groups of boys and girls who are not performing well at school can be identified" (Martino, 2003, p. 12; also see Collins, Kenway, & McLeod, 2000; Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2002; Lingard, Martino, Mills & Bahr, 2002), literacy success and failure is often determined by a single measure and reported in terms of gender, without acknowledging other contributing factors such as class, race, ethnicity and geographical location. According to the EQAO (2011) in Canada and the NAEP (2009) in the United States, female students consistently score higher than boys on their respective high-stakes literacy tests. In 2011, 87% of fully participating female students and 80% of fully participating male students in

www.manaraa.com

Ontario were successful on the OSSLT. This achievement gap has been quite stable since 2007: 6-8% (EQAOb, 2011, p. 64). This trend is also supported by the PISA test results. For example, girls out-performed boys in reading in all countries participating in 2009, with an average advantage of 39 score points across Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD, 2010). OECD (2010) also reported data about reading attitudes to explain gender gaps: boys enjoy reading less than girls and girls are almost twice as likely to report reading fiction as boys (pp. 89-90).

Few would debate the need for evidence as a basis for educational reform; however, what counts as evidence and how that evidence is interpreted are two critical questions often missing from educational debates (see Luke *et al.*, 2010). Although evidence concerning boys' achievement or lack of it might be gathered from multiple sources to compile a more comprehensive understanding of the issues, numbers, reported by high-stakes tests such as the OSSLT and PISA, remain virtually incontestable. Thus, the processes and politics underpinning high-stakes testing and the categorical reporting of student scores are invisible, and certain truth claims about boys' achievement are legitimized by the "authority" and "objectivity" associated with numbers (see Rose, 1999). Luke *et al.* (2010) point out that the formation of these categories is "far from 'natural' or 'transparent'" (p. xi) and argue that "educational policy cannot and does not entail the unmediated, direct translation of factual, empirical claims into direct actions" (p. xiv). In a similar vein, Rose (1999) argues, "It is a matter of analyzing what counts as truth, who has the power to define, the role of different authorities of truth, and epistemological, institutional and technical conditions for the production and circulation of truths" (p. 30). Thus, it is important to consider how certain evidence is privileged, interpreted as a "common sense" approach and used to rationalize boy-friendly agendas such as those

www.manaraa.com

involving advocacy for more male teachers as a basis for improving boys' literacy achievement. In other words, we must ask how the system's "normative goals" inform policy-use of evidence (Luke *et al.*, 2010, p. xv).

In this section, I have attempted to locate my research within a particular context and illustrate how the concerns of this research stem from the mobilization and legitimization of certain "truth" claims about boys as *the new disadvantaged* (Epstein *et al*., 1998: Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Martino, 2008a; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Rowan *et al*., 2002; Titus, 2004). I have also attempted to show that reliance on a single measure such the OSSLT as evidence is far too narrow, thus necessitating a richer, contextualized understanding of issues surrounding some boys' underachievement if effective reforms are to be implemented. Luke *et al.* (2010) suggest that what counts as evidence in education needs to be broadened rather than narrowed: "To address questions of equity requires rich, interpretive, and evolving sciences, not a narrow technical approach that invites capture by particular doctrinal and generic approaches to systems reform, public policy, and institutional governance" (p. xv). Connolly (2008) concurs stating that it is critical that we "scrutinise more readily the products of quantitative work" and suggests that the evidence produced through qualitative research has much to add to the numbers generated through quantitative means (p. 258). This research aims to provide localized, contextualized narratives as evidence to broaden our understanding of the boys' literacy debate and raise critical questions about the way that discourses, relying on common sense assumptions and scores collected from a regime of standardized testing, strategically position boys as a category of disadvantage in need of male English teachers as role models to address their literacy underachievement. In this way, it aims to produce a more "theoretically-informed empiricism" through its engagement with existing literature in the field and through undertaking qualitative

www.manaraa.com

research that attends to the problematic of context specificity as central to developing a more in-depth understanding the problem of boys' literacy achievement (Anyon, 2009, p. 2).

Dominant Discourses and the Framing of Boys' Underachievement

For Foucault (1972) discourse refers to the "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). These discourses, if dominant, constitute a "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). For this research, an understanding of the discourses that have shaped our understanding of boys as literacy subjects and how they influence educational reform is crucial. Thus, to further elaborate the context in which this research is situated, I will focus on how three discourses, in particular, frame both the problems and the "fixes" surrounding boys' underachievement as literacy learners.

Boys are essentially different than girls. Although some research challenging popular "neurosexism" (see Fine, 2010; Eliot, 2009) exists, proponents of essentialist mindsets continue to argue that "there is something fundamentally different about the way men and women think, feel and act, and that these differences are tied to their different biological and psychological make-up" (Rowan *et al*., 2002, p. 29). This understanding of men and women, which is espoused by the media and many "backlash blockbusters" (see Mills, 2003), is appealing due to its simplicity (see Skelton, 2001b). The physical differences, signified by the male and female body, make arguments about emotional, psychological and intellectual differences between the two sexes appear logical and natural. For example, Gurian (2002) argues that "a boy is, in large part, hard-wired to be who he is" (p. 103). In other words, a boy's biology determines who he is and how he interacts in the world. Sax (2005) concurs, pointing to the hard-wired sex differences in boys and girls to explain their different learning styles. The claims made in popular texts such as these are seldom challenged because they are supported by biological science. For instance,

www.manaraa.com

Gurian (2002) claims that one of the reasons that boys do less well in reading is because they have a smaller corpus callosum than girls. He writes, "The brain that will read better is the brain that can draw more heavily on both sides of the brain at once, which is what reading requires. The smaller corpus callosum in boys is also one of the reasons boys find it more difficult to identify with accuracy the emotions on another person's face" (p. 110). Likewise, Sax (2005) claims that girls develop an earlier connection between the amygdala, a structure of the brain, and the cerebral cortex which enables them to talk about feelings earlier than boys. When differences between boys and girls are understood to be biologically determined, they simply need to be acknowledged, accommodated and valued so that both boys and girls might be treated equitably in school (Rowan *et al.*, 2002). Thus, the recruitment of male English teachers who are better suited to understand and therefore accommodate the learning interests and needs of boys appears to be a plausible solution; however, a closer investigation of such claims reveals "how little concrete evidence there is for the popular idea that there's a male brain hard-wired to be good at understanding the world and a female brain hard-wired to understand people" (Fine as cited by Ireland, 2010, p. 1).

Eliot (2009) also argues that although boys and girls differ in many ways, they are not hard-wired: "The truth is that neuroscientists have identified very few reliable differences between boys' and girls' brains" (p. 32). In fact, she contends that women do not have a larger corpus callosum, as suggested by Gurian (2002; also see Fausto-Sterling, 2000); that the "actual ability difference" between boys and girls is "quite small," and that "gender is a very poor predictor of any individual student's performance" (p. 33). Eliot does not suggest that there are no biological differences between boys and girls, but contends that "environmental factors" play an important part in shaping gender gaps, i.e., opportunities for boys to talk, read and write and

www.manaraa.com

opportunities for girls to throw, catch, construct to develop their spatial skills (p. 33). Currently, our understanding of boys' and girls' natural predisposition toward certain activities limits their opportunities to develop skills beyond stereotypical notions and also magnifies what are understood to be the innate tendencies of boys and girls. For boys, in particular, she contends that choices are limited. Girls are taught that they can do anything, while boys' choices are restricted to activities that are considered appropriately masculine.

Boys as victims of feminization. Within this context of what has been described as a "moral panic" about failing boys (Epstein *et al.*, 1998; Hall & Coles, 2001; Rowan *et al*., 2002; Sanford, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Titus, 2004), supporters of recuperative masculinity politics (Lingard & Douglas, 1999) and notions of boys and girls as competing victims have captured the attention of the media and educational stakeholders. Those supporting a recuperative masculinity politics contend that the absence of fathers and male mentors and the predominance of female teachers are connected to boys' failure in school (see Biddulph, 1994; Bly, 1991; Pollack, 1998). They also point to the essential biological and psychological differences between boys and girls to account for boys' unwillingness to engage with school-based literacy (see Biddulph, 1994, 1998; Bly, 1991) and rail against feminizing influences that are turning boys into "soft males" (Mills, 2003, p. 65). The competing victim syndrome, also, works to construct boys as victims, but in a different manner. It maintains that boys and men face similar injustices to that of girls and women. By silencing the struggles that girls continue to face, it claims that the feminized environment has led to girls' success but interferes with boys' achievement. Such politics "construes men as the 'victims of feminism' and [seeks to] return to a societal arrangement perceived to have existed prior to feminist politics" (Lingard, 2003, p. 33; also see Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Lingard *et al*., 2009).

www.manaraa.com

Mills (2003) argues that this construction of boys as victims of feminist gains, in large part, has been shaped by "backlash blockbusters," texts that "seek to inform educators and parents about the best ways to raise boys," which are "frequently cited in popular feature articles on men and boys" and have been "big sellers in different parts of the world" (pp. 59-60). According to Mills, the popularity and wide-dissemination of these texts have enabled the proliferation of discourses about gender that "work against" the productive learning needs of girls and some boys (p. 60). These texts, although not homogenous in their approach to masculinity issues, tend to be driven by recuperative masculinity politics and a "competing victim syndrome" (Cox 1997), both of which are characterized by an essentialist mindset and an understanding of boys and girls as binaries with opposing educational needs (Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Martino & Meyenn, 2001; Skelton, 2001a). Thus, popular discourses, grounded in such politics, perpetuate notions of boys' essential masculinity as a basis for counteracting the inimical and detrimental effects of feminization. They argue that the biological make-up of boys predisposes them to particular learning styles, interests and environments, and that schools simply need to "relearn how to value traditional masculine skills and abilities" (Rowan et al., 2002, p. 31).

These polemics facilitate claims about the English classroom as a feminized domain of teaching and its failure to address boys' "natural" learning interests and needs (Bouchard, Boily, & Proulx, 2003; Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Martino, 2008a; Rowan *et al*., 2002). The existence of more female teachers in "English, humanities and arts and drama departments" (Lingard *et al.*, 2009, p. 119) and the curriculum supposedly failing to address boys' interests have been pinpointed as major contributing factors to boys' unwillingness to engage with school-based literacy (Rowan *et al*., 2002). Pirie (2002) also points out that English is understood to be

www.manaraa.com

"unmanly" (p.5) and that many boys do not "feel as comfortable in English as girls do" (p. 3). Weaver-Hightower (2003) challenges such claims, arguing that the,

> 'feminine' nature of the English curriculum is debatable at best, for many of the authors covered in contemporary schooling … are still from the 'dead White men' camp, and many of the themes are masculine or sexist and the protagonists are male (p. 486).

He contends that if we accept this argument, then "increasing the 'fit' of the curriculum to boys' concerns will only exacerbate existing inequalities" (pp. 486-487).

Many researchers (see Bouchard *et al.*, 2003; Foster *et al.*, 2001; Froese-Germain, 2006; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Lingard *et al*., 2009; Martino & Frank, 2006; Martino & Kehler, 2006, 2007; Mills, 2003; Rowan *et al*., 2002; Titus, 2004; Weaver-Hightower, 2003) call into question the framing of debates which implies links between the feminization of schooling and boys' failure to achieve. They suggest that a more informed basis for pedagogical reforms is needed; however, the perception that boys are disadvantaged because schooling and in particular the secondary-school English classroom is better suited to address girls' interests and strengths continues to inform remediation strategies.

Schools need to be boy-friendly. Not only have the discourses, as briefly outlined above, influenced our understanding of the "boy problem" (Martino & Kehler, 2006), but also they have been employed to advocate for a more boy-friendly learning environment in school. Boys' literacy underachievement is often identified as a failure of schools, and in this case the English classroom, to cater to boys' innate strengths and interests as literacy learners. Schools are failing boys by not preparing them to achieve to the same extent as girls on high-stakes tests such as the OSSLT (see Martino & Kehler, 2007; Martino & Meyenn, 2001). As the majority of

www.manaraa.com

secondary-school English teachers are female, they, by virtue of their sex, are often blamed for failing to accommodate boys' particular learning styles. Mitchell (2004) suggests that the pedagogical approaches typically associated with English language arts cater to the strengths of girls, and suggests that the declining number of males entering teaching only exacerbates the problem as boys then understand English as feminine. Given these sorts of concerns, three dominant approaches are advocated to address boys' literacy underachievement. They are (i) the need for more boy-friendly content and teaching strategies, (ii) the need for single-sex classes in English, and (iii) the need for more male teachers, who are better suited to relate to boys and address their learning needs (Martino & Kehler, 2007, pp. 407-408). For the purposes of this research, the third reform initiative is most salient.

In the 1970's, feminists used sex-role theories to argue that girls need to see more female teachers in science and mathematics if they are to be encouraged to pursue careers in traditionally male professions. They argued that the sex roles of girls could be transformed by changing "expectations in classrooms, setting up new role models, and so on" (Connell, 1995, p. 13). Feminists claimed and continue to claim that schools are "masculinising agencies and that they privilege maleness over females" (Skelton, 2001, p. 170). This approach effectively opened up opportunities for girls in traditionally male-dominated subjects like math and science. Girls were shown, in part through their female teachers as role models and in part through discourses proclaiming that girls can do anything, that they could succeed as mathematicians and scientists if they so desired.

Sex role theory, consequently, has been adopted to address the reluctance of boys to engage and achieve in English language arts. As Weaver-Hightower (2003) coined it as the "boy turn." This perspective appeals to the tacit belief that "boys will be boys" and fuels claims that

www.manaraa.com

male teachers, because they are men, are naturally more suited to cater to the learning needs and interests of boys simply on the basis of gender alignment. As Martino and Kehler (2006) point out, this approach is understood to "ameliorate the emasculating influences of female teachers" (p. 114). The issues influencing boys' lack of engagement and achievement in the English classroom, however, cannot be understood simply as "reverse discrimination" (Martino & Meyenn, 2001, p. 14). English, a subject perceived to be feminized (see Bouchard *et al.*, 2003; Froese-Germain, 2006; Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Martino, 2008a; Martino & Frank, 2006; Martino & Kehler, 2006, 2007; Rowan *et al.*, 2002), does not carry the same status for some boys as subjects like science and mathematics, which are understood to be traditionally masculine domains; therefore, the type of reforms needed to engage some boys in learning opportunities in English class is complex. The limitations placed on boys to be masculine and the incentive to excel in traditionally masculine subject areas make addressing boys' lack of engagement and underachievement in English a much different problem than opening up opportunities for girls to engage and achieve in traditionally male subject domains (see Pirie, 2002). Martino (2008b) argues the need for "analytic frameworks," capable of making sense of the crisis concerning the male teacher shortage, which move beyond the limits of sex-role modeling as a regime of truth (p. 600). He contends that sex role theory is inadequate to elucidate the complexity of gender identity and its influence on students' participation in the curriculum and achievement patterns (also see Francis, 2000; Francis and Skelton, 2005; Segal, 1990).

Discourses about the capacity of male teachers to address the learning needs of boys, which, as already discussed, are informed by neoliberalism, and assumptions about boys' essential nature and schools as feminized institutions are often propagated by the media (Lingard, 2003; Mills, 2003, Titus, 2004; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). For example, the following

www.manaraa.com

news articles propagate concerns about the declining number of men entering the teaching profession and link the male teacher shortage to boys' lack of engagement and underachievement: *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (Mitchell, 2004), *Ontario urged to counter drop in male teachers* (*CBC News*, 2004), *Pupils make more effort with male teachers as they are seen as 'more fair'* (*Daily Mail*, 2010), *Male teachers an endangered species?*(Esplanada, 2009) and *Where Did All the Male Teachers Go? France Worries That Boy Students May Be Suffering* (Pech & Figaro, 2011). These articles repeatedly claim that the declining number of men entering the teaching profession, especially at the elementary level, but not exclusively, is problematic for boys. As a result, the sentiments expressed in these headlines take on the status of "truth," and fuel a sense of crisis about the absence of male teachers as role models for boys. They work to reinforce notions of male bonding and suggest that women, as polar opposites of men based on their biological make-up, struggle to understand the needs of boys. Kindlon and Thompson (1999), for example, write,

> Boys benefit from the presence of male teachers and authority figures as role models of academic scholarship, professional commitment, moral as well as athletic leadership, and emotional literacy. The presence of men can have a tremendously calming effect on boys. When boys feel full acceptance—when they feel that their normal developmental skills and behaviour *are* normal and that others perceive them that way—they engage more meaningfully in the learning experience (p. 50 original emphasis).

Since the claims here do not disrupt common sense understandings of men and women as binaries and subscribe to conceptions of normalization, the politics underpinning such claims go unquestioned; however, as Martino and Kehler (2006) point out, "Absent from such accounts is a

www.manaraa.com

gender analysis regarding how male bonding functions to enforce and legitimate certain hegemonic practices of masculinity that are often policed through femiphobia and homophobia (p. 119; also see Skelton, 2001a). There is also no recognition of the differences amongst men (Mills, 2004, p. 29).

Additionally, there seems to be an understanding that the differences between men and women teachers translate into "distinctly gendered modes of teaching" (Martino & Kehler, 2006, p. 123). Male teachers are understood to be disciplinarians, who are able to breakdown instructions into clear, simple, bite-sized pieces and provide opportunities for more hands-on experiences. Not only is this understanding problematic because it assumes that all men use similar approaches in their classrooms, but also because this pedagogy, as outlined above for example, seems inadequate to prepare boys to "actively participate in a society and labour market that demand high order processing and high levels of interpersonal and emotional literacy" (p. 123; also see Martino & Berill, 2003). The framing of male teachers and boys' literacy needs in this manner relies on the perpetuation of simplistic gender stereotypes and fails to acknowledge how norms of traditional masculinity and the policing of these norms contribute to boys' understanding of what it means to be a boy in school and, in particular, the secondary-school English classroom (see Martino & Kehler, 2006; Martino & Meyenn, 2001).

Beyond Gender as an Explanatory Framework

To further unpack the significance of what counts as evidence in the framing of boys' underachievement, I draw attention to literature in the field that points to other social and structural factors influencing boys' literacy (Luke *et al*., 2010). For example, Collins, Kenway, and McLeod (2000) found that socio-economic status makes a larger difference than gender even in English, a subject in which 'girls generally do better than boys' (p. 4). Teese, Davies,

www.manaraa.com

Charlton, and Polesel (1995) argue that middle-class boys are doing better than working-class girls. Francis and Skelton (2005) point out that socio-economic class as well as other socio-cultural factors significantly influence achievement on school exams. Mead (2006) suggests that 'when racial and economic gaps combine with gender achievement gaps in reading, the result is disturbingly low achievement for poor, black and Hispanic boys' (p. 9; see also American Association of University Women, 2008). These findings are supported by research conducted by PISA, which states that 'the social background of an individual student is the strongest single factor associated with performance in PISA' (OECD, 2004, p. 14). These data clearly suggest that gender is by no means the only factor affecting literacy achievement, and highlight the need to ask which boys and which girls are at the greatest risk for failure (see Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2006; Collins *et al*., 2000; Lingard, 2003; Lingard *et al*., 2002; Martino, 2008a; Martino & Kehler, 2007; Teese *et al*., 1995; White, 2007; Younger & Warrington, 2005, 2007). As Alloway *et al*. (2002) point out, "Boys are not all the same and cannot be treated as a homogenous group. They bring different social and cultural backgrounds to the literacy classroom and these need to be given serious consideration" (p. 7).

An example of a structural factor that has virtually been erased from boys' literacy debates is the disconnect between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices. Hall and Coles (2001) write, "It is only by building [links] from the child's home literacy background to the school literacy environment that we can hope to encourage confident, well-rounded readers who have a strong sense of their own agency and independence" (p. 216). Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, and Vacca, (2003/2004) suggests that as teachers, "we need to take stock of what students already are able to do in the name of literacy. Most are engaging in significant literacy activities in their everyday lives outside of school" (p. 309). They continue by suggesting that

www.manaraa.com

bridges need to be formed to connect students' in-school and out-of-school literacies to support "more nuanced thinking in both worlds" (p. 309). Cumming-Potvin (2007) argues that teachers need to be "aware of and draw on students' out of school literacy experiences to provide scaffolding in classroom pedagogy" (p. 486). She also points to the difficulties associated with evaluating, based on the school curricula, "boys' literacy as a broad set of practices, including potentially powerful skills such as surfing the net, engaging with computer soft and hardware (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Love & Hamston, 2003), or playing interactive board and videogames" (p. 486). Sanford (2006) suggests that there is "an increasing gap between the types of literacy activities being practiced in and out of school" (p. 305), primarily because teachers lack confidence engaging with technical and digital literacies. Kress (2003) points out that "[i]t is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from a vast array of social technological and economic factors" (p.1).

According to Heron-Hruby, Wood, Mraz (2008), a multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 1996) "offers teachers expanded options for tapping into the ingenuity and variety of literacies young people already use outside of school" (p. 261). The New London Group (1996) define pedagogy of multiliteracies as a focus on:

> Modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects … Multiliteracies also creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes (p. 64).

This conception of literacy suggests that there is a need for English educators to "rethink traditional literacy practices" and embrace literacy as "socially-constituted" which "entails new

www.manaraa.com

understandings of 'texts,' reading and writing" (Grabill & Hicks, 2005, p. 302). This approach to literacy instruction also "emphasizes the contribution that students' multimodal cultures and subcultures make to how they create and otherwise use ideas, both in and out of school (Heron-Hruby *et al.*, 2008, p. 260).

Giampapa (2010) points out that although the nature of literacy in the broader context has evolved, traditional print-centric literacy practices persist in Canadian schools and that assessments of academic achievement are tied to traditional practices. Despite this reframing of literacy as "linguistically, technologically and socially-situated practices" (New London Group, 1996, as cited by Grabill & Hicks, 2005, p. 302) a gap continues to exist between literacy instruction in schools and the literacy skills students will require for "active participation as world citizens" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4).

This research draws attention to the impact of framing boys' literacy achievement in terms of gender. Research which identifies other significant factors as explanatory frameworks for boys' underachievement is not taken up and reported on by educational stakeholders and media with the same vehemence as gender discourses. The existence of this research and its invisibility in dominant discourses draws attention to the political agenda underpinning such framings and the way in which certain truths are created as a rationalization for action (Rose, 1999).

English Language Arts Education

English is not a subject in isolation, or in its own right; it is a subject to make possible all other things. (Mr. Stephenson, at Upwardly Mobile School)

Mr. Stephenson's description of English as a subject prompted me to think more deeply about the nature of English language arts in order to understand how teachers' beliefs about the

www.manaraa.com

subject influence their pedagogy. As Kelly (2000) points out, "English is a construct, not a given, an essence; and the construct of English is not monolithic" (p. 83). As a construct, it is also understood to be a political tool (Ball, Kenny & Gardiner, 1990): at times, its primary function is to provide its students with the necessary communication skills to be productive members of society; at others, it is "represented as significantly related to the cultural well-being of its subjects" (Peim, 1993, p. 197). Historical accounts suggest that the identity of English has always been a site of contestation: personal growth/liberal/humanizing versus moral management/traditional/ordering (see Peim, 1993); however, with the emphasis placed on high-stakes literacy tests, expectations to provide a more intercultural education, increased globalization and the prominence of technology in all aspects of modern life, teaching English is becoming an increasingly complex and messy job. Fleischer and Fox (2005) speak to the complexities that permeate English education when they write, "[I]t is at the same time a field that is inherently interdisciplinary; its concerns are simultaneously theoretical and pragmatic, long term and immediate; its conversations cross levels and job descriptions and contexts" (p. 255-256). In Hawthorne, Goodwyn, George, Reid, and Shoffner (2012), Goodwyn explains the tensions that English teachers must navigate in what is describes as "troubled times" (p. 288). The first faction favours "correctness in language use" and "the exclusive study of the great tradition of English literature." The second points toward a "functional model of English, a literacy approach for most students to prepare them for a compliant workforce." The third calls for a return to a time when "English teachers had real influence over curriculum and testing." Finally the fourth looks to the future and to a model of English "operating in multimodal, digital environment in which students are fully engaged in a creative relationship with reading and writing all kinds of text" (p. 299).

www.manaraa.com

Competing versions that define the subject of English and its ever-evolving nature made it necessary to establish what analytical framework I would employ for the purposes of this research. Despite the fact that I have been a secondary-school English teacher for twenty-two years, choosing such a framework to discuss the different approaches to teaching English language arts was challenging, as my own practice draws from many conceptions of English; it is a mixture or blend of my own passion for literature, my awareness of the importance of preparing my students for future academic pursuits and the workplace, my sense of current political pressures that extol the virtues of efficiency and accountability and my knowledge about our ever-changing, digital, media-saturated world that necessitate critical thought and multiple literacies. These complex and sometimes contradictory perspectives on English and hence my role as an English teacher translate into a wide variety of pedagogical approaches in my daily practice. For example, both the transactional and the transmission models have a place in my classroom (Strickland & Strickland, 1993), as I believe that context is critical for teaching and that my approach as a teacher must be malleable enough to adapt to the learning needs of my audience and my understanding of the many purposes of English.

The nature of the subject of English also necessitates unpacking how the broader context influences both the philosophies and practices of English teachers. English teachers come from multiple backgrounds and bring multiple interests and concerns to the classroom (see Fleischer & Fox, 2005); their "trainings, histories, and own linguistic biographies are blended and complex" (Luke, 2004, p. 87). This diversity among English teachers plays an integral part in how they understand and construct the subject of English for their students. To add another layer of complexity, Luke (2004) argues that English instruction is "contingent upon the changing demographics, cultural knowledges and practices of economic globalization" (p. 85). He expands

www.manaraa.com

upon this point by suggesting that "English constitutes and is constituted by shifts in culture and community, flows of capital and discourse, emergent technologies and communications media, as much as it might entail language or literature *per se*" (p. 86). For example, in our current climate of accountability and efficiency, English language arts instruction has been influenced by the emphasis placed on the test scores of high-stakes literacy tests such as the OSSLT in Ontario, making it "one of the most highly contested and publicly visible subject areas" (Wixon, Dutro, & Athan, 2004, p. 70).

Thus, I am concerned to draw on literature in the field of English Education in order to be equipped with analytic frameworks on orientations to teaching and conceptualizing English as a subject that enables me to make sense of male teachers' pedagogical practices and philosophies. I considered Cox (1989) in the British context who identified five models for the teaching of English as a possible framework: personal growth, cross-curricular, adult needs, cultural heritage and cultural analysis (as cited by Goodwyn, 1992, p. 1). Morgan's (1997) conception of the "geography of English" in the Australian context was also intriguing. She describes the various versions of English as "aesthetic, ethical, rhetorical, and political" (as cited by Kelly, 2000, p. 82). Ultimately, for the purposes of this research, I chose Ball *et al.* (1990), again from the UK, whose matrix identifies four versions of English: *English as the Great Literary Tradition, English as Skills, Progressive English* and *English as Critical Literacy* (p. 76).

Although the categorical titles provided in the Ball *et al.*'s (1990) model are relatively self-explanatory, I take some space here to elucidate them further. *English as the Great Literary Tradition* places emphasis on "a sense of shared culture and thus common values" (p. 78). Literature is used to convey this sense of culture through its universal themes, which work to

www.manaraa.com

unify and historically civilize its subjects (also see Barcan, 1986); the "authority of the text is paramount" (p. 78). The teaching of grammar and a fixed standard of English also fall into this category. *English as skills* stresses the acquisition of skills and competencies "required by the market and economy" in a competitive world: "correct forms of expression and presentations of self are of prime importance; standards and criteria for which are determined by agencies of the educational state acting on behalf of 'industry'" (p. 77). These skills extend beyond reading and writing skills to include life skills and strategies to market oneself. *Progressive English* is best understood as the personal growth model of teaching English. It is grounded in a child-centred philosophy of teaching and learning. Thus, it values "individual creativity" and "self-expression" (p. 79). In this model, diversity is celebrated and content depends heavily on student interest. Finally, *English as Critical Literacy* is political and critical in its focus. This model views English as a site to teach students to "read the world" and attends to injustices (p. 80).

These versions of English are not understood to be mutually exclusive; there are seepages and overlaps, as illustrated by my own philosophies and practices above; however, they do serve as a framework for understanding the context in which the male English teachers in this study find themselves. Kelly (2000) writes,

> If, among other things, pedagogy is about knowledge, power, and audience, then a long-term relationship to a subject carries with it already formulated pedagogical assumptions about what counts as knowledge, for whom it is intended, and how it might be shared (p. 80).

Kelly draws a clear link between teachers' knowledge of the subject area and their pedagogical practice. This framework as conceived of by Ball *et al.* (1990) serves as a starting point for

www.manaraa.com

understanding the factors that influence the pedagogical practice of the participants in this research as secondary-school English teachers.

In addition, I must consider the extent to which English is being redefined as a multicultural and global entity (see Colarusso, 2009, 2010). Colarusso (2010) argues that "Because language and literature play a significant role in mediating cultural identity and cultural diversity, secondary English teachers face the challenge of defining their practices in response to these tensions" (p. 434). English teachers are now faced with expanding their subject by focusing on intercultural texts and learning, media analysis, technology, metacognitive skills and multiliteracies, while at the same time preparing students to be successful on print-centric high-stakes tests (see Colarusso, 2009, 2010). To clarify, Colarusso (2010) defines intercultural learning as "openness to knowledge external to the common culture and inherited curriculum" (p. 437; also see Young, 1996). The inclusion of intercultural texts opens up new opportunities to include a variety of textual forms and communication processes to facilitate language learning in the English classroom (Colarusso, 2009).

Next, the influence of the explicit reference to "citizenship in a global society" in Ontario's English curriculum documents must be considered (Ontario Ministry of Education 2007b, p.27). According to Colarusso (2010),

> globalization and global citizenship in education, move beyond cultural learning and appreciation towards connecting learning with real world action, often promoting information and communication technologies to make the world smaller and allowing students to connect consciously and materially with fellow "global citizens" (p. 439).

www.manaraa.com

With this directive in mind, English teachers are faced with finding ways to balance *English as the Great Literary Tradition* (Ball *et al.*, 1990) with multicultural texts. They must also broaden their own skill sets to teach the type of informational and communication technologies that facilitate a sense of globalization for their students.

Finally, with increased focus on intercultural learning and globalization, demands for *English as Critical Literacy* emerge (Ball *et al.*, 1990). In the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines for secondary English (2007), critical literacy is defined as:

> The capacity for a particular type of critical thinking that involves looking beyond the literal meaning of texts to observe what is present and what is missing, in order to analyse and evaluate the text's complete meaning and the author's intent. Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking in focusing on issues related to fairness, equity, and social justice. Critically literate students adopt a critical stance, asking what view of the world the text advances and whether they find this view acceptable (p. 206).

This definition is consistent with the understanding of critical literacy as outlined by Ball *et al.* (1990); however, increased technologies and media texts create new challenges in critical literacy instruction for English language arts teachers. Critical literacies, for Morrell (2005), means "literacies involving the consumption, production, and distribution of print and new media texts by, with, and on behalf of marginalized populations in the interests of naming, exposing, and destabilizing power relations; and promoting individual freedom and expression" (p 314). Once again, this understanding of critical literacies draws attention to the challenges that English teachers face not only to access the language and literacy texts and practices of adolescents, but also to create an awareness of these texts as tied to power relations in society.

www.manaraa.com

Thus, English teachers are faced with many questions about the texts, practices and discourses of their classrooms, in addition to how they should be combined with media (Alvermann, 2001). Clearly, what it means to be an English teacher is messy and complex. Competing philosophies and increased ever-shifting demands make questions such as "What is English?" and "What does it mean to be an English teacher?" critical questions for this dissertation which seeks to understand the influence of male English teachers on boys' literacy achievement. Luke (2004) suggests that what is needed is:

> a renewed sense of the purposes and consequences, powers and practices of English, of the intellectual, ideological, and moral force of all forms of representation and, equally, a strong sense of "English" as language, as mode of information, as a multifaceted and ambivalent cultural force within and across the practices and technologies of economic and cultural globalization (p. 94).

It is with these models and understandings of the subject of English that I investigate the philosophies and practices of the male English teachers in this study.

Teaching English in the Ontario Context

The Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum for English is also an important contextual piece for this research. Although *The Ontario Curriculum, grades 9 & 10 - English* does not explicitly attempt to define the subject of English, it does itemize the principles upon which English is based:

> The English curriculum is based on the belief that language learning is critical to responsible and productive citizenship, and that all students can become successful language learners. The curriculum is designed to provide students with the

www.manaraa.com

knowledge and skills that they need to achieve this goal. It aims to help students become successful language learners.

Successful language learners:

- Understand that language learning is a necessary, life-enhancing, reflective process;
- Communicate – that is, read, listen, view, speak, write, and represent – effectively and with confidence;
- Make meaningful connections between themselves, what they encounter in texts, and the world around them;
- Think critically;
- Understand that all texts advance a particular point of view that must be recognized, questioned, assessed, and evaluated;
- Appreciate the cultural impact and aesthetic power of texts;
- Use language to interact and connect with individuals and communities, for personal growth, and for active participation as world citizens (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4).

These principles encompass all four versions of teaching English as outlined by Ball *et al.* (1990); therefore, they are understood to be in keeping with the model for teaching English embraced in this dissertation.

This curriculum document also includes an explicit statement of the responsibilities of the English teacher. They are as follows:

Teachers and students have complementary responsibilities. Teachers develop appropriate instructional strategies to help students achieve the curriculum expectations, as well as appropriate methods for assessing and evaluating student learning. Teachers bring enthusiasm and varied teaching and assessment approaches to the classroom, addressing different student needs and ensuring sound learning opportunities for every student.

www.manaraa.com

> Using a variety of instructional, assessment, and evaluation strategies, teachers provide numerous opportunities for students to develop the literacy and language skills that will allow them to participate more effectively in their communities as responsible and active citizens. The study of literature and the media provides students with an awareness and appreciation of the culture that surrounds, challenges, and nourishes them (p. 6).

I draw attention to this official declaration of the responsibilities of an English teacher to illustrate the open-ended nature of this statement and once again provide contextual information for this research. For example, this definition is not explicit about the different approaches to the study of literature. Phillips and Sanford (2000) suggest that there are five different philosophical approaches and/or purposes to the study of literature: literary study as (i) a vehicle to "heighten moral understanding"; (ii) the most effective "form" of language for "developing both personal and public ways of knowing"; (iii) "the archetype of the world of human values"; (iv) means of presenting the reader with other worlds (also see Colarusso, 2009), and (v) a "source of narrative thought to defend against the events of modern civilization" (p. 283).

Nonetheless, these are the regimes of teaching English as stipulated by the Ontario Ministry of Education. They are consistent with models of teaching English in the broader context (Ball *et al.*, 1990; Colarusso, 2009, 2010; Goodwyn, 1992; Hawthorne *et al.*, 2012; Luke, 2004; Morgan, 1997). They provide a means by which to name and make sense of the various pedagogical approaches to English teaching that I observed and report on in this dissertation.

Why this Research Now?

In Ontario, a number of policy-informing documents have legitimized boys as disadvantaged subjects and rationalized and authorized the recruitment of male teachers as a

www.manaraa.com

remediation strategy (see Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Carrington *et al.*, 2008; Coulter & McNay, 1993; Francis, 2008; Francis *et al*,, 2008; Martino & Frank, 2006; Martino & Kehler, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a). I have already discussed at length the context in which this research is situated vis-à-vis the sense of "moral panic" that has been created with regard to boys' literacy underachievement (Epstein *et al*., 1998; Hall & Coles, 2001; Rowan *et al*., 2002; Sanford, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Titus, 2004). This concern about boys' underachievement as literacy learners is evident in the Ontario context through the Ontario Ministry of Education's inclusion of a special link on their website dedicated to "Boys' Literacy" and the dissemination of several key documents such *Me Read? No, Way! A practical guide to improving boys' literacy skills* (2004), *Me Read? And How? Ontario teachers report on how to improve boys' literacy skills* (2009), and *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009). As the titles of the first two documents suggest, they focus on classroom strategies designed with boys' interests and needs in mind. In *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, boys are explicitly identified as a group at risk of lower achievement:

> Our government is committed both to raising the bar for student achievement and to reducing achievement gaps. Recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special education needs are just some of the groups that may be at risk of lower achievement. To improve outcomes for students at risk, all partners must work to identify and remove barriers and must actively seek to create the conditions needed for student success (p. 5).

The inclusion of boys in the above list, in addition to achievement gaps on high-stakes testing as mentioned earlier and the resources devoted to "practical guides", speaks to the continued concern for boys' lack of achievement in school.

www.manaraa.com

In addition, the Ontario Ministry of Education's concern about the declining number of male teachers in both elementary and secondary schools is evident in *Narrowing the Gap: Attracting Men to Teaching* (2004). In the report, the following recommendations are made:

1. A three-year, province-wide campaign to attract men to teaching should be supported by the Government of Ontario;
2. Faculties of education and school boards encourage men to enter the teaching profession;
3. Faculties of education and school boards include male teachers in recruitment activities;
4. Schools should attempt to have as many students as possible work with male teachers, if they are present;
5. School boards should create co-op and peer tutoring opportunities for male secondary school students in elementary schools;
6. Principals seek opportunities for men to volunteer with students;
7. Support be given to school boards to create mentoring programs to support new male teachers, and
8. The Ontario Ministry of Education support research to "determine whether there is a correlation between the achievement of boys and the presence of male teachers" (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004, pp. 26-27).

Given these recommendations, in particular #8, this research is understood as timely, as little research currently exists, which examines such a correlation between boys' achievement and the presence of male teachers. Furthermore, the small body of research that does exist raises questions about the validity of such claims (see Carrington, Francis, Hutchings, Skelton, Read & Hall, 2007; Francis *et al.,* 2008; Lam, Tse, Lam & Loh, 2010; Lingard *et al.,* 2002; Neugebauer,

www.manaraa.com

Helbig & Landmann, 2011; Sokal and Katz, 2008; Sokal, Katz, Adkins, Grills *et al.*, 2005; Sokal, Katz &Chaszewski, 2007).

Nonetheless, the dearth of male teachers is a recurrent theme in educational debates. The National Education Association (NEA) reported that the percentage of male teachers in the US is at a 40-year low (White, 2007, September 25). In Canada, the percentage of male teachers has declined from 41% in the 1990's to 35% in 1999 (Statistics Canada, 2003). The number of male teachers has also dropped in Australia between 1987 and 1997 (Lewis, Butcher & Donnan, 1999). Although unsupported by research, popular opinion holds that the lack of male role models in the teaching profession has contributed to boys' disadvantage, particularly as literacy learners. Because the dearth of male teachers appears to be more acute in elementary schools and in particular at the primary level, much of the populist concern, media attention and educational research has focused on the lack of male role models for boys in elementary school (Ashley & Lee, 2003; Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Carrington *et al.*, 2008; Francis *et al.*, 2008; Martino, 2008a; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010). In comparison to reports that male teachers in elementary schools represent only "one in ten kindergarten, primary and juniors qualified teachers (Grades K-6) under the age of 30 … [and] only one in five junior-intermediate qualified teachers (Grade 4-10) under 30 are men" (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004), the representation of male teachers under 30 in the intermediate-senior division (Grades 7-12), reported as one in three, has garnered relatively little attention; however, this statistic is somewhat misleading. Lingard, Martino and Mills (2009) point out that "men tend to be located in certain sections of the school, such as the sciences and manual arts departments" (p. 120). On the other hand, men teaching in supposedly feminine areas of the curriculum such as English are greatly under-represented. Rowan *et al.* (2002) argue that,

www.manaraa.com

> traditional literacy practices are associated with behaviours and interests that do not sit easily alongside dominant models of masculinity … Skills relating to English and science or maths, therefore, are routinely produced as mutually exclusive. It is an either/or situation within which English is linked to understandings of traditional femininity – or subordinate masculinity—while science and maths are associated with hegemonic and complicit masculinities (p. 62).

With the current call for male teachers as a reform strategy, this understanding of English as feminized is an important research focus as it is not only suggested to be linked to the decline in the number of male English teachers entering the teaching profession, but is also frequently cited as a contributor to boys' lack of achievement as literacy learners (see Pirie, 2002).

Finally, the secondary-school English language arts classroom has been purposefully chosen as a research site because it is officially positioned as the primary site for the development of literacy skills by the Ontario Ministry of Education:

> Literacy development is a communal project, and the teaching of literacy skills is embedded across the Ontario curriculum. However, it is the English curriculum that is dedicated to developing the knowledge and skills on which literacy is based – that is, knowledge and skills in the areas of listening and speaking, reading, writing, and viewing and representing (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 3).

Given this explicit statement by the Ontario Ministry of Education placing the development of literacy skills in the hands of the English teacher, the secondary-school English classroom is understood to be an important research site. Millard (1997) supports this positioning of the secondary-school English classroom as central to literacy learning:

www.manaraa.com

> Fiction chosen for reading together in class takes on an increased importance in the first years of the secondary school. It is at this stage in education that the processes of learning are reorganized into discrete academic disciplines and the task of developing reading and writing is most often left firmly with the English teachers (p. 100).

She also suggests that "English lessons remain the site where expectations of reading and readers are formed, and what English teachers organize as reading in class determines for most pupils how they construct notions of the good reader" (p. 101).

Finally, the Ontario College of Teachers (2004) explicitly states that "the academic impact upon students who have a male teacher compared to a female teacher needs further study" (p. 24). Despite this identification of the secondary-school English classroom as a critical site for literacy learning, little research has been devoted to this particular site. Ruggles Gere and Berebitsky (2009) write,

> The current inattention of researchers to the quality of English teachers is particularly unfortunate because of the importance of English in the high school curriculum and the prominence of English-related skills in tests; in nearly every high school, English is required for all four years, and verbal/reading/writing skills occupy a prominent place in the high-stakes tests regularly used as indicators of student achievement (p. 249).

This research, through its exploration of the capacity of male English teachers in the secondary-school context to improve boys' literacy achievement, intends to address these gaps by contributing new knowledge to educational debates which have been colonized by a particular rhetoric about failing boys, the feminization of schooling and the need for more male teachers as

www.manaraa.com

role models (Lingard et al, 2009; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; 2008). It aims to provide a deeper context-specific understanding of boys' relationships with their English teachers.

A Reflexive Narrative to Situate my Voice as Researcher

> Reflexivity recognizes that researchers are inescapably part of the social world that they are researching … [They] should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in the research, seeking to understand their part in, or influence on, the research … researchers should hold themselves up to the light … (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 171).

In an attempt to be transparent about my own bias and subjectivity, I have included two "critical incidents," (Tripp, 1993) as a declaration of, and a supplement to the reflexivity I began in the previous section. This reflexive account is intended to acknowledge myself in the research; however, as I began to write these narratives, I struggled to find both a beginning and an end and worried about the impact of such a simplistic illustration of my subjectivity. That being said, it is my hope that the following narratives will work to situate me as a researcher, as it is critical that this research be understood as co-constructed, a representation of "interactive processes" between the researcher and the researched (Creswell, 2007, p. 179; also see Gilgun, 2005).

The sense of "moral panic" surrounding boys' underachievement as literacy learners initially became a topic of interest to me primarily because I am the mother of a young male reader (Epstein *et al*., 1998; Hall & Coles, 2001; Rowan *et al*., 2002; Sanford, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Titus, 2004). He began reading quite young and continues to be an avid reader, yet his initial refusal to read the *Joonie B. Jones* series when he was 6 or 7 years old is worth noting here. I was surprised by his reluctance to even open the books, as he had never done that before. At first, he would not tell me why he did not like the books, but after some prodding he

www.manaraa.com

told me that it was because he believed that the books are for girls. Admittedly, an illustration of Joonie, a cute first-grade girl can be found on every cover, but I did not think that would bother Kurt. I was wrong. By the time he was in grade one, he understood that by reading books about girls, he would be transgressing norms of masculinity. This incident of self-regulation speaks to the power of codes of masculinity, which had little to do with his literacy instruction in school and has raised questions for me about how boys' literacy underachievement is framed. I am happy to report that after I read the first book in the series to him, he decided to read the series even if they are intended for girls.

This second incident worked to narrow my focus to examine explicitly the capacity of male English teachers to influence boys' literacy achievement. As a secondary-school English department head, I was involved with the interviewing and hiring of the teachers within my department. My department was made up almost entirely of women, so when it came time to hire some new teachers, we were looking for men. The talk within the department was that we needed a male English teacher, not only for the boys but also to bring a different perspective to the department. At the time, I did not question this quest to hire a male English teacher. In fact, I embraced it and was actively seeking out the best male English teachers I could find. Many teachers (some men and many women) applied for the position, but the men were given extra consideration. The resume of one male English teacher, in particular, suggested that he was a promising candidate. When I told my principal about this candidate, she responded by asking, "Is he normal?" She might have been asking why he would be applying for a position in a feminine domain of teaching, but I interpreted her question as asking whether or not he embodied traits of hegemonic masculinity.

Her question has stuck with me. It raised questions for me about the kinds of men that are

www.manaraa.com

desired in the English classroom. Why are they needed? What are they being recruited to model? What expectations are placed on male English teachers to construct themselves as heteronormative? This incident has been instrumental in my decision to investigate the influence of male English teachers in the secondary-school context, and both have shaped who I am as a researcher and the questions that I ask.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced my research topic and provided the political and social context for the study. In particular, I have situated the call for more male English teachers within the context of the neoliberal political agenda and unpacked how high-stakes testing has been used to construct boys as a particular kind of literacy subject. Next, I have devoted space to describing the polemics that constitute boys as a homogeneous group, victimized by the feminization of schooling, and in need of a more boy-friendly school environment. This section is followed by a discussion of the literature in the field that points to significant social and structural influences on literacy achievement such as socioeconomic status and the disconnect between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices. I also dedicated some space to identifying and discussing the analytic framework I use to organize my thinking about the subject of English. In the next section, I provided a justification for the research focus of this dissertation. Finally, to be transparent about the lens through which I see boys' literacy underachievement, English as a subject and reform strategies that advocate male English teachers as a solution to boys' disadvantage in the English classroom, I included a brief reflexive account of myself as a mother and English teacher. By doing so, I acknowledge that there is "no neutral research" (Lather, 1986, p. 41), and that my "cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics" inform my stance as a researcher and writer (Creswell, 2007, p. 179).

www.manaraa.com

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces.

(Foucault, 2007, p. 40)

Current education mandates advocating the recruitment of male bodies to address boys' underachievement in school tend to be, for the most part, grounded in theories of sex-role socialization. Discourses regarding the need for male teachers as role models for boys to counteract the feminizing effects of schooling and female teachers are evidence of the way that power/knowledge relations are used to mobilize certain "truths." Although many researchers have drawn attention to the limitations of such theories to account for the "complex dynamics of gender identity" (Segal, 1990, p. 69; also see Britzman, 1993; Connell, 1995, 2009; Crichlow, 1999), they continue to inform our thinking about the reforms required to address literacy achievement gaps. In keeping with my understanding that there are "always … other perspectives from which to interpret the material under review" (Humes & Bryce, 2003, p. 180), I employ a number of theories as analytical frameworks to look beyond sex-role theories of socialization and the "singularity of gender" as a marker of influence (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010), to investigate the complexities surrounding the issue of male teachers, masculinities and gender affiliation as it relates to the topic of literacy underachievement.

This chapter is dedicated to elaborating on how a feminist poststructuralist theory and a theory of masculinities, as elaborated by Weedon (1997) and Connell (1995) respectively, as well as Foucault's conception of power relations, subjectivity, discourse and normalization inform this research. These theoretical frameworks have been strategically adopted to interrupt unquestioned assumptions, grounded in theories of sex-role socialization and notions of gender

www.manaraa.com

affiliation, about male teachers being better suited to address boys' needs and interests and to create spaces for "thinking otherwise" about the phenomena being studied (Ball,2006, p. 64). They provide me with the analytical tools to interrogate discourses that have "shaped and created meaning systems that have gained the status and currency of 'truth'" (*Foucault*, n.d.) in debates about the need for more male English teachers to improve boys' literacy achievement.

This strategic use of theory for data analysis stems from Anyon's (2009) perspective on theoretically informed empiricism (p. 2). She contends that, "Neither data nor theory alone are adequate to the task of social explanation … they imbricate and instantiate one another, forming and informing each other as the inquiry process unfolds" (p. 2). She suggests that descriptions of the objects we study without attention to "the context and social forces in which the object of study is embedded" are inadequate in understanding key "explanatory principles" (p. 2-3). By using critical social theory, she claims that we are able to make "links between educational 'inside' and 'outside' between past, present, and future, and between research design and larger social meanings" (p. 3). In this sense, I use the theoretical frameworks, as described below, in conjunction with case-study data to make links between current discourses about boys as disadvantaged literacy learners and male teachers as their "rescuers," neoliberal political agendas of accountability and efficiency and the discursive and non-discursive data collected for this research.

Feminist Poststructuralist Theory

Weedon (1997) draws on the work of Foucault and applies it specifically to issues of gender, making it an important theoretical framework for this study. According to Weedon (1997), "feminism is a politics … directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society" (p. 1) and feminist poststructuralism is a "mode of knowledge production

www.manaraa.com

which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (p. 40); it addresses questions of how "social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed" (p. 20).

Although some feminists contend that a poststructuralist approach is inadequate, pointing to weaknesses such as its inability to "address trends of inequality, and potentially deconstruct the very notions of value and agency on which feminism is based" (Francis, 2001, p. 70); Francis (2001) argues that a poststructuralist lens is attractive to many feminists because of its "articulation of destability and complexity," its rejection of "gender as something fixed," its scepticism of the "rational approach" and "possible objectivity," and its contribution of tools such as discourse analysis to analyze "the complexity of human interaction around issues of identity and power" (p. 67).

Interrogating essentialist mindsets. A feminist poststructuralist analytic framework allows for a critique of the dominant theories informing the call for male English teachers to address boys' literacy underachievement as it disrupts simplistic notions of gender essentialism that are used to justify reform agendas such as the need for more male role models and a boy-friendly curriculum. According to Rowan *et al.* (2002), proponents of essentialist thinking argue that there is something "fundamentally different about the way men and women think, feel and act, and that these differences are tied to their different biological and psychological make-up" (p. 29). Many journalists and educational consultants, such as Gurian (2002), continue to present men and women in these essentialist terms as "hard-wired" (p. 103); biology determines their natural interests, strengths and weaknesses. Gurian writes, "When we return to the common sense of nature in our upbringing of boys, we work with boys, give them the structure, discipline,

www.manaraa.com

and wisdom they, in particular, need" (p. 103). When the nature of boys is understood in these terms, educational success for boys depends on schools acknowledging and accommodating their "maleness" (Gurian, 2002, p. 103; also for a critique of this position see Rowan *et al.*, 2002). This essentialist perspective is informed by regimes of nature or biology which often go unquestioned. It is also the so-called stable or fixed foundation from which theories of sex-role socialization emerge (Britzman, 1993).

A feminist poststructuralist perspective "rejects essentializing notions" (Weedon, 1997, p. 178). It argues that biological differences do not have "inherent 'natural' or social meaning"; instead, they are produced within a "range of conflicting discourses" (Weedon, 1997, p. 123). For example, the assumption underpinning discourses such as "boys will be boys," is that their biological make-up predisposes them to particular learning styles, interests and environments (Lingard *et al.*, 2002; Martino, 2003; Martino, Lingard & Mills, 2004). What logically follows is the assumption that schools and their teachers contribute to their underachievement by failing to cater to the learning needs and interests of boys. Feminist poststructuralist theory, on the other hand, posits that identity is "discursively produced, necessary but always contingent and strategic" (Weedon, 1997, p. 176). This lens provides alternative analytical tools to make sense of boys' literacy achievement, which in turn makes possible shifts in perspective when interrogating the viability of claims that suggests that male English teachers as a group are naturally better suited to cater to boys' literacy and social needs. Titus (2004) cautions that "some learned behaviours can be deeply ingrained and difficult to modify" (p. 155), blurring the distinctions between learned and determined gender behaviours. If subjectivity, as theorized by a feminist poststructuralist framework, is "socially constructed and contradictory rather than essential and unified" (Weedon, 1997, p. 176), then it is problematic to suggest that male English

www.manaraa.com

teachers and boys' learning needs are fundamentally the same (see neuroscientific perspectives such as those elaborated by Eliot, 2009).

This theoretical perspective does not, however, advocate for an erasure of biology. Instead, it argues that there are multiple lenses for understanding gendered behaviour. Eliot (2009) writes,

> …sex differences are not nearly as large or as fixed as this new wave of essentialism projects. The truly innate differences – in verbal ability, activity level, inhibition, aggression, and perhaps, social perception – are small, mere biases that shape children's behavior but are not themselves deterministic. What matters far more is how children spend their time, how they see themselves, and what all these experiences and interactions do to their nascent neural circuits (p. 303).

Eliot does not discount biological sex difference, but rather points out the impoverished understanding one achieves from reductionist explanatory frameworks. Fausto-Sterling (1997) also draws attention to the kind of knowledge biologists have to offer studies in social science; however, she cautions that we often use "the accounts of biology that most suit our social belief systems" (p. 255). She contends that social scientists have much to offer in the way of "thick, complex, multivariate descriptions" and to rely solely on biology as an explanatory framework is inadequate (p. 256). A feminist poststructuralist theoretical perspective facilitates a questioning of essentialist, reductionist claims about the influence of male English teachers and boys' achievement. It supports the aim of this research to produce nuanced, contextualized data to gain a deeper understanding of the factors at play for boys and their male teachers in the English classroom.

Interrogating discourses. This research has emerged from the understanding that discourses shape the way we perceive boys as "disadvantaged" literacy learners and male

www.manaraa.com

English teachers as solutions, on the basis of gender affiliation. Thus a feminist poststructuralist lens enables me to examine such discourses and the power/knowledge relations that inform them.

According to Weedon (1997) discourses in Foucault's work are,

> ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (p. 105).

Paechter (2001) argues that,

> Discourses are important because they structure the ways in which we can think about things. Because they are treated as, and appear to be self-evidently a reflection of 'reality', they can remain unchallenged, prescribing for us what is 'normal' or 'natural' behaviour, and penalizing those who attempt to challenge or step outside them (p. 41-2).

Weedon (1997) builds on these conceptions suggesting that discourse is a "structuring principle of society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity" (p. 40). This addition of subjectivity is important because it draws attention to the way in which males and females as subjects are "produced historically" and "change with shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them" (p. 32). In this sense, male and female subjectivities do not have essential natures. Rather, they are shaped through an array of complex and often conflicting discursive practices. Gee (2005), also points out that "meaning" is produced and situated: "grounded in specific contexts of use by specific sociocultural groups of people" and "largely unconscious" (p. 54). This theoretical perspective is salient because it provides me with

www.manaraa.com

what Gee (2005) calls "thinking devices" (p. 7) to interpret claims about male teachers and boys' literacy underachievement not as *the* truth but as an interpretation based in a particular political context, specifically a neoliberal regime of efficiency and accountability. The discourses informing dominant educational reform strategies, whether conscious or unconscious, are presented as natural or common sense approaches; however, a feminist poststructuralist perspective is skeptical of such unilateral claims that fail to acknowledge power interests, complexities and multiple realities. According to Weedon (1997), "feminist poststructuralism is able, in detailed, historically specific analysis, to explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyse the opportunities for resistance to it" (p. 40), making such a theoretical perspective salient for this research. Because the need for male role models is aligned with *common-sense* understandings of gender, these discourses often go unchallenged; however, as Weedon (1997) points out, "meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language and language is not an abstract system, but is always socially and historically located in discourse" (p. 40). A feminist poststructuralist theory facilitates the questioning of claims, which are presented as natural and fixed and opens up opportunities for producing alternative perspectives and knowledge.

Understanding power. A feminist poststructuralist lens facilitates an understanding of power being discursively constructed. Also, according to Weedon (1997), "power is exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects" (p. 113). For example, when a Member of Parliament in the UK who holds an education portfolio claims that boys are being "'sissified' and expected to give in to the feminization of the world" (Rowan *et al.*, 2002, p. 31), women, specifically female teachers, are blamed for boys' problems. This claim speaks to existing power structures and gender inequalities, and prompts the questions –

www.manaraa.com

Why are men being recruited and what types of masculinities are understood to improve boys' achievement? Are male teachers being recruited to address the perceived feminization of the English classroom? Are the adopted remediation strategies aimed at "reinstating boys to their 'naturally' superior position" (Rowan *et al.*, 2002, p. 14) or a genuine concern for the achievement of both boys and girls? Achievement gaps have been used to create a sense of "moral panic"—"concern … about a perceived threat to values or interests held sacred by society or a threat to the social order itself" (Titus, 2004, p. 145) – concerning boys' literacy achievement (Epstein *et al.*, 1998; Hall & Coles, 2001; Rowan *et al*., 2002; Sanford, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). A feminist poststructuralist theory provides a lens to interrogate the power regimes underpinning claims associated with the recruitment of male English teachers.

Foucault's Conception of Power Relations, Subjectivity, Normalization and Discourse

Foucault's work on power relations, subjectivity, discourse, and normalization also informs this research. His theorizing about power, discursive formation and practices, regulatory apparatus, continuities and normalizing norms has much to offer in way of understanding how dominant constructions of boys and their male teachers are mobilized and used to inform strategies of reform at the policy level. This work also illuminates how the discursive and non-discursive practices of both boys and male English teachers in the field are influenced by such constructions. The analytic categories he has generated inform my engagement with feminist poststructuralist perspectives as elaborated by Weedon (1997), as she draws heavily on his work.

According to Diamond and Quinby (1988), Foucault's conception of power relations and subjectivity converges with feminism in a number of ways:

- Both recognize the body as the site of power;
- Both point to local operations of power;

www.manaraa.com

- Both emphasize the role of discourse "in its capacity to produce and sustain hegemonic power," and
- Both are critical of the privileging of "Western masculine elites as they proclaim universals about truth" (as cited in Olssen, 1999, p. 34).

A theoretical framework that draws on Foucault also adds another dimension to this investigation by focusing specifically on *how* power is exercised and how discursive practices function to inform conceptions of masculinity and pedagogical practices. Some feminists have been critical of Foucault for this focus on the "how" rather than the "who" and the "what" of power; however, for the purposes of this study, a focus on *how* power is exercised to form objects through discursive practices is important because it provides me with a lens to understand and analyze both the "said" and the "unsaid" of participant interviews and the "acts" I observed in the English classroom (Foucault, 1972, p. 110). Gore (1995) contends that the functioning of power "remains invisible in our daily practices, unless we are looking for it" (p. 184). By adopting this theoretical framework, I am able to maintain a focus specifically on the function of power relations, techniques of normalization and discursive practices which are understood to be integral to this research.

Power relations and subjectivity. Foucault (1982) argues that power is not something that exists or is possessed; instead, it is exercised in power relations. This shift in thinking about power as "a way in which certain actions modify others" (p. 219) is critical because it is the actions as communicated by male English teachers and as played out in the classroom that are the focus of this study. For example, Francis and Skelton (2001) illustrate the ways that male teachers construct themselves as "properly masculine" (p. 19). They found that male teachers themselves are complicit in the perpetuation of codes of hegemonic masculinities (also see

www.manaraa.com

Cushman, 2008; Francis & Skelton, 2001; Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Roulston & Mills, 2000; Sargent, 2005; Skelton, 2002). King (1998) also found that the straight male teachers in his study positioned themselves explicitly as heterosexual by placing family photos on their classroom desks. These studies illustrate how the participants perpetuate understandings of idealized or dominant masculinities through the discursive and pedagogical practices (Foucault, 1972) rather than challenge them.

They also demonstrate the relationship between power and the subject. According to Foucault (1982), the exercise of power "consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (p. 221). In the above examples, it can be argued that the active self-construction of the male teachers in accordance with hegemonic masculinities is "guided" to adhere to understandings of what is acceptable and privileged in the role of teacher. This form of power "categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him" (Foucault, 1982, p. 212). In other words, it is a form of power that makes him a subject: both subjugated and made subject to (p. 212). As suggested here, individuals are active in becoming a certain kind of subject. Systems of knowledge and power relations contribute to the construction of subjects, inciting individuals to construct themselves in certain ways. While it is possible to argue that these participants have choices or degrees of *freedom* in exercising certain choices, gender norms, which modify individual action, make resisting difficult and often result in punitive acts (Butler, 1997).

This understanding of power as exercised through "acts" is important for this research because it is through the participants' actions as described and observed that perceptions of influence will be interpreted. It brings into focus the importance of regulation of action and codes

www.manaraa.com

of normalization that guide actions. It also provides me with a "series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy)" (Foucault, 1982, p. 219) as tools of inquiry to interrogate the acts as they occur. When power is exercised rather than possessed, it is destabilized: "the subject is not a 'thing' outside of culture, and there is no pure 'state of nature' … The self is a regulated but not determined set of practices and possibilities" (p. 35).

Foucault (1982) points out that,

> one must analyze institutions from the standpoint of power relations, rather than vice versa, and that the fundamental point of anchorage of the relationships, even if they are embodied and crystallized in an institution, is to be found outside the institution (p. 222).

This perspective will inform the analysis of power relations and subjectivity for this research. Gore (1995) uses Foucault's techniques of power (surveillance, normalization, exclusion, classification, distribution, individuation, totalization, and regulation) to illustrate the "regimes of power" in a number of school sites (p. 168). Gore's application of these mechanisms of power further informs my thinking of how power is exercised, particularly in relation to how male teachers are constructed and position themselves vis-à-vis boy's literacy achievement in the English language arts classroom.

Norms as regulatory apparatus. In *Security, Territory, Population* (2007), Foucault distinguishes between normation and normalization. According to Foucault, "discipline normalizes … it breaks down individuals, places, time, movements, actions, and operations. It breaks them down into components such that they can be seen, on the one hand, and modified on the other" (p. 84). In this sense, norms are understood as disciplinary mechanisms. They serve as

www.manaraa.com

"an optimal model" and the "operation of disciplinary normalizations consists in trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model" (p. 85). Foucault argues that what is considered to be "normal" and "abnormal" is prescribed by the norm. He uses the term "normation" in this case to indicate the fundamental nature or primacy of the norm in relationship to the "optimal model" (p. 85).

Using the smallpox epidemic in the eighteen century as an example, he also explains the "techniques of normalization" (p. 84). In the case of the epidemic, the normalization process begins with *the normal* as indicated by the number of deaths as they are plotted on one or several different distribution curves. From these different normalities, the normal is identified and techniques to bring the most unfavourable in line or closer to the favourable are determined. In this scenario, the "distributions will serve as the norm" (p. 91). This process is the opposite of disciplinary normalization as it begins with normalities to establish what is normal. Foucault writes, "The norm is an interplay of differential normalities. The normal comes first and the norm is deduced from it, or the norm is fixed and plays its operational role on the basis of this study of normalities" (p. 91).

Both the conceptions of normation and normalization are useful analytical tools in that they draw attention to both the qualifying or exacting and correctional roles of norms, a sort of "normative project" (Foucault, 2003, p. 50). First of all, Foucault's discussion of the techniques of normalization illustrates that it is far from a "natural law" to define existence but instead a method of "intervention" to bring the unfavourable closer to the favourable (p. 50). It also suggests that norms are produced from what is understood to be normal at a given time and place, again highlighting the constructed nature of norms and their instability. The normative speaks to the ways in which norms, as mechanisms of discipline, serve as models of behavior.

www.manaraa.com

Through the concept of the "public … a pertinent space within which and regarding which one must act" (Foucault, 2007, p. 105), the objects of the "gaze" modify their actions to conform to the optimal model or the norm. In this case, prior knowledge of the norm is necessary, as this knowledge in itself serves to modify actions (as in the panopticon[1]); in this way power is everywhere rather than conceived solely or exclusively in terms of a hierarchical model and individuals are active participants in the regulation of their actions. In this sense, the norm is "the basis of which a certain exercise of power is found and legitimized" (Foucault, 2003, p. 50).

The concepts of normative and normalization are useful analytical tools to interrogate the ways in which boys constitute themselves and are discursively constituted by education policy-makers and male English teachers, as well as notions of male teachers as role models. If, like in Foucault's example of the smallpox epidemic, a figurative "normalcy curve" is used to determine boys' natural strengths and interests and to move outlying cases closer to what is understood to be normal, what we are really doing is homogenizing boys as a group. Unlike in the smallpox example where individuals do not choose to be exposed to infection, boys, it is argued, are free to choose their interests, engagements and behaviours; however, choice might be considered an illusion, as resisting what is understood to be *normal* masculine behaviour is often punished (Butler, 1997). Foucault also illustrates through his discussion of normation how norms are used as disciplinary mechanisms. As a consequence, boys actively modify their behaviour to conform to more favourable constructions of masculinity, such as athlete or detached analytical thinker, as prescribed by societal norms. The disengagement and lack of achievement of boys as literacy learners are understood to be negatively influenced by notions of literacy and in particular the subject of English as a feminine domain (Bouchard *et al*., 2003; Froese-Germain, 2006; Lingard

[1] An architectural building designed by Jeremy Bentham which in the prison setting allowed the observer to observe inmates without them knowing whether or not they are being watched, creating a sense of permanent visibility, a mechanism of power, that assured self-regulation.

www.manaraa.com

et al., 2009; Martino, 2008a; Martino & Frank, 2006; Martino & Kehler, 2006, 2007; Millard, 1997; Rowan *et al.*, 2002). Given an understanding of masculinity and femininity as binaries, it is not surprising that some boys consciously construct themselves in a way that is not conducive to literacy achievement; they choose to either downplay their ability or interest in the subject or reject it outright as a subject for girls, in an attempt to align themselves with what are considered to be normal constructions of masculinity (Millard, 1997). In this sense, gender norms prescribe the *normal*. Thus, it is possible to understand discourses about the recruitment of male English teachers as role models as an attempt to normalize engagement and achievement in English for boys; however, if societal norms that construct English as feminine remain unchallenged then eliminating the disciplinary mechanism associated with boys engaging with the "feminine" will be difficult.

Discourse. Foucault's theorization of discourse is particularly important and informs my particular use of this analytic category in this dissertation. Foucault (1972), himself, describes his use of the term "discourse" as "indiscriminate." (p. 31). Given this declaration, I decided that I would need to be very specific about my use of his work; I would need to identify exactly what aspects of his work on discourse in particular are salient. I begin by acknowledging up front that I look to his theorizing about discourse, not in search of a succinct definition or a cohesive mapping out of a definitive method of discourse analysis, but rather "to work in careful scholarship and engage in a respectful conversation with Foucault" as part of the meaning-making process of this research (Graham, 2005, p. 6). Rather than seeking a definitive analytical method to apply, I look to Foucault's theorizing about discourse as "resources in an interpretive art" (Edwards & Nicoll, 2001, p. 106). This, however, does not suggest that drawing on Foucault to do discourse analysis is unsystematic, for as Wetherall (2001) points out, "the process of

www.manaraa.com

analysis is always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint" (p. 384; also see Graham, 2005).

Discursive formations and practices. Foucault's conception of power as a central aspect of discourse is a significant "resource" for discourse analysis for this study (see Stahl, 2004, p. 4330). Discourse is a mechanism of power in that it circulates or communicates a certain truth. The interplay between discourses and power/knowledge is understood to be salient for this research because like power, discourse is an object that is exercised rather than possessed; it has a function. Thus, Foucault's conception of discourse as formation and discourse as practice are instrumental analytical tools. Foucault (1972) suggests that discursive formation is "a space of multiple dissensions; a set of different oppositions whose levels and roles must be described" (p. 155). These dissensions or ruptures, which create new discourses that either repeat, contradict or branch out from the "already-said," are "objects to be described for themselves" (Foucault, 1972, p. 151). For Foucault, an important element of discourse analysis involves an examination of opposing discursive formations; it,

> distinguishes them from those that do not belong to the same time-scale, relate[s] them, on the basis of their specificity, to the non-discursive practices that surround them and serve[s] as a general element for them. [It] is always in the plural; it operates in a great number of registers; it crosses interstices and gaps; it has its domain where unities are juxtaposed, separated, fix their crests, confront one another, and accentuate the whitespaces between one another (p. 157).

This type of analysis facilitates the understanding of how individual statements – "the simple inscription of what is said" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 15) – and non-discursive acts function within discourses For example, in boys' literacy debates, statements and acts that echo, contradict,

www.manaraa.com

transform or push the limits of dominant discourses are understood to function within a network of relations with other statements and acts. All discursive and non-discursive irregularities are understood to exercise functions. By attending to the "specificity" of discursive and non-discursive acts, unities are ruptured. This process enables an analysis of discourse that does not make reference to "the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs" (Foucault, 1972, p. 25). It also draws attention to the fact that they are historically contingent practices, facilitating the questioning of discourses claiming to describe a kind of truth about boys' underachievement, which extends beyond the limits of time and space.

An understanding of discourse as practice is also important because it shifts my focus to consider how these practices function according to a set of rules as a mechanism of power. According to Foucault,

> [discursive relations] determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them, etc. These relations characterise not the language (*langue*) used by discourse, nor the circumstances in which it is deployed, but discourse itself as a practice (Foucault, 1972, p. 46).

The relations to which Foucault refers are significant in that they draw attention to the "group of *rules* that are immanent in a practice, and define it in its specificity" (p. 46). Practices are exercised according to a set of rules rooted in a particular kind of power/knowledge that stems from power relations. Thus, discourses must be understood to do more than describe situations, events or conceptions; they form or construct these objects or things and order them. Foucault (1972) writes,

www.manaraa.com

> I would like to show that 'discourses', in the form in which they can be heard or read, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, coloured chain of words; I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language *(langue)*, the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects… of no longer treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language *(langue)* and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe (p. 49).

This idea of discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak," provides me with a significant analytical tool to interpret "truth claims" (Foucault, 1984, 1987) regarding the need for more male role models to address boys' underachievement (see Martino & Kehler, 2006). For as Foucault (1972) points out,

> It is not the objects that remain constant, nor the domain that they form; it is not even their point of emergence or their mode of characterization; but the relation between

www.manaraa.com

> the surfaces on which they appear, on which they can be delimited, on which they can be analysed and specified (p. 47).

This understanding enables the questioning of whose interests are served through claims of boys as disadvantaged and male teachers as solutions. It provides a framework to see other possible truths that might be unspoken or hidden: to look beyond the words to the sets of rules that govern the practices that form regimes. Foucault (1984) writes,

> Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (p. 131).

The relationship between what we understand to be true and how discourses, governed by rules, function to perpetuate these truths is of central importance to this research which calls into question taken-for-granted claims about the capacity of male English teachers to positively influence boys' literacy achievement. By focusing on discourse as formation and practice, I draw attention to its role in constructing or shaping our understanding about the influence of male English teachers as a certain truth about male power and authority that often goes unchallenged. This theoretical perspective is useful in that it suggests that discourses do more that designate or describe the way things are through language. Instead, they are seen to be active in the formation of certain truths. The regimes that govern this ordering of both discursive and non-discursive practices must be considered.

Continuities. Foucault's emphasis on the necessity of questioning the unities or continuities of discourses, as mentioned above, is another important "resource" or meaning-

www.manaraa.com

making tool for the discourse analysis employed for this research. Given that discourses "structure the way in which we can think about things" and appear as "self-evident" (Paechter, 2001, p. 41), Foucault (1972) argues that we must "question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar" to make visible this structuring process (p. 22). He argues, that these divisions are

> always themselves reflexive categories, principles of classification, normative rules, institutionalized types: they, in turn, are facts of discourse that deserve to be analysed beside others; of course, they also have complex relations with each other, but they are not intrinsic, autochthonous, and universally recognizable characteristics (p. 22).

When continuities are separated or broken, notions of "self-evidence" are lost. Thus divisions, groupings and structures are understood "on the basis of a complex field of discourse" (p. 23). He also points out that the way we come to think about objects or things, in this case boys as literacy learners and male English teachers, depends on a number of choices that are silenced or hidden by unities. These choices are a result of an "operation" that is "interpretative" (p. 24). For example, Foucault uses the example of a "œuvre" to show that what determines a body of work is really a matter of choice and interpretation, and that a œuvre for one author is not necessarily the same as another, and yet the same word is used to describe or categorize both. This theorizing when applied to my research focus provides me the analytic tools to interrogate, for example, discourses that construct male English teachers. Discourses tend to have a homogenizing effect, which renders invisible or silences the multiple versions of what it means to be a male English teacher. In other words, even though the biographies, histories, philosophies, etc. vary from one male English teacher to the other, they are placed in the same category and described using the same words. Foucault does not suggest that continuities be

www.manaraa.com

rejected definitively, but rather they should not be accepted without question: "the tranquility with which they are accepted must be disturbed" (p. 25). As part of this disruption, he suggested that we must renounce the idea that discourses are derived from some "secret origin" and that they are based on the "already-said" which includes that which has already been spoken as well as the "not-said" (p. 25). This "not-said," according to Foucault, is "a hollow that undermines from within all that is said" (p. 25). In both cases, what is implied is that discourses are connected to something unseen, perhaps unheard and, therefore, considered to be without origin or innate. Foucault argues that this understanding of discourses makes it difficult to question them as it is suggested that there is something legitimate, innate or natural about them.

Once discourses are removed from continuities or unities, Foucault argues that they must then be replaced within their grouping to analyze their relations, the rules that govern them and the time and space within which they were formed. This process, as already discussed, facilitates an examination of how discourses are formed and whether or not alternatives are possible. He argues that the erasure and rejoining of unities enables us to "describe the interplay of relations within it and outside it" (p. 29). It also makes possible a "freeing" from "groupings that purport to be natural, immediate, universal unities" (p. 29). It renders the events, choices, rules and relations, for example, visible. Foucault (1972) writes,

> [continuities] do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized we must define in what conditions and in view of which analyses certain of them are legitimate; and we must indicate which of them can never be accepted in any circumstances (p. 25-26).

www.manaraa.com

Foucault's theorizing about the continuities of discourses is salient for this research as it interrogates claims or dominant discourses about boys' essential nature and notions of male teachers as role models for boys. My understanding of how to approach the task of making sense of discourses that have come to be understood as truth and therefore instrumental to the design and implementation of educational reforms has been deepened by this work of Foucault. In this study, it is important that the invisible or hidden continuities and rules governing these particular discourses be interrogated and questioned.

Theory of Masculinities

Like the theories already discussed, a theory of masculinities as elaborated by Connell (1995) provides a framework to rethink assumptions that underpin the call for male English teachers as a remediation strategy. The focus specifically on *male* English teachers requires a theoretical framework that positions the concept of masculinity at the centre. As discussed previously, popular understandings of what it means to be a man draw on essentialist notions of masculinity that are "fixed" (Connell, 2002, p. 4). This understanding of gender as determined by the physical and psychological body lends itself to simplistic solutions and fails to account for the multiple and complex issues surrounding gender identity and gender norms. Conversely, a theory of masculinities draws attention to masculinities as "configurations of practice structured by gender relations. They are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change" (Connell, 1995, p. 44). It is this understanding of masculinities as relational, a configuration of practice and interwoven within structures of power that shapes my analytical approach.

Rejecting sex role models. Give the attention being paid to male teachers as role models, a theory to facilitate an examination of the assumptions that underpin sex role theories of

www.manaraa.com

socialization is critical. Connell (1995) does just that. In fact, she argues that sex role theory is an "unworkable" (p. 26) framework because acts are "reduced to the body" (p. 71), it polarizes masculinity and femininity, and it fails to acknowledge power relations.

Connell (1995) argues that sex role theory is problematic because it blurs the distinction between sex differences and sex roles. Being a man or a woman means "enacting a *general* set of expectations which are attached to one's sex" (Connell, 1995, p. 22). As a result, sex role theory attempts to force all biological males and females into "a kind of static containers" (Kimmel, 1987, p. 12) and assumes a "concordance among social institutions, sex role norms and actual personalities" (p. 23). Reforms based on this theory are not concerned with questions about how institutions and norms modify and/or constrain the actions of individual males working in what has been constructed as a feminized subject area (Bouchard *et al.*, 2003; Froese-Germain, 2006; Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Martino, 2008a; Martino & Frank, 2006; Martino & Kehler, 2006, 2007; Rowan *et al.*, 2002). It is assumed that by recruiting men to teach English and serve as role models, boys will be more willing to engage with and therefore find success with school-based literacy endeavours. Connell's theory of masculinities rejects this view that posits the male body as inherently aligned with societal norms of masculinity, and draws attention to the distinction between sex differences and masculine roles, which is crucial for my research.

Connell (1995) also argues that sex role theory is unworkable because it is based on a dichotomous understanding of what it means to be male and female. According to Connell, sex role theory posits masculinity and femininity as relational; masculinity, as a concept, cannot exist "except in contrast with 'femininity'" (p. 68). For example, acts of masculinity are logical and aggressive, while femininity ascribes to the emotional and passive. This understanding of gender, however, is based on a "static traits rather than real life enactments" (Kimmel, 1987, p. 12).

www.manaraa.com

When action is understood in terms of dichotomous, homogeneous categories, men and women are incited to act in accordance with gender norms. Connell's theory of masculinities argues that various forms of masculinity exist and that other contributing factors such as class and race contribute to the complexities surrounding gender identity. This understanding of multiple masculinities works to resist notions of homogeneity and polarization that underpin a sex role theory of socialization.

Finally, Connell argues that sex role theory is inadequate because it downplays issues of power. She points out that there is "little attempt to investigate the effects of expectations or norms in social life. They [are] simply assumed to exist and to be effective" (p. 24). Since gender norms are understood to be aligned with the reproductive interests of society and natural inclinations of individuals, the influence that power relations have in producing and reproducing sex roles is considered to be negligible. The theoretical traditions I have adopted speak to my understanding of power as an integral part of research, making sex role theory a perspective requiring scrutiny.

Embracing multiple masculinities. In addition to providing me with the tools of inquiry to interrogate claims that boys need male English teachers to improve their literacy achievement, Connell's (1995) theory of masculinities provides me with a framework to understand configurations of practice in Western society. It argues that masculinities are social constructions, multiple and steeped in power relations.

Connell argues that gendered acts never happen in isolation; they are always part of a larger, historical structure. She speaks of "gender projects … [to emphasize the *process*] of configuring practice through time, which transform their starting-points in gender structures" (p. 72). Thus, masculinity is a socially constructed way of identifying patterns of action. These

www.manaraa.com

patterns constitute the organizing structures of society. Understanding masculinities as a process is important because it facilitates a rejection of simplistic, biologically-determined, homogenous understandings of both boys as literacy learners and their male English teachers.

To conceptualize multiple masculinities, Connell discusses four patterns of masculinity: hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalization. These patterns inform this research because, once again, they call into question the recruitment of male bodies to teach in the secondary-school English classroom. If we accept that there are multiple masculinities, then claims that suggest that male teachers, as a consequence of being male, are better equipped to improve boys' literacy achievement are inadequate. We must ask what kinds of masculinities are desired.

Lingard *et al.* (2009) found that the male teachers desired as role models are those who do not disrupt "normalize[d] hegemonized constructions of masculinity (p. 142). They argue that this "culturally exalted" (Connell, 1995, p. 77) dominant form of masculinity is so "ingrained" that the qualities expected of male teachers are rarely discussed (p. 142). While Skelton (2001b) points out, hegemonic masculinity is not "something embodied within individual male personalities but is the public face of male power" (p. 172), it is understood as the ideal and defines norms of masculinity.

Connell also argues that men, as a group, gain from the "overall subordination of women" through what she calls the "patriarchal dividend" (p. 79). Even though as individuals, these men fail to meet the standards prescribed by hegemony, they maintain a position of privilege simply by being male. This pattern of complicity serves as a useful analytic framework to interpret how masculinities play out in the English classroom.

www.manaraa.com

Also, some masculinities are subordinated because they are associated with femininity or understood as marginalized because of race, class or ethnicity. These patterns of masculinity are important not only because they are multiple and hierarchal but also because they speak to the limitations of reforms necessitating male English teachers in the classroom for boys.

In Summary

As will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter, the call for more male English teachers to address boys' literacy underachievement is not supported by the literature. In chapter one, I discussed how this understanding of the capacity of male teachers seems to be derived from common-sense understandings of essentialized masculinity and femininity and draws on role model theories. The theoretical perspectives of Weedon, Foucault and Connell, as discussed in this chapter, facilitate the questioning of such common-sense claims by providing the analytic or interpretative tools or resources needed to interrogate how "knowledge circulates and functions" within power relations (Foucault, 1982, p. 212). In particular, I have discussed the benefits of using Weedon (1997) to position gender at the centre of poststructuralist thought; how Foucault's theorizing about power, subjectivity, normalization and discourse open up spaces for interrogating discourses and the relations, norms and practices that underpin them; and how Connell (1995), through his theory of masculinities, provides me with a framework to examine how power operates within configurations of masculinity. In summary, these theoretical perspectives are particularly poignant because they draw attention to how historically specific relations and practices of power structure, authorize and define the limits of certain rationalities for thinking about the influence of male English teachers as role models . In short, such analytical perspectives enable a questioning of gender regimes that govern discourses about boys and male teachers as subjects in the English classroom.

www.manaraa.com

Chapter Three

Reviewing the Literature

> *By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped research can lead to better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice.*
>
> (Barritt, 1986, p. 20)

This literature review examines the body of research that currently exists concerning the English as a feminized subject area and the links between classroom teachers' gender and boys' literacy achievement. It also reveals an important gap: the shortage of research focusing specifically on the links between the male English teacher and boys' achievement in reading and writing at the secondary-school level. I have organized this literature review under the following sub-headings: *Feminization of teaching*, *English as a "soft" or feminine subject*, *Male teachers and boys' literacy achievement* and *Male teachers as role models for boys*. This organization is designed to facilitate easy reading, not to suggest that these topics are mutually exclusive. In fact, these sub-topics are interconnected and intertwined with one another so much so that in discussing them, some overlap and repetition has occurred which speaks not only to the importance of the topics but also to the problem of addressing a complex issue such as the "boy problem" (Martino & Kehler, 2007; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; 2008) with simplistic, quick-fix solutions.

Feminization of Teaching

Although my research interest does not focus specifically on the feminization of schooling (see Moreau, Osgood & Halsall, 2007), the fact that fewer men are entering the teaching profession, especially in the primary and junior divisions and some subject areas in the intermediate-senior division makes claims or perceptions of teaching as feminized an important contributing factor. If more male teachers are needed, the implication is that female teachers are

www.manaraa.com

failing to cater to the learning needs and interests of boys; therefore, a review of the literature focusing on the feminization of teaching is important to establish a context for my research.

Acker (1995/96) examines teachers' work through the "lens of gender" (p. 100). She reviews literature primarily from Britain, Canada and Australia to explore trends in the field of teachers and teaching to determine when gender is a consideration and when it is not. She also traces the historical legacy of "moral panic" (Epstein *et al.*, 1998; Hall & Coles, 2001; Rowan *et al.*, 2002; Sanford, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Titus, 2004) concerning the underachievement of boys in school at the hands of their female teachers as far back as 1873 when critics spoke out against coeducation in high school. Concern about the education of boys has reappeared many times since then. For example, Lieberman raised concerns about the scarcity of role models for boys in 1956 and Sexton questioned the "suppression" of masculinity in the "female-dominated elementary school ethos" in 1969 (Acker, 1995/96, p. 100). Today, a quick perusal of mainstream media and educational policies indicates clearly that the feminization of schooling is, at least in part, to blame for the underachievement of boys: "…the men's rights position maintains that schools are feminized and feminizing, both with respect to the preponderance of female teachers and in the passivity of the process of learning itself" (Lingard & Douglas, 1999, p. 54).

Coulter and Greig (2008) also examine recurring themes surrounding debates about the position of male teachers in the Canadian context from a historical perspective. They contend that women's initial entrance into the teaching profession can be traced to economic considerations, and that for the last 130 years, women have almost always been more predominant than men in the classroom. They also suggest that teaching became understood rather quickly as work that is more "naturally" suited for women.

www.manaraa.com

This historical overview is important for my research because it identifies many of the same arguments and politics that are presented in current debates about the need for more men in the classroom. In particular, it highlights essentialist arguments and the need for role models for boys:

> It is assumed that the mere presence of biological men in classrooms, hallways, and schoolyards will solve the boy problem. It is just 'natural' that men would be good role models for boys and have the power to fill in for absent fathers (Coulter & Greig, 2008, p. 429).

Also, Coulter and Greig (2008) conclude by calling into question the feminine nature of schooling; another theme that will be explored by focusing on the gendered-nature of the secondary school English classroom.

Martino (2008a) also draws attention to the history of teaching as women's work and its "emasculating associations for male teachers and boys" (p. 195). He argues that a historical perspective concerning the shortage of male teachers and the feminization of schooling is useful because the,

> emergence of feminization of teaching historically has always aroused some level of concern at both the level of women's subordinated status relative to men in the labour market and in relation to questioning both a male classroom teacher's masculinity and gender deviance in female teacher's expressions of gender non-conformity (p. 201).

In other words, by positioning current concerns about boys' underachievement in its historical context, I am able to draw attention to continuities, making relationships between claims of feminization and attempts to remasculinize schooling by reasserting masculine power and

www.manaraa.com

normative heterosexuality clearer (Foucault, 1972). A historical perspective highlights the influence that hegemonic masculinity has always had in debates about the shortage of male teachers. As Acker (1995/96) also argues, "The role of rhetoric about what is believed to be properly feminine or masculine can be seen to influence policies in the past and the present" (p. 120). Martino (2008a) uses this historical perspective to inform his understanding of the discourses underpinning the current male teacher debate and to refute such discourses about the "supposed detrimental influences of the feminization of elementary schooling" (p. 189; also see Martino & Kehler, 2006).

Other researchers have examined the way in which teaching as women's work has been devalued in society (Froese-Germain, 2006; Mills *et* al., 2004). Mills *et al.* (2004) write that the feminized construction of teaching served to,

> devalue the status of teaching by constructing such work for women as being a 'natural feminine activity … [and] worked to police the entry of men into certain areas of the profession – namely the early years of schooling, and other supposedly 'feminine' areas of the curriculum – and to construct men who do become such teachers as 'abnormal' which is often read as being gay or a (potential) paedophile (p. 365).

This devaluing of teaching works against the recruitment of more men into the profession. The hierarchy of occupations that perpetuates the lower status of women needs to be addressed not just to facilitate the employment of more male teachers, but also to acknowledge the importance of education in society and promote gender equity both within and beyond schooling.

www.manaraa.com

English as a "Soft" or Feminine Subject

Simpson (1974), although dated, provides an excellent starting point for this review of literature pertaining to the feminization of English as a subject. The data for this study was collected from mail questionnaires sent to 22,000 teachers in North Carolina in 1962 and 1963. He found that "science and mathematics were seen [by teachers] as masculine, English and foreign languages as feminine" (p. 391). He also found that the "highest-prestige group of all were the most conformist men, those teaching science, and the lowest were the most non-conformist men, those teaching English" (p. 394). Based on his findings, he also speculated that "social norms governing appropriate occupations apply more strongly to men than to women" (p. 394). While these data were collected in a very different social context, they are worth noting, as they suggest that current understandings of English as a feminine domain of teaching are not new.

Roulston and Mills (2000) speak to the way in which school subjects are "hegemonised and gendered" (p. 5) which reinforces dominant versions of masculinity. They claim that subjects such as math and science have been constructed as masculine and therefore remain at the top of the "hierarchy" of subjects (Roulston & Mills, 2000, p. 5). Subject areas such as "home economics, dance, drama, early childhood studies or music" and the primary division are seen as feminine domains of teaching and are therefore "subordinated within a school's social organization of masculinity" (Roulston & Mills, 2000, p. 5). They also found that men who work in these "subordinated" areas of teaching are not considered "real men" and often feel pressured to demonstrate behaviours that conform to hegemonic notions of masculinity. It should be noted that although they do not explicitly identify English as a subordinated subject area, many other researchers have (Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Rowan *et al.*, 2002, Martino, 2004).

www.manaraa.com

The attitude expressed by one of the boys in Martino's (1997) study underscores the extent to which English is gendered: "English is more suited to girls because it's not the way guys think … Therefore, I don't particularly like this subject. I hope you aren't offended by this, but most guys who like English are faggots" (p. 354). While this perception of English as a subject not suitable for "guys" will need to be explored further in this study, it is of interest not only because it may speak to one of the contributing factors for boys' lower achievement, but also because it may play a part in deterring some men from becoming English teachers. In rural America, Cummings (1994) investigated the perceptions of 11th grade students (both boys and girls) by asking them to respond to a writing prompt in their English class—"What do you believe the reason(s) are for (i) the higher scores in reading/literature for females? (ii) the higher scores in math for males?" (p 197). She found that the students' responses "embodied stereotypic thinking" (p. 199). They suggested that reading is more natural for girls and that boys need math to enter traditionally male-dominated occupations such as mechanics and medicine. In addition, they mentioned the logic of math being more suited for boys and that "reading is for sissies" (p. 198). These understandings of reading and the subject of English call into question the effectiveness of recruiting male bodies to improve boys' achievement if dominant understandings of masculinity as expressed above are not challenged and deconstructed.

Millard (1997) speaks to the supposedly feminine nature of common approaches to the teaching of English in her study, which focused on the gender differences in reading and writing of boys and girls (age 11-13). She suggests that the emphasis on personal growth, narrative, and expressive responses contributes to perceptions of feminization. She writes,

> The focus on personal subject matter for writing and expressive response in reading exercise a strong influence on the way English, as a subject, is perceived

www.manaraa.com

> by adolescents. In particular, this influence becomes stronger as pupils begin to distinguish certain kinds of school activity as more appropriate to one sex than the other (p. 42).

Here Millard contends that constructions of English as feminized are influenced by the pedagogical approaches in addition to historical influences and the predominance of female teachers.

Hurrell (2001), using naturalistic qualitative research methods, examined the "interplay" between masculinities and English as a subject (p. 53). The data in this research were drawn from one particular grade eight class in Australia. He found that none of the boys in this study constructed English as "feminized, effeminate or for homosexuals only" and that in this context "masculine subjectivities" were accommodated (p. 57). Although he acknowledged that it is possible that the boys he interviewed "moderated their opinions due to perceptions about the interview and [his] role as interviewer," they did not explicitly express negative opinions about English. This is not to suggest that gendered identities were not found to be pervasive in this English classroom. In fact, Hurrell writes,

> Students were reading and writing gendered texts on a continual basis. Gender influenced their relationships with each other, with their teacher and with the curriculum. I strongly argue that teachers require an awareness of this permeation of the classroom by gender (p. 59).

The impact of the teacher's gender in this case cannot be commented upon, as it is not taken up by Hurrell; however, it does raise some important questions for me about the impact of his masculinity on his students. Instead, Hurrell draws attention to his pedagogical approach which includes "his accommodation and flexibility within limits,

www.manaraa.com

and [the] centrality of relationships in his teaching" as possible explanations for the boys' positive perceptions of English. This insight or finding supports the direction of my research which contends that the nature of the pedagogical practice of male teachers is critical to deepening our understanding the potential for influence for boys' achievement in the secondary-school English classroom.

Francis (2000a) also presents a different lens with which to view school subjects. In her paper, she examines the perspectives of secondary-school students about gender, subject preference and subject ability to see if any shifts in understanding has occurred. Like Roulston and Mills (2000), she points out that traditionally masculine subjects such as math and science are awarded high-status because they are associated with qualities like "rationality and objectivity"; whereas, the arts are associated with "emotion and subjectivity": traditionally feminine qualities (Francis, 2000a, p. 35). The data discussed in her paper was collected from 100 (50 boys and 50 girls) 14-16 year old students who attended three different schools within Greater London, England. During the interview process, students were asked to identify their most and least favourite subjects and then asked, "Do you think that male and female students have the same ability at different subjects?" (Francis, 2000a, p. 37).

The findings from Francis (2000a) call into question the findings from some previous studies on gender and subject preference (see Archer & Macrae, 1991; Cummings, 1994; Sharpe, 1976; Thomas, 1990; Martino, 1997; Whitehead, 1996). Francis (2000) found that English was most frequently listed as a favourite subject by boys, which runs counter to the proliferation of claims made by media and educational policy-makers that boys are underachieving and disengaged in the English classroom because it is primarily taught by female teachers. The vast majority of student responses also indicate that subject ability is "unrelated" to gender (Francis,

www.manaraa.com

2000a, p. 46). Rowan *et al.* (2002) also present some evidence to suggest that some girls dislike and struggle in English. A group of five girls from Willoughby Heights, a government-funded co-educational high school, "challenged the claim that English was better for girls. They argued loudly that the books they read were irrelevant to them, that they would rather be doing any other subject (even maths)" (p. 115).

Also, one additional finding from the Francis (2000a) study is particularly relevant to my research. One girl, Patrice, explained why she believes that girls and boys tend to be better at different subjects. During her interview, she said,

> … Well, I, I used to think that, yeah, they have, the same abilities, but *now*, learning from what said Miss said, yeah? … she said that how, males is good at graphs an' that, and females at languages, and I can see her point of view cos I'm no good at graphs and that …" (p. 42).

Here, Patrice explicitly identifies her teacher's role in influencing her understanding of gender and how it influences ability in certain subject areas. This testimony speaks to the capacity of teachers to perpetuate gender norms, which I interrogate in this research.

Many researchers have offered criticism of simplistic and reductionist notions that suggest that English or literacy learning is feminine in nature (Froese-Germain, 2006; Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Martino & Frank, 2006; Martino & Kehler, 2006, 2007; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). This research investigates "male teachers' accounts of their work within feminised environments" (Roulston & Mills, 2000, p. 1), an area of study in which little research exists.

Male Teachers and Boys' Literacy Achievement

The decline in the number of male teachers is often linked to boys' literacy underachievement (see BBC News, 2005; Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Eng, 2004; Hetzner,

www.manaraa.com

2003; Mills *et al.*, 2004; Ontario Public School Boards' Association, 2000; Ontario College of Teachers, 2004; Sax 2005; Tinklin, Croxford, Duckiln, & Frame, 2001). Although, as indicated above, there are far fewer men in the teaching profession than women, the influence of a predominantly female teaching force has on boys' achievement is unclear. Assumptions about the link between the declining number of men in teaching and the literacy achievement gap in favour of girls seems to draw more on "common-sense" notions than on empirical evidence, as there is little research to support this interpretation of boys' underachievement (see Neugebauer *et al.*, 2011; Sokal *et al.*, 2007). In fact, there are a number of studies that suggest no significant link between the gender of the teacher and boys' literacy achievement. Sokal *et al.* (2007) found that "the sex of the reading teachers in [their] study did not have consistent effect on all boys" (p. 256). This Canadian study focused on 180 third- and fourth-grade boys who were identified by their teachers as struggling readers. It involved a 10-week reading intervention program, "intended to help all of the participants to become better readers" (p. 653). Despite the lack of findings regarding achievement, they did find that boys taught by female research assistants developed a more positive "self-perception as readers" (p. 656). Also, some boys, but not all, who worked with male research assistants "developed a less feminized view of reading and had better perceptions of their social feedback about their reading skills" (p. 656). These findings point to the diverse nature of the category of "boy" and the complexity surrounding literacy achievement.

Sokal and Katz (2008) also call into question claims about the capacity of male teachers to improve boys' literacy achievement. In addition, they explored the influence of computer-based reading on boys' achievement. This Canadian study focused on 119 third- and fourth-grade boys who were randomly assigned to read weekly for 30 minutes with either a female or

www.manaraa.com

male research assistant for 22 weeks. All of the boys were identified as struggling readers by their teachers. They found that "neither male reading teachers nor computer-based reading had a significant effect on boys' reading performance" (p. 88). They did, however, find a decrease in boys' view of reading as feminine in the treatment group working with a male research assistant and using computers. Sokal and Katz suggest that this finding may be significant in that it draws attention to the "actions" rather than the body of the male teacher, in this case a male teacher using technology. This finding is of particular interest to my research which seeks to understand the pedagogical practices used by male English teachers to engage boys and facilitate their achievement and investigates whether boys themselves attribute their literacy achievement and/or improvement to the influence of a male teacher.

While the findings of both of the above studies suggest the need for further research about the influence of male reading teachers on boy's achievement, the studies are not without limitations. It should be noted that the reading intervention was conducted by research assistants, not teachers, and that all of the boys who participated in the study continued to attend their regular classes with their regular teachers. Most of these teachers were females, but some were male. Also, the varied backgrounds and experiences of the boys may have influenced the findings. Some of the boys had past experiences with male teachers that again may have influenced the findings. My research focuses specifically on the influence of the male classroom teacher and the boys in their classes during regular instructional time in an attempt to emulate classroom conditions.

Sokal *et al.* (2005) investigated whether the "sex of the reading model would influence boys' experiences as readers" of 21 first- and second-grade boys from an inner-city elementary school in Winnipeg (p. 113). They found that "the sex of the reading teacher has no effect on

www.manaraa.com

inner-city boys' reading performance or self-perception as readers when Paired Reading is implemented through incorporating choices in texts of high interest to boys" (p. 125).

Lam *et al.* (2010) also investigated teacher gender and achievement in reading literacy in Hong Kong. They found no support for claims that boys learn to read better when taught by male teachers. In fact, they found that the reading attainment of both boys and girls was improved when taught by female teachers. In this study, 4697 grade four students were asked to complete a standardized test designed by the IEA for PIRLS 2001. Both literary and informational texts were included in the test battery. The students were also asked to complete the PIRLS survey which comprises an "attitude toward reading" scale and questions concerning reading habits. Also, the teachers of the participants completed a questionnaire about "basic demographic data and school background information, classroom information, instructional strategies and activities deployed, teacher resources and parental involvement" (p. 755). Teacher responses on the questionnaire revealed differences in the teaching strategies used by male and female teachers. Male teachers used whole-class activities and discussions and relied on regular assessments to maintain control, whereas female teachers tended to be more willing to use a wide range of strategies and were more concerned with the reading interests of their students. They seemed more willing to share control with their students than were their male counterparts. Because the data for this study was collected through a questionnaire, it is difficult to say if the teachers actually used these approaches in their classrooms. They indicated that they preferred the strategies, but further research is needed to investigate what strategies male and female teachers actually employ in their classrooms. My research does just that. Through classroom observation, I gather data in the classroom context and observe first-hand the pedagogy employed by the male English teachers in the study.

www.manaraa.com

Neugebauer *et al.* (2011) examined whether the gender of teachers influences the academic achievement of male and female students in German (a girl's domain), mathematics (a boy's domain) and science (neutral). The sample consisted of 5,858 fourth grade students in 166 schools (308 different classes). They exploit two aspects of the German primary school system: students typically are taught by the same teacher for two or more years and teachers and students have limited choice as to what schools they are assigned. Using data from IGLU-E, the German supplemental sample from the 2011 Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) study and teacher grades, they found no same-sex teacher effect for boys or girls in the three subjects in German primary school: "we find that boys do not benefit from male teachers and girls do not – at least not significantly – benefit from female teachers, neither with regard to their academic performance as measured by test scores, nor with regard to their grades" (p. 682). To verify if these findings are robust, they also checked their hypotheses using a number of subgroups such as students' socioeconomic status and migration, teacher traits (i.e., age, experience, amount of further education, employment status) and classroom traits (i.e., class size). They conclude that the call for more male teachers to address boys' "educational and psycho-social needs in school" is not based on sound evidence.

As suggested earlier, these studies call into question claims about the capacity of male teachers to positively influence boys' literacy achievement. Although their findings are consistent—none of them found any link between the gender of the teacher and boys' literacy achievement—they also suggest that more research in this area is needed. Also, it should be noted that all of these studies focused on elementary-school aged boys and their teachers. My research addresses a gap in the literature, by focusing on secondary-school English teachers. Given the emphasis placed on students at this level to pass the Ontario Secondary School

www.manaraa.com

Literacy Test (OSSLT) in order to graduate and the perception of English as a feminized subject, male English teachers have been identified as a reform strategy, making it an important research focus.

Male Teachers as Role Models for Boys

Although the call for more male teachers as role models (see Ontario College of Teachers, 2004; Martino, 2008a) has garnered much attention from the media and ministries of education in many corners of the Western world, it remains a contentious issue. There seems to be an uncritical assumption that boys' achievement and engagement is negatively affected by the lack of male teachers in the school system, particularly at the elementary and primary levels, but not exclusively. This approach, although attractive because of its simplicity, appears to be grounded on little empirical research. In this section, I review a number of studies that investigate the popular assumption that male teachers as role models are needed to improve schooling for boys.

Bricheno and Thornton (2007) investigated whether or not children see their teachers as role models, given claims about the capacity of male teachers as role models to improve boys' behaviour and achievement in school. They administered questionnaires to 10- and 11-year olds in two elementary schools and 14- and 16-year old students in two high schools in the UK (197 boys and 182 girls in total). The schools selected for this sample vary according to socio-economic status. On the questionnaire, students were asked to select attributes of a role model from a prepared list, to identify which attributes are most important to them and discuss their own role models. As part of the questionnaire, students were given a definition of "role model" – "a person you respect, follow, look up to or want to be like" (p. 383). The findings of this study indicated clearly "who these children's role models were, and what they regarded as important

www.manaraa.com

attributes for a role model" (p. 387). They found no indication that students see teachers as role models. Only 2.4% of the students identified teachers as role models. The majority indicated close family members as role models. These findings call into question education-policy initiatives and media hype about the capacity of male teachers to act as role models for boys and therefore positively influence boys' behaviour and achievement.

Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010), using a case-study approach, report on data collected from one Black male elementary school teacher in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, to raise questions about claims about teachers as role models. This interview data was collected as part of a larger research project that aimed, by drawing on feminist, queer and antiracist theoretical frameworks, to produce further knowledge about "the extent to which gender had an impact on teachers' pedagogical relationships with students of the same gender" (p. 45). They interviewed 72 elementary school teachers from four public schools (male, female, visible minorities). The case-study approach enabled them to devote thick description to individual teachers in their particular contexts to draw attention to the limitations associated with gender- and race-based role modeling to explain teachers' influence. The case reported on this paper highlights the need to look beyond a sex role theoretical framework to address the issues of Black boys living in "impoverished inner-city communities" (p. 59). Andrew, the focus of this case, suggests that role-model discourses divert attention away from more pertinent pedagogical factors, such as "connecting with community," "high expectations," and making connections between the curriculum and "the everyday lives of minority students," for improving the "quality of education for disadvantaged minority students" (p. 59). Although Andrew is also critical of discourses about role modeling because they neglect to address issues of masculinities for boys, he does acknowledge the importance of minority students seeing themselves in their teachers;

www.manaraa.com

however, he is careful to point out that representation is not enough without careful attention to the quality of teachers' pedagogical practices. This research highlights the need to move beyond the "singularity of gender" and race to make sense of teachers' influence (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010).

In the UK, Francis *et al.* (2008) conducted a large-scale qualitative study to investigate the views of primary teachers and their pupils about the impact of matching teachers and their students by gender. This group of researchers used classroom observations and semi-structured interviews to collect data from fifty-one teachers and 307 seven and eight year-old students (both boys and girls from ethnically diverse backgrounds). They found that an "overwhelming majority" of students when asked if the gender of the teacher makes any difference indicated that it does not (p. 24). This majority indicated that it sees "the teacher's purpose or 'role' as to teach them," and therefore was more concerned with the qualities of teachers that enabled them to be effective in the classroom (p. 24). They also found that slightly more girls than boys indicated that teacher gender does not make a difference. For the minority of students who did suggest that gender is a salient factor, their explanations in support of their position tended to be "disparate and sometimes contradictory" (p. 32). In addition, they found that the "majority of teachers rejected the notion of matched pupil-teacher gender as salient in teacher-pupil relationships" (p. 33). Like the students, they suggested that individual teacher qualities have the greatest impact on student engagement. The teachers (mostly male) who did support teacher-pupil gender matching tended to draw on discourses of role modeling and gender bonding to justify their standpoints. Francis *et al.* suggest that the tendency for male teachers to support the notion that gender matching is beneficial for students might stem from the fact that this policy is more "affirming" for male teachers and it enables male teachers to construct themselves as masculine.

www.manaraa.com

This research challenges the rationale that underpins reform strategies that advocate the recruitment of male teachers to address boys' underachievement and assumptions about gender bonding and teachers as role models (also see Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Carrington *et al.*, 2007). Another important finding, emerging from this data as reported in Skelton and Read (2006) concerns teachers' responses to students based on gender. They found that although the students believed that their teachers treated them in a "fair and just manner," the teachers reported that they respond differently to their pupils according to gender (p. 105). This finding is considered to be salient for research that investigates the gendered nature of pedagogical approaches and its potential influence on boys' achievement in the secondary-school English classroom.

Francis (2008), again drawing on the findings of the above large-scale study, draws attention to the diversity of the male teachers' practices in their study. In this paper, Francis focuses on three cases to explore in depth the "discursive constructions" and gendered performances of male teachers in the classroom (p. 111). She found that these male teachers had "strongly contrasting pedagogic practices, disciplinary effectiveness, and approaches to pupils and to the teacher role" (p. 119). This paper also draws attention to the "shifting and nebulous nature of gendered subjectivity" (p. 119). She found many contradictions within their performances and their articulations about gender that in part may be attributed to the other aspects of their subjectivities (race and class) and in part to the stereotypically gendered expressions used as analytical tools. Finally, this research raises questions about the way in which "gendered discourses" are taken up to create "power positions" (p. 120). The findings of Francis (2008) are particularly salient for this research as they illuminate the complexities and fractures between and within the subjectivities of male teachers. This research also examines the

www.manaraa.com

nuances of what it means to be a male English teacher and raises questions about the discourses that claim male teachers are needed as role models for boys.

Carrington *et al.* (2008), also in the UK, use quantitative data from 413 classes of eleven year-olds to investigate whether or not male teachers have positive effects on boys and female teachers have positive effects on girls, concerning attainment levels and attitude in school. They focused on data from Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) Project run by the Curriculum Evaluation and Management (CEM) Centre, University of Durham (p. 319). This project provides schools with feedback about student's attainment and progress. The participants for this study were comprised of one hundred and thirteen classes taught by male teachers and three hundred classes taught by females. The multilevel models used to examine student attainment in mathematics, reading and science revealed that the gender of the teacher was unrelated to student attainment. The same was found to be true for the attitude measure, except attitudes towards school: both boys and girls demonstrated more positive attitudes towards school when taught by female teachers. Although they acknowledge that there are a number of other factors that could have influenced the results of this study (personalities, teacher effectiveness, etc.), the findings of this study call into question notions of male teachers as role models to improve boys' attitudes and attainment in school. They suggest that policy initiatives need to focus on the recruitment of "effective, high calibre teachers" regardless of gender (p. 323).

Using his own journal writing about the literacy learning of his son, observations and interviews of men and boys collected by teachers in his pre-service and graduate programs, and his own personal experience with writers and 'authorities' in the field, Booth (2002) makes a number of claims about the literacy practices of boys. Booth (2002) suggests that as a result of

www.manaraa.com

the emphasis on novels in school and the predominance of female English teachers, boys come to see "literacy endeavours as 'feminized', valuing female knowledge and behaviours over their interests" (p. 14). As a result, he argues that boys are reluctant to engage in literacy practices because they do not understand how boys read, write and respond. Booth claims that in order to help boys see themselves as literate subjects, they need male literacy role models (p. 17). Thus, the male teacher "as role model is invested with a particular masculinising capacity necessary to counteract the feminization" (Martino & Frank, 2006, p. 19).

Martino and Frank (2006) call into question rhetoric about the capacity of male teachers as role models to improve boys' schooling experiences by investigating the "impact of masculinities" in male teachers' lives (p. 17). The data for this study are drawn from case-study research in schools in Australia, Canada and South Africa. It focuses on the interviews of two male teachers in an elite private boys' school in Australia. From these interviews, three themes emerged as significant: (1) the imperative to establish a "normal" masculinity; (2) the impact of teacher knowledges; and (3) the significance of the male teachers' construction of schoolboy masculinities (p. 21). They found that teachers' pedagogical practices are potentially limited by practices of normalization and that "teacher threshold knowledge needs to be built around interrogating such gender regimes" (p. 21). As one of my research questions for this study explicitly focuses on the influential factors in determining male English teachers' pedagogy, the work of Martino and Frank (2006) provides an important starting point from which to begin thinking about and examining factors of influence for the teacher participants in this research.

Roulston and Mills (2000) interrogate claims that are made in popular texts (Bly, 1991; Biddulph, 1994, 1998) within the mythopoetic and therapeutic movement about the lack of spiritual leadership and the pain boys experience because their fathers are absent and distant.

www.manaraa.com

According to these claims, male teachers are needed as role models for boys to counter the feminine influences of their mothers and female teachers and reinscribe traditionally masculine qualities. Roulston and Mills (2000) argue that calls for more male teachers need to be informed by "underlying assumptions about masculinity which teachers themselves bring to their work" (p. 1). Drawing on the accounts of two male music teachers, Roulston and Mills (2000) found that the men in their studies attempted to legitimize their masculinity by aligning themselves with "very jock" behaviour (p. 8) and distancing themselves from the "prissy" (p. 8). These "signifiers of hegemonic masculinity" (p. 8) are used to bond with their male students and encourage them to sing, an activity constructed to be feminine and gay. Although Andy, one of the teachers in this study, identifies himself as an ideal role model for his students because he is involved in both sports and music, he also constructs his masculinity by using homophobic discourses to assert that boys should not be outdone by girls. Ironically, as pointed out by Roulston and Mills (2000), Andy does not challenge hegemonic masculinity in his role as a role model for his male students, the very masculinity that attempted to undermine his own involvement in music throughout his life.

In Martino and Kehler (2006), they "aim to investigate media texts as a site for the emergence of certain "truth claims" (Foucault, 1984, 1987) regarding the need for more male role models in schools" (p. 114). The media, according to Martino & Kehler (2006), propagate claims informed by recuperative masculinity politics (Lingard & Douglas, 1999) that appeal to the public's common sense such as:

- "boys will be boys" (see Epstein *et al.*, 1998) which draw on an essentialist understanding of gender;
- boys need men to "confirm" their masculinity;

www.manaraa.com

- boys need male role models because they are being raised by their mothers;
- schools, because of the predominance of female teachers, are failing boys and as a result they are underachieving;
- gender differences necessitate pedagogical approaches to address these differences.

Absent from these common sense claims is a "gender analysis regarding how male bonding functions to enforce and legitimate certain hegemonic practices that are often policed through femiphobia and homophobia" (Martino & Kehler, 2006, p. 119; also see Skelton, 2001a). A more nuanced understanding of the purpose of male teachers as role models for literacy learning is required, although the "logic of recuperative masculinity politics" (Martino & Kehler, 2006, p. 121) precludes such a discussion. At the very least, Martino and Kehler (2006) suggest that an "an essentialist argument about the need for male role models in schools as a panacea for addressing boys' diverse educational and social problems" (p. 125) should be avoided and a more "sophisticated media debate" (p. 126) is integral.

Martino (2008a) also draws attention to the politics of hegemonic masculinity driving the call for male teachers as role models in elementary schools. In his paper, Martino (2008a) illustrates the extent to which role model discourse is "part of a broader cultural project of re-masculinization" (p. 217) and points to the gap between policy and research in this area. Martino's critique does not focus on male teachers themselves, but instead on the politics behind structural reforms. He argues that healthy masculinity is not based on biological essentialism or sex differences and that an analysis of the role of homophobia, compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity is necessary.

Lingard *et al.* (2009) also question what male teachers are being recruited to model. To illustrate that some kinds of male role models are more eagerly sought after than others, Lingard

www.manaraa.com

et al. (2009) introduce several male teachers from the research they conducted for an Australia Research Council Grant. What comes across in the stories of John, James and Mustafa is an assumption that the male teachers desired are those who do not disrupt "normalize[d] hegemonized constructions of masculinity" (p. 142). They are expected to be athletic, straight, Anglo-Celtic and disciplinarians. Lingard *et al.* (2009) suggest that simply recruiting male bodies that embody idealized construction of hegemonic masculinity will likely do little to address boys' underachievement in school. Obviously their qualifications as educators must be given priority over their sex. Lingard *et al.* (2009) highlight the qualities of caring, the ability to challenge students intellectually, to connect the classroom to their world and encourage them to value and engage with differences as desirable. They also suggest that male teachers who are able to disrupt hegemonic notions of masculinity might have the most potential to have a positive impact in the lives of boys and girls (p. 144).

In spite of the attention devoted to the importance of role models for boys, Coulter and McNay (1993) claim that,

> a review of research concludes that claims for male elementary teachers as important same-sex role models are not supported empirically; boys who have male teachers do not have fewer problems in schools nor are they better adjusted; boys from father-absent homes do not imitate or rely more on male teachers than other boys (p. 1).

Carrington and Skelton (2003) concur. They write, "There is no evidence to suggest that this composition of the teaching population [predominantly female and of white ethnic origin] actually makes any significant difference to young people's educational achievement" (p. 256). By drawing on data collected from telephone interviews with student teachers in the primary

www.manaraa.com

division (18 males and 18 females) in England and Wales, they found that current policies regarding the recruitment of male teachers as role models is "uninformed by the findings of research on 'role models'" (p. 263). According to a female teacher interviewed for Lahelma (2000), the "need for male models in schools seemed to be self-evident for many teachers: 'children at the age of puberty would definitely need a father figure, and many of them'" (p. 179). In this study of 13- and 14-year old Finnish students in a secondary school in which only 20% of the teaching population was male found that the students interviewed did not share the "same fears as raised in the public 'lack of male teachers' discourse" (p. 183). They also concluded that "Female numerical dominance of the teaching profession seems to be more a problem for adults than for young men and women" (p. 184). This claim supports my research focus, which calls into question the capacity of male teachers on the basis of gender alignment to facilitate improved achievement in the English classroom. As Ashley and Lee (2003) caution, poor role models can be damaging: "A poor male role model at home or school can do a great deal of damage, whereas no male role model at all does not necessarily lead to any kind of problem" (p. 63). My research will, in part, interrogate what it means to be a male English teacher and how important a male body standing at the front of a classroom is to boys' engagement and achievement.

Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012a) interviewed over seventy elementary school teachers (male and female, including minority and queer) in Canada and Australia to examine the empirical basis for the perceptions that male teachers are needed as role models for boys. They also observed some of these teachers and their students within the classroom and interviewed thirty-six students (male and female, including visible minorities) in order to obtain a more "in-depth understanding of the phenomena (or question) under consideration – that is, the limits of

www.manaraa.com

race and gender-based role modeling as a basis for explaining teacher influence" (p. 4). They employ a case-study research design in conjunction with feminist, queer and anti-racist theoretical frameworks to draw attention to the inadequacies of educational reforms grounded in assumptions about male teachers as role models for boys. By highlighting multiple important "social and cultural influences" that influence both teachers and minority and disadvantaged students in school, they argue that we must move beyond the "singularity of gender" and race and notions of teachers as role models as explanatory frameworks to embrace,

> analytic perspectives that are capable of unraveling the complexities and contradictory dimensions of the dynamics of gender, race, class and sexuality, as they relate to theorizing about the influence of male teachers, masculinities and gender and racial affiliation in urban school communities (p. 244).

Finally, Martin and Marsh (2005) investigated the academic motivation and engagement for 964 junior and middle high school boys and girls in the Australian context. They found that both boys and girls are no more or less motivated or engaged in classes taught by female teachers than they are in classes taught by male teachers. This finding challenges discourses about role modeling and gender matching as a basis for educational reform to address boys' underachievement.

Conclusion

The studies reviewed in this chapter are important for this research for a number of reasons. They highlight significant empirical research in the field concerning school and in particular English as a subject as a feminine pursuit, male teachers' capacity to improve boys' literacy achievement and male teachers as role models. The research reviewed in this chapter concerning the feminization of teaching and English as a "soft" or feminized subject area serves

www.manaraa.com

to provide the context for this research. Claims about the need for more male teachers rely heavily on the assumption that male teachers are able to offset or counter notions of subjects such as English as feminine. Although this research is not unified in its findings, it draws attention to discourses that normalize certain practices for boys and girls and justifies this research's focus on the English classroom. The research reviewed in this chapter concerning male teachers as role models is also important as it either downplays the significance of male teachers are role models by pointing to the inadequacies of sex role theories of socialization to explain the complexities surrounding boys' subjectivities or points to the lack of evidence to support claims that link male teachers to boys' literacy achievement.

This thesis builds on the findings of such studies and intends to add to the body of research that questions dominant assumptions not only about the capacity of male teachers as role models but also to positively influence boys' literacy achievement. By focusing specifically on boys and their male English teachers in the secondary-school classroom, this research aims to provide further knowledge about the extent to which male teachers influence boys' engagement with and achievement in the subject of English.

www.manaraa.com

Chapter Four

Methodology

I think metaphorically of qualitative research as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material. This fabric is not explained easily or simply. Like the loom on which fabric is woven, general world views and perspectives hold qualitative research together.

(Creswell, 2007, p. 35)

Lather (1991a) writes, "Methodology is the theory of knowledge and interpretive framework that guides a particular research project" (p. 3-4; also see Harding, 1987, p. 2). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) contend that a theory is not a lens through which we see the world but rather a tool to help us "devise questions and strategies for exploring it" (p. 306; also see Vaandering, 2009). The "theory of knowledge" that informs both the questions that I ask and the methods I use to explore them is one that foregrounds gender and understands the world to be socially constructed; however, in keeping with my understanding that factors contributing to boys' achievement as literacy learners are multiple and complex, I have embraced theoretical perspectives which draw attention to understandings of gender and power that move beyond the limits of sex-role socialization.

This chapter focuses on the methods of inquiry used to conduct this research. With an understanding that quantitative measures, such as those reported on high-stakes tests like the OSSLT in Ontario, are too narrow to fully understand the complexities associated with boys' engagement and achievement as literacy learners, this research study uses qualitative methods to broaden our perspectives of not only what counts as evidence (see Luke *et al.*, 2010), but also to elucidate the factors of influence that numbers are unable to illuminate. As Connolly (2008) contends, there is a need for good quantitative research to "pinpoint" educational needs or areas of concern; however, he also suggests that this research be used "to guide the focus for more in-depth qualitative work to then begin to understand some of these processes further" (p. 257).

www.manaraa.com

Given the need for more in-depth knowledge about the influence of male teachers in terms of their capacity to influence boys' literacy achievement, a qualitative case-study approach has been adopted.

Although this research is interested in the mechanism or technologies of power that function at both the micro-level within individual schools and classrooms and at the macro-level through metanarratives and discourses that shape how we have come to understand male English teachers and boys as subjects in the English classroom, a genealogical methodology, as conceived of by Foucault, has not been adopted for this research. In a lecture entitled, "Subjectivity and Truth," Foucault described his conception of a genealogy of the subject as "studying the constitution of the subject across history which has led us up to the modern concept of the self" (1993, p. 202). Central to his analysis are both "techniques of domination" and "techniques or technology of the self", which he explains as,

> techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on (p. 203).

He suggests that the "contact point" between these two techniques has to do with government, or the governing of people which is constituted both by the coercion of others and through an active modification of the self (p. 204). According to McHoul and Grace (1993), Foucault thought of his "genealogical researches as opening up 'spaces' for debate; they are 'propositions' or 'game openings' and are not meant as dogmatic assertions" (p. 85). Foucault (1994) himself stated that "I take care not to dictate how things should be" (1994, p. 288). With this understanding of the

www.manaraa.com

work of Foucault as interpretive devices or meaning-making tools, I turn his work not as a prescribed method but instead as a "tool-box," which is in keeping with how Foucault (1974) suggested he hoped his theories would be used: "I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area... I would like the little volume that I want to write on disciplinary systems to be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers (p. 523-4). My analysis draws on four major themes from Foucault's tool-box: power relations, subjectivity, normalization and discourse to disrupt notions of what it means to be a male English teacher and what it means to be a boy in a secondary-school English classroom. I am not so much concerned with how historical processes or continuities have led to our understanding of the English classroom as feminized, and therefore an arena in which boys are disadvantaged, but instead to draw attention to the limitations of such understandings that inform education policy and disrupt notions of a unitary gender that erase or bleach the significance of multiple and complex contextual factors.

In this chapter, I continue to provide justification for the qualitative methods of inquiry and in particular the case-study design adopted for this research. Next, I discuss the procedures used to recruit and select the participants for this study. The methods used to collect and analyze data follow, and finally the critical ethical considerations for this research are discussed.

Qualitative Inquiry

Although Denzin and Lincoln (2005) are careful to point out that qualitative research means different things in different times and spaces, they offer this understanding:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.

www.manaraa.com

> These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

This definition provides a good starting point for this chapter not only because it clearly outlines the approach of the qualitative researcher but also places emphasis on the potential of qualitative research to change the way we understand the world. It also draws attention to the process of interpretation or meaning-making with a particular worldview or theoretical lens, which is particularly important given Luke *et al.* (2010) contention that we must question what counts as evidence in boys' literacy debates. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also point out that,

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researched and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning (p. 10).

According to Patton (2002), constructionism or constructivism, terms that are often used interchangeably, begins with the assertion that because the human world is different than the physical world, it must be studied differently (also see Guba & Lincoln, 1990). Social constructionists argue that because humans are able to construct and interpret reality using social, cultural, political and linguistic constructs, their world is not real in an "absolute sense" (Patton,

www.manaraa.com

2002, p. 96). The human world is understood to become real through people's experiences and perceptions, lending it to multiple realities. Thus, social constructionists are concerned with the implications of constructed realities for human experiences and interactions (Patton, 2002, p. 96). They argue that concepts of "truth" are not fixed but rather constructed through consensus of values, repetition of practice and a particular framework.

This social constructionist perspective is directly aligned with the qualitative research methods used to investigate claims about the capacity of male English teachers to improve boys' literacy achievement. Using a qualitative method of inquiry, which makes it possible to study issues in depth and detail, I begin with the assumption that different male English teachers and different boys have different experiences and perceptions, and that all of their voices deserve to be heard. This assumption underpins my decision to conduct this research to "create spaces" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 23) for the participants to speak from their gendered perspectives about their lived-experiences.

Test results such as those published by Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) use numerical data to posit a single truth about boys as literacy learners: girls outperform them. In response, quick-fix, common-sense remediation strategies are undertaken to cater to boys' interests and needs in the English classroom, which has been constructed as "feminized" (Froese-Germain, 2006; Martino & Frank, 2006; Martino & Kehler, 2006, 2007). Creswell (2007) contends that qualitative research is used when "we need a *complex*, detailed understanding of the issue … [and] to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are explaining" (*original emphasis*, p. 40). In this way, a qualitative method of inquiry is in keeping with the purpose of this research study, which is to call into question

www.manaraa.com

essentialist notions or theories that claim that men as a homogeneous group are better suited to address boys' literacy achievement.

Qualitative Case Study Design

Patton (2002) argues that single cases "selected purposefully… permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth" (p. 46). In addition, he suggests that the "logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 46). Stake (2000) also argues that, "Case studies are of value for refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability" (p. 448). These aspects of qualitative case-study research are directly related to the major concerns of this study.

When claims are made about male English teachers, as a consequence of their male bodies, being better suited to address boy's literacy achievement, the issue is presented in generalized terms beyond the limits of time and space without drawing attention to how gender is constructed. This research, which aims to interrogate claims about the capacity of male English teachers, employs the case study design not only to illustrate the limits of generalizability, but also to gain a holistic and context-sensitive understanding of individual cases (Patton, 2002). By producing a "wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 14), the depth of understanding is increased and the potential for generalizations and quick-fixes is limited. Patton (2002) asserts that social constructionists are "more interested in deeply understanding specific cases within a particular context than in hypothesizing about generalizations and causes across time and space" (p. 546). Through the collection of localized, nuanced, information-rich stories from individual cases, this research aims to show that there are multiple and complex contributing factors surrounding boys'

www.manaraa.com

lower achievement in the English classroom, such as the gender dynamics at play, gender norms and pedagogical strategies.

In addition, Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993) identify the "voices of teachers themselves" as missing in too many educational studies (as cited in Hibbert, 2004, p. 71). Qualitative case study design is characterized by open-ended questions to enable the researcher "to understand the world as seen by the respondents" (Patton, 2002, p. 20). In fact, Patton (2002) suggests that the "task for the qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world or that part of the world about which they are talking" (p. 20). By using the qualitative case study design, I am in a position to "gather stories" (Patton, 2002, p. 341) about specific, unique cases and create a space for the voices of male English teachers to be heard.

Next, I turn my attention to a discussion of the qualitative methods—"techniques for gathering empirical evidence"—that I used to collect and analyze data (Lather, 1991a, p. 3; also see Harding, 1987, p.2). Specifically, I discuss the participants to be recruited, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations. I begin with the participants.

The Participants

Because the purpose of this study is to gain a more in-depth understanding of how gender influences literacy achievement, I interviewed eleven male English teachers from a number of different secondary schools in one school board in South Western Ontario to gather information about their perceptions and pedagogical practices which are understood to be "central to enhancing student learning and achievement" (Martino *et al.*, 2004, p. 450).

Currently in Ontario, it is not uncommon to have teachers whose expertise lies in other subject areas, such as mathematics, science and physical education, teaching English credits. For

www.manaraa.com

the purposes of this study, any male teacher assigned to teach at least one line of English (one English credit) in the secondary-school setting regardless of his academic qualifications, was considered an English teacher. I purposefully recruited teachers who vary according to experience, socio-cultural backgrounds, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. to demonstrate the complexity surrounding gendered identities; however, the selection of individual participants was dependent on the teachers' willingness to participate, their comfort level with the research process and my ability to negotiate access (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). For example, one of the teachers who participated in the interview process recommended I interview one of his colleagues because he believed that the insights and experiences of this particular male teacher would be important for this study; however, this particular individual would not consent to participate for unknown reasons.

With an understanding that the classroom is "complicit in the production of gender norms" (Rowan *et al.*, 2002, p. 49), five teachers, from the eleven who participated in the interview process, were recruited to participate in the classroom observation process. Although I believe that knowledge could be gained from all eleven cases, only five cases were selected for a number of reasons. At this stage, critical cases, those understood to have the potential to "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" were desired (Patton, 2002, p. 236). I chose cases based on both the school community in which they are located and the diversity of the male teachers according to teaching experience, pedagogical philosophies as English teachers, age, race, and sexual orientation. Given that qualitative case study methodology is employed to understand in depth the relationship between boys' literacy achievement and male English teachers, a detailed and deep investigation of five cases seemed appropriate (see Patton, 2002). By focusing on five cases, I was able to investigate multiple

www.manaraa.com

versions of male English teachers in multiple school sites and still achieve the kind of depth necessary to understand the complex nature of the phenomenon.

In order to build cases, I also interviewed twenty-nine boys from the five classes that I observed to examine their understandings of the links between the gender of their teachers and their own literacy achievement. I purposefully selected both high achievers and low achievers based on their teachers' recommendations. Originally, I had hoped to select the student participants based on their midterm marks in English; however, difficulties due to school closures and some participants' unwillingness to participate necessitated that I interview those who were willing to consent. Fortunately, a good mixture of self-identified and teacher-identified participants was eventually interviewed. I believe that the perspectives of both high and low achievers are important to investigate commonalities, complexities and variations.

Originally, I had hoped to create space for the perspectives of some female English teachers as well. Jones (2006) points out that "the voice of female teachers is absent from the general discourse [about the recruitment of men into primary teaching], yet they have a wealth of experience upon which to draw" (p. 75). Jones also argues that women can make a "significant contribution to policy and should have the opportunity to be heard" (p. 61). Given the parameters of this thesis and its aim to pay attention to nuances and depth, the perspectives of female English teachers, although important, will have to become the focus of another research project.

Although my sample size is relatively small, it is in keeping with the purpose and rationale of the study. Patton (2002) writes, "While one cannot generalize from single cases or very small samples, one can learn from them—and learn a great deal, often opening up new territory for further research" (p. 46). He also argues, "The validity, meaningfulness, and insights

www.manaraa.com

generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 245).

Data Collection

The methods used to collect data pertain to the research of a qualitative case study: semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and the collection and examination of artifacts, as a basis for generating data (Patton, 2002). To assemble a "comprehensive and complete picture of the social dynamic of the particular situation," I gathered multiple sources of data (Patton, 2002, p. 60). Although each aspect of the data collection process is independent, I was cognizant of how each relates to the whole. This holistic lens allowed me to pay greater attention to "nuance, setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context" (Patton, 2002, p. 60) which again is in keeping with the primary aim of this study.

To begin the process of recruitment, I personally contacted the school administration and the English Department Heads of every school within the designated school board via email and/or telephone. I solicited the help of school administration and English Department Heads to disseminate information about my research and invited potential participants to contact me again either by email or telephone. As mentioned earlier, I made every effort to recruit a diverse sample of male English teachers to participate; however, the teachers' willingness to participate ultimately determined my sample.

Once, the participants were recruited and the consent forms were signed, I scheduled and conducted one one-hour semi-structured interview with each of the eleven male English teachers in this study. As much as possible, I attempted to conduct the interviews at a time and place that worked best for the teachers. Most were conducted at the participating schools; however, one was conducted at the Board of Education office and one was conducted at a local coffee shop

www.manaraa.com

due to a weather-related school closure. The semi-structured format is appropriate because it enabled me to direct the interview by asking open-ended questions and at the same time invite the interviewees to give accounts of their teaching in terms of their understandings.

I began each interview with a number of questions designed to gather information about the teacher's background and experience as a teacher, his understanding of how his gender plays out in the classroom and his understanding of the links between his gender and male students' achievement. The following is a sample of questions I used to guide my interviews with the male English teachers in this study:

- Can you tell me about yourself - your experience, background, how long you have been teaching English, why you chose to become an English teacher etc.?
- Can you talk about high achieving students in your class? What factors in your opinion contributes to their achievement? What about students who are struggling in English?
- Can you talk about those students and their particular problems with English or who are not doing very well? Think of individual students that come to mind.
- Do you think your being a man makes a difference? Can you explain? Do you notice any differences in the way that boys and girls respond to you? In terms of your approach to teaching, is there a difference in the way you teach boys? Are you conscious of any differences?
- Are you conscious of responding to boys differently in class in terms of how you teach, text selection etc.?
- Do you think that having a male teacher makes a difference for boys in English? Can you explain? Do you think boys respond differently to a male teacher?

www.manaraa.com

- Why do you think there are more female English teachers? Why aren't there more males going into English teaching?
- There has been some discussion in the media and policy that boys would benefit from having male teachers, and that male teachers can actually be instrumental in helping boys to achieve better grades. Do you think that male teachers can help boys to achieve better grades in English?

These open-ended questions made possible "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the teachers' experiences and understandings which is understood to be critical for this dissertation. As patterns and themes began to surface in their narratives, I shifted my focus to "verifying and elucidating what appear[ed] to be emerging," in an attempt to understand the critical issues of concern for the participating teachers (Patton, 2002, p. 253).

Based on the richness and diversity of the data collected during the initial interview process, I selected the five teachers for classroom observation. Always mindful of the effect my presence may have at the research site, I negotiated an appropriate amount of observation time with the teacher participants. Initially, I requested to observe each of the five teachers in their classrooms one or two times a week over a one month period to gather field notes. In reality, I had to be flexible; however, I was able to observe the practice of each teacher in eight to fifteen classes. During the classroom observation phase, I collected emergent data, but I also used the following codes to focus my observations:

- Pedagogical approaches – teaching strategies (i.e., teacher-centred); approaches to reading and writing texts, etc.; evidence that gender influences within their repertoires of teaching practice

www.manaraa.com

- Interactions with boys in the class – both curricular (i.e., discussion about texts, student progress, etc.) and beyond curricular (i.e., attempts to make connections beyond the classroom)
- Boys' participation and demonstration of learning expectations
- Constructions of masculinity – both discursive and non-discursive constructions (see Connell, 1995; Butler, 1997)

Having already interviewed these teachers, classroom observation, through triangulation, provided another method of gathering data. This method of data collection facilitated an understanding of how their ideas, beliefs and understandings, as they were communicated during the interview, played out in practice.

Although I intended to be a non-participant observer in the classroom, I was aware that, "[a]ll observation involves the observer's participation in the world being studied. There is no pure, objective, detached observation; the effects of the observer's presence can never be erased" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 634). With these words in mind, I entered the classroom. It was my hope that the novelty of my presence would diminish with time, and I think in some cases it did to a certain extent. Having said that, I always remained aware of the fact that my very presence in the classroom was potentially generating data and that my "stance [as an English teacher turned academic researcher] frames the text produced" (Fine, 1994, p. 17).

Next, I began the process of recruiting some male students from each of the classes I observed to share their understandings in a one-hour interview. Although I originally intended to interview only four male students from each class, I ended up interviewing all of the boys who consented to participate. As a result, I interviewed twenty-nine boys in total. The voices of boys were understood to facilitate an understanding of how boys understand the gender of their

www.manaraa.com

teachers contributing to their achievement or lack of it. The following is a list of questions I used to begin our dialogue during the interview process:

- Can you tell me about yourself – i.e., interests, hobbies
- Can you tell me about your school experience – successes, struggles, favourite and least favourite subjects, factors that make a class a "good" or "bad" experience
- Do you enjoy reading? Why/why not?
- What do you think of English as a subject? Explain.
- Do you see yourself as doing well/poorly in English?
- What do you think contributes to your achievement or lack of it?
- What types of activity do you enjoy most in English class? Why?
- Tell me about your English teachers, both your current and past teachers.
- Have you had any English teachers who have made a difference to your achievement or to how you feel as an English student?
- How important is your teacher to your interest and achievement in English? Explain.
- Can you think of any teacher who has really influenced your motivation and desire to do well in English? Can you talk about these teachers or explain what they did to influence you in such a positive way?
- Do you think your teacher's gender has any influence over your interest and achievement in English? Explain.

The data collected from the boys in this study added credibility through triangulation. Although, some scholars (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Silverman, 1985) are critical of triangulation, Cohen *et al.* (2007) point out that it "can be a useful technique where a researcher is engaged in a case study, a particular example of complex phenomena" (p. 143).

www.manaraa.com

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) points out that the "challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data" (p. 432). The case study design of this research dictated at least in part how I began the process of reducing and making sense of the data. I started the "sense-making" (Patton, 2002, p. 453) process by transcribing the interviews. This process provided me with an opportunity to "get immersed in the data" (Patton, 2002, p. 441). Because my "foremost responsibility consists of doing justice to each individual case" (Patton, 2002, p. 449), I proceeded by writing up the individual cases using the interview transcripts, and my field notes from both my classroom observations and my examination of classroom materials. This approach helped to "ensure that emergent categories and discovered patterns are grounded in specific cases and their contexts (Patton, 2002, p. 57; also see Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It is also consistent with my belief that "context is critical to understanding" (Patton, 2002, p. 63) and facilitates cross-case analysis: a process of searching for "patterns and themes that cut across individual experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 56), without forfeiting the depth, detail and context of the individual cases (see Patton, 2002). To facilitate the process of looking for themes or patterns across the individual case, I began by coding data under the same headings that I used to focus my field notes for the classroom observation process:

- Pedagogical approaches
- Interactions with boys in the class – both curricular and beyond curricular
- Boys' participation and demonstration of learning expectations
- Constructions of masculinity – both discursive and non-discursive constructions

Inductive analysis was also employed to ensure that my findings emerged out of the data (Patton, 2002). These emergent patterns or themes were also coded. Next, the data was organized into

www.manaraa.com

convergent and divergent categories (Patton, 2002) because the participants' unusual and ordinary (Stake, 2000) understandings of influence as a result of gender affiliation are important. Finally, by exploring multiple cases, I was able to build layers of understanding and quite literally construct "thick description" (Geertz, 1973).

The theoretical frameworks which I have adopted for this research also played a significant role in my analysis of the themes and patterns that emerge. This is what Anyon (2009) calls "theoretically-informed empiricism" (p. 2). For example, a poststructuralist perspective facilitates an understanding of data as text which might "be better conceived as the material for telling a story where the challenge becomes to generate a polyvalent data base that is used to *vivify* interpretations as opposed to 'support' or 'prove'" (Lather , 1991b, p. 91). This perspective makes possible multiple interpretations and is critical of claims of essentialism and nature.

Drawing on a theory of masculinities, as elaborated by Connell (1995), I understand that there is more than one kind of masculinity and that gender relations and practices construct our understanding of what it means to be masculine. It also facilitates an understanding of hegemonic masculinity as dynamic and constructed culturally and historically. In addition, it provides me with a lens to recognize that the sex role model theory that underpins the call for more male English teachers reduces gender to homogenous, dichotomous categories. Connell's (1995) theory of masculinities played a critical role in the way I approached the research questions and analyzed the data, as it influenced my understanding of who and what is important (Patton, 2002).

My analysis was also informed by several of Foucault's methodological imperatives as well. For example, it focused on i) "power at the extremities" – in specific schools and

www.manaraa.com

classrooms with particular male English teachers and their male students; ii) "real practices, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, and dictate our behaviors; iii) power as something that functions or circulates "in the form of a chain … through a net-like organization," and iv) "an *ascending* analysis of power starting from its infinitesimal mechanisms each of which has its own history, its own trajectory, its own technologies and tactics (as cited in Olssen, 1999, p. 21). These imperatives facilitated an interrogation of power relations in a specific location: the secondary-school English classroom. They provided me with a lens to view the aims or objectives of power relations. It also helped me to understand that these aims although pursued within the classroom are invented beyond the classroom context in discursive practices that perpetuate regimes of truth and regimes of power (Foucault, 1984).

Since the focus of this study is really about *claims* about the capacity of male teachers to improve boys' literacy achievement, *taken-for-granted* approaches, and *media-generated* debates (Martino & Kehler, 2007, p. 407), discourse analysis, as explicated in the theory section particularly in relation to deploying Foucault, informs my approach to interpreting interview data. While interview data was treated as text in the poststructuralist sense, my particular approach to discourse analysis also entailed examining the non-discursive elements. In this regard, the use of observation field notes enabled an examination of non-discursive elements of discourse related to the ordering of bodies in the classroom space and the interactions involved in these *practices*.

Although I intended to let themes and patterns emerge from the data, Foucault's techniques of power (surveillance, normalization, exclusion, classification, distribution, individuation, totalization and regulation) (see Gore, 1995) proved useful in making sense of the

www.manaraa.com

discursive practices I encountered during the data collection process. Gore (1995) demonstrates the usefulness of Foucault's techniques of power for analyzing how power is exercised or functions "at the micro-level of pedagogical practice" (p. 168). She explains that this type of analysis which draws explicitly on Foucault opens up space for the production of "'thick' description and explanation" at context-specific sites of research. This understanding of how to use the work of Foucault as "thinking devices" (Gee, 2005, p. 7) or analytic tools facilitated my engagement with Foucauldian theory. It provided me with a "tool-box" (Foucault, 1974, p. 523) to interrogate the "regimes of power" and the "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1984) that govern gender roles and gender expectations, as well what it means to be an English teacher, as they emerged in the data. As Foucault (1988) points out,

> A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices that we accept rest.... Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as we believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practising criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult. (p. 154)

This research aims to disrupt policy initiatives, fuelled by media-generated discourses surrounding the results of high-stakes literacy scores, which intend to address gender gaps by recruiting male English teachers to re-masculinize dominant understanding of English as a feminized subject area. It aims to show that such understandings are not self-evident, and that the categories of *boy*, *male teacher*, and *English teacher* are complex, multiple and sensitive to context.

www.manaraa.com

The process of analyzing the data I collected was not without many twists and turns and in fact some roadblocks. After I had organized and written up the individual cases, I realized that within the scope of this thesis, it was not possible to include all five cases. I also struggled with my decision to omit the data collected during my initial interviews with the eleven male English teachers, as the focus of this research is indeed about male teachers. At this point in the process, I had to make some tough decisions which required that I return to the data with a slightly different analytical approach. Although my analysis as detailed above needs to be understood as foundational and an important part of the process, my decision to focus on only one case as a whole and organize the rest of my analysis around the categories of "male English teachers" and "boys" necessitated yet another layer of analysis. At this point, I returned to my theoretical framework and in particular Foucault's discourse analysis. As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, Foucault (1972) argues that we must "question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar" to make visible this structuring process (p. 22). In order to gain a deeper understanding of the male English teachers and the boys as individual subjects, I attempted to remove them from their "continuities" (Foucault, 1972) to see what other categories might be used to group them other than gender. During this process, I separated discourses about the teaching of English from discourses of gender, and was able to see more clearly the multiple factors that shaped these teachers' understandings of what it means to be an English teacher and what it means to be a male teacher. The same process was used to interpret the narratives of the boys. In both cases, the "acts" (both discursive and non-discursive) were rendered more visible. Following this process, the male English teachers and the boys were put back into their contexts or continuities to examine their relations, the rules that govern them and their connection to time and space. This rejoining, as Foucault (1972) points out, is important because it facilitates an

www.manaraa.com

understanding of categories as a formation and opens up the possibility for alternative groupings. It was this process that ultimately led to the organization of the following three analysis chapters. I begin by focusing on some of the male English teachers who participated in study, followed by a chapter on the boys focusing primarily on their responses to my research question: Do you think your teacher's gender has any influence on your interest and achievement in English language arts? Chapter seven is the only chapter that focuses on a single case.

In an attempt to capture the richness and complexity of the issues surrounding the recruitment of male English teachers to address boys' literacy underachievement and address concerns about validity, I analyzed the data from more than one standpoint. Cohen *et al.* (2007) suggest that "exclusive reliance on one method … may bias or distort the researcher's picture of the particular slice of reality being investigated" (p. 141). Thus, I employed methodological triangulation to address issues of distortion that can arise from a single approach or perspective and to capture the nuances of the individual cases. I was constantly comparing my observations in the classroom with the interview transcripts to make note of consistencies and inconsistencies between what the male teachers in this study said both during interviews and within their classroom when addressing students. I also tried to compare what the male English teachers said about boys' literacy achievement with what the boys themselves had to say. Also, the multiple methods I used to collect data strengthened the study through triangulation. Patton (2002) points out that different kinds of data "may yield somewhat different results because different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real-world nuances" (p. 248). Methodological triangulation works effectively not only to collect data, but also to illuminate the complexities associated with gender and its taken-for-granted influence concerning boys' literacy achievement. It is also aligned with a social constructionist view of knowledge in that it attempts to "capture and report

www.manaraa.com

multiple perspectives rather than seek a singular truth" (Patton, 2002, p. 546). Patton (2002) points out that "consistency in overall patterns of data from different sources or reasonable explanations for differences in data from divergent sources can contribute significantly to the overall credibility of findings" (p. 560). Thus triangulation contributed significantly to the validity of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Finally, I would like to draw attention to an issue often associated with qualitative research. It focuses on questions of "trustworthiness" (Patton, 2002, p. 546). One of the ways to address issues of trustworthiness is through reflexivity. According to Cherryholmes (1988), the reading of a text is never an "unmediated act" (p. 121). My subjectivity as a middle-class, white, female English teacher turned researcher was of critical importance throughout the data analysis phase of this study. It informed my readings of the pedagogical practices I observed, the philosophical standpoints that were articulated and the boys that I met. It also influenced this text that I have created. Thus, my "selectivity, perceptions, background and inductive processes and paradigms shape the research" (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p. 172) and become part of the story. The years I have spent as a secondary-school English teacher make claims of objectivity naive. In fact, I struggled to put aside the teacher in me when I observed pedagogical practices that I considered to be ineffective or outdated practices in the English language arts classroom. Lather (1991b) suggests, "Past efforts to leave subjective, tacit knowledge out of the 'context of verification' are seen by postpositivists as 'naïve empiricism.' [and that our] best tactic at present is to construct research designs that demand a vigorous self-reflexivity" (p. 66). Reflexivity, according to Patton (2002) is "a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective" (p. 64). Although Pillow

www.manaraa.com

(2003) warns that reflexivity may "reinstitute and reproduce exactly the hegemonic structures many of us are working against" (p. 192), I feel that by being explicit in its use and using it critically to illustrate how the claims I make and the stories I tell reflect who I am and how I think and feel, it became an important tool for data analysis. Thus, throughout this research study, I have attempted to be reflexive as I elucidated meanings and constructed interpretations. These methods were used to generate much-needed, research-based evidence about the capacity of male English teachers to improve boys' literacy achievement.

Also, the anonymity of the participants and the schools involved is critical. To protect the identity of all participants, the data was coded using pseudonyms. With the case study approach, which seeks to describe the cases in depth and detail, ensuring anonymity can become difficult. In this regard, any data that have the potential to disclose the identities of the participants or the schools was not included in the study.

Finally, one of the biggest ethical considerations for this thesis has to do with the voices that in the end were left out of this dissertation. Although each and every one of the cases in this study have much to offer to a broader understanding of the influential factors associated with boys' literacy achievement and the role of the male English teacher, the parameters of this thesis made the inclusion of all of them infeasible. Throughout the writing of this thesis, I struggled greatly to decide what must be included and excluded. Ultimately, I decided that in order to most effectively address my research questions, I would include a chapter focusing on the male English teachers, a chapter on the boys and only one chapter reporting on a single case. Again, deciding which case was not easy; however, because the boys in this case were in the college-level stream of English, which according to the EQAO results makes them most at risk for failure on the OSSLT, they are understood to be a group from which much can be learned. In

www.manaraa.com

addition, they were in their fourth year of secondary-school and many of them had only been taught by male English teachers at the secondary-school level. Despite their experience in the English classroom with a number of male teachers, many of them were failing to achieve. Given these factors, this case is discussed in detail in chapter seven as much can be learned from their stories.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the qualitative methods of inquiry used to investigate the capacity of male English teachers to positively influence boys' achievement in the secondary-school English classroom. This research design is consistent with the central aims of this thesis, which relate to producing more nuanced, information-rich understandings of how both secondary-school boys and their male teachers understand their gender to influence achievement. In addition, I have outlined the benefits of organizing data collection and analysis in cases; this approach not only makes possible the refining of theory but also illuminates "complexities" and points to the "limits of generalizability" (Stake, 2000, p. 448). The methods used to recruit and select the participants and collect data are also detailed. Finally, I have elucidated the significance of Anyon's (2009) theoretically-informed empiricism for this study, by discussing how the theoretical frameworks selected for this research play an integral part in the meaning-making process. As I struggled to interpret the narratives I collected, I found myself returning to the theories that underpin my decisions to engage with qualitative research and broaden concepts of what counts as evidence in boys' literacy debates (Luke *et al.*, 2010).

www.manaraa.com

Chapter Five

Male English Teachers

Do you think that male teachers can help boys to achieve better grades in English?
Only if they are great teachers!
(Mr. Michaels at Community High School)

In this thesis, I have argued that "what counts as evidence" (Luke *et al.*, 2010) in boys' literacy debates needs to be extended beyond numbers to include nuanced, context-specific accounts if effective reforms to address boys' underachievement are to be implemented.

Coffey and Delamont (2000) argue that, "By listening to and making sense of teachers' experiences and accounts we are better placed to understand those everyday teaching realities" (p. 74). Thus, in this chapter, I turn my attention to eleven secondary-school male English teachers. I aim to produce knowledge about the male English teachers who participated in this study, with special focus on the factors that influence their pedagogy and their perceptions of influence concerning boys' achievement in English language arts. In particular, this chapter focuses on two of my central research questions: What are the factors that influence male English teachers' pedagogy and how do male English teachers understand their capacity for influence concerning boys' achievement in English?

I begin by providing a brief overview of the eleven male English teacher participants in chart form. In this chart, I include their understandings of their capacity, on the basis of gender affiliation, to improve the achievement of boys in English language arts. Next, I conduct a detailed analysis of five purposefully-selected male English teachers who agreed to be interviewed for this research. My purpose is to illustrate that there are multiple ways to be a male English teacher by focusing on their pedagogical approaches and to examine how their understandings of boys in English language arts mediates their practices. By doing so, the limitations of explanatory frameworks and discourses that reduce teacher effectiveness to a crude

www.manaraa.com

form of gender affiliation become evident. What also emerges is the extent to which male English teachers' classroom practice is influenced by their subjectivities, which includes, but is not limited to gender, and what has been termed as "teacher threshold knowledges" (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Martino *et al.* (2004) define "teacher threshold knowledges" as including "subject discipline knowledge, knowledge of student development, understandings about the purposes of schooling, knowledge of educational policy and a knowledge and understanding of gender concepts and their impact on students' attitudes and learning" (p. 436). This conception builds on Shulman's (1987) pedagogical content knowledge which includes,

> . . . the most regularly taught topics in one's subject area, the most useful forms of representation of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations - in a word, the ways of representing the subject that make it comprehensible to others. . .[I]t also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult: the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to learning. (p. 9).

An analysis was conducted of the differences in the participants' "threshold knowledges" (Darling-Hammond, 1997), specifically beliefs about boys as learners, English as a subject and pedagogical practices that work best for boys which stem from a complex intermingling of personal and professional experiences and values and beliefs (see Moje, 1996). This analysis revealed the importance of recognizing the complexity of the various interweaving influences that impact on male teachers, and how they make sense of their own subjectivities as male teachers and their influence on male students' achievement and participation in the English classroom. What is also salient is how various discourses

www.manaraa.com

inform male teachers' understandings of their pedagogical practices and influence on male student achievement (see Francis, 2008; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010).

Although I did not originally intend to devote an entire chapter specifically to the teachers' perspectives, the data and analysis presented in this chapter is understood as an opportunity to triangulate these perspectives with those of the students and "to understand the reasons for the differences … [that will] potentially' contribute significantly to the overall credibility of findings" (Patton, 2002, p. 560).

A Brief Overview of the Teacher Participants

Given that only five of the eleven male teachers who participated in this research are examined in detail in this chapter and one in Chapter seven, I include a brief overview of all of them here. The teacher participants vary according to years of teaching, from seven to thirty years, and teachable subjects: English is the second teachable subject for five of the participants. Although it is difficult to summarize their responses to my question – Does your gender make a difference for boys' achievement? – in the space below, I decided that it was important to try: (i) to acknowledge the responses of the other five teachers that I did not make space for in this dissertation, and (ii) to facilitate comparisons with the boys' responses in the following chapter. While only four boys out of twenty-nine suggested that male English teachers made a difference for their achievement in English, five out of the eleven male teachers indicated that gender is a significant influence. Further research investigating the reasons behind these different perspectives between the male teachers and the male students is needed.

www.manaraa.com

Names	# of Years Teaching	1st & 2nd Teachable Subjects	Does your gender make a difference for boys' achievement?
Mr. Parker	14	English & drama history	"It is impossible to narrow it down to gender."
Mr. Michaels		English history	"Students underachieve for so many reasons."
Mr. Butler	14	physical education technology English	"Perhaps in some cases if the relationship is such that the teacher can help the student realize his potential, but I don't think it necessarily has to be a male teacher. Really is comes down to the individual. My wife is a teacher, and she connects with some of the boys in her classes."
Mr. Black	22	English history	"Yes" (He indicates that he challenges gender norms.)
Mr. Ashes	15	English	"Yes absolutely" (He is unclear about his reasons.)
Mr. Stephenson	22	English	"No" (However, he suggests that his physical size makes a difference and as a male his physicality commands respect).
Mr. Baker	7	physical education English	"Yes" (He draws on notions of role modelling to support this belief).
Mr. Andrews	8	geography English	"Yes" (He identifies gender affiliation as the primary reason).
Mr. Polonius	25	English history	"Yes" (sees himself as a role model and tries to challenge gender norms but does not know if his gender influences achievement).
Mr. Alonzo	30	French English	"No, I don't think so because I think that among other things, you are assuming there are only two genders and that is a false assumption." (However, he acknowledges that for some boys it might make a difference.)
Mr. Denver	19	English	"I don't … but as a man I have a different influence over boys and that I can affect them… not because I am male but because they expect it because society tells them that because I am male, I am able to do so and so and they buy into that."

The remainder of this chapter focuses on five male English teachers. When I began to write this chapter, I thought that I would be able to organize the analysis under thematic headings; however, what I came to realize is that the complex histories, biographies, beliefs and practices of these male teachers rendered it next to impossible to organize the chapter in this way. As a result, I examine each of the teachers holistically, which facilitates the use of Anyon's

www.manaraa.com

(2009) "theoretically informed empiricism" (p. 2) in my analysis of the data. She claims that "no fact is theory-free" and that theory "dictates what kinds of patterns one finds" (p. 2). By organizing this chapter to focus on individual cases, the way "theory and data involve and invoke one another" is transparent (Anyon, 2009, p. 5). This structure facilitates my search for understanding, which is grounded in the interview data and interpreted or explained by calling on theories.

The Case of Mr. Polonius

Context - Upwardly Mobile School. In keeping with one of the aims of this research, to produce nuanced, contextualized data, and my poststructuralist framework, a lens that sees subjectivities as socially constructed, I begin by situating Mr. Polonius within his school context. Mr. Polonius teaches at an urban academic school. The students at Upwardly Mobile School come from homes with predominantly university-educated parents and 75% of them speak English at home most often (EQAO, 2012b). According to the context information provided for interpreting the school's results on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), 85% of the first-time eligible students[2] writing the test were enrolled in academic English in March 2011 (EQAO, 2012b). In this type of learning environment, a high percentage of the student body continues to study at the university level, although according to Mr. Polonius a huge number of them pursue degrees in mathematics and sciences, as Upwardly Mobile School is a school known to have success in these subject areas.

During my interviews with some of Mr. Polonius' students, many of them talked about the link between a good work ethic and success in school. They even suggested that academic rigor at this level in their academic careers will pay off for them in the future: It is clearly a

[2] First-time eligible students for the March 2012 test, for example, typically entered Grade 9 during the 2010–2011 school year. These students (and any others who were placed in this cohort) were required to write the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) for the first time in March 2012. **First-time eligible** includes all students in the first-time eligible cohort who are working toward an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) (www.eqao.com).

www.manaraa.com

school at which marks are important. On one of my observation days, I overheard a number of boys discussing their marks on a science test. Each of them boasted about their success on the test and shared their marks which ranged between 85% and 100% with one another. Discourses about the importance of a good work ethic for academic achievement and academic rigor speak to the type of cultural capital to which these students have access. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital is a "hereditary transmission of capital" that begins at birth and is engrained in the socialization of children (p. 49). Thus, for example, children who grow up in homes with well-educated parents know what a university degree is and the kind of commitment to education (i.e., grades and work ethic) that is necessary to be successful and understand its intrinsic and extrinsic value. The students who attend Upwardly Mobile School have access to this type of capital, which should be understood as a significant contextual factor for this case. In this kind of marks-driven environment, it should not be surprising to learn that since March 2007, student success rate on the OSSLT has never been lower than 90%. It is also worth noting that other than in March 2007 when 92% of the boys and only 87% of the girls were successful on the OSSLT, girls have consistently outperformed boys (see EQAO, 2012b).

His philosophy as an English teacher. Mr. Polonius' history, biography, training and experiences are understood to have shaped who he is as an English teacher in this particular localized context (see Fleischer & Fox, 2005). He is a white male in his early 50's who has been teaching English for 25 years. He has a wealth of teaching experience, gathered in a number of different schools in a number of different school boards and in his position as an English Department Head. These years of experience are evident in his relaxed and confident teaching style and his obvious rapport with his students. As Polonius says, "By this point in my career, I bloody well better be good at this job." Mr. Polonius told me that although he has always been a

www.manaraa.com

reader and interested in literature, it was his grade thirteen male teacher who turned him onto teaching and really opened up to him the possibilities of literature. Like this particular English teacher, whom Mr. Polonius considers a mentor (see Bricheno & Thornton, 2007), he subscribes, in large part, to *English as the Great Literary Tradition* model for teaching English (see Ball *et al.*, 1990). For Mr. Polonius, the study of literature is central to the subject of English. He is passionate about literature and its power to open up discussions about life, people and "truths":

> And I also think and of course the math teachers are not going to like this but I am more and more convinced about the importance of the study of English. What other subject area opens up all those possibilities – relationships, and morality and what is reality? And all these kinds of questions and ideas except the study of literature. Literature does what I think nothing else can do. In a sense, I think there is a greater responsibility on an English teacher… From literature, we can find what I call big "T" truths. It is not the only truth or even the ultimate truth or even a truth that you necessarily want to believe but it is something that at least makes you think. It forces you to look at yourself and look at the world around you in a different way.

Mr. Polonius implies that English belongs in a "special space" (Peim, 1993). In part, through its big "T" truths, it is understood to convey universal standards of morality and ethics, and in part it moves beyond the dissemination of "civilizing and socially unifying content" (Ball *et al.*, 1990, p.78) to inspire individual growth. According to Peim (1993), English, as a subject, belongs to a "specifically liberal set of assumptions," and a dominant strand of these assumptions makes claims about the "role of literature in the shaping of the individual consciousness." In other words, English plays a crucial role in the process of determining "the development of the individual," (p. 205) a tenet of the *Progressive English* (Ball *et al.*, 1990) or the *Personal Growth*

www.manaraa.com

model (Goodwyn, 1992). In his classroom, Mr. Polonius uses literature to prompt discussions about identities and to challenge his students by asking, "not what do you want to be but who do you want to be"? Perhaps that is why he loves *Hamlet* so much, as his pseudonym implies; a play that begins by asking, "Who's there?" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, line 1), a line that may be interpreted as "Who am I?" The way Mr. Polonius talks about English as an opportunity to talk about "relationships, and morality and what is reality" also suggests that English "represents traditional values … ordered and ordering" (Peim, 1993, p. 205); however, this understanding of the purpose of literature is interwoven with the possibilities it represents for students to discover who they are through the universal themes found in literature. His belief about and passion for literature and the way he presented it in his teaching are understood as significant factors in his success with students in the English classroom. Mr. Polonius also explicitly identified his love of literature as a critical factor for his effectiveness: "I think the fact that I am excited about the literature makes them excited about it."

Mr. Polonius also uses storytelling extensively in his teaching. On my first day observing his class, I was immediately captivated by his ability to tell stories, which he admits really defines his teaching style. He eagerly shares personal anecdotes with his students about, for example, the birth of his children and his days working in a funeral home. These stories are not only used to engage the students, as they are often humorous and told with theatrical exuberance, but also to illustrate the connections between literature and life, a theme that underpins most of Mr. Polonius' teaching. This aspect of his pedagogy which develops "children's imaginative and aesthetic lives" (Goodwyn, 1992, p. 4) is aligned with a *Progressive English* (Ball *et al.*, 1990) or the *Personal Growth* model (Goodwyn, 1992).

www.manaraa.com

As I observed Mr. Polonius teach, I was interested to see whether or not his teaching style, way of speaking, mannerisms or interactions with his students could be understood as essentially masculine attributes. His approach was often teacher-centred or directed – he read texts aloud to his class; he explicitly instructed his class on how to write an essay using student exemplars; he guided his students' interpretations of text through whole class discussions, and he told stories to facilitate the making of connections. The only equipment he used to support his teaching was low-tech – an overhead projector, blackboard, a television and DVD player. On occasion, Mr. Polonius' students were also instructed to work in a writers' workshop type environment – writing silently from prompts, sharing and editing writing in small groups and student presentations. Within the broader education policy context and public domain, male teachers have been and continue to be constituted in terms of their gender and its transformative potential (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004); these aspects of Mr. Polonius' teaching practice are not understood to be gender-specific, which raises questions about notions of such a transformative potential based on gender. Mr. Polonius' pedagogical choices appear to be grounded in his understanding of literature as central to the subject of English and his belief that it is his job to prepare his students to be successful at the post-secondary level, which is an important goal given the local school context, and in life. The philosophy of teaching English that Mr. Polonius espouses cannot be reduced to gender. Instead, it needs to be understood in terms of his affiliation with particular philosophical orientations to the teaching of English which involves a prioritizing of and a particular framing of literature (see Peim, 1993; Goodwyn, 1992; Ball *et al.*, 1990).

Heteronormative Privilege. Some aspects of his teaching, however, might be understood as influenced by heteronormative, masculinity (Connell, 1995) and shaped by his

www.manaraa.com

"threshold knowledge" about gender (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Many of his anecdotes focused on his wife and children. In one lesson, he described himself as "mind-numbingly average" because he has done everything in his life in the "right" order – he went to school, then university, got a job, got married, had children, etc. Here Mr. Polonius acknowledges that discourses of heterosexuality construct and normalize his identity as a man and a teacher. Francis and Skelton (2001) argue that "heterosexuality is so bound up with the dominant constructions of masculinity which many male teachers are attempting to achieve" (p. 10). Implicit in this claim made by Francis and Skelton (2001) is that masculinity is negotiated, which is an important analytical tool for investigating the biography of Mr. Polonius. His self-identification as a heteronormative male in the public space of the classroom affords him a certain privilege; it also implicitly reinforces heterosexual masculinity as normative (Foucault, 2003). On a number of occasions, I witnessed him making fun of his masculinity – drawing attention to his "less than macho" attitude and appearance: "Rock manly – that's what you think of [me] right?" Acts such as these draw attention to gender norms, and Mr. Polonius's self-fashioning of a man who fails to embody traits of hegemonic masculinity is a source of humour in the classroom. His self-fashioning, however, is understood to be "contingent and strategic" (Weedon, 1997, p. 176; also see Martino, 2008b). It is contingent on his essentialist understanding of boys and girls as binaries. For example, he explained how he changed his teaching practice to meet the needs and interests of an English class whose make-up is predominantly boys:

> For example, when we were doing *The Odyssey*, I mean, I tend to just because it is what I like to do. As I am reading things, I dramatize things and stand on desks and yell and so on which is fun for me and fun for the kids too … Now I don't know whether that is directly attributable to boys though or whether it was just the boys in

www.manaraa.com

> the class, I don't know, but I had boys in the class last year who were much more willing to get up and be Odysseus because *The Odyssey* is a boy story. It is a guy. The guy is going home, and he is strong and he is smart and all this kind of stuff. And the girls are there, and he goes to bed with them, which is what they are for. It is in a way kind of a sexist book. The guys and the girls in the class seem to enjoy it.

Heteronormative masculinity informs or suffuses his own pedagogical understanding of the teaching of literature and the reception regimes governing the way in which his students take up particular positions in response to the text (see Foucault, 1984; Martino & Kehler, 2007). Mr. Polonius begins by pointing to essential differences: boys are more "energetic" and "boisterous," which means he must adjust the way he teaches. His understanding of gender differences also influences the content (on what he places emphasis), although he was careful to point that he has never chosen different texts to study based on the gender make-up of a class. He is "strategic" in his emphasis on the masculine qualities of the character Odysseus to capture the boys' interest because he believes it will engage the boys, alluding to essentialist discourses about boys' innate interests (Weedon, 1997, p. 176). Boys are constructed as a particular kind of subject which espouses certain gender norms. These norms are regulated through both discursive and non-discursive acts such as Mr. Polonius' discussion of *The Odyssey* as well as his decision to include the text as part of his course (see Foucault, 1980). In this way, Mr. Polonius's practice appears to be implicated in acts of hetero- and gender-normative complicity (see Martino, 2008b).

Interestingly, Mr. Polonius qualifies his initial essentialist framing by suggesting that his approach might have been effective because of the particular group of boys in his classroom and that the girls also seem to enjoy this approach. Through this clarification, he raises questions

www.manaraa.com

about notions of girls and boys as binaries with dichotomous interests. He also draws attention to the complex and contingent nature of subjectivity through the identification of other contributing factors that might have influenced the way this group of boys responded to his practice as compared to another one of his English classes whose make-up was predominantly girls:

> If I think about the grade nine class that I have this year as opposed to the one I had last year. Two very different characters and partly attributable I am guessing because of the gender mix. Because last year, I had a class with an unusually heavy load of boys: this year I have a class with an unusually heavy load of girls. Now they were at different times of day which makes a difference and with different kids.

Despite Mr. Polonius' assertion that he changed his approach to cater to a pre-dominantly male class, he acknowledges that gender is not the only influential factor for his students' interest and engagement in English. He suggests that the difference between the classes is only "partly attributable" to the gender mix; timetabling differences and the differences among "kids" are also offered to account for the different characters of these two classes.

Mr. Polonius' heteronormative identity is also understood as strategic (Weedon, 1997). He told me that he knows that he is not a "manly man" because he likes to cook for his wife and is not a fan of sports like hockey and football, yet his explicit heteronormativity and performance of masculinity (discussing his wife and children, making fun of his manliness, standing on desks and emphasizing Odysseus' acts of hegemonic masculinity) privilege him in such a way that he is able to challenge some norms of masculinity without his own masculinity being called into question (see Butler, 1990; also see Martino 2008). He told me that he tries to disrupt stereotypes about what it means to be a man by talking about his love for his wife and children, something that he believes is not the norm for men (Foucault 2007). He also stated,

www.manaraa.com

> I have really grasped onto the importance of not as a teacher but as a male teacher being able to demonstrate – look this is what a guy can be …. There is this one last part towards the end of the book that I read to the class because it is so important and it makes me cry … Partly I do that because it is important and partly I do that because I want the students to see that a guy can stand up in front of a group of people and weep openly and that is ok. And in fact it is a good thing.

This "strategic" show of emotion enables him to resist dominant constructions of heteronormative masculinity. This act draws attention to the "ways in which subjects take up and develop various subject positions in their everyday lives" (Sondergaard, 2002, p. 194). Mr. Polonius consciously deploys his heteronormative privilege as part of his pedagogical practice to question gender stereotypes, which supports Sondergaard's (2002) claim that "masculine expressions are not a consequence of biology, bodies or other essentialized phenomena but rather a consequence of specific historical and sociocultural processes of construction" (p. 197).

It is in this way that Mr. Polonius believes that his gender makes a difference for boys (see Martino, 2008a). He wants to model for his students, primarily the boys, a version of masculinity that shows emotion. He hopes to disrupt or "rupture" (Sondergaard, 2002) constructions of masculinity as propagated by the media: "chasing criminals and shooting guns, which is cool stuff." Thus, he is understood to be consciously interrupting narrow hegemonic conceptions of masculinity in his classroom through his "self-fashioning" and "performative practices" from his privileged heteronormative position (Martino, 2008b, p. 586).

Ideology versus evidence. When I first asked Mr. Polonius if he understands his gender to make a difference for boys, he answered with an emphatic, "Absolutely, it does"; however, as his interview continued it became apparent that his belief is grounded not in evidence but rather

www.manaraa.com

ideology. Through his interview, he repeatedly referred to his belief that he can make a difference for his students and in particular boys. This ideology seems to be grounded in some sort of romanticism about the possibility of influence he embodies as a male English teacher. In particular, he espouses dominant discourses about the capacity of male teachers to positively influence boys' achievement in the English classroom (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a):

> I guess that is *my hope*. It is always hard to know. We very rarely get any real feedback from our students. You get students who say thank you sir I really enjoyed your class and things like that. And something they will come back from university and say wow thanks I really learned how to write an essay and that is all wonderful stuff to hear. It is not too often that you find out about a larger personal impact but I guess *I believe enough in the possibility* and that even if one student learns something or draws something out of it. *I know I make myself sound like some kind of saint. I am out to save the world.*
>
> Whether as a male that really makes a difference, again honestly based on nothing, no research, *just a gut intuition or maybe a hopeful wish,* I think it does and so I behave as though it makes a difference. And so I conduct myself as though my *presence not only as a teacher but as a male teacher actually does make a difference. Whether that is actually true or not, I have no idea.*
>
> Now whether my being male has anything to do with that, I don't know. In terms of the relationship with the guys, as I said I *suppose there is my belief that there is the possibility* that a guy might see oh there is another guy as a kind of role model or

www.manaraa.com

> they might say oh gee, what a fruitcake, he cries when he reads. That is the other possible response (*emphasis added).*

Mr. Polonius's claims speak to the power of discourses to construct a certain truth about the capacity of teachers as influential figures (Foucault, 1984). A quick search using "Why become a teacher?" as a prompt found a number of websites and testimonials from teachers proclaiming that people become teachers because they want to make a difference (see http://www.ctf-fce.ca/TIC/Default.aspx?SID=626067; http://www.unc.edu/uncbest/teacher.html; http://www.teacherssupportnetwork.com/corporate/KnowledgeCenterArticle.do?id=5; http://www.aft.org/pdfs/tools4teachers/becomingateacher0608.pdf for examples). On the *Teacher Support Network,* it states that "the most compelling reason to become a teacher is the desire to work with children. Some point to a 'calling,' a yearning to help children learn, watch them grow, and make a meaningful difference in the world" (http://www.teacherssupportnetwork.com/corporate/KnowledgeCenterArticle.do?id=5) The *American Federation of Teachers* writes that, "[t]eachers directly affect the lives of the students they teach … For some, teachers are among the most memorable people in their lives … Teachers are directly responsible for educating future generations" (http://www.aft.org/pdfs/tools4teachers/becomingateacher0608.pdf).

Although Mr. Polonius does not have a lot of concrete evidence that his gender makes a difference for the boys in his classroom, his belief that it does influences his conduct as an English teacher: "I conduct myself as though my presence not only as a teacher but as a male teacher actually does make a difference." He even jokes about the about his idyllic conception of teaching and in particular the teaching of English when he refers to his grandiose conception of himself as a "saint" trying to "save the world." However grandiose, this conception plays a

www.manaraa.com

significant part in determining how he conducts himself in the classroom. This romanticism and idealization of the teacher as invested with a particular visionary capacity and influence to turn students around and to motivate them is consistent with idealized images of teachers found in Hollywood films such as *Dead Poets' Society*, *Freedom Writers*, *To Sir with Love*, *Stand and Deliver*, etc. Rosen (2004) found that prospective teachers "desire the positive exaggerations and stereotypes [in Hollywood films about teachers] to be indicative of the heights to which they aspire" (p. 16). Mr. Polonius has twenty-five years of teaching experience, but it seems he has not yet lost his idyllic vision of what it means to be a teacher; he continues to negotiate the kind of teacher he wants to be according to his values and beliefs. Coffey and Delamont (2000) argue that, "The work of teaching is not only about managing the classroom and delivering the curriculum, it is also about managing and negotiating biographies, identities and selves (p. 74).

In our discussion about male teachers as role models for boys, Mr. Polonius questions discourses that identify gender as a significant factor of influence, which contradicts his earlier emphatic "yes." He suggests that he might be a role model for some boys, but again this understanding is based on ideology rather than empiricism: "honestly based on nothing, no research, just a gut intuition or maybe a hopeful wish." His ideology, rather than evidence, speaks to discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). He echoes discourses that through repetitive practices form regimes of truth about the difference teachers can make in the lives of students (Foucault, 1984). Mr. Polonius seems to take for granted his influence on boys' achievement, without concrete evidence to substantiate his beliefs. It was only when I explicitly asked him to support his claims, that the "unsaid" (Foucault, 1972) or the power of discourse to form individual ideology

www.manaraa.com

emerged, which supports Gore's (1995) contention that the functioning of power "remains invisible in our daily practices, unless we are looking for it" (p. 184).

The Case of Mr. Denver

Mr. Denver, a black male in his late 40's, also teaches at Upwardly Mobile School in the same English department as Mr. Polonius. He has also had a wealth of teaching experience. He has been teaching since 1992 with the same school board; however, he has still had considerable diversity in his career. He taught in a school for the deaf for a couple of years; he has taught mathematics, computers, history, English, business and special needs classes. At Upwardly Mobile School, Mr. Denver primarily deals with a different segment of the school population than Mr. Polonius. He often teaches English at the essential level and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC).

"My Caribbean background as a man." Mr. Denver was born in Jamaica into a middle-class family who expected him to "go to university, and be proper, very culturally proper." His biological mother was the ambassador to the United Nations for Jamaica, so he and his twin brother were raised first by his grandparents who were traditional, religious and strict: "polish your shoes, put your clothes out, stand and remain standing until your mother is seated or until you know, that kind of formal Caribbean background," and later by his aunt in Canada who adopted them. For Mr. Denver, school was defined in terms of the strict discipline it both expected from its students and as a means of control. In Jamaica, he attended the type of school that "caned" students for not doing homework: a public act of punishment that brought "shame" to both the individual and the family. In Canada, he went to a Christian high school which again was traditional in its teaching methods and its fostering of conservative values.

www.manaraa.com

Mr. Denver's "West Indian background," has also made him the target of racial discrimination. He recounted incidents of being detained by the police for driving on the campus of the private university that he attended, being spit at and called a "nigger" at the bus stop on campus, and being mistaken as a janitor by the parents of some of his students. An incident that was particularly poignant for him occurred when he was a teenager in Canada. In keeping with his traditional upbringing, he and his brother were not allowed to date unless they were granted permission from both sets of parents, so when his brother wanted to date a white girl who attended their Christian high school, he had to seek permission from her father, who happened to be a pastor. Permission was denied "because he was black." Mr. Denver told me that this particular incident changed the way he looks at the world:

> So that was a shocking thing for me, and that was the thing that I think changed the way I perceived everything in life, although it never happened to me. Because he was a pastor, that changed my opinion about the way I perceived people from that point forward.

I draw attention to these aspects of Mr. Denver's biography to begin to unpack the multiple factors that define and inform his pedagogical practice (see Fleischer & Fox, 2005). As Price (1999) points out, there is a tendency to erase the "complexity of, and interrelations among, class, race, and gender relations and the ways these social processes are interwoven through their experiences" (p. 225).

His authorized practice. Mr. Denver's classed, raced and religious identity and experiences should not be downplayed or dismissed. They are "intermeshed" with his gendered identity and manifest themselves in many aspects of his teaching (Cealey, Harrison and Hood-Williams, 1998). Mr. Denver described himself as a teacher who is "tough" and "firm" with high

www.manaraa.com

expectations for both himself and his students. He maintained that his primarily essential, applied and college-level English students respond well to the way he runs his classroom with "fairness" and "discipline," a combination in which he believes. My observations confirm this assessment of his classroom practice; he demands respect and sets high academic standards for his students. The exercise of discipline is considered a "strongly masculinized characteristic" (Francis, 2008, p. 113). In this case, however, understanding maleness to be a predisposition to discipline would be a failure to understand how the particulars of Mr. Denver's history have influenced his subjectivity and his pedagogy. Through a disciplined life, Mr. Denver achieved both academically and professionally. He, in turn, uses it in his classroom with the understanding that his students will "respond to discipline" and achieve. In addition, research suggests that teachers tend to teach the way they were taught (Anderson, Imdieke & Standerford, 2011; Lortie, 1975; Kennedy, 1999). Mr. Denver's discipline is understood to have more to do with his own history in school and cultural background than his masculinity.

This is not to suggest that his identity as a man does not play a part in his overt embracing of discipline. He also constructs himself as a paternal figure who sets the same high standards regarding language, behaviour and achievement for his students as he does for his own children. Both his children and his students are forbidden to swear or use defamatory language; they must work hard and be accountable for their actions, and they must be respectful. If they are not, they know that there will be consequences such as being asked to stand by their desks during class, a form of corporeal punishment, or asked to apologize to the class. Clearly, this archaic form of discipline, i.e., removing a student's chair, is reminiscent of the past and can be linked to his own traditional schooling experience. Also, Mr. Denver stated explicitly that his strict rules about language and swearing are "because of his Christian background." This is not to say that

www.manaraa.com

Mr. Denver does not actively modify his actions according to gender norms (Foucault, 1982), as he is well aware of the societal expectation for men to be disciplinarians: "In the classroom,…I think they're more prone to respect because I'm male, and they think that being male makes me more likely to follow through on my punishments and be less sympathetic." This knowledge of discipline as a man's domain incites him to construct himself accordingly (see Robinson, 2000; King 1998). Multiple, interwoven factors are understood to contribute to Mr. Denver's espousing of discipline.

The expectations for order that Mr. Denver experienced in his own upbringing as a young boy in Jamaica are also evident in his teaching practice. Mr. Denver is an extremely well-organized teacher. All of his daily lessons are on PowerPoint and kept both in binders and on thumb drives. Each day, he projects both his notes on the screen for the students to copy and his questions to answer. For example, during a novel study, the notes would focus on the content details of a particular chapter. During the class, Mr. Denver makes sure that all of the questions on student handouts, which are identical to the PowerPoint slides, are answered orally and that all of the students record these answers in their notes:

> In all my classes, I have a PowerPoint presentation to start to expand beyond a topic and then I'll use a lecture and notes, so there are detailed notes, so I'll have an overhead and I'll have detailed notes for them to take as well as giving them a lecture and a PowerPoint presentation that expands beyond what they're learning in the books.

This pedagogical approach is rooted in part in the English as *English as the Great Literary Tradition* model (Ball *et al.*, 1990), in part in an understanding that academic rigour is essential to student growth and learning, and in part in his belief that students need to be accountable:

www.manaraa.com

"accountability is necessary for success." It is understood to be somewhat "monologic" (Nystrand, 1997) in nature, "meaning that teachers dominate instruction so thoroughly that it is as if they are presenting a monologue. Even when teachers ask questions, the questions typically have pre-specified 'correct' answers, so that students have little opportunity to influence the course of the class session" (Gamoran & Carbonaro, 2003, p. 2). This type of instruction is a technique for maintaining control and order. Gamoran and Carbonaro (2003) explain, "Each step in the teaching process is predictable, and uncertainty is minimized. Teachers who fear a loss of control may thus rely on monologic instruction to establish and maintain order" (p. 3). This approach is keeping with many aspects of Mr. Denver's familial and schooling histories: one that is permeated with discipline, standards, order and high expectations.

According to Mr. Denver, however, his practice has been adopted to build self-esteem in his applied and college-level English students through its predictability and enhanced opportunities for success:

> I give them overhead notes and I answer all their questions, and I tell them all the questions that are going to be on the test are in their notes, but they have to take the notes and they have to study their notes, but I give them all the questions that are going to be on the test in their notes. If they take the notes and they have the overhead and they have the PowerPoint, they'll do well on their first test, and I think giving them a positive first test is a world of difference because they've been so slammed with negative things by the time that they reach the 4C [grade twelve college-level English] class, they don't think they can do it. They know it. I can't do it. I can't do it, why am I trying, why am I here? But if I give them the notes and this is going to be their study, it'll be there and they know it and they study it and they do

www.manaraa.com

> well. They have achieved success and so they're more apt to believe me the next time. Take this note, it'll be there, and they study that note … I don't think it's fair to test them on something they don't know, and don't think it is fair to test a college student who doesn't know how to study on something he hasn't studied.

The philosophy that governs Mr. Denver's practice is clear. Essentially Mr. Denver, through this practice, teaches his students the importance of taking notes and how to study. Students are rewarded with marks for being diligent in their note-taking and knowing the information. These skills have merit in that they foster accountability, are transferable to other disciplines and will potentially be useful in college and university; however, they are not understood to be explicitly linked to literacy achievement. In fact, VanDeWeghe (2007) who identifies nine "classroom discourse practices" that make a difference in students' "reading comprehension achievement," explicitly states that, "question-and-answer recitation" is not an effective practice in this regard (p. 90). Hinchman *et al.* (2003/2004) also argue that, "Presenting information efficiently such as through lecture or notes on the overhead and chalk board may contribute little to meaningful or memorable learning" (p. 306). Although some students (both boys and girls) did not take notes during Mr. Denver's lessons and many did poorly on his infamous tests, which always included at least one question that was "impossible" to answer, many students in this localized context of Upwardly Mobile School understood rigor to be an integral part of the academic culture, and therefore spent a great deal of time memorizing the somewhat obscure details of a novel to prepare for the tests. The success of this pedagogical approach, however, appears to be contingent on school context. In this particular case, many of the students saw hard work as part of the process and price of academic excellence, which speaks to their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

www.manaraa.com

A kind of paternalistic sharing of stories and life lessons (a father sharing his insights with his children) also plays an important role in Mr. Denver's English classroom practice. This aspect of his teaching is aligned with *Progressive English* or the personal growth model (see Ball *et al.*, 1990; Goodwyn, 1992) and is aligned with his self-fashioning as a father figure (see Martino, 2008b; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Sondergaard, 2002). For example, on one occasion, he told his students that he does not identify his race on applications or forms that he is required to fill out because he does not want stereotypes about race to define him, indicating some understanding of how discourses constitute the "'nature' of the body" (Weedon, 1997, p. 105). On another occasion, he took the opportunity to remind his students to count to ten before saying anything when they are angry, a life lesson prompted by a line in *The Green Mile*: "What a man says can get him into more trouble than anything else." Brown (2007) writes, "When we take up a text, we are engaging in a conversation with the author, with others, and with ourselves" (p. 73). Mr. Denver clearly models his connections with texts, an important reading strategy, and uses them as opportunities to share what his students coined as "life lessons." This approach, which appears to be aligned with his subjectivity as a father figure, informs a type of pedagogy that positions him as a "dispenser of knowledge," which is characteristic of a "transmission" model of learning (Strickland & Strickland, 1993).

His performance of masculinity. In many ways, Mr. Denver embodies signifiers of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995; Roulston & Mills, 2000): a firm disciplinarian who has high standards and commands respect. His conservative upbringing did little to challenge these traditional gender roles and expectations. This understanding of Mr. Denver, however, is incomplete. He is adamant that gender stereotypes, like racial stereotypes, must be disrupted because they constrain perceptions, interactions and actions. Mr. Denver points to gender

www.manaraa.com

regimes to explain the potential for change embodied in male English teachers. Although he does not believe that recruiting more male English teachers will improve boys' achievement, he does suggest that common sense assumptions, or as he says stereotypes, guide our expectations and interactions with men and women. What he suggests is that gender affiliation is an opportunity for change (see Martino, 2008a):

> I do believe that as a man I have a different influence over boys and that I can affect them. I can cause affective change, and I can affect change on them in a different way because they expect it of me, because they expect, not because I'm male but because they expect it and they expect that this is what I will do and it's not primarily because of me being male, it's because society tells them that because I am male, I am able to do so and so. They buy into that, because I am male, they are going to, they should listen to me or because I am male … I might be more knowledgeable in some areas which is culturally biased or gender biased as well, but they buy into it, but they see that because I am male and I am sensitive to these issues that not all men are the same, that not all men have to be that way. So I think it's important that more men get into that just to shed that, those stereotypes that men have to be a certain way.

Mr. Denver suggests that male teachers might be needed to disrupt or "rupture" (Sondergaard, 2002) stereotypes because they are able to model different versions of masculinities: men being unable to cry, for example. That is not because men innately respect and respond to the actions and ideas of other men but rather because they have been taught to do so (Titus, 2004): "I don't think it's something that I've, that it's there because I was born that way. I think it's something that's because I was indoctrinated into that idea culturally and it's reinforced through

www.manaraa.com

stereotypes, it is reinforced in the media and it's reinforced all throughout my life, and so …" Mr. Denver's understanding of power that extends beyond an individual male teacher is reminiscent of Foucault (1980) who conceived power as "[n]ever localized here or there, never in anybody's hands … power is exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. (p. 98).

As evident through a number of aspects of Mr. Denver's biography, his intent to disrupt gender norms is intertwined with acts that implicitly reinforce them (see Martino, 2008b; Sondergaard, 2002). That being said, his hope that male teachers can make a difference is understood to be rooted in a sincere wish that the regimes that govern our understandings of gender and race be broken:

> I think it'd be nice to have more male teachers saying that it's ok to connect with your emotions; it's ok to feel sympathy; it's ok to have empathy for people who are suffering and to care about those things. I think you are in real trouble if a society has men who are unable to empathize with their wives or with their children or with others and that if you cannot produce a society where men can do that, you're going to suffer and that society is going to decline. There are going to be divorce rates and there's going to be skyrocketing crises in crime and suicide rates and things like that because you're hiding behind a shell that shouldn't be there.

Given the particulars of Mr. Denver's history as detailed above, this perspective might appear incongruent, but as he pointed out, he had four strong female role models in his life, who all went to university, who all had high expectations for him and would not settle for second

www.manaraa.com

best. This aspect of Mr. Denver's realized subjectivity adds yet another layer of complexity and contradictions.

The Case of Mr. Andrews

Context – Downtown Core School. This particular school reported the lowest achievement on the OSSLT of all the schools involved in this research: 60% of fully-participating[3], first-time eligible students were successful in March 2011(EQAO, 2012b). That being said, it services one of the most challenging student population, in terms of learning needs, of the schools in this study; 48.3% of the student population has special needs, which is defined in this way: this statistic reports "the percentage of the students at the school, who are eligible to write the OSSLT, … who have an identified special need" (The Fraser Institute, 2010). According to the Fraser Institute, the parents' average income for this student population is also the lowest of the six schools involved in this study: $59,000, and the fewest students reported reading in English other than homework more than three hours per week: 32% (EQAO, 2012b). This context is understood to play an integral part in informing the pedagogical practices of the teachers at this school (see Martino, 2008a).

His philosophy and practice as an English teacher. Mr. Andrews is a tall, white, well-dressed male English teacher in his early 30's. Although he declined participation in the observation of this study, I include a detailed analysis of his interview transcript to illustrate how discursive practices about male teachers and boys as literacy learners are used to construct and position this particular male English teacher (Gore, 1995). Mr. Andrews self-fashions himself as "very, very modern and current" (see Martino, 2008b; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Sondergaard, 2002). Perhaps that explains, in part, his love of media and his take-it or leave-it

[3] This method of reporting provides percentages based on students for whom there is work for both sessions of the administration of the OSSLT and who were assigned an achievement result (successful, not successful). Students who are not working toward an OSSD, those who were absent and those who were deferred are excluded (see www.eqao.com).

www.manaraa.com

attitude about the literary Canon. The former is understood to be much more "current and modern" than the latter. Although Mr. Andrews is required to teach "fictional literature" in his English class, a requirement of his particular English department, he questions its effectiveness. He suggests that it has little relevance for a great number of students and believes that "there are other ways to achieve the same elements of the curriculum rather than fiction," so he tends to focus more on teaching his students how "to think," how to "put a sentence together" and how to "write reports," skills that he understands to be useful because they prepare students for life beyond school. This philosophy is aligned with the *English as Skills* model for teaching English, which places emphasis on providing students with the necessary skills to be able to compete in a competitive market (Ball *et al.*, 1990). He also uses a lot of media in his English classroom because he feels it is "way more accessible than traditional literature." He explained that through the use of media in English, students are able to make connections between the "concepts/ideas studied in class" and their own lives. This approach to teaching English involves elements of both *Progressive English* and *English as Critical Literacy* (Ball *et al.*, 1990). He understands media texts as facilitating connections between the curriculum and students' lives and opportunities for students to "read the world" (Ball *et al.*, 1990; also see Hinchman *et al.*, 2003/2004; Heron-Hruby, Wood, Mraz, 2008).

He also suggested that his passion for and engagement with media fosters a connection between him and his students:

> If you don't know what Twitter is, if you don't know what Facebook is, you're already sending out this giant barrier between you and the students and that's the last thing they need to make a subject that a lot of them find inaccessible. You know what I mean, it's a bigger distance. It's creating that divide, making it even wider.

www.manaraa.com

Mr. Andrews is very aware of the way he presents himself in the classroom; he consciously presents himself as someone who shares common interests and values with his students. He believes his construction of an English teacher, who engages with many of the same multi-modal practices as his students, works to build a positive rapport with his students, which is understood as critical for their engagement and achievement (see Heron-Hruby, Hagood, & Alvermann, 2008): "if you don't have that relationship with students, if you don't establish positive relationships with students you might as well not even bother." Roulston and Mills (2000) also identify teachers' perceptions of being "attuned to contemporary youth culture" as a source of connection with students (p. 228).

Although his engagement with and privileging of social media is consistent with his "modern" persona, it is also indicative of his orientation with particular philosophies for teaching English. Above, Mr. Andrews echoes a concern about the gap between the experiences and knowledge of teachers and their students that is a recurrent theme in education research. For example, Lankshear and Knobel (1997) suggest that "schools are out of touch with emergent technological literacies" (p.133). Buckingham (2003) proposes that "schools need to make much stronger attempts to address and build connections with young people's media culture" (p. 313). Sanford (2002) discusses the reluctance of some teachers to use popular culture and technology in the classroom and suggests that the incorporation of multiple literacies in the classroom "would help connect students to the world beyond the classroom" (p. 28). Grabill and Hicks (2005) contend that English teachers and English educators "should no longer have conversations about literacy without considering technology (p. 306). Hinchman *et al.* (2003/2004), concur, suggesting that, "Viewing printed textbooks as the only legitimate sources of information in a classroom limits what students who are less print oriented will be able to

www.manaraa.com

demonstrate in the way of learning" (p. 307; also see Hinchman & Young, 2001). Mr. Andrews suggests that through his knowledge of social media, he fosters a connection with his students. In this way, he is understood to espouse a pedagogy of multiliteracies, by placing emphasis on students' multimodal literacy practices outside of school (Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Grabill & Hicks, 2005; Giampapa, 2010; Heron-Hruby, Wood, Mraz, 2008, p. 260; New London Group, 1996).

Mr. Andrews illustrates a very different version of a male teacher than the other participants in this study (Connell, 1995). His conception of English elucidates that the subject is an "object of struggle" (Ball *et al.*, 1990, p. 75), that "what counts as English" is contestable (Luke, 2004, p. 88). He says, "I know English teachers have a lot of passion towards literature right and the idea of moving a lot of fictional literature just drives them crazy" (see Luke 2004; Morrison, Bryan & Chilcoat, 2002; Sanford, 2002). He, on the other hand, does not have the same vested interest in literature because it is not "what drew" him to the subject. In fact, his decision to become an English teacher stems from his experiences in and interactions with his grade nine English teacher who showed him that media studies can be an integral part of the English classroom (see Buckingham, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 1997; Morrell, 2002; Nixon, 2003; Sanford, 2002). Mr. Andrews had an immediate connection with this particular male English teacher because they shared a love of media. Although he admitted that he also liked his other secondary-school English teachers and even explicitly identified one of his female English teachers as a "brilliant teacher," their pedagogical practices, in particular the texts they used, were more traditional. In university, he went so far as to say that he "hated" English, the required readings and the fact that media was not included, so much that he actually switched his major to geography, but that did not deter him from his goal: "to become the English teacher like

www.manaraa.com

the teacher [he] had." In his role as an English teacher, he is explicit with his students about his preference for media and his struggle to engage with Canonical texts, a strategy he said "works for him," suggesting that it fosters a connection with his students who also struggle to read traditional school texts. In this way, Mr. Andrews embraces a particular model for teaching English that is an amalgam of *Progressive English* (Ball *et al.*, 1990) or a personal growth model (see Goodwyn, 1992) and *English as Critical Literacy* (Ball *et al.*, 1990). Multiliteracies and media are central to his pedagogical approach. This orientation is understood to inform his pedagogical approach as an English teacher and raises important questions about explanatory frameworks that identify the "singularity of gender" as a marker of influence (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010, p. 38). Mr. Andrews actively constructs himself as a certain kind of male English teacher by drawing on his own experiences as a male student in English. In order to construct himself in this way, he resists normalizing and homogenizing pressure to conform to certain regimes about the teaching of English (Foucault, 1984), while at the same time reinforces hegemonic notions of masculinity and its incompatibility with traditional approaches to the teaching of English.

Mr. Andrews indicated that he tries to be a role model for his students like his grade nine male English teacher was for him, but he does not believe that most students see teachers as role models (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010): "I don't necessarily think we're as influential as we maybe like to think we are." Despite this perception, he knows that he has had a positive influence on some of his students and continues to try to make a difference. He suggested that as a male English teacher he is conscious of the type of man he models for his students because he believes it makes a difference for the boys in his English classes:

www.manaraa.com

> I try to be consciously in the middle leaning towards, very slightly, towards more masculine because, I don't know exactly why, because I want students to know like I'm welcoming, I'm safe and I'm open and all that sort of stuff and that's good, but I don't want them to think of me because I think it's very, very easy for students to think of English teachers that are male as weak and soft.

Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) argue that, "Learning to signify a masculine self entails learning how to adjust to audiences and situations and learning how one's other identities bear on the acceptability of a performance" (p. 282). Mr. Andrews points to his conscious decision to position himself as a certain kind of male English teacher. He acknowledges discourses that position English as a feminized subject (Martino, 1997; Millard, 1997; Mills, Martino *et al.*, 2004; Simpson, 1974) and suggests that he engages in a kind of "self-fashioning" (see Martino, 2008b; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Sondergaard, 2002) as more masculine to distance himself from being constructed as feminine in order to present himself as "straight," as suggested by his reference to constructing himself as "safe" (Mills *et al.*, 2004; Martino, 2008b). Connell (1995) argues that,

> Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (p. 77).

Mr. Andrew's active construction of himself as a particular kind of male English teacher draws attention to the way in which knowledge/power incites individuals to participate in a type of self-regulation (Foucault, 1972). Wetherell and Edley (1999) point out that "more fine-grain work on which complicity and resistance look like in practice" (p. 337) is needed when investigating how

www.manaraa.com

men position themselves as gendered individuals. In this case, Mr. Andrews appears to be "strategically" negotiating his subjectivity in opposition to what he understood to be the feminine subjectivities of some of his English teachers in his situated history (Weedon, 1997, p. 176).

Mr. Andrews also talked about some of his university English professors and one in particular who was the "nicest man" but when he read poetry to his class, he would cry. Mr. Andrews suggested that although there is "nothing wrong with that … it certainly contributes to the idea of men being, male teachers being softer …totally reinforces the stereotype." He suggested that this version of masculinity (Connell, 1995) does little to encourage boys to engage with the subject, alluding to the ordering of power relations constructed through discourses (Foucault, 1972). He understands his version of masculinity – masculine, modern, media-savvy with little vested interested in fictional literature – as "more real" and one that has facilitated achievement for some boys and a connection with a lot of male student athletes in the school who ask to be in his classes even though he is not an athlete himself. Drawing on Connell (1995), Francis and Skelton (2001) point out that, "One way of handling the various contradictions involved in their constructions of gender and occupational role is for men to emphasize those aspects of teaching that are more compatible with conventional masculinity" (p. 12). Mr. Andrews is understood to be strategically aligning himself with dominant versions of masculinity in the classroom (see King, 1998, Martino, 2008b; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a). The case of Mr. Andrews draws attention to the complexity, context-specificity and fluidity of masculinities as configurations of practice and suggests that "the social construction of the system of differentiations of men and men's practices" warrants further investigation (Hearn, 2004, p. 60; also see Martino, 2008b).

www.manaraa.com

Finally, Mr. Andrews suggested that more masculine men "bring different types of literacy" to the English classroom. Drawing on his own experience, he told me that he teaches the essay, for example, differently than other teachers do. He explained that he uses a formula for essay writing that he learned from his own grade nine English teacher: "state, illustrate, elaborate." He explicitly instructs his students (boys in particular) to think of it as a math equation, in which one simply follows the equation and inserts the parts. Although Mr. Andrews learned this approach to essay writing from a male English teacher, it is not understood to be gender-specific. A quick internet search using the prompts "state, illustrate, elaborate" revealed that is a common organizational approach to essay writing (see for example http://ww2.rainbowschools.ca/~mcbaina/Class1/Handouts/Essay_guide_revised.pdf ; http://mrcallens.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=611&Itemid=1; http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20101219175711AAi8JIA).

He, however, suggests that this approach is more logical like mathematics and therefore a more natural fit for boys (see Francis, 2000a), drawing attention to binaries that discourses construct to order gender relations (Foucault, 1972). He also implies that because he is male he has increased sensibility about boys' dislike of fiction: "maybe I'm more sensitive to seeing guys, the way guys struggle." In this claim, he uses an essentialist understanding of boys to suggest that they all dislike fiction, even though, as revealed above, he previously indicated that he actively self-fashions himself to be a certain kind of male teacher who will not be readily identified with the kinds of teachers he had in his situated past who enjoyed literature and fiction (see Martino, 2008a; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Sondergaard, 2002). Finally, he alludes to a gender affiliation with boys when he talks about being more "sensitive" to their needs, which speaks to the power of dominant discourse to perpetuate regimes of truth about boys as a certain type of

www.manaraa.com

learner (Foucault, 1984); however, it might also be argued that his own personal struggles with literature and course reading requirements have more to do with his "sensitivity" than gender, drawing attention to the complexities surrounding the negotiation of identity formations.

The Case of Mr. Baker

Context – Community School. As its name suggests, this school has a strong sense of community. It is a school steeped in history and traditions, as suggested by the photos of alumni that adorn the walls of the school. According to the Fraser Institute, the parents' average income at this school is currently $65, 000 (The Fraser Institute, 2010). In the past, this urban school was known as an academic school; however, changes to school boundaries have resulted in changes in the school population. These changes have meant that more courses at the applied and essential levels are being offered. Two years ago, an essential level English course was offered for the first time. This school has also seen changes in the success rate of its students on the OSSLT. In March 2007, 89% of fully participating first-time eligible students were successful; however, in March 2011 only 77% were successful. This steady decline in the success rate of students on the OSSLT might, at least in part, be attributed to the changing demographics of Community School.

At the time of my interview and observation of Mr. Baker, there were three male English teachers in the department; however, this particular department has had considerable turnover in teaching staff, with a number of lines of English being taught by LTO's (Long Term Occasional Teachers). As a result, the make-up of this particular English department has varied considerably in the last several years. Mr. Baker is such a teacher. When he and his family moved to their current home, Mr. Baker was unable to get a full contract position, despite the fact that he had

www.manaraa.com

five years teaching experience with another school board. Mr. Baker was, however, able to get an LTO position and has been working at Community School for two years in this capacity.

A male English teacher as mentor. Mr. Baker is a white male in his early 30's who loves sports. He played sports at a "high level" and in a relatively short period of time, he has had success coaching sports in the secondary-school system. Although Mr. Baker's first teachable subject is physical education, he enjoys teaching English. He told me that he thinks he would really miss reading with his students and reading what they write in their journals.

He identified a male English teacher (Mr. X) in his own past who made a difference for him, and indicated that he thought it would be wonderful if he could have the same kind of impact on his male students: "you know this man who impacted me, and I think it would be great if I could do the same thing with English." Although he attributes his desire to teach English to Mr. X, he does not credit his connection with this teacher solely to gender affiliation because he also had a negative experience with a male English teacher. Mr. Baker's experience with two different male English teachers draws attention to the difference between male teachers (Connell, 1995). Gender affiliation does not guarantee connections or achievement, as exemplified by the case of Mr. Baker who struggled to achieve his English credit with one male English teacher and thrived with another (see Carrington and Skelton, 2003). The factors influencing student achievement in any subject, but in this case English, are multiple and complex and clearly cannot be reduced to the gender of the teacher. Sukhnandan, Lee and Kelleher (2000) stress the importance of "avoid[ing] language that may suggest that all boys or all girls can be deemed to behave in an identical fashion" (p. 5). Mr. Baker's account here suggests that the same caution must be taken when referring to male teachers.

www.manaraa.com

Mr. Baker described his grade twelve male English teacher who was about to retire as "arrogant [and a teacher who] spoke down to some of us." Although Mr. Baker passed the course, he admitted that he and this particular male English teacher "did not click" and that he "struggled" because this male teacher made engaging with and achieving in English "tough." Despite their gender affiliation, Mr. Baker indicated that he had few connections, little respect and a negative learning experience with this particular male English teacher.

His description of Mr. X, his OAC (Ontario Academic Credit) and Writers' Craft teacher, is notably different. He told me that because of Mr. X, English became "easily" his favourite subject in high school, other than physical education. Mr. Baker explained that Mr. X made learning English "extremely fun." Mr. Baker described him as "laid back," "patient" and "funny." He also remembered Mr. X as a teacher who genuinely seemed to care about his students (see Francis *et al.*, 2008; Francis & Skelton, 2001; Gilligan, 1977; King, 1998; Noddings, 2003). He indicated that Mr. X "would make time to come watch school athletics," and although he did not coach, "he was still interested in how his students did in their athletic endeavours." Mr. Baker was also impressed by that fact Mr. X had "kept tabs on him" and got "updates from [his] old basketball coach" about his life after high school. Mr. X actually told Mr. Baker, when they ran into each other years after he had graduated, that "he was one of the kids he wanted to know about – what [he] was up to," which Mr. Baker offered as evidence of Mr. X's genuine interest in his students. Mr. Baker clearly places more emphasis on "affective characteristics" than pedagogical practice to account for Mr. X's effectiveness as a teacher (Stronge, 2007, p. 22). Specifically, he highlighted the interest Mr. X demonstrated in his athletic pursuits. Stronge (2007) writes, "Students revealed that effective teachers demonstrate interest in

www.manaraa.com

students' lives beyond the classroom. Teachers who attend sporting events, concerts, and other special programs in which their students participate are valued by their students" (p. 26).

Mr. Baker's biography is also understood to add another layer to his connection with Mr. X. He lost his father at a young age and admits that he might have been looking for male role models in his life. Although Mr. X was not "into sports" himself, his son was: his oldest son played high school basketball and actually competed against Mr. Baker's team. Mr. Baker recounted a story about Mr. X's relationship with his son:

> He once told a story to us about coming home from work one day and his youngest was playing basketball on the driveway. When Mr. X got out of his car the basketball rolled to him....he said he picked it up, did a Kareem Abdul-Jabbar sky hook and nailed the shot. He told us it was the first and last time his son will ever see him shoot a basketball.... 'My kid thinks I am a great basketball player, why would I show him otherwise??' I don't know why I loved that story so much...partly because it is about the admiration that sons feel for their fathers, partly because it was about basketball and partly because to look at Mr. X, you would know that he didn't have an ounce of athletic ability but to his son he is a fantastic basketball player....I think it is hilarious.

Since Mr. X's son was the same age and shared an interest in basketball with Mr. Baker, it facilitated an imagining of him as an ideal father figure: he went to his son's games; he played basketball in the driveway with his sons; he cared. The connection Mr. Baker feels for Mr. X might be understood as "an unpredictable attachment which emerges from spoken and unspoken forms of fantasy, pleasure, and desire" (Crichlow, 1999, p. 241). Carrington and Skelton (2003) suggest that it is unlikely that gender or racial affiliation is sufficient to create the type of bond

www.manaraa.com

necessary for role modelling; however, for Mr. Baker, the identity of Mr. X is "meaningful, accessible, honest and rounded" making him a plausible role model (p. 258).

The particular needs and interests of Mr. Baker, as a student, and the personality and pedagogical approach of Mr. X fostered a connection between these two individuals; however, it is erroneous to assume that this connection is generalizable to all male English teachers and the boys in their classes. That being said, the case of Mr. Baker illustrates how particular experiences can become understood in generalized terms. As a teacher, Mr. Baker's connection with his former teacher, Mr. X, works to minimize his disconnection with his other male English teacher. His understanding of the potential of male teachers, as a group, is inflated and becomes a kind of "truth" (Foucault, 1984) because of his experience with a particular male English teacher. Thus all male teachers benefit (see Connell, 1995). Mr. Baker credits his desire to be an English teacher to his relationship with Mr. X, a relationship that has influenced his understanding of his own potential as a male English teacher. This narrative draws attention to the power of the "already said" about the potential of male teachers for boys to shape our knowledge even when some of our experiences (Mr. Baker's negative experience with his other male English teacher) challenge such knowledge (Foucault, 1972).

Factors informing his practice. When I asked Mr. Baker about his philosophy as an English teacher, he placed emphasis on the student more than the subject in his response. For him, helping students to be confident in their abilities is critical for achievement, so he tries to provide opportunities for his students to "cultivate their confidence." He also talked about the importance of creating a classroom based on "mutual respect" in which students feel "safe" and "comfortable." Like his own teacher role model, he gives his students choices: "I think choice is important. Providing the students with some options is always helpful. This way it becomes

www.manaraa.com

their own and I think they appreciate that." As an English teacher, his philosophy seems to be most closely aligned with the *Progressive English* (Ball *et al.*, 1990) or personal growth model (Goodwyn, 1992), , in which the students' "self-discovery and personal growth are at the centre" (Ball *et al.*, 1990, p. 79). He wants his students to understand the importance of English. He does this by pointing to admission requirements for university and college programs. He also models its importance in his own life by talking about the books he reads and being enthusiastic about the texts they study in class. In addition, he always tries to make the materials being studied relevant for his students, which aligns his practice with a pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996). Using technology is one way in which Mr. Baker bridges the gap between students' in-school and out-of-school experiences (Hall & Coles, 2001; Hinchman *et al.* 2003/2004; Sanford, 2006).

Although some boys in Mr. Baker's English classes fail to achieve, he believes that being a male English teacher makes a difference for both boys' engagement and achievement in English. This belief stems from his own positive relationship with a male English teacher, which is reinforced by dominant discourses and is understood as a certain truth about male teachers being better equipped to cater to boys' natural tendencies and learning needs (Foucault, 1984). It also stems from a gender regime that positions athletic boys as non-readers. Mr. Baker said,

> I think the students or the boys, and I am stereotyping here, that are less likely to read as often are those who are involved in sports or sort of the traditional male types of activities. Whether or not that is true, I have no idea. I am thinking about the boys in my class that are involved in sports in this school. When I meet them and when they are in my class, I don't think oh he loves to read. So what I try to do especially with boys like that is I make it clear about my involvement with sports and athletics, and I

www.manaraa.com

> talk to them about things like coaching. I have a boy on the football team. I talk to him about football. I think it is important for him to see me in that light, but also being able to talk about the imagery in *The Great Gatsby*. I think they can see just because he reads *The Great Gatsby* doesn't mean he can't like sports. Just because he appreciates things from books doesn't mean that … I can like reading, but I can also want to play football. I think that is important.

Despite Mr. Baker's personal involvement in sports and enjoyment of reading, he does not consider this combination to be *normal* for boys (Foucault, 2007). Mr. Baker very clearly draws on a kind of gendered discourse about the norms for certain types of boys which exclude engagement with reading. He suggests that his subjectivity as both a reader and an athlete disrupts norms that operate as a disciplinary mechanism for boys (Foucault, 2007). Although he explicitly states that this assumption is just that and not based on a confirmed fact or truth, it constructs a kind of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1972) that guides his pedagogical approach in the classroom and informs his understanding of what boys need and how they understand English as a subject (see Martino *et al.*, 2004). He constructs himself as an ideal role model for boys because he embraces two worlds that gender regimes regulate apart. (See Roulston & Mills, 2000). His comments suggest that he is very aware of the "existing social organization of masculinity" that privileges sport and uses it to validate his masculinity while engaging in reading, a feminine pursuit (see Connell, 1995). What is "discursively unsaid" (Foucault, 1980) here is that boys are reluctant to engage in reading, not because of weak skills or necessarily a natural disinclination, but because it is understood to be "unmanly" (see Skelton & Francis, 2011). He also alludes to the cultural capital associated with sports. Connell (1995) writes, "In historically recent times, sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture"

www.manaraa.com

(p. 54). Mr. Baker is aware that sport, as an institution, is a signifier of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Roulston & Mills, 2000), and he uses gender regimes explicitly to normalize his engagement in English and motivate his male students to do the same, thereby challenging gender norms (Foucault, 2007). Although Mr. Baker's intention is to overcome gender stereotypes, he inadvertently, by emphasizing his *normal* or more favourable masculine practices, reinforces "dominant constructions of masculinity, and existing gendered relations of power," the very constructions he was seeking to disrupt (Roulston & Mills, 2000, p. 234; also see Foucault, 2007).

Mr. Baker provided other examples to illustrate the modifications he makes to accommodate boys' learning needs, once again drawing attention to the impact a teacher's belief system has on practice:

> I think the timing of when I need to. If I really want them to analyze how they felt about something and really express their emotions, I think that is something that needs to come a little bit later on if the majority of them are boys because I don't think that is something boys are comfortable with doing right off from the get-go. So I think it has to be a build-up. I can't think of what a journal topic would have been. There are journal topics that I have said ok this won't work right now. I will wait to later on in the semester when they are more comfortable with sharing their thoughts and emotions.

Although well-meaning and in keeping with his goal of creating a safe and respectful classroom environment, his pedagogical approach draws on essentialist notions of boys struggling to express their emotions, a trait understood to be feminine (see Francis & Skelton, 2001). This understanding of boys legitimizes certain gendered teaching approaches which in turn reinforce

www.manaraa.com

assumptions about boys' natural inclinations. In other words, rather than treating the category "boys" as constructed by practices and acknowledging that meanings are given to those practices, Mr. Baker takes for granted the nature of boys as constructed by practices and accepts the meanings given to those practices (see Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009).

Mr. Baker also suggested that he uses sports analogies quite frequently in his classroom to engage his male students. During my observation of his classroom practice, I was able to get a sense of Mr. Baker's teaching style and rapport with his students. He is quietly confident in his abilities, which manifests itself in a relaxed yet at the same time a no-nonsense approach in the classroom. In Mr. Baker's English class, students are routinely asked to read, write and engage in whole-class discussions. During these discussions, Mr. Baker often draws on his experience and knowledge of sports to help his students, primarily boys, make connections to the English texts they are studying. He admitted that he does so, not only because he is comfortable talking about sports but also because he believes the boys in his English classes can relate to the ideas being discussed:

> I do this a lot. Any examples for whatever the case is – I try to tie them to sports. And that is fairly consistent. I don't know if it makes it easier for me to teach it. I think for the most part the girls will get it regardless of the example and I think sometimes the boys need to relate to it a little bit more. And I think that is why I focus on sports and I think part of it is probably for me as well. I am a little more confident when it comes to talking about anything associated with athletics … I think girls are able to relate different topics together, and they can see that he is saying football, but this is really what he means. We could relate it to whatever. But I think boys need something that is specific to them.

www.manaraa.com

What emerges here is an understanding of boys and girls as static identity categories and binaries (Weedon, 1997) and the belief that gender-specific teaching strategies are needed for boys (see Millard, 1997). Girls know little about sports but are able to figure out what their teachers are talking about when they use sports analogies to clarify ideas for boys. Boys, however, need examples that are "specific to them" to facilitate their understanding. Mr. Baker subscribes to this pedagogical approach even though he pointed out that not all of the boys in his classes are interested in sports. The perceived feminization of English as a subject (Martino, 1997; Millard, 1997; Simpson, 1974) and an understanding of sport as a masculine domain (Connell, 1995) incite Mr. Baker to adopt certain pedagogical approaches, which inadvertently reinforce norms of masculinity that are understood to engage boys and facilitate improved achievement.

The Case of Mr. Parker

Context – Academia School. This site is an urban secondary school known for its high academic achievement. In March 2011 100% of the first-time fully-participating students were successful on the OSSLT (EQAO, 2012b). Although the parents' average income at this school is reported as $88,700 (both high achieving students citywide and students, irrespective of their achievement, who live within school boundaries attend), parental, school and board expectations for student achievement are high. As a result, it is not surprising that the students at this school site reported the highest number of students who read more than three hours a week in English not including homework: 54%. Despite the fact that for some students, Academia School is their local school, only 2% of the students who wrote the OSSLT in March 2011 were in applied English (EQAO, 2012b) and none of those students were identified as special needs (The Fraser Institute, 2010).

www.manaraa.com

I purposefully chose to devote space to Mr. Parker's experiences and understanding for a number of reasons: one of which is the school context in which he teaches. In this particular context, the boys are not underachieving according to the OSSLT: in March 2011 all of the boys and the girls successfully completed the OSSLT. There are a number of factors that are understood to contribute to this school's success that extend beyond the gender of their teachers as an explanatory framework. First of all, as mentioned above, the students and their parents have high expectations for their achievement. Mr. Parker told me that a high percentage of the students at Academia School are identified as gifted, have a background in performing arts and/or have parents who are well educated. The student body at Academia School, like the students at Upwardly Mobile School, has access to cultural capital in the form of the educational qualifications of their parents (see Bourdieu, 1986). This capital in the form of parental educational qualifications is an important contextual piece for this case. Mr. Parker also explained that the parents of the students at this particular school provide their children with a great deal of support. The benefits of parental support for school achievement are well documented (see Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte & Bertrand, 1997; Potvin, Deslandes, & Leclerc, 1999). He suggested that they grow up in homes where they are encouraged to read "for personal interest or for pleasure." He also pointed out that they are "exposed to other media in their home life as well – newspapers or magazines or they discuss things with their parents." As a result, Mr. Parker described the students at Academia School as "well rounded" and "worldly" (see Bourdieu, 1984). According to Mr. Parker, they are also "very marks conscience and they push themselves and they have their eye on their peers so they are very competitive with each other and don't generally slack off or disengage." He suggested because of the school's reputation as an academic school, it attracts a certain kind of student. As a result, the school offers very few

www.manaraa.com

courses at the applied/college level, and is often forced to run split class (i.e., a grade 9/10 applied English class) because they do not have enough students enrolled in either class. The success of the boys in this particular school context and the fact that only one male English teacher teaches at the school draws attention to the problem of using gender as an explanatory framework for boys' underachievement. The tendency of policy and media discourses to downplay or "bleach" the significance of contextual and school-related factors for student achievement needs to be addressed (see Jordan, 2010; Martino, 2011).

Mr. Parker further highlights the importance of school context by comparing his present teaching experience with his previous one in a lower socioeconomic, small town, community. At that school, he suggested that the student were not as "well-rounded" or "worldly," which resulted in a different type of teaching experience. He described the difference in this way:

> Oh, I can think back to [X High School] for example and it was probably not be engaged by the literature. Finding the novels boring or irrelevant to their lives and finding the assignments tedious or too difficult or challenging. Sometimes there are other pressures like students who have to work at a part-time job. I don't see that as much here. I remember at [X High School], the students who would leave right at three o'clock and go to work at a restaurant or coffee shop or something for eight hours and say they have no times for homework. I certainly ran into that there; not so much here [at Academia School].

Mr. Parker draws attention to a number of factors that potentially influence students' engagement and achievement in English that extend beyond the classroom. As possible explanations for the failure or underachievement of the students in this particular context, he acknowledges "literature" that is not engaging for these students, assignments that are too difficult, and outside

www.manaraa.com

pressures such as the demands of part-time jobs. He also points out that at Academia School, these other factors play a minimal role in students' engagement and achievement. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the case of Mr. Parker was chosen purposefully to draw attention to the importance of school context. Mr. Parker's experiences in two very different secondary schools calls into question notions of teacher gender as the single most important factor for boys' achievement and draws attention to the dangers of reform initiatives that fail to account for significant contextual factors. The history and biography of this particular teacher also influenced my decision to devote space to this case.

Acknowledging his biography. Mr. Parker is a white male in his late 30's who has been a teacher for fourteen years; the past eight have been at Academia School. He became a secondary-school English teacher when his dreams of becoming a journalist, an actor and a university professor came to an end. It is also important to note that Mr. Parker is gay. Although he does not discuss his personal life with his students, he told me that he assumes that both the teaching staff and the students are aware of his sexual orientation. A female colleague at the school who was interviewed because she was identified by one of the male students in this study as an excellent teacher confirmed that the sexual orientation of Mr. Parker is common knowledge at the school.

I draw attention to the sexual orientation of Mr. Parker to add another layer of complexity to understandings of male English teachers. His history and biography as a gay male English teacher raises critical questions about how individual teachers understand their capacity for influence concerning boy's achievement in English and what factors determine their pedagogy. Mr. Parker told me that although his sexual orientation is a "non-issue" at Academia School, this was not the case at his previous school. He described the students at that school as "homophobic

www.manaraa.com

and vocal about it." He suggested that because he was a new teacher, not married and dressed differently, he had to earn the students at X High School's respect: "You're new here and you are not like us and we are going to call you a fag in the hallway." Interestingly, although Mr. Parker was open about these acts of discrimination in his history, he also tried to downplay them by pointing to the fact that he was a new teacher:

> You know, once you get established and get the respect of the students then they sort of bring the others along with them and I think it is as much being new somewhere like the students will harass you for whatever reason.

Mr. Parker's understanding of his own subjectivity is complex, layered, and fluid and understood to influence his understanding of his capacity to influence the achievement of the boys he teaches.

Mr. Parker recounted a "critical incident" (Tripp, 1993) in his past that influenced his decision to become a teacher:

> Well I think I had a terrible experience with a male teacher in grade eight. My grade eight teacher was… thinking about him was one the things that made me want to become a teacher so I could not be like that and I could be somebody else because he was… He and the other grade eight teacher, they were very jocky and totally pandered to the pretty girls and the jocky boys and the rest of us could, you know, just do what we wanted. He would like openly mock… take on gay affectations as an attempt at humour and allowed the bullies to rein supreme over the rest of the class and it was terrible. I thought, I would never be … It was the first time I thought of maybe becoming a teacher.

www.manaraa.com

Mr. Parker's own subjectivity and his experience with this particular teacher are understood to influence his own understanding of his role as an English teacher and the kind of English teacher he has become. He experienced first-hand what it is like to be in a classroom with a teacher who subscribes to a certain type of hegemonic masculinity and to be marginalized by such pedagogy.

Although Mr. Parker's grade eight teacher's presence in the school might work to de-feminize notions about teaching being "women's work" (Acker, 1995/1996), such hierarchies of masculinity and femininity which lead to bullying and the marginalization of some students are not values we want to encourage. Meyer (2008) argues that pressure to conform to ideals of hegemonic masculinity is at the "core of most gendered harassment" (p. 40; also see Robinson, 2005). In addition, a number of studies have suggested that teachers who embody such versions of masculinity do little to address boys' underachievement (see Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Roulston & Mills, 2000). This aspect of Mr. Parker's history adds another layer of complexity to debates about the need for more male teachers and raises important questions about the desired qualities of male English teachers (see Lingard *et al.*, 2009).

During his interview, Mr. Parker pointed out the difficulties associated with essentialist notions of male English teachers. He said,

> I think it is impossible to narrow it down to gender because I think there have been a couple of other male teachers on staff who have done the odd English class here or there just due to timetabling. I am the only full-time male English teacher, and we were very different, and I don't think that … I don't think you could say that—I can think of two others who are still here—all three of us could have the same impact on a male student. I think it is about the student, and it's about… I think it's about personality and temperament more so than gender because I could also think of the

www.manaraa.com

> differences in the female teachers; there are some that are very motherly and nurturing and the students gravitate to them and adore them, and then others who are much more structured and less motherly … (laughing). I try to be aware of this in the classroom … Um, so I think it is bigger than that, it is about more than just gender.

Mr. Parker highlights the limitations of assumptions about teachers' supposedly natural pedagogies based on gender. He does this by pointing out not only the differences between himself and other male English teachers on staff, but also highlighting some differences between his female colleagues. In this way, he embraces multiple masculinities (see Connell, 1995). Mr. Parker also calls into question the discourses that "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Male teachers, and for the purposes of this research male English teachers, are constructed as a certain type of subject. This case highlights the limitations of such discourses as practice, which tends to blur the multiple versions of male teachers, which renders further investigation of pedagogical practices redundant.

His pedagogy. In the high-achieving environment of Academia School, Mr. Parker has a reputation as a tough teacher. He acknowledged that he has high expectations of his students. He told me a story about his grade twelve female English teacher with whom he "clashed." In this class, he received his lowest English mark and was almost denied access to university because of it. As an adult, he now realizes that he learned a great deal from this particular teacher, even though he did not realize it when he was in high school. He told me that he even wrote a letter to this teacher when he was in university to tell her how much he learned and still retains to this day.

His experience with this tough English teacher is understood to have influenced the importance he places on writing in his classroom and his high expectations for his students (see

www.manaraa.com

Anderson *et al.*, 2011; Lortie, 1975; Kennedy, 1999). Mr. Parker subscribes to a model for teaching English that blends the study of literature with formal writing skills; in this way, he espouses an amalgam of *English as the Great Literary Tradition* and *English as Skills* models for teaching English (Ball *et al.*, 1990). This approach has been adopted to prepare students to be successful at the college or university level, which is an important focus in this school context. Learning to write essays is also a major focus at Academia School, again because it is a skill students will need to be successful at the post-secondary level:

> With my senior level courses, I tend to do a lot more essay writing than perhaps is required by the curriculum, as I feel this is a skill students definitely need to master before moving on to college or university.

At Academic High School, the individual English teachers do not have a lot of control over the texts studied in their courses. Within this particular English department, the core texts for each grade level are set by the Department Head. Both the academic expectations for the students at Academia School and Mr. Parker's own experiences with a tough English teacher who made a difference for his learning are understood to play an important role in influencing his pedagogical decisions as a teacher.

In Mr. Parker's English classes, students work primarily in groups to discuss literature, compare responses and review literary analysis questions. They even worked in a self-directed manner in small groups to learn and test their knowledge of formal grammar. In fact, the small-group approach was the only approach I observed during the data collection period. Mr. Parker suggested that he uses this approach for a number of reasons:

> Students usually feel "safer" participating first in a smaller group before contributing to a whole class discussion. This also allows me to observe group dynamics and

www.manaraa.com

> determine what students are active, informed participants. I also think small groups are effective for presentations or seminars, as students feel more secure at the front of the classroom if they are not alone.

My observation of Mr. Parker's class, however, challenges these notions of safety and effectiveness. Although I conducted this research at the end of May and beginning of June which might have contributed to the students' behaviour, very few of them appeared to be "active, informed participants." The class I observed was made up of twenty-nine students, seventeen of which were boys. On a daily basis, I witnessed these students, primarily the boys, throw pens, push desks, wander around the room, push, hit and massage each other, and generally be disruptive. From my point of view, it appeared that the students were wasting a lot of time. On one occasion, one of the boys in the class announced, "We are here to socialize," which seemed to sum up the attitude of many of the students in the class. I was surprised to see this type of "carnivalesque" atmosphere in this marks-driven context (Baktin, 1984). Such practices and relations appeared to subvert Mr. Parker's power and authority as well as the learning process. Despite his attempts to reason with some of the boys about their behaviour, circulate and prompt them with questions to re-focus their attention, this particular group of students struggled with the freedoms and responsibilities inherent in Mr. Parker's pedagogical approach, which relied heavily on students' self-motivation, collaboration and engagement as learners.

On several occasions, Mr. Parker apologized to me for their behaviour and appeared to be embarrassed by it. One day, he confided that he felt he should "take some of the blame [for their behaviour] and nipped it in the bud sooner"; however, I never witnessed him raise his voice, try another pedagogical approach or even become visibly frustrated with the noise level. Mr. Parker acknowledged that there was a "pecking order" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 3) among

www.manaraa.com

the boys in this room, and tended to devote considerable attention to the leaders of the pack. On a number of occasions, he moved these boys in the hall to work, but they still managed to disrupt their peers from this location.

Mr. Parker's extensive use of small-group work raises a number of questions. First of all, it raises questions about gendered pedagogical approaches, as this approach was not employed to the same extent by any of the other male English teacher participants in this study. Some of the teachers used no or next to no group work in their classes; Mr. Parker used it almost exclusively. Secondly, it draws attention to the importance of the localized, school context and the complex nature of literacy learning. All of the students in this particular class passed the OSSLT, and the class average at 75% was higher than Mr. Parker's well-behaved morning class, which I observed to facilitate some comparisons. His morning English class appeared more engaged and willing to collaborate on the exact same tasks as the afternoon class, and yet their class average was lower (71%) and they tended to need more time to complete assignments. This class by being high achieving and yet by far the most disruptive group in this study adds another layer of complexity to the nature of literacy learning, the importance of cultural capital for student success (Bourdieu, 1986) and the influence of male English teachers. In this particular case, Mr. Parker's pedagogical approach draws attention to the way teachers teach and regimes of classroom practice, discourses that tend to be absent from debates.

Embodiment of complexities. Although Mr. Parker raised the possibility that some boys in some school context might respond to hegemonic versions of masculinity – "Do they need a football coach to be the male teacher there to inspire them or maintain discipline at the bare minimum and then hopefully inspire them? I don't know" – he maintained throughout the interview that a teacher's gender is a non-factor at his school, drawing attention to the limitations

www.manaraa.com

of focusing solely on gender to understand boys' literacy underachievement (see Martino, 2008a; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a). He indicated that in his particular case, his gender might make a difference simply because he is an anomaly, the only male English teacher at the school. He did not suggest that by virtue of being male that he was able to offer a better or worse learning experience, just different:

> Not necessarily better or worse but just it is a different experience, different sense of humour, different delivery, you know, perhaps different sensibilities. You know? So …. and I think that students like variety, so maybe and I don't think it's … I don't even think it is really about gender as much as it is just personality, different temperament.

He begins by framing gender in terms of binaries to explain the different experiences he, as a male English teacher, is able to offer his students; however, he qualifies this assertion by pointing out that the differences between himself and his female colleagues have more to do with personality than gender. Yet, Mr. Parker continues by explaining that although much of the teacher autonomy is restricted at Academia School to maintain consistency across the English department, he modifies his approach to cater to the learning interests and needs of boys:

> Yeah, I had to use humour a lot more to engage them and to keep their attention. Um, in sort of a nudge, nudge, wink, wink way you sort of try to emphasize the violence in King Lear or in Frankenstein more maybe or … to engage them. Um, I would also have to be more interactive with them. If they were doing literature circles or some sort of group activity, I would have to monitor and circulate among them and

www.manaraa.com

> question what they are doing and just sort of keep them on task. Um, more, yeah, more interactive approach with the predominantly male class, I think.

What emerges through Mr. Parker's description of how he modifies his practice to cater to boys is an understanding of boys, as a homogeneous group, who is interested in violence, easily distracted and need more guidance to stay on task. He draws on regimes of hegemonic masculinity (see Connell, 1995), dictating the terms of his pedagogical engagement with the boys in his classes. Based on such understandings of masculinity, certain boy-friendly strategies are mobilized. In other words, power is exercised through the categorization of boys as a certain type of student and the imposition of "laws of truth" about their subjectivities (Foucault, 1982, p. 212). Thus, gender norms go unchallenged and boys continue to require more vigilance in the classroom.

Mr. Parker understands boys to require a different approach adding another layer of complexity. He was critical of his grade eight teachers' hegemonic practices and repeatedly pointed to the limitations of discourses that claim that male teacher by virtue of being male are the same, and yet he claims to have adopted pedagogical approaches that adhere to essentialized notions of the boys as learners. I do not seek to criticize this aspect of Mr. Parker's teaching, but rather point to the power of discourses to shape and create "truth" even when personal experiences and subjectivities question such discourses (Foucault, 1984).

Conclusion

In this chapter, by devoting "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) to five male English teachers and their contexts, a more in-depth understanding is provided of the limits of role-modelling as an explanatory framework for teacher influence (see Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a). What emerge are multiple versions of male English teachers and a wide range of

www.manaraa.com

understandings about English as a subject. The biographies, histories, values and beliefs of these teachers are so complex that any attempt to isolate gender as the sole marker of influence seems misguided. Given their diversity, the need not only to elucidate the desired qualities of male English teachers is pinpointed as critical but also an understanding of how the "self-fashioning" (see Martino, 2008b; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Sondergaard, 2002) of male English teachers is informed by gender norms and regimes warrants further investigation (Foucault, 1984). What also becomes clear is that there is no one masculine philosophy of English as a subject or pedagogical approach, calling into questions assumptions about the link between gender and pedagogical practice. The male English teachers in this study subscribe to an amalgam of orientations or models for the teaching of English, which are not gender-specific. Subscription to particular orientations or philosophies of the subject of English stem from teachers' particular biographies, histories, values and worldviews. That being said, their understandings of the subject of English, their roles as English teachers and boys' engagement and achievement in English language arts clearly shape the pedagogical practice of these men. Thus, the pedagogical practices of these male English teachers are understood to be influenced by their "teacher threshold knowledges" (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Martino *et al.*, 2004). Chege (2006) suggests that the "negotiation of identities revealed 'biographical conflicts' hinging not just on the need for teachers to apply learned pedagogical skills, but also on the fact that being a teacher required navigation of teachers' cultural histories, the past, present and future expectations that were set in dynamic tensions within and outside the classroom (p. 26; also see Carson and Johnson, 2000). This research suggests that if effective school reforms are to be implemented, the impact of such knowledge on the school experiences of boys (and girls) and

www.manaraa.com

how they are interwoven with the subjectivities of male English teachers must be given greater consideration.

Chapter Six

The Boys

I guess it [having a male teacher] like makes a difference, but not one that really matters….

(David at Academia School)

www.manaraa.com

In the previous chapter, by providing context-specific, information-rich accounts of a number of male English teachers, I have illustrated the limitations of framing teachers' pedagogical approach solely in terms of gender. Teachers' biographies, histories, personalities and their affiliation with particular philosophical orientations for the teaching of English, which involves a prioritizing of and a particular framing of literature are identified as critical influential factors for determining teacher practice.

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the boys who participated in this study. Scholars such as Cook-Sather (2002), Freire (1998) and Giroux (1992) point out the need to attend to the voices of those who are directly affected by educational policy decisions: students. As part of this research, I interviewed twenty-nine boys from five different school sites. During the interview process, each boy was asked whether or not he thinks a teacher's gender influences his interest and achievement in English language arts. This chapter focuses primarily on their responses to this question. In addition, it seeks to begin to unpack their understanding of discourses about male teachers as role models. This discourse continues to serve as justification for the recruitment of male English teachers as a remediation strategy, and therefore warrants further interrogation, given the lack of evidence and a rigorous research base to support such a position.

Making sense of the complexities and contradictions found throughout my field notes and transcriptions was challenging, as I was always mindful of the pitfalls associated with attempts to reduce the data to categories or themes. Although this research does not aim to make generalizations beyond the scope of this study, or reduce its findings to numbers, and wishes to emphasize that the responses as they are reported here must be understood as particular to these male participants in a specific time and space, I came to understand that "without classification,

www.manaraa.com

there is chaos and confusion" (Patton, 2002, p. 463), and began the process of organizing, into three groups, the boys' responses to the following question – Do you think your teacher's gender has any influence on your interest and achievement in English language arts? Patterns began to emerge by organizing the data under these three headings: (i) yes, I think gender does matter; (ii) no, gender doesn't matter, and (iii) border walkers. I have coined this latter group of students as border walker, because their responses to my question were explicitly contradictory or because their responses were conditional on a number of factors. For example, Anthony, a grade eleven student at Academia School, responded in this way:

> Depending on the type of personality, you could get along better with a male if you are a male, and a female if you are a female, but really at the same time, I do not think it is a big deal … It is the way they teach … that makes you interested.

Here Anthony begins by providing a possible condition "type of personality … could," of particular students for whom the gender of the teacher might influence achievement; however, he continues by pointing to what he considers the most important factor: "the way they teach" (see Francis *et al.*, 2008). The ten male students that I have placed in this category all place conditions on their answers either for or against calls for more male English teachers to address boys' literacy underachievement or contradict themselves; hence, they are understood to be walking on the border.

This initial categorization of the data, revealed the following:

No, gender doesn't matter	Border walkers	Yes, I think gender does matter
15	10	4

www.manaraa.com

Although the majority of the male students who participated in this research indicated that the gender of the teacher does not influence their achievement, a more nuanced analysis is needed to understand the particularities (Stake, 1995, p. 8; Yin, 2009, p. 15): histories and pedagogical experiences with their English teachers. In keeping with this understanding of the importance of the particularities, the remainder of this chapter will focus on unpacking and unravelling the detailed data that I collected from some of the boys from each of the above categories. The narratives of these boys have been purposefully selected as critical cases, in that they are understood to be "information-rich" and to potentially have the "the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (Patton, 2002, p. 236). Since the aim is to provide an overview of the boys' responses to a central question for this research concerning the capacity of male English teachers to facilitate boys' literacy achievement, I have organized the analysis according to the above categories and am not concerned with positioning the responses within their context. In the following chapter, I will focus more fully on contextualized factors, as I engage in case analysis to illuminate the multiple variables at play, thereby raising important questions about policy rhetoric about the male teachers as role models for boys.

Thus, I begin with the responses of the boys who adamantly opposed the idea that male English teachers, on the basis of gender affiliation, are better suited to facilitate their achievement, followed by the boys who I have labelled border walkers. Finally, I unpack the narratives of the boys who suggested that the gender of the teacher does make a difference for their achievement, before offering some concluding analysis.

Boys who Say that Gender is Not an Influential Factor for their Achievement

Twenty-five of the twenty-nine boys who participated in this study challenged the idea that male teachers on the basis of gender affiliation are better equipped to address their

www.manaraa.com

achievement in English language arts. Fifteen boys were adamant that gender is not an influential factor for their achievement. Although all of their responses draw on specific, contextualized experiences, what emerged through an analysis of these data was the boys' understanding of more significant factors such as teaching experience, style and expertise, respect for students, a sense of caring and an ability to connect with students. In this sense, they confirm the findings of research conducted by Carrington *et al*. (2007), Francis *et al.* (2008), Lam *et al.* (2010), Lingard *et al*. (2002), Sokal and Katz (2008), Sokal *et al.* (2005), Sokal *et al*. (2007) which show that the "gender of teachers has no significant impact on students' learning and their engagement with school" (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a, p. 232).

The following boys' responses to the question—Do you think your teacher's gender has any influence on your interest and achievement in English language arts?—are included to provide an overview of the students' perspectives in this category. These boys are quite clear that the gender of the teacher does not make a difference and provide some of their insights about what really matters:

> "I don't know. I feel like it's more the fact I like them. It's more they come off as a good person. Like I like teachers that are on a personal level with the students I guess" (Nathan, Upwardly Mobile School)

> "I don't mind no. I think it is more the person than the gender really. They [teachers] have to be engaging; they have to know what they are talking about; I feel like they need to explain things that people can understand" (Tim, Community School)

> "If your teacher has the same personality … If the teacher is just … just doesn't make the class interact then his is not going to be a great teacher. I don't think gender matters at all. You can be man, woman, it doesn't matter" (Brian, Upwardly Mobile School)

www.manaraa.com

> "Not personally. I think that … male or female if you handle yourself like in a, you know, if you don't take yourself too seriously, if you relate to the kids, you know still deliver what you got to do in your job, you know, and you have that common, you know, that unwritten rule of respect, you know, I'll treat you fairly, you treat me fairly, you know that kind of thing. I think class can be great no matter what" (Nevan, Upwardly Mobile School)

> "I can get along with anybody, so it doesn't bother me that I have a male or female teacher" (Berk, Small Town School)

> "It doesn't matter if the teacher is male or female; it matters how they teach (Jason, Small Town School)

> "Not really no because to me as long as they're able to teach their subject so that we can understand it, it doesn't really affect me if it's a man or a woman" (Evan, Small Town School)

> "I personally would not favour male teachers over female teachers for English. I am not a big sexist. Just because I have always had that [male English teachers], I am always one for change, but it is just that I have always grown up with that [his father is an English teacher] and that is how my brain has been set for that so it flows naturally" (Marvin, Community School)

From the above responses, what become apparent are the multiple teacher traits that appear to matter to these boys, ranging from personality to content knowledge to respect to personal connection and to pedagogy. Because within the scope of this thesis, there is not enough space to unpack the narratives of all of these boys, I have purposely chosen two to elaborate their understanding of the complex factors that come into play for their engagement and achievement

www.manaraa.com

in secondary-school English language arts. The narratives of these boys, in particular, warrant greater attention because they identify pedagogical conditions that lead to higher achievement and/or engagement in English which troubles common sense understandings of gender affiliation. Two cases also work to provide a more nuanced understanding of role modelling. In addition, it should be noted that six of the boys in this category will be discussed in depth as part of the case study analysis which is the focus of the following chapter.

Joel. His experiences with both his male and female English teachers, as well as his drama teacher, are particularly illuminating, not only because he is adamant that gender is a non-factor but also because he identified some of his teachers as role models. Joel is a grade twelve student at Upwardly Mobile School. At the time of his interview, he was taking an optional credit in English: Writers' Craft with Mr. Polonius, and his mark was in the high sixties. He was taking this optional English course, in part because of the teacher, and in part because he had recently decided to pursue journalism as opposed to kinesiology at the post-secondary level. Although his teacher suggested that Joel continues to struggle with writing and Joel admitted that he is not the best "technical" writer, he is determined to pursue writing and the arts in his future. In fact, Joel attributes his decision to go into journalism to his grade twelve English, Mr. Polonius, a teacher who, according to Joel, has been influential in his life, but not because he is a man.

When I asked Joel if he thinks the gender of his teacher makes a difference for his achievement, he responded by saying, "I don't think gender has to do with anything … I believe experience counts for pretty much everything." He reiterated this belief a second time at the end of the interview by saying, "I still feel like gender doesn't make a difference; it just depends on the individual." To support this understanding of gender as a non-factor, he pointed to several

www.manaraa.com

school-related experiences. He told me that he received his lowest English mark in grade nine. Despite the fact that he had a male teacher who he described as a "great teacher," he found the course "incredibly hard because [he] was not good at English [and] … he didn't enjoy it very much". In grades ten and eleven, he had the same female English teacher, and although he achieved well in both courses, he described these experiences as "just bad …It was dead." When I probed further, I discovered that it was her approach to texts, in particular Shakespearean plays, which turned him off, not her gender. As the interview unfolded, it became clear that for Joel an English teacher must share his passion for the arts and in particular the theatre, something that he believed his grade ten and eleven female English did not have:

> Well, all we did was just read *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*. Because I had the same teacher and I didn't get anything out of it, like it was just words to me, just word by word. It wasn't anything that spoke to me and then we just wrote essays and this is how this [the essay] is structured. Ok, I'll just follow these rules, and we'll see what happens, and I didn't get anything you know any universal meaning to it.

Joel is passionate about the theatre and Shakespeare, and in his opinion this female English teacher did nothing to bring the play to life. Her pedagogical approach to the text which appears to be focused on decoding the language so students understand what happens in the play and perhaps rooted in a "transmission" philosophy of learning was ineffective for Joel (see Strickland & Strickland, 1993; Weaver, 1990). He wanted to talk about the significance of its themes that extend beyond the boundaries of the play, but instead, according to Joel, she used it as a springboard for essay writing. Joel believes that a background in the theatre is an essential quality of an English teacher, but he suggested that in this case he would have settled for "some sort of like analytical sense [I think he means analytical approach to the play] … movie criticism,

www.manaraa.com

you know something like that, at least some sort of performance-based experience." It is on this basis that Joel assesses the quality of his English instruction and teachers. Because Joel is passionate about these texts, he wants a teacher who can bring them to life for him.

Mr. Polonius, as his pseudonym suggests, is such a teacher. He loves the theatre and in particular he loves *Hamlet*, making him the ideal teacher for a student like Joel: "I feel like Mr. Polonius is one of the best teachers that I have ever had just because, maybe because of his experience, maybe it's his passion, but it just works well with my type of burning." Mr. Polonius has clearly been influential for Joel, but as Joel repeatedly stressed in his interview, he did not understand this connection in terms of gender. Instead, he talked about Mr. Polonius' approach to *Hamlet* as a source of their connection:

> Mr. Polonius has background in the dramatic arts and we have got to remember that Shakespeare was created to be performed and I think that's what teachers these days forget that this is a performance. This isn't just literature, and Mr. Polonius, you know, he gets a sense of the emotions emitted from each character, and that applies to understanding the themes of it, you know, so I believe English teachers should actually have a dramatic background, you know. That will help a lot.

Clearly their love of Shakespeare serves as a basis for connection for this particular boy and his teacher; however, Mr. Polonius' theory of English, "what it is for, and how best to teach and learn it in practice" (Phillips & Sanford, 2000) is of critical importance for Joel's engagement. Their connection cannot be reduced to gender, nor does it translate necessarily into higher achievement. It does, however, appear to contribute to Joel's understanding of Mr. Polonius as a kind of "inspirational figure" or role model for him, yet it again would be erroneous to conclude

www.manaraa.com

that this conception of Mr. Polonius as role model is rooted in gender affiliation (Carrington & Skelton, 2003).

Joel is Vietnamese. His parents work hard and have always stressed the importance of job security to Joel. Perhaps that is why he initially intended to do a science or kinesiology degree at university: they are understood to be more marketable than a degree in English or drama. When I asked him what his parents thought of his decision to pursue a degree in journalism, he said,

> They just want me to do very well in school. I guess in like public school they had high standards for me, you know, like to be a doctor or something like that. It's very cliché you know if you are talking about like Asian ethnicities be a doctor. You study hard and no fun, you know, it's not no fun but yeah …

Joel suggests here that his parents' aspirations for him are connected to their values and ethnicity and implies, by the way he talks about studying hard and having no fun, that these aspirations are not necessarily aligned with his own goals. He told me that he understands that careers in the arts have less job security, but that is where his passion is. This tension caused by an inability to agree on his future with his parents was a source of frustration for Joel and facilitated a deeper connection with his teacher, Mr. Polonius. According to Joel, Mr. Polonius told the class that one of his children is going into philosophy and the other one into theatre, and that he is ok with that. He told his children, "ok just do what you love," words Joel would like to hear from his own parents. Joel explicitly connected this aspect of Mr. Polonius' personality to his understanding of him as a role model:

> So I guess you know he's more the happier, follow-your-dreams kind of person, so you know I never get that at home I feel. I feel like job security and you know getting enough money is. That's what my parents are showing me, while I feel like Mr.

www.manaraa.com

> Polonius's a role model to me, somewhat a father figure because I never get that at home so, and I'm more an artistic sort of person, so job security is not going to be you know there. So yeah and like my drama teacher Ms. X, she's like a mother figure to me because their [Mr. Polonius and Ms. X] styles of teaching, you know, accommodates to my personality rather than my parents' styles of teaching, so I guess it depends on the individual, the student, like viewing Mr. Polonius – is he a role model or is he not?

Bricheno and Thornton (2007) found that children identified close family members most often as role models. In this case, it appears that Joel has substituted his teachers as role models because his mother and father are apparently not supporting his desired academic and career aspirations. He appears to be looking for support for his love of the arts and the theatre, and has found that support in his English teacher and drama teacher. Crichlow (1999) points out, "a role model is a person chosen and created by another, an unpredictable attachment which emerges from spoken and unspoken forms of fantasy, pleasure, and desire" (p. 241). Joel's attachment to Mr. Polonius stems from his own subjectivity, which is rooted in his desire to pursue a career in the arts; it would be erroneous to explain this connection in terms of gender affiliation. As Joel indicated, it is their "styles of teaching," and I would argue their world views or life choices, that foster a connection. Mr. Polonius' approach to life and in particular his children's decisions to pursue the arts stand in direct contrast with Joel's own parents' preference for financial or job security. He also identifies his female drama teacher as a role model because of her teaching style and their shared interest in the theatre, which challenges discourses of role modelling according gender binaries. Both of these teachers have won Joel's "respect" and "admiration" because they share common interests, and they are, by virtue of the kinds of individuals that they are, inspiring him

www.manaraa.com

to follow his dreams (Carrington & Skelton, 2003, p. 258). Joel's affiliation with these two teachers speaks to his rejection of rhetoric that isolates the gender of the teacher as the most significant factor, without considering other significant, multiple factors, as a central indicator for boys' success as literacy learners. This finding supports the research of Carrington *et al.* (2007) who found that boys who do see their teachers as role models "are just as likely to see a female teacher as such as they are a male" (Sternod, 2011, p. 268). It also draws attention to the importance of "contextual particularities" in discourses about the need for male role models for boys in school (Britzman, 1993).

Elton. He is a grade ten academic student of Arabic decent at Community School. Like Joel, Elton was adamant that the gender of a teacher has nothing to do with his achievement in English. This understanding of gender as a non-factor for his achievement is particularly poignant because of the strong relationship he had with his grade ten English teacher, who was also his basketball coach and a man he considered to be a role model because he understands him to be "a family man … like he treats everyone well, he treats his wife well and his kids well and he is very good to be around." Although Elton met Mr. Baker's daughter once at a basketball game, he draws on discourses of idealized father figures to construct an imagined identity of his teacher. Elton's description of Mr. Baker could be used to described many of television's idealized dads such as Andy Taylor from *The Andy Griffith Show*, Ward Cleaver from *Leave It to Beaver*, or Dr. Heathcliff Huxtable from *The Cosby Show* (see http://artofmanliness.com/2008/06/10/the-all-time-best-and-worst-tv-dads/; http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-best-tv-dads.php). Crichlow (1999) argues that conceptions of the role modelling "require an engagement with the more complex ways individuals achieve such relationships" (p. 247). In addition to his image as "a good family man," Mr. Baker has had

www.manaraa.com

success as a basketball player (he played at a high level in university), and is a coach who has been good to Elton; even though Elton did not make the team, he was invited to assume a support role for the team, i.e., manager. Elton's conception of Mr. Baker as a good family man cannot be substantiated by evidence; instead, it appears to stem from a broader ideology of idealized masculinities, or as Crichlow (1999) suggests an "idealized identity box[ ]" (p. 239). Because of Mr. Baker's success as a basketball player, a sport Elton loves, and his expertise as a coach, Elton bestows other hegemonic characteristics to his subjectivity, such as a good family man, even though Elton cannot possibly have evidence to support this claim. This situation makes Elton's response to my question about the influence of male teachers on his achievement in English an important case of study, as discourses about male teachers as role models who are better equipped to address boys' literacy achievement centre around idealized or hegemonic notions of masculinity (see Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Roulston & Mills, 2000).

Elton told me that he likes English because it is easy for him and that he had a male English teacher in both grade nine and ten. He admitted that he thinks he is doing better in this English class because of his sports connection with his teacher; however, he not did attribute his achievement to the gender of the teacher. In fact, he explicitly stated that his teacher's gender, as a general rule, does not make a difference for his achievement. This speaks to his understanding of the multiple and diverse identities of male teachers, and men in general. To elaborate on this point, he talked about the difference between his two male English teachers: "I like this one more than last year's one [male English teacher] because last year's one was kind of, I don't want to say strict but like he was just, he had a lot of rule on things … that sometimes did not really make sense to most of the class." Here, he highlights the difference in pedagogical practice between his two male English teachers; in particular classroom management rules such as how

www.manaraa.com

assignments were to be turned in and returned to the students are cited as examples of these rules. Elton also suggested that his grade nine male English teacher "did not teach [them] very well." Elton indicated that he prefers Mr. Baker's pedagogical approach which involves reading core texts together and discussing them as a class. In grade nine, he was expected to do much of the work on his own, including the reading: "We did not discuss any of it last year. We kind of just got the questions and on the exam we had questions from it, and we had never really talked about them to see what everyone else thought." Again, Elton draws attention to the different pedagogical approaches employed by two different male English teachers. For Elton, one was more effective than the other. This comparison of two male English teachers, as Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2010) point out, "raises important questions about the conceptual limits of a discourse about role modeling that tend to reduce a teacher's influence to his gender" (p. 50). It is also consistent with the data collected from a great majority of the boys in this category.

To further challenge discourses of gender affiliation, a source of influence for boys, Elton also highlighted his female grade nine mathematics teacher as a teacher who stood out for him. He described her as a "really good teacher" who "asked everyone questions and knew what she was doing and she knew how to control [the class]." In addition, he described her as "funny … the kind of person where you can joke with but you still get something done; you get something serious done." Elton explicitly identifies both pedagogical and content knowledge as indicators of effectiveness for this teacher (see Ashley and Lee, 2003; Lahelma, 2000; Lingard *et al*., 2002). Elton's identification of this female teacher who was able to make a difference for Elton's achievement draws attention to the limitations of a framework that focuses on the "singularity of gender" in teachers to conceptualize the issues surrounding boys' literacy underachievement (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010, p. 38).

www.manaraa.com

Border Walkers

As explained above, the border walkers were the most problematic for me because as a group, they were the least certain about the difference male teachers make for their interest and achievement. They tended to highlight multiple factors at play for both sides of the male teacher debates. Perhaps David summed up the position of this group the best when he said, "I guess it like makes a difference, but not one that really matters." Despite the fact that David appears to conclude that his teacher's gender does not influence his achievement (six out of the ten in this category explicitly conclude in this way), I was reluctant to place these responses in the "No, gender does not matter" category. I am aware that an oversimplification of the responses of these boys might work to deny the power of discourses to construct "truth" and the extent to which these boys actively subscribe to these discourses even when their own personal experiences work to challenge them (Foucault, 1982, 1984). Even though none of the boys in this category indicated that the gender of the teacher influenced their achievement, they did leave the door open for the possibility that a male teacher could make a difference for boys in one of the following ways: i) male teachers are understood to be authority figures; ii) male teachers have a different style of teaching, and iii) male teachers are easier to relate to. I draw here on Connell's theoretical concept of "gender regimes" to illustrate how boys in explain teacher influence. The boys in the other two categories also made reference to these discourses, but they were more clear about their position on the male teacher issue either one way or the other than the boys in this category. The boys in this category struggled to answer my question definitively, but this struggle in some cases resulted in more explicit articulations about the complexities surrounding the male teacher debate.

www.manaraa.com

As in the above section, I begin with a number of boys' responses in the border walker category to my question - Do you think your teacher's gender has any influence on your interest and achievement in English language arts?:

> No not really, no. Not for me but like in general, like I would say usually people take female teachers for...they are more easy going perhaps. Like you can, how do I say this...umm...like you can do pretty much like whatever you want kind of thing in that class if you have a female teacher but if you have a male teacher there is more authority, kind of thing (Arbin, Upwardly Mobile School).

> Jeff: Yeah it could be kinda like relating to him and wanting to like be as good as him at English.
> Anne: So not necessarily because it is a man or a woman?
> Jeff: No, I don't think so.
> Jeff: I think that it is just the way that that teachers teaches.
> Anne: Ok.
> Jeff: The way they explain things and give you examples. (Jeff, Upwardly Mobile School)

> I never really thought about that. Like, I think it is just whoever you can get friendly with, not a man or woman, uhm but if you are guy you might have the same interests more common interests so that you could connect it with that but if you think of teacher and student, so it is kind of hard, so I think it is just the teacher's personality (Jonah, Academia School).

> Yes, I'd say yeah I do, not like a huge difference; I'd say how they teach it and like how their personalities a bigger difference but I think gender makes like a small difference yeah … More, I'd say like their personality, if I'd could be, like if they're normal and like I can talk to them about stuff then I could learn a lot better from them, not someone who's super uptight or super like a lot different than me you know (Trevor, Academia School).

www.manaraa.com

The responses here range from "No, not really, no" to "it could be" to "I never really thought of that" to "yes, I'd say yeah I do." That being said, however, they do share some commonalities. Each participant, in his own way, draws on ideologies of masculinity or discourses about gender affiliation as part of the explanation even when their own personal experiences contradict or challenge this discourse. For example, Arbin draws on discourses of male teachers as authority figures, yet when I questioned him about Mr. Polonius, his English teacher, as an authority figure, he responded in this way: "Hmm...Somewhat I guess because he is a really easy going teacher and at times does let us do pretty much whatever we want. But there are other times where he tells you what to do." He is hesitant to confirm that Mr. Polonius fits his description of male teachers as authority figures. His claim does not entirely align with his experiences; instead, it appears that he is simply repeating the "already said" (Foucault, 1972, p. 151).

Jeff, Jonah and Trevor all indicate that the way teachers teach and their personalities are important factors, even those their initial responses are quite different – "It could be," "I never really thought of that" and "yes, I'd say yeah I do" (see Francis *et al.*, 2008). They also draw on discourses of gender affiliation as evidence of connections between students and their teachers. Jonah suggests that gender affiliation "might" mean shared interests, but then downplays the connection, pointing out that the institutionalized nature of student-teacher relationships renders this connection less significant. Foucault (1972) argues that we must "question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar" to make visible this structuring process (p. 22). Jonah's claim does not seem to be grounded in his experiences as he points out up front that he had really never thought about gender making a difference. Instead, they appear to be grounded in discourses about gender affiliation which are presented as "self-evident" (see Paechter, 2001, p. 41).

www.manaraa.com

Next, I focus on the data collected from one boy who understands there to be a clear link between gender and teaching style. I also examine how two boys discursively construct their teacher as someone with whom they can relate. This relationship appears to stem from notions about their teacher's embodiment of heteronormative masculinity (see Connell, 1995). I also examine the claims that these boys made about male teachers having a different teaching style and gender affiliation facilitating relationships between the boys and their male teachers. I wrap up this section by interrogating further notions of male teachers as role models for these boys. Once again, the narratives of these three boys were purposefully selected to unpack in detail, as they are understood to be cases that have potential for "the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (Patton, 2002, p. 236).

Ivan. He is an intrinsically motivated, high-achieving, grade twelve student of Israeli decent at Upwardly Mobile School:

> Since grade nine I starting, I open up a book, it was a non-fiction book …and that really opened up just science to me so I started forcing myself to read just non-fiction books, just to learn it and I would actually force myself to read at least 20 pages. Even though sometimes I didn't like it, I would just have to. And now I'm starting to read more novels, I guess I like it a bit more.

When I asked Ivan why he was forcing himself to read, he said, "I don't know. I felt like I really should be smarter and more knowledgeable and I don't know that was something I tackled down." Ivan's desire to learn and his commitment to reading, even when he does not like it, are understood to be an important part of his subjectivity as a male student. He subscribes to academic regimes about the power of reading and the benefits of hard work. This

www.manaraa.com

power/knowledge is linked to his cultural capital (both parents are doctors) and his history as a student in Israel up until the age of ten (Bourdieu, 1986).

Ivan is an "A" student in all of his subjects and the kind of student who "pushes himself for the sake of pushing himself," so it probably not surprising that the quantity and quality of learning that occurs in a class are crucial for him. For example, he suggested that he likes his current English class with Mr. Polonius because he is providing him with experiences that he would not undertake on his own, i.e., reading novels and analyzing them. He also enjoyed his grade nine English class, taught by a female English teacher, because "it was a lot of individual work, just there was a lot of freedom to it … I liked grade nine partly because of the teacher. She was nice and she didn't really interfere too much with my work and everything."

That being said, Ivan did indicate that, although he has been able to be successful in subjects taught by both male and female teachers, male teachers teach differently than their female counterparts. Ivan described the pedagogical approach of male teachers as "more straight forward." When I asked him to explain, he said,

> They manage to, I guess, just explain things to me without complicating things even more … I mean I look at a textbook. I can see what's going on. I can read it and I know what's going on. Same thing with a male teacher I would say. Doesn't mean that they're not creative or they don't have imagination, but they manage to pass on the message a little better.

Ivan's comparison between a textbook and the pedagogical approach of male teachers is interesting. It implies that the male teaching style is more transparent for him: clear, logical, ordered like a textbook. Also, he is very clearly privileging the teaching of his male teachers when he indicates that they communicate more clearly and "better." In this way, Ivan "orders"

www.manaraa.com

his teachers according to gender, echoing traditional gender hierarchies (Foucault, 1972). Ivan qualifies this claim by suggesting that the subject of English is a special case in that it cannot be learned from a textbook; he described learning in the subject of English as more of an "apprenticeship. You've got to learn it as you're going."

Ivan also stated in his examples that he learns best through a pedagogy of discussion, which is an approach he associates with male teachers. He contrasted this approach with the "just sitting down and doing work, work, work" approach which he associated with female teachers. Based on my observations, Mr. Polonius' pedagogical approach is best described as a discussion-based approach to learning. The majority of the lessons that I observed centred on a whole-class discussion of literature. My observations also confirm Ivan's description of his male English teacher as: "pretty casual," another quality that he seemed to associate with his male teachers (see Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a); however, Ivan's claim that discussion-based teaching is a masculine approach seems problematic. He seems to be generalizing the approaches of some of his male and some of his female teachers and categorizes them according to gender binaries. VanDeWeghe (2007) concludes by stating that, "effective approaches based on organization of classroom discourse and implemented through small-group work and whole-class discussion do result in measurable gains in reading comprehension" (p. 90), which might explain Ivan's preference for a discussion-based pedagogy; however, the gendered nature of this pedagogical approach needs further research.

Even Ivan's original description of the pedagogical approach of his male teachers as straightforward appears to be rooted in ideology rather than evidence, as this claim appears to be incongruent with his description of his male English teacher, which highlights "his amazing insights on books that I would say, I mean it blows me away sometimes." I observed Mr.

www.manaraa.com

Polonius making complex, sophisticated arguments to support interpretations of a number of different literary texts. These discussions depended on high-level thinking skills. Mr. Polonius' subscription to *English as the Great Literary Tradition* influences his approach to literature. He suggests that it contains universal truths and that it is a door to understanding who we are as humans and our cultural heritage (Ball *et al.*, 1990). From my observation and the interview transcripts, he is certainly a teacher who inspires learning; however, the "big T truths" at the core of his teaching and his pedagogical approach extend far beyond the "straight forward." Ivan's understanding of gender dichotomies speaks to the power of discourses to construct knowledge, even when their own personal experiences work to challenge such "truths" (Foucault, 1982, 1984). This case draws attention to the power of discourses to *normalize* certain pedagogical practices as masculine or feminine (see Foucault, 2003, 2007).

Although Ivan respects the expertise of his male English teacher, Mr. Polonius, he does not think of him as a role model: "I mean sometimes some of his ideas I don't agree with for example, and that would be it I would say. Just the fact that I need to think like the person for him to be a role model." This "be-like" (Crichlow, 1999; also see Bricheno & Thornton, 2007) understanding of role models extends beyond gender to highlight the importance of sharing worldviews: "I need to think like the person." Ivan's conception of role models works to disrupt essentialism that underpins sex role theories (see Britzman, 1993; Crichlow, 1999; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a) and is supported by other research which found that role modelling seems to be related to career aspirations, specifically interest in becoming teachers (see Hutchings *et al*., 2008; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a), close familial relationships (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007) or inspirational figures (Carrington & Skelton, 2003).

www.manaraa.com

Steve and Ross. The most frequent response in this category centred on the notion that boys are able to relate to male teachers due to their gender affiliation. I draw attention to the responses of two boys, both white, in this section because their connection with their teacher centres on sports, a signifier of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Roulston & Mills, 2000).

Although their teacher, Mr. Baker, has received some negative feedback about all of his sports analogies from some of his students, for Steve and Ross it has definitely fostered a connection between them and this particular teacher. Steve is an athletic boy and a high academic achiever who aspires to be a doctor one day. All of his marks are 80+. He has always had male English teachers in secondary-school, but he told me that his marks were just as high or even higher in grades seven and eight when he had female language arts teachers. He was also careful to point out that he does not understand all male English teachers to be the same. He told me that he did not connect with his grade nine male English teacher in the same way that he connects with Mr. Baker, drawing attention to the limitations of focusing on "the singularity of gender … as a central factor in determining and defining a teacher's pedagogical influence" (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010, p. 38; also see Britzman, 1993; Carrington & McPhee, 2008). In fact, Steve rejected claims that identify the gender of the teacher as a significant contributing factor for boys' achievement. That being said, he does suggest that gender plays a part in social relations:

> I don't. I think it's just that when usually there's a male teacher, they can kind of relate to guys more, but there is a lot of teachers at [Community School] that are women that are still really good teachers .. So I don't think it matters if they are a boy or a girl to me. It's just the respect thing and how well they can teach and yeah how much they can relate to the students or whatever… So I think if you can kind of

www.manaraa.com

> connect with your teacher's personality, it doesn't matter if they are a boy or girl or what they are interested in, but if you have similar interests then you're obviously going to be able to connect with them more.

Steve begins by highlighting gender affiliation as a source of connection with teachers, but then he continues to highlight what he considers to be important qualities in a teacher which are not gender based. By doing so, he discursively separates guys' "relating" from the important qualities of a teacher. Next, he points to the importance of shared interests in building connections. In this particular case, his connection with Mr. Baker stems from a mutual interest in sport, a masculine institution. Connell (1995) contends that gender is constructed in interaction and that schools are sites where "sport prowess is a test of masculinity" (p. 37). Steve's connection with Mr. Baker does not disrupt either his commitment to achieving high marks in school or his image as an adolescent male. His interest in sport facilitates a more open admiration for and connection to his sports-minded teacher and provides a means through which he is able to demonstrate acceptable or desirable masculinity (see Connell, 1995; also see Lingard *et al.*, 2009).

Despite Steve's high praise for Mr. Baker, he did not suggest that his achievement in English had been influenced. He continues to be a high academic achiever. In fact, in his interview, he did not talk about his connection to the texts he was studying or how his skills were improving. Instead, he focused on the fact that Mr. Baker both commands respect from and shows respect for his students (Francis & Skelton, 2001, p. 13; also see Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Francis, 2008; Haase, 2008; Keddie, 2007a, 2007b; King, 1998; Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Mills, Haase & Charlton, 2008; Skelton, 2001a). This respect stems from not only Mr. Baker's demeanour in the English classroom, but also his engagement with and passion for sports. It is

www.manaraa.com

also connected to Steve's perception of Mr. Baker as a role model: "I do because Mr. Baker does talk about his home life a lot, so he's kind of a role model to me, just I don't want to be a teacher, but I just want to be the way he is, I don't know, the way he presents himself and everything. He's really friendly and approachable and everything." Like Elton in the previous section, Steve imagines Mr. Baker as an idealized family man, which appears to be connected with his heteronormative identity (Connell, 1995). Although Steve was careful to point out that he does not see all of his male teachers in this way, his connection with Mr. Baker plays a part in this construction as role model (see Bricheno & Thornton, 2007). Mr. Baker, as identified by many of his sports-minded male students, embodied the traits of hegemonic masculinities (see Connell, 1995). This athletic ability and interest are sources of privilege for Mr. Baker and are understood as traits associated with ideals of manhood (see Connell, 1995).

Similarly, Ross, another student in Mr. Baker's grade eleven university-preparation English class, played sports his whole life. Unlike Steve, Ross did not place much emphasis on Mr. Baker's involvement in sport. That is not to say that it did not influence the way he understood and related to his male English teacher. He told me that, "He's [Mr. Baker] a guy that you would kind of want to hang out with outside of school which is kind of weird to say, but he's just a teacher that's kind of cool and laid back, not laid back, but he knows what he's doing and he gets it done, but he also has those discussions where he gets through to the students." Ross speaks to the connection he feels he has with his teacher, and although he acknowledges that it might be "weird" to think of a teacher in these terms, he likes him as a "guy." Here, Ross did not state explicitly that this understanding has anything to do with his profile as a coach or his sports analogies in class, although he confesses that "it makes us look at him differently." He commented on the fact that Mr. Baker does not "flaunt" his athletic/coaching ability, suggesting

www.manaraa.com

that being good at sports carries social capital. He also grants him a kind of hegemonic status by idealizing his masculinity when he suggests that he is the kind of "guy" he would like to associate with: cool, laid back, quietly confident, a doer. In a sense, he is actively constructing his own masculinity in relation to his teacher's and engaging in a type of surveillance of his own masculinity in an attempt to fashion himself as a *normal* or desirable male (Foucault, 1977; also see Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Mr. Baker's embodiment of many of the signifiers of hegemonic masculinities facilitates "easier" classroom interactions for Ross without disrupting the "existing social organisation of masculinity" (Roulston & Mills, 2000, p. 8; also see Connell, 1995).

Despite Ross's praise of Mr. Baker, he was careful to point out that liking a teacher does not necessarily translate into higher achievement:

> I guess you can like him as a teacher but maybe not try as much as you should and I don't know. I think that might have been what happened at the beginning of the semester for me when I had the low seventy. I liked him as a teacher but maybe I wasn't achieving as much as I should and then I actually applied myself to the course and started getting better marks.

Ross clearly makes a distinction between his positive relationship with his teacher and increased achievement. This distinction between enjoying his teacher's personality and pedagogical approach and academic achievement is important as it raises questions about discourses that contend that male teachers as role models are needed to facilitate achievement. He was also careful to point out that even though he thinks guys find male teachers "easier to talk to," he does not think that the gender of the teacher influences achievement:

www.manaraa.com

> I don't think gender really plays a big part. It's really teaching style, and I think it does play a part like I said in talking to the teacher, but I think that's also personality-wise for the student. If you have a hard time talking to people then especially talking to another person like a girl, of the other sex, it might be difficult. I'm not saying that it's like a big deal but for some people who need like I said an extra boost in marks, maybe asking for a different assignment or something like that.

Ross suggests that for some male students who might have difficulty talking to women, achievement might be affected if those students have trouble asking for help or clarification, but he explicitly states that it really depends on particular students' personalities, and cannot be assumed to be the case for all boys, thereby discrediting discourses of gender essentialism (Weedon, 1997). Again, his response is rooted in a kind of power/knowledge about men and women as dichotomous, constructing "truths" about the natural bond between men based on sex sameness. Francis (2000) suggests that boys use a variety of strategies in an attempt to achieve acceptable masculinities (also see Francis & Skelton, 2001, p. 12; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Active engagement and interaction with Mr. Baker is understood to be acceptable because his personality, interests and pedagogical approach are aligned with notions of hegemonic masculinity which are perpetuated through discourses, claiming to articulate "truth" rather than construct it (Foucault, 1984; Weedon, 1997).

Lionel (white), yet another student in Mr. Baker's class, attested to the existence of this connection between Mr. Baker and some of the "sports guys": "a lot of guys are more into it than usual …A couple of guys who play hockey have good connections with him I think." Even though Lionel is not a "sporty guy" himself, and he described the class as "pretty boring" and "kind of tedious [because] we spend a lot of time doing nothing," he did suggest that for some

www.manaraa.com

boys, an interest in sports facilitated a stronger connection with their athletic male teacher. This shared characteristic of hegemonic masculinities led certain boys, not all, to relate to and build identificatory relations with certain types of male teachers.

Lionel's claim that sports foster a connection between Mr. Baker and some of the boys in his English class draws attention to the ways in which boys learn to police their masculinities and place themselves under a kind of surveillance. Boys' understanding of what is *normal* masculinity regulates the extent to which they engage with their teachers and in particular in subjects constructed as feminized. Foucault's (2007) work is useful here in that it provides a framework for understanding the techniques of power boys use to self-regulate their subjectivities and engagement in English according to gender norms (also see Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003).

Although none of the boys in this category linked the gender of the teacher explicitly to their achievement, they did indicate that gender might enhance boys' relationships with their teachers, and that it might influence the teacher's pedagogy. These discourses are often conflated to include increased achievement for boys as well. Kindlon and Thompson (1999) suggest that male teachers are role models of "academic scholarship, professional commitment, moral as well as athletic leadership, and emotional literacy (p. 50). This data points to the power of discourses about gender affiliation and role models, as illustrated by Kindlon and Thompson (1999) to construct a certain "truth" about gender (Foucault, 1972). It also points to limitations associated with reducing boys' literacy underachievement to the gender of the teacher (see Carrington *et al*., 2007; Francis *et al.*, 2008; Lam *et al.*, 2010; Lingard *et al.*, 2002; Neugebauer *et al.*, 2011; Sokal and Katz, 2008; Sokal *et al*., 2005; Sokal *et al*., 2007).

www.manaraa.com

Several of the boys in this category also suggested that male teachers are understood as authority figures, which might distinguish them from their female counterparts. This understanding of male teachers as disciplinarians (see Francis &Skelton, 2001, p. 13; also see Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Francis, 2008; Haase, 2008; Keddie, 2007a, 2007b; King, 1998; Lingard et al., 2009; Mills *et al.*, 2008; Skelton, 2001a) will be examined in the following section.

Boys who Indicated that Gender has a Positive Influence on their Achievement

Out of the twenty-nine boys whom I interviewed, only four indicated that they believe that male teachers have the capacity to positively influence their interest and achievement. All of these boys attended Upwardly Mobile School. Three of them had the same male English teacher (although they were in two different classes) at the time these data were collected. Two of them are identified as white, one as black and one as Lebanese. Two of them were taking grade ten academic English, one was taking OSSLC and one was taking grade twelve university-preparation English. During the semester in which I collected these data, two of them achieved their English credit. As will become evident, these boys, like the border walkers, also draw on discourses about men and women as binaries which translates into different teaching styles and their ability to relate to and control boys in the classroom; however, the boys in this category like some in the other categories, sometimes in spite of their own situated experiences, maintain that male English teachers are better equipped to address boys' literacy needs and interests.

Kent. Like several of the border walkers, Kent, a grade twelve, white, student in Mr. Polonius' university-preparation class at Upwardly Mobile School, draws on the patriarchal notion of men as authority figures that need to be feared and respected to explain why he understands male teachers to make a difference for boys in school. As part of his explanation in support of his belief that male English teachers make a difference for his achievement, he

www.manaraa.com

indicated that it was the kind of authority they offer which makes a difference (see Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Francis, 2008; Haase, 2008; Keddie, 2007a, 2007b; King, 1998; Mills *et al.*, 2008; Skelton, 2001):

> I think it matters for the student if they are a boy or a girl. Like girls respond to girl teachers better and guys respond to guy teachers better … I think because, for guys anyway, the guy teacher offers a little bit more authority almost like they are almost a little scary which is kind of what you need … And the girl teacher like when they tell you to do something it doesn't register the same.

Kent begins with the assumption that gender affiliation serves as a basis for heightened engagement, regardless of class, age, ethnicity, race, interests or personality, a common sense understanding that is rooted in essentialism. This assumption is also rooted in an understanding of male teachers as being "'natural' disciplinarians" (Francis & Skelton, 2001, p. 13; also see Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Francis, 2008; Haase, 2008; Keddie, 2007a, 2007b; King, 1998; Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Mills *et al.*, 2008; Skelton, 2001a). Connell (1995) points out that in the "established gender order" (also see Foucault, 1972), authority is "culturally linked" to hegemonic masculinity and is key to the "legitimation of patriarchy" (p. 90). Agreeing with Connell, Jones (1993) contends that "what we construe as being in authority, and acting authoritatively, has depended upon representations of authoritativeness that privilege masculinity" (p. 81). Robinson (2000) found that this sort of gender regime, as it exists within the schools, as an institution, and reflecting broader society, works to devalue female pedagogical authority: "based on their perceptions that 'force', 'power' and 'control ' were more credible and effective discipline methods" (p. 83; also see Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a). This devaluing of female authority is suggested by Kent's claim that "the girl teacher like when they

www.manaraa.com

tell you to do something it doesn't register the same." Kent's understanding of the gendered nature of power and authority led to his privileging of male teachers and an acceptance of male acts of discipline as something he needs, conjuring notions of boys being initiated into manhood through these acts. Thus, discursive practise function to inform Kent's conceptions of masculinity and notions of gendered pedagogical practices. In this sense, power is exercised to "order the possible outcome" or subjectivity of male teachers (Foucault, 1982, p. 221; also see 1972).

Kent's understanding of male teachers as authority figures is also interesting, given the fact that I did not observe any explicit acts of discipline in Kent's English class during the data collection period. That being said, I did not witness any behaviour warranting any discipline either. My observations call into question any suggestion that his pedagogical approach be considered "a little scary." I never witnessed Mr. Polonius raise his voice, become confrontational, threaten anyone or try to exert any sort of physical presence in the class. In fact, he routinely made fun of his own masculinity: he sarcastically describes himself as "rock manly" and laughed at a tendon issue that he had developed from marking. Mr. Polonius also confessed that he has never considered himself a "manly man." When I asked Kent about this understanding of male teachers as frightening, he clarified by saying that "the bigger ones are more scary," again drawing attention to the power of discourses to form objects (Foucault, 1972). Also, Kent's privileging of physical size is in accordance with Ingalls (2006) who states that "physicality can lend or take away from our construction of authority" (p. 245). It also supports Butler (2004) who points out that, "it is through the body that gender and sexuality become exposed to others, implicated in social processes, inscribed by cultural norms, and apprehended in their social meanings" (p. 20; also see Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995). Kent draws

www.manaraa.com

on a hegemonic conception of masculinity which is physically strong, intimidating, powerful and to be feared as a kind of "truth" to discuss male teachers as a group, and he claims that this understanding influences his achievement in the classroom: "I would definitely say that it helps you get a better mark because you are like scared of them almost so you go there every day and you are on time and you are listening, you are productive when you have to be and you not missing due dates. Stuff like that just makes little differences."

Although Kent explicitly links the authority embodied by his male teachers to his achievement (he is the only participant in this study to do so), the evidence to support this claim is tenuous at best (Butler, 1990). Some of his experiences with male English teachers, as described by him during his interview and reported on in my observational field notes, raise important questions about this understanding of the influence of male teachers. For example, Kent claimed that his fear of male teachers motivated him to attend, be on time, listen, be productive and submit assignments on time; however, this understanding of what is required to achieve in English is very different than his teachers. Mr. Polonius, as discussed in the previous chapter, positions literature at the centre of his English classes and sees it as a vehicle to "heighten moral understanding" and develop "personal and public ways of knowing" (Phillips & Sanford, 2000, p. 283). He described strong English students in this way. They have:

> an ability to think in terms of abstractions and not get lost. I think the really strong students like you and I they get excited about English. Literature revs them up. And you get talking about characters, and ideas and themes. And they immediately want to engage because they're exited and interested by it. It draws them and they stay in.

Kent's conception focuses on actions, what he needs to do, for success; whereas, Mr. Polonius is concerned with the level of engagement and thinking. This disconnect suggests that Kent's

www.manaraa.com

articulations are informed by discourses of gender norms which positions male teachers as authority figures.

In addition, during the data collection period, despite the presence of his male English teacher, Kent was absent for half of the classes I observed, and he did not achieve his grade twelve university-preparation English credit. He stopped attending the class when he discovered that he was not going to be able to upgrade his mark from the previous semester. This was his second attempt at grade twelve English, but the mark he achieved on his first attempt was not high enough for university admission, so he was repeating the course. Interestingly, his first grade twelve English teacher was a man, one who stands well over 6'; however, the physical size of his teacher did not influence Kent's achievement. As a result, he was repeating the course to achieve the marks he desired. Mr. Polonius told me that Kent would be better served in the college-level English class (another stream of English), but he is determined to go to university to pursue a degree in social work. Kent's progress in his English courses calls into question his claim that a male English teacher, on the basis of being male, makes "a pretty big difference actually," and draws attention to other significant factors for achievement, i.e., streaming and attendance.

Devin. This participant, a boy of Anglo-white decent, in Mr. Denver's grade ten academic class at Upwardly Mobile School, also told me that he believes a teacher's gender makes a difference for his engagement and achievement:

> I think me personally I think I like maybe a male teacher maybe a little bit better because they can kind of understand a little bit more what guys are going through …like if the work's not being done, he can understand why it's not being done, maybe like because he's gone through the same stuff … I also like the discipline

www.manaraa.com

> thing. That's good because like he can connect. I don't know so you feel like you're not being chewed out by a teacher. You're being given that chance to do better.

Like many of the boys already discussed in this chapter, Devin draws on discourses that perpetuate common sense notions of gender affiliation. He contends that male teachers because they are men understand boys better. Their shared experiences facilitate a kind of understanding or bond. This bond is understood to influence Devin's hierarchical positioning of male teachers as more effective disciplinarians (see Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Francis, 2008; Haase, 2008; Keddie, 2007a, 2007b; King, 1998; Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Mills *et al.*, 2008; Skelton, 2001). According to Devin, male acts of discipline become apparatuses of opportunity – "a chance to do better." At the hands of female teachers, discipline is an act of "chewing out" because it is not accompanied by the experience of having been a boy in school (see Robinson, 2000). Here, he constructs a certain truth about male power, specifically, that a male form of discipline coupled with understanding is productive. What is the "unsaid" here is that he has more respect for the authority of his male teachers (Foucault, 1977, p. 195). The gender regime embedded in school, as an institution, thereby privileges male authority as it is understood to be aligned with societal gender norms (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a). Devin's conviction to the difference between male and female authority speaks to the taken for granted sexism at work. It is presented as common sense that boys accept male authority better than female authority, suggesting that they "have internalized the power relations that predominate in society" (Ng, 1995, p. 143; also see Foucault, 1972).

Despite Devin's certainty that for him "male teachers are better," when I asked him about some of his previous English teachers, he recounted a positive experience in a class taught by a female teacher, calling into question this perception. Devin told me that his favourite English

www.manaraa.com

teacher was female. His description of this teacher who taught him in grade nine focuses on her abilities as a teacher and not her gender. He liked her because she "didn't make English boring … she was helpful … [and instilled] good work habits." Devin's achievement in grade nine, a mark of 88%, opposes his perception of gender affiliation as a significant indicator for achievement (see Carrington *et al.*, 2007; Francis *et al.*, 2008; Lam et al., 2010; Lingard *et al.*, 2002; Neugebauer *et al.*, 2011; Sokal and Katz, 2008; Sokal *et al.*, 2005; Sokal *et al.*, 2007); however, Devin's understanding of a connection between the gender of the teacher and his achievement draws attention to the way "knowledge circulates and functions" (Foucault, 1982, p. 212). Even though Devin's personal experiences provide evidence that his own achievement does not depend on a male English teacher, he subscribes to a discourse that privileges gender matching (Francis *et al.*, 2008, p. 22). The contradictions as illustrated through the data collected from Devin were further complicated when he highlighted "liking the subject and how the subject is taught as important contributing factors to his success." This situation speaks to the power of systems of knowledge to impose truth and construct subjects (Foucault 1982). Once again, gender norms work to legitimize his claim that male English teachers are better suited to addressing his learning needs and interests even when his own experiences disrupt this "ordering of objects" (Foucault, 1972).

Abdul. He is a black student who was also a member of Mr. Denver's grade ten academic English class at Upwardly Mobile School. Abdul identified a number of connections that he has with his male teacher, Mr. Denver, that work to disrupt notions of gender as the single most important factor influencing achievement for boys: Abdul's siblings were taught by Mr. Denver; Abdul was assigned by his mathematics teacher to work one on one with Mr. Denver in a credit recovery class; Mr. Denver explicitly connects with him beyond the classroom

www.manaraa.com

in the halls by asking him how things are going, and he makes a special effort within the class by acknowledging his interest in basketball. Despite these connections that extend beyond gender, Abdul claimed that the gender of the teacher makes a difference for him: "I don't know. I'd like to say no, but I think it does … Just cause like I don't know I find it easier to connect with like guy teachers than like girl teachers just like past experiences." Abdul was uncomfortable privileging his male teachers, which may speak to his sense of the politically incorrectness of institutional sexism that works to undermine the efforts and expertise of his female teachers, and yet his affiliation with a particular teacher, Mr. Denver, that appears to have more to do with a number of non-gender specific experiences and perhaps interests is ultimately the deciding factor. Thus, Abdul is understood to reduce his connections with teachers to gender as an explanatory framework; discourses of gender affiliation incite certain systems of knowledge as "truth" (Foucault, 1982, 1984).

Abdul, like Devin, also identified a female teacher as influential for him. He talked about his grade six female teacher to draw a comparison with his current male English teacher:

> She's kind of just like Mr. Denver like the way she teaches and stuff. Like she'll like give us life lessons and stuff like that and like she just always wants to have fun and stuff … She did different stuff than normal teachers did …Like she would always like Mr. Denver did, she always connected to like her kids and stuff like that and like she'd tell us what happened. She'd like give us funny stories like oh yesterday I was doing this and this happened and like it was good for like grade six because at the time nobody really wanted to do that much work right. So it was good.

Here Abdul highlights some of the qualities of an effective teacher, such as having fun, fostering connections, and sharing life lessons which he does not identify as gender-specific, and yet he

www.manaraa.com

maintained throughout his interview that he connects more with male teachers: "all the male teachers I've had have been good like, we're kind of like friends too you know. I don't know. It's different." Abdul alludes to gender binaries when he states that the relationship between men is different than between men and women. This dichotomy is used to explain his description of male teachers as "friends." This assertion suggests that male teachers, as a group, have a "stable identity" that works to facilitate a kind of bonding with boys and because it is grounded in biology excludes women (Butler, 1997, p. 402). What is "unsaid" here is that there is a bond or brotherhood between male teachers and their male students which excludes female teachers and girls (Foucault, 1972). This claim appears to contradict his situated experiences with his grade six female teacher. Abdul seems to suggest that, despite the positive learning experience he had in her class which appears to blur differences in teaching styles based on sex differences, there is an unquestioned connection between boys and male teachers that they consider to be natural or *normal* or simply taken-for-granted and therefore needs no further explanation. These data, again, speak to the power of discourses to trump personal experiences that may be understood as anomalies and prescribe "what is 'normal' or 'natural' behaviour" (Paechter, 2001, p. 42). They have the currency of truth, even when contextualized encounters and relationships challenge these discourses (Foucault, 1982).

Moe. This Lebanese boy was one of eight students (five boys and three girls) in Mr. Denver's Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course at Upwardly Mobile School. This class was scheduled first period of the day, which meant that many students struggled to get to class on time. The greatest late offender was Moe. He was routinely late four out of five days a week. According to his teacher, Moe stays up late every night "gaming" while his father works as a taxi

www.manaraa.com

driver. Although Moe would not explicitly confirm that this is the case, one of his friends in the class turned him in when Moe tried to deny his late night gaming activities.

Moe identified English as favourite subjects, despite the fact that he struggles to achieve. During the data collection period for this research, he was enrolled in OSSLC because he had failed the OSSLT twice. In fact he was taking the course for the second time and was again unsuccessful, achieving a mark in the 30's. In the semester prior to my meeting Moe, he was enrolled in grade twelve college-level English also with Mr. Denver, but he failed this course as well and was planning on repeating it in summer school. Even though three of Moe's five secondary-school English teachers have been male, Moe continues to struggle in English and to meet the standards required by OSSLT. That is in part why I was surprised when Moe told me that he believes that male English teachers are better suited to address boys' achievement. He said,

> Um actually it does matter … like um, men, when it is a man teacher I can talk with him more often and give him lots of explanation and if it is a woman, she would be like, you gotta do this and that is all I can tell you. Move along. But like a man teacher, he would also tell you lots of information and hope to help.

Like Ross, a border walker, Moe suggests that male teachers are easier to talk to, which speaks to his understanding of men and women as dichotomously positioned and his own alignment with members of his own sex. He also indicated that male and female teachers have different pedagogical approaches: men give lots of explanation to help and women's instructions are limited to "move along." Here he highlights a different sort of pedagogical relationship with his male teachers, one of helping/caring which is often understood as a feminine trait (see Francis &

www.manaraa.com

Skelton, 2001, p. 11). According to Moe, the approach taken by his male English teachers is more effective for him, and yet he continues to fail to achieve in English.

Moe's case is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. First, I became aware of Moe very early on in the observation period and well before I interviewed him, because he was chronically late for class, as mentioned above. Each day upon arrival, Mr. Denver would comment on his tardiness and ask him how late he was "gaming" the night before. Moe would smile and shake his head as he took his seat and always tried to deny any late night gaming activity, but it was clear that he came to school tired and struggled to focus. Mr. Denver would call upon Moe repeatedly throughout the class to keep him engaged. At first, I was confused about all the attention Mr. Denver devoted to one student. He was constantly joking with him about his lack of sleep, gaming, lying, poor attendance and the fact that he never brought his books to class, while the rest of the class sat silently and waited. This extra attention, Mr. Denver told me, was an attempt to keep Moe engaged in the class material. He said that otherwise Moe drifts off and does not pay attention.

It is little wonder that Moe spoke highly of his male English teacher during his interview. Clearly, Mr. Denver went above and beyond to try to help Moe achieve the literacy test requirement, even if this effort was unsuccessful. It is, however, his experiences with his other male English teacher that are, in particular, worth noting. When I asked Moe to describe a teacher who had made a difference for him in terms of learning and achievement, he identified his grade eleven male English teacher. According to Moe,

> he was like very nice and he really wanted me to get my mark up so he would always bring a chair up beside me and help me finish all the work due from a long time ago, so I could get my mark up… Plus he also helped me with the exam like he told me

www.manaraa.com

before the exam and he started giving me some tips that this is gonna be on the exam. Study this part; it is very important …and I got my mark up so I was actually happy.

Eager to talk to this teacher about his success with Moe, I asked the English department head about him, only to discover that he was no longer a teacher at Upwardly Mobile School. As it turns out, Moe's favourite English teacher was at the school on a reciprocal transfer and was asked to return to his original school because of his "questionable teaching performance." According to the department head, the Principal had some "serious reservations about his pedagogy." Even though this particular male English teacher gave Moe the encouragement that he desired, a perception of support at the micro level of the classroom and a passing grade, he was unable to prepare him for success on either the literacy test or in grade twelve English. The principal's questioning of his pedagogy reinforces its importance beyond the gendered body, something that a struggling student who simply wanted to be successful did not understand, and yet it strengthened his conviction that male English teachers are better suited to address his learning needs.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the central question for this research: What evidence exists to support or challenge the claims that male teachers influence positively boys' achievement as literacy learners? To address this question, I interviewed and observed twenty-nine boys in their English language arts classes. Out of these twenty-nine participants, only four maintained that their literacy achievement was positively influenced by the gender of their teachers; however, a careful analysis of these data calls into question such claims, draws attention to the power of discourses to form objects (i.e., male English teachers) and argues that

www.manaraa.com

their achievement cannot be reduced to the "singularity of gender" (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010, p. 38; also see Foucault, 1972).

This chapter has also drawn attention to the complex and sometimes contradictory understandings these particular boys hold in terms of framing their male teachers as bodies of influence. Gender affiliation is frequently cited as a source of connection; however, this affiliation often stems from the embodiment of particular kinds of masculinities, mutual interests and/or shared experiences, which again complicates discourses that perpetuate common sense notions of male teachers, because they are male, being better equipped to address boys' literacy underachievement. Some boys also highlight their understanding of male teachers as natural disciplinarians and gendered pedagogical approaches as sources of difference; however, only one participant (Moe) attempted to explicitly link this difference to his achievement. Further investigation of the teacher qualities of Moe's English teacher raised important questions about this teacher's ability to influence higher achievement. Finally, in this chapter, I began to complexify and challenge discourses that position male teachers as role models for boys. As illustrated by some of the boys introduced here, simplistic understandings of male teachers as role models are misleading, and if reforms are implemented on this basis, their effectiveness is understood to be questionable.

Chapter Seven

The Case of Mr. Alonzo

My identity is not summed up in the presence of a couple of body parts.

www.manaraa.com

(Mr. Alonzo at Small Town School)

In the previous chapter, the data revealed that many of the boys did not identify the gender of the teacher as a factor influencing their achievement. In fact, by engaging with some of the literature and critique of role modeling in the field of boys' education, attention has been drawn to the limitations of recruiting male teachers to facilitate increased engagement and achievement for boys as literacy learners. Such views about male teachers as role models do not take into consideration or fail to acknowledge the interwoven and overlapping factors influencing boys' subjectivities, how boys come to understand the subject of English and how pedagogical practices play a part in constructing boys as certain types of learners. In fact, much commentary and critique in the field has been directed at the problem of essentializing discourses about boys as a homogeneous group which work to erase other significant contributing factors and how they influence boys' literacy achievement. A consideration of these other factors such as social class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographical location and pedagogical approaches has the potential to deepen or further our understanding of which boys are failing and how boys come to understand literacy engagement and achievement. In addition, debates and critique in the field have highlighted how dominant discourses of role modeling fail to ask what types of male teachers are needed to facilitate boys' achievement and tend to downplay or even omit any discussion about the desired qualities of the male English teachers being recruited to address boys' literacy achievement, thereby suggesting that simply being a man framed in heteronormative terms is all that is needed to show boys that it is "normal" to engage and achieve as literacy learners in English language arts. In this chapter, through case study analysis of one specific teacher and a group of boys in one particular school, my aim is to provide a more

www.manaraa.com

nuanced, contextualized understanding of the various influences and pedagogical factors that influence boys' literacy achievement.

This chapter focuses on the case of Mr. Alonzo at Small Town School. The members of this case – Mr. Alonzo, Berk, Jack, Michael, Aaron, Jason and Evan – are introduced not as a "generic" male teacher and boys but instead as located in a "social and cultural context" (Dutro, 2002, p. 468). The nuanced, "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) and analysis that follows works to address my research questions regarding the factors influencing boys' literacy and achievement in the English language arts classroom. I am particularly interested to examine how the boys themselves understand their own literacy achievement or underachievement. In short, I investigate what can be learned through the study of a particular case involving a male English teacher and the boys in his class about the significant factors contributing to boys' underachievement in English language arts.

Selecting only one case for detailed case analysis was difficult. I struggled with the fact that each of the five cases in this study had the potential to illustrate the complex and interwoven factors that contribute to the success of some boys and the failure of others. Nonetheless, this case was ultimately purposefully selected for a number of reasons. First of all, the boys, as a group, in this case are the lowest achievers in this study. Three of the six boys in this case did not pass the English class I observed. Secondly, they were all in the applied/college stream of English. Only two of the six boys started out in the academic stream and then transferred to the applied/college stream of English; the remaining boys had always been in the applied/college stream. In 2011, 45% of the fully-participating students in the applied English course were unsuccessful on the OSSLT. This percentage stands in stark contrast to the 5% of fully-participating students in the academic stream who were unsuccessful (EQAO, 2011b, p. 68-69).

www.manaraa.com

Based on this data, they are, as a group, of greatest concern. Male English teachers are understood to be a necessity to facilitate the achievement of boys in the applied/college stream of English. Finally, the fact that they were in their fourth and some cases fifth year of secondary school was beneficial as they were able to discuss multiple experiences in English with a number of different teachers. This particular group of boys was also of interest because of the number of male English teachers they had had in their four years of secondary school. One of these boys had two male English teachers. For four of them, three of their four English credits were taught by males, and one of the boys had a male English teacher for all of his English credits. Although this situation might be somewhat unique, it is understood to be an "information-rich case … from which one can learn a great deal about the issues of central importance" because the boys have extensive, real experience with male English teachers (Patton, 2002, p. 46).

Although their teacher, Mr. Alonzo, is understood to be an excellent teacher whose personal and professional subjectivity and his pedagogical approach cannot be reduced to the "singularity of gender", his particularities were not critical in the selection of this case. (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010) The individual experiences of all of the male English teachers that I observed as both human beings and as teachers are understood to influence their pedagogical approaches, their understanding of gender and its impact on student achievement. An unpacking of any one of them would draw attention to the limitations of rigid or narrow conceptualizations of what it means to be a male English teacher by disrupting the category of male teacher as fixed or stable. It would also highlight the significance of other influential factors such as race, class, age, ethnicity, pedagogical philosophy and experience, etc. in shaping who they are and how they relate to their students in the English classroom.

www.manaraa.com

Given my understanding that "context is critical to understanding" (Patton, 2002, p. 63), I begin this case analysis by situating the case in its school and community context. Next, I provide a detailed analysis of Mr. Alonzo, the male English teacher at the centre of this case. As indicated by many of the boys in the previous chapter, the way teachers teach is understood to be more significant than their gender per se. Thus, I unpack Mr. Alonzo's pedagogy, including his explicitly-stated modelling of non-tradition gender norms, and his views of student achievement. Like the failure to ask which boys are failing in public and educational discourse, a negligence to ask what types of male teachers are needed to best facilitate boys' needs also exists (Lingard *et al*., 2009, p. 143; Martino, 2008a). This case study analysis draws attention to the limitations of essentialist notions of male teachers by illustrating the importance of understanding "in depth the details of what goes on" (Patton, 2002, p. 28). Smulyan (2006) suggests that male teachers perform multiple masculinities. This multiplicity is influenced by "biography, historical constructions of teaching and gender, and contextual dynamics" (p. 476). Finally, I turn my attention to the six boys in this case. Given the parameters of this dissertation, I am unable to include all of the boys' perspectives on all of my interview questions. Instead, I begin with a brief introduction of each boy via a chart which identifies their ethnic backgrounds, course enrolments and achievements, favourite and least favourite subjects, interests and career aspirations. This information is included to illustrate, in a snapshot, their diversity, but does not seek to reduce their identities to simplistic categories. Next, I have purposefully chosen to focus on their reflections about their secondary-school English teachers to highlight the factors that they understand to be influential for their engagement and achievement in English language arts. To organize my analysis, I have isolated a particularly salient point from each boy's interview transcript to organize my analysis. I am aware that my "selectivity shape[s] the research" (Cohen

www.manaraa.com

et al., 2000, p. 141); however, for the purposes of this dissertation, I decided to take up a different emergent theme from each boy's narrative. In some cases, the highlighted themes emerged from many or all of the narratives, but to illustrate the multiple factors of influence for these boys, I have elected to organize the writing up of the cases in this way. Also, as part of this case analysis, I have included my own triangulated observations throughout. Patton (2002) points out that different kinds of data "may yield somewhat different results because different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real-world nuances" (p. 248). With an understanding of data as "situated accomplishments or versions" (Speer 2005, p. 70), multiple standpoints are critical to draw attention to consistencies, inconsistencies, complexities, contradictions and gaps in the framing of boys as disadvantaged and the recruitment of male English teachers as a viable method of reform.

Small Town School

The school setting for this particular case is crucial. First of all, it is important to note that according to Stats Canada 2006 Community Profiles, only 2.5% on the population living in this community reports having completed a university certificate, diploma or degree and that 49% of the experienced labour force reported working in agriculture or the trades (www.statcan.gc.ca). Based on this demographic information and the information provided by Mr. Alonzo about how the current economic recession has been particularly difficult for many families in the town due to the number of jobs that have been lost, this community is understood to be predominantly working-class, which is salient considering the body of research that identifies social class as a significant indicator of school achievement (Booth, 2002; Dutro, 2002; Hicks 2002; Hinchman, Payne-Bourcy, Thomas, and Chandler-Olcott, 2002; Laurie, Holloway, & Smith, 1999; Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan & Wasik, 1993; OECD, 2004; Payne-Bourcy & Chandler-Olcott, 2003;

www.manaraa.com

Porche, Ross & Snow, 2004; Reay, 2001; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Sukhnandan *et al*., 2000; Lucey, 2001; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001).

Anyon (1981) describes social class as,

> A series of relationships to several aspects of the process in society by which goods, services, and culture are produced. That is, while one's occupational status and income level contribute to social class, they do not define it. Contributing as well are relationships to the system of ownership of physical and cultural capital, to the structure of authority at work and in society, and to the content and process of one's own work activity (p. 4).

Anyon claims that one's class is determined by one's relationship to ownership, authority and work. Bourdieu (1984) explains class distinctions in terms of "capital" – financial, social and cultural. He suggests that class is defined not only by the accumulation of wealth, but also by one's ability to access powerful groups in society, ideas, literature, arts, educational opportunities, etc.

This research did not explicitly set out to examine the influence of social class on boys' achievement in secondary-school English. As a result, the kind of biographical information (i.e., parental income and employment) necessary to determine the participants' social class was not intentionally gathered. Mr. Alonzo suggested that his own working-class background has facilitated a connection with many of his students as he has an increased sensibility for the "dissonance" some of his working-class students face as they engage with middle-class practices in school (Hicks, 2002, p. 4); however, this information was not made in reference to the status of individual students. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the social class of the participants is

www.manaraa.com

characterized by the kind of work and/or educational goals to which these boys aspire and by knowledge about the particular demographic of the school's population.

The school itself is understood as a composite school because it offers both academic and non-academic courses and is designed for students of all abilities (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/composite+school). In the English department, six locally-developed/school to work/workplace courses, seventeen applied/college-level courses and eight academic/university-preparation courses were offered in 2010-2011. Curtis, Livingstone and Smaller (1992) contend that working-class students tend to be placed in workplace and college-level class. The disproportionately high number of students taking workplace and applied level English at Small Town School is consistent with this claim and stands in stark contrast to some of the other schools examined in this research that offered no workplace courses and less than five applied/college English classes annually.

According to the contextual information provided for interpreting the school's results on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), 96% of the students speak English at home most often. 97% of the students reported having computers in their homes and 92% reported having books. Although the girls reported reading more fiction than the provincial average (87%), the boys reported reading less fiction (45%). Both the boys and the girls reported spending less time than the provincial average reading web sites, e-mail and chat messages (G-90%/B-85%). Also, worth noting is the fact that 39% of boys as opposed to 51% of girls reported doing work-related writing outside of school (EQAO, 2012b).

The students at this particular school have consistently performed below both the school board and provincial averages on the OSSLT. Since March 2007, student success rate on the OSSLT has never been higher than 78%. In March 2011, only 73% of fully-participating first-

www.manaraa.com

time eligible students were successful. Other than in March 2007 when 70% of the boys and only 68% of the girls were successful on the OSSLT, girls have consistently outperformed boys. In March 2011, 19% of girls were not successful as opposed to 34% of boys. It is also worth noting that only 38% of the first-time eligible students writing the test were taking academic English in March 2011. By establishing the context in which a particular male English teacher and the boys in his class are situated, I begin the process of unravelling the layers of complexities.

Mr. Alonzo

Mr. Alonzo is a white male in his 50's and one of two male English teachers at Small Town School. He has been teaching for close to thirty years. His first twenty-five years were spent teaching French. He made the switch from a secondary-school French Department Head to an English Department Head when the opportunity became available because he was looking for new challenges and was interested in the difficulties that some students encountered as readers. At the time, he considered opportunities outside of education, but his "great pleasure in teaching" influenced his decision to remain a classroom teacher. Mr. Alonzo has had a variety of teaching experiences with diverse student populations: urban, rural, students from welfare families to upper middle-class families, severely disabled to severely gifted students, "white bred" to racially mixed visible minorities. He attributes these multiple and divergent experiences to shaping who he has become as both a person and a teacher.

His pedagogy. Mr. Alonzo's experiences as a French teacher have had a profound influence on his pedagogical approach in the English language arts classroom. They are reflected in his understanding of the difficulties students face when engaging with texts that might be considered foreign because of elevated vocabulary, sophisticated syntax, subject, or language.

www.manaraa.com

> My teaching of English is very influenced by my understanding of the fact that many students have difficulty with understanding language samples in front of them. I worked for years with students for whom all texts were difficult texts, and all were, in a sense, disabled learners because they didn't have the whole language system [French]. So I mean that has influenced my approach to literature as well, and it's also meant I think that for somebody who is a very long term teacher, I do not have the vested interest in certain of the famous old books that people of my generation frequently do.

My observation of his classroom practice confirms that Mr. Alonzo's approach to the teaching of English appears to be aligned with his perception that some students have difficulty accessing texts. The walls of his classroom were decorated with informational posters, most of them Ministry generated, on reading and writing strategies. He is careful to clarify new or difficult vocabulary prior to reading. On one occasion, his students were asked to engage in a "cloze reading exercise," an activity in which students are asked to insert the words that have been deleted from a passage using their understanding of syntax and the text's meaning. In another lesson, he instructed his students to work in groups to complete an "inference wheel," an exercise designed to encourage students to interpret events in a text. He also regularly removed the title from texts and asked his students to create a new title based on their reading. As well, graphic organizers were routinely used in Mr. Alonzo's English class to help the students navigate texts and organize their ideas. Hunter (1997) writes, "English is … an amalgam of different pedagogical activities held together by various unifying strategies" (p. 315). Models for the teaching of English tend to be organized around the language versus literature debate. In the case of Mr. Alonzo, his pedagogical approach tends to privilege the accessing of language which

www.manaraa.com

tends to be aligned with the *Progressive English* model of teaching English rather than the aesthetic study of literature characteristic of the *English as the Great Literary Tradition* model (see Ball *et al.*, 1990). In Mr. Alonzo's English class, "language and literature function as tools in the perceptions of self, society, and world which are socially constructed" (Colarusso, 2009, p. 13). In addition, Mr. Alonzo's pedagogy and approach to text in his English class are concerned with social justice by disrupting existing power relations (see Morrell, 2005).

Although Mr. Alonzo attributes his approach to his background as a French teacher, his model of teaching is also aligned with the emphasis placed on skills and strategies by the high-stakes nature of the OSSLT and the prescriptive and detailed expectations as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*. This curriculum document begins by highlighting at length the importance of literacy, language development and the English curriculum. This discussion culminates by stating the principles underpinning the English curriculum: "The English curriculum is based on the belief that language learning is critical to responsible and productive citizenship, and that all students can become successful language learners. The curriculum is designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills that they need to achieve this goal" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4). Clearly, the purpose of the subject of English currently in Ontario is to provide students with the literacy skills and knowledge that will enable them to be productive members of society. This emphasis on literacy and language is consistent with the aims of the OSSLT: "For the purpose of the OSSLT, literacy comprises the reading and writing skills required to understand reading selections and to communicate through a variety of written forms as expected in The Ontario Curriculum for all subjects up to the end of Grade 9" (EQAOa, 2011, p. 1).

www.manaraa.com

Herman and Golan (1993) found that the teachers in their study reported that the accountability pressures associated with high-stakes testing "substantially influence[d] their instructional planning." According to Volante (2004), "Research suggests that teachers will often skew their efforts in the direction of activities that would lead to increases in these highly publicized scores" (Earl, Levin, Leithwood, Fullan & Watson, 2003). Based on my observations, it seemed plausible that the pedagogical approach of Mr. Alonzo, an enthusiastic teacher who has participated in numerous professional development sessions concerning the implementation of strategies to better facilitate the literacy success and higher student achievement on the OSSLT, might have been influenced by the current climate of accountability spurred on by neoliberalism (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012b). At the very least, his pedagogical approach is understood to support the aims of both Ontario curriculum expectations and the OSSLT; however, when I asked him explicitly about how the OSSLT has influenced his approach to teaching English, he responded in this way:

> Somewhat, in the sense that there is some overt prepping for the document in grades 9 and 10, as well as some significant focus of the forms in which they write in for those grades, and especially for 1P1 [grade nine applied English] and 2P1 [grade ten applied English]. On the other hand, I'd say that the "way" I teach is far more strongly influenced by the Reading Specialist course I took, by knowledge of how intelligence theories and then differentiation and instructional strategies to match the content, the products and the expectations. I am especially interested in finding appropriate strategies for learning and totally disinterested in being able to rhyme off a meaningless chant like "We'll do a team-game tournament" or "We made a foldable!" while grinning like Voltaire.

www.manaraa.com

Although he does not dismiss the OSSLT as a possible influence, he pinpoints a number of other professional development opportunities that have influenced the "way" he teaches, including the curriculum expectations which are produced from the same philosophical stance as the OSSLT. His response highlights the difficulty of isolating a single influential factor in determining a teacher's pedagogical approach. Finally, he appears to be critical of using strategies such as "foldable" for their own sake, which supports his philosophy that classroom strategies must be contextualized to facilitate learning and real understanding.

Although Mr. Alonzo's pedagogical approach places a strong emphasis on language skills and reading strategies, he also works hard to contextualize learning in his classroom. The texts employed in Mr. Alonzo's English class are not the typical, tried and true pieces of literature traditionally found on the syllabuses of many secondary-school English courses. As Mr. Alonzo points out, he does not have the same "vested interest" in traditional literature as many of his peers. In his class, students' read media articles (in print form), local poetry, contemporary plays, non-fiction "how to" books and detective fiction, which is in keeping with the variety of texts prescribed by the Ontario curriculum: "Students will analyse a variety of informational and graphic texts, as well as literary texts from various countries and cultures" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 108). These texts were selected based on their relevance for the students in the class. For example, the students were asked to respond to a news article by creating power point presentations on the non-fiction books they were reading. One group was reading *The Wealthy Farmer*. The applicability of texts such as these for students coming from a rural and/or lower socioeconomic area is evident. The use of media and non-fiction might be interpreted as an attempt to introduce more boy-friendly texts into the classroom; however, given Mr. Alonzo's explicit attempts to disrupt gender norms in the classroom, as will be discussed

www.manaraa.com

later, it seems unlikely that his text selection might be understood as an attempt to cater to boys' innate interests. Instead, they are understood as stemming from Mr. Alonzo's understanding of what works with students who have difficulty reading and his attempt to make reading accessible and meaningful through connections. Gee (2004) points out that "learning to read is about learning to read different types of text with real understanding" (p. 39). The texts that Mr. Alonzo uses in his English classes are chosen with the intent of generating real understanding for his students. He told me that *The Wealthy Farmer* as opposed to *The Wealthy Barber* is an option for this assignment because its content is more meaningful for some of his students, given their rural backgrounds. Moje (1996) points out,

> … teaching and learning are socially constructed acts. Differences in teachers' knowledges and beliefs about pedagogy stem from a complex interaction of their experiences, beliefs about pedagogy stem from a complex interaction of their experiences, beliefs, and values about life and learning … as teachers and students interact, they define situations and negotiate meanings made from their interactions. For teachers, the meanings they make from their interactions with students have implications for their pedagogical knowledge and decisions (p. 176).

Mr. Alonzo's teaching practice is the culmination of both his professional and personal experiences, his philosophical stance as an English teacher, his values and beliefs and interactions with students in this particular context, Small Town School, who struggle to access texts. In his particular teaching context, the importance of equipping his students to be productive members of society shapes his practice.

www.manaraa.com

Mr. Alonzo's philosophy and classroom instruction appears to have little to do with gender. As he points out, his teaching has been influenced by the courses he has taken, his experiences in the classroom and various instructional strategies and theories. These opportunities and experiences potentially impact the teaching of both male and female teachers. In fact, when I asked him if he understands his gender to influence boys' achievement in the English classroom, he responded in this way:

> I don't think it is my gender that matters. I think it is the time, thought and energy I put into working on courses to make their material related to kids, stretch their abilities, expand their horizons, ask them questions and ask them to question. I really don't flaunt my maleness in the class … My identity is not summed up in the presence of a couple of body parts … I think it's complex. I don't think there is a single factor. I think there are so many factors at play. I mean there's more than one factor about who I am and the roles I play in class, right, and I do play more than one role in class.

Again, Mr. Alonzo highlights what he does in his English classroom as significant and is critical of simplistic, reductionist notions that the presence of a male body is sufficient to influence boys' achievement. He contends that his identity is complex and fluid and cannot be reduced to the singularity of his embodied gender (Butler, 1997). His personal and professional identity and experiences are too complex to be understood as a single, fixed and bodily marker of subjectivity. This understanding is consistent with Cealey *et al.* (1998) who point out that the formulation of identity is so complex that it is impossible to separate, for example, gender from race, age, class, etc. They argue that these aspects of identity do not "intersect" but rather are intermeshed rendering them inseparable (also see Francis, 2000a). Mr. Alonzo also asserts that

www.manaraa.com

his pedagogical practices and their effects trump any influence associated with being a male teacher. It is through his pedagogy – his performance as a teacher – that he is able to connect and motivate his students. The importance he places on his pedagogy is consistent with other research that contends that "good teaching matters" (Lingard *et al*., 2009, p. 78; also see Darling-Hammond, 2000; Dudley-Marling, Abt-Perkins, Sato & Selfe, 2006; Heck, 2009; Lingard *et al.*, 2000).

His views on role modelling. In *Boys: Getting it Right*, a report cited in Ontario's *Narrowing the Gap*, it states, "an understanding of gender issues is important but the role modelling and teaching by males whose relationship and commitment to boys is genuine is the most important factor" (p. 164). Given the tendency to define the need for more male teachers in terms of role models for boys (see Booth, 2002; Ontario College of Teachers, 2004; also see Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Coulter & McNay, 1993; Lahelma, 2000; Lingard *et al*., 2009; Martino, 2008a; Martino & Frank, 2006; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010 for a critique of this position) to counter the feminizing effect of a predominately female teaching staff, which is particularly salient for "soft subjects" like English, I asked Mr. Alonzo if he sees himself as a role model for boys and if so what he thinks he is modelling. He told me that it is his "hope" that he is a role model for both boys and girls because what he tries to model is "humanism." He explained, "I hope I'm modelling an ability to reach out and understand people who are as different from you as possible in your community. I hope I'm modelling a love of excellence in forms that you can embrace yourself in the same way." Mr. Alonzo's response appears to be grounded in a romantic ideology or desire rather than empiricism (see Rozen, 2004). Also, he does not draw on gender binaries to explain his conception of role modelling. Instead, he identifies qualities that he understands to be important for all people. Although I concur that "the

www.manaraa.com

attribution of aspects of behaviour or expression as masculine or feminine is highly problematic (Francis, 2008, p. 110; also see Maclnnes 1998; Francis, 2000a), it might be argued that he is modelling both a feminine trait such as caring for others and a more masculine pursuit of and admiration for excellence (see Francis & Skelton, 2001), drawing attention once again to the embodiment of complexity.

Mr. Alonzo admitted that schools, particularly elementary schools, are "pink ghettos by in large" (predominantly comprising female teachers), making it difficult for "some guys to find a guy role model," but he pointed out that he is not a role model for all boys because he consciously challenges gender norms in his teaching:

> I am not a role model to guys who think of themselves as jocks because I'm not and I'm quite clear about that. It's quite interesting. I occasionally say I don't believe in sweating and on the other hand, the kids are all aware that I value work and I frequently tell them that work is the most fun of all. I've had one brilliant student once say to me, "If you don't like sports and you don't want to watch sports, and you think that sports are generally a bunch of spoiled brats, why do you come and cheer at our games?

Mr. Alonzo's response to this student's probing was "I think we're talking about those multi-millionaire whiners that are on television all the time as opposed to real people who I actually care about." This pro-feminist response works to challenge notions of hegemonic masculinities in two ways. First, Mr. Alonzo is explicitly critical of the performances of hegemonic masculinities associated with traditional team sports. He, himself, does not participate in team sports, although he is interested in health and fitness associated with being active. Secondly, he

www.manaraa.com

acknowledges that he attends school sporting events because he cares for his students, a quality that is traditionally understood to be feminine (see Francis & Skelton, 2001; Gilligan, 1977; King, 1998; Noddings, 2003). Even Mr. Alonzo acknowledges that teaching is a caring profession which might explain why men are less likely to become teachers: "I think it's a caring profession and that it's true in our society that men are not taught that they should and could be in a caring profession." By stating that he is more interested in the people playing the sports and not the institution of sport, he challenges notions of hegemonic masculinities.

In his English classroom, he regularly provokes discussion with his students with his "slagging of sports." When I asked him about this overt challenging of gender norms, he told me that he needs,

> to be honest with them about those things, and on the other hand I'm going to turn our differences into a place where we can have a conversation so that we can move towards understanding each other better because I would think that one of the most important thing you can do in English is to help people to have those conversations with real and fictional people to help you understand other people better so that you have less conflict with them in the long run, but in the short term you have to get the conflicts out in the open before you can deal with them.

Here, Mr. Alonzo subscribes to a mixture of *Progressive English* and *English as Critical Literacy* (Ball *et al.*, 1990). He uses these conversations to not only challenge his students and provoke thought, but also to create space to recognize multiple masculinities. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) contend that "multiple masculinities are … multiple possibilities opened up in our culture which expand rather than constrain the opportunities for men to live rewarding lives for

www.manaraa.com

themselves and others" (p. 49). By espousing a pro-feminist political position (Lingard and Douglas, 1999), Mr. Alonzo not only models an alternative masculinity but he raises the consciousness of his students concerning the constraints placed on men to act according to particular gender norms (Butler, 1990). Although he claims his daughter has accused him of being "the family feminist," and some of the male students in his classes have remarked that he "betray[s] the gender when [he] take[s] a stance against machismo, sexism etc., he says it is who he is. He is a teacher who resists "normalizing pressures" and confronts traditional constructions of masculinity in his daily practice (Lingard *et al.*, 2009, p. 145).

Lingard *et al.*, (2009) argue that there is an "implicit assumption" that the desired male teachers do not "disrupt" hegemonic constructions of masculinity and that notions of normalized masculinity are so ingrained that claims about the needs for more male English teachers rarely mention the qualities of such teachers (p. 142). Given the particularities of Mr. Alonzo's complex identity and the nuances of his pedagogical practices, I draw attention to the need to bring the desirable qualities of male teachers to the forefront of male teacher debates. Mr. Alonzo's gendered performances interrupt often unquestioned signifiers of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Roulston & Mills, 2000) and work to expand "categories that resist both binary and substantializing grammatical restrictions on gender" (see Butler, 1990, p 143). This case analysis calls into question notions of gender as a "stable identity" and suggests the essentialist frameworks underpinning the call for male English teachers are inadequate frames of reference (Butler, 1997, p. 402). Following Martino (2008b), it illuminates the need to ask "how male teachers' masculinities are negotiated and how these contradictory relations impact in significant ways on their self-perceptions as teachers, their pedagogical practices and their relations with students" (p. 601).

www.manaraa.com

Student achievement. With an understanding that a teacher's perception of the factors influencing student achievement is critical in that it informs pedagogical decision-making and teacher-student interactions (see Moje 1996), part of my interview with all of the male teacher participants focused on their insights into the factors contributing to the high and low achievement of students in English. In addition to the sex of the student, Mr. Alonzo identified a number of influences at play such as parental motivation and involvement, student motivation and self-perception, peer influence, attendance, inappropriate placement in a course, illness, fractured families, skills, work load, and socioeconomics. These potential influences draw attention to the multiple and varied factors influencing achievement and the limitations associated with isolating gender as the single most important factor for boys' achievement.

Mr. Alonzo does identify the sex of the student as having influence, but he does not suggest that the success of girls and the failure of boys in English are biologically determined. Instead, he points to societal perceptions and expectations as critical influences. Although he was able to identify boys and girls as both high and low achievers in his English class, he suggested that boys are more frequently underachievers because "guys don't perceive of themselves as good" and are more likely to be placed in the applied and college streams in English. He elaborated by saying,

> Guys are told they can't do English. Guys are told all those words are pretty. It's all reading between the lines, and they are pretty sure all they can see on the paper are the lines. They can't see anything written in between the lines. They've been told that poetry is this great mystery. They've been told that Shakespeare is this god in old English years and years ago that nobody understands and that guys should be out repairing cars or punching each other out.

www.manaraa.com

Mr. Alonzo refers to gender regimes that incite boys to construct themselves as a particular kind of gendered subject which dictates the terms for how they are meant to relate to English language arts. He also suggests that this understanding of boys is "discursively produced" (Weedon, 1997, 176), challenging essentialist discourses. "Gender regimes, in terms of schools, may be defined as the pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity among staff and students, orders them in terms of prestige and power, and constructs a sexual division of labor within the institution" (Kessler *et al.,* 1985, p. 42). Curious about who conveys such messages, I asked Mr. Alonzo to clarify. He said, "they've told themselves that frequently. Who this mystery person is [shakes his head to indicate he does not know]. Who told them that [shakes his head to indicate he does not know]. But they repeat him frequently." He suggests that boys are active in their subscription to gender norms. He also speaks to the power of discourses to structure the way we think so that our understandings appear to be self-evident or a reflection of reality but it is also a mechanism of control that governs through norms and defines the ordering of things (Foucault, 1972). Through repetition, these discourses come to be accepted as truth and go unquestioned. Butler writes, "Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (Butler, 1990, xv). This distinction between acts that are natural or static and those that through repetition have the appearance of nature is critical. Discourses presented as "truth claims" (Foucault, 1984) incite boys to self-regulate and regulate each other to conform to what is understood to be "properly masculine" (Skelton & Francis, 2011, p. 468) even if it is to the detriment of their academic achievement in the English classroom.

www.manaraa.com

Mr. Alonzo suggested that through the combination of good teaching and male representation these discourses about what is "properly masculine" (Skelton & Francis, 2011, p. 468) might be disrupted. As already discussed, Mr. Alonzo, by espousing a pro-feminist position in his English classroom, overtly challenges traditional gender norms. In this sense, he suggests that the gender of the teacher can make a difference, a reality that he confessed he wishes were not the case. To illustrate his point, he described two "critical incidents" (Tripp, 1993) from his own teaching experience. In the first incident, the students were asked to declare a position on a play they were studying by physically moving to one side of the classroom or the other. After the students moved, one boy found himself with his female classmates on one side of the room, while all of the other boys in the class had taken the opposing position. When this boy asked why he was the only boy in the room to take up this position, Mr. Alonzo took this opportunity to point out that his position heightens his chance for success because girls outperform boys in school. This explicit disruption of gender alliance shocked the male students in his class and played out in this way: "At this point, I have guys staring at me, and I said I think I was just a traitor to my … gender, and then we all had this laugh over this thing." Mr. Alonzo suggested that this challenging of traditional thinking, by pointing out that girls tend to outperform boys in school, works because he is not a female teacher. He suggested that incidents such as these come up because he is male and because he "can talk about the things that males struggle with more." What he is suggesting is that his gender affiliation with the boys positions him to challenge discourses governing norms more effectively than his female colleagues. When female teachers are presented with similar situations, according to Mr. Alonzo, boys resist, making accusations of "gender solidarity" This privileging of male authority and trivializing of female authority to address sex stereotypes is also explored in Martino (2008b).

www.manaraa.com

The second incident he described focused on his ability, as a man, to de-feminize texts that focus on the narratives of women for boys, by providing an alternative reading of the text. Mr. Alonzo claimed that "sometimes there are female teachers who get push-back from kids if the protagonist of a novel is female too. They assume it is a 'chick' book." He said that he and another male English teacher in his department routinely teach *The King's Daughter* by Suzanne Martel in their grade nine applied classes. When asked by the boys why they are reading a girls' book, these male teachers respond by pointing out that the female protagonist is "probably as tough as they are, if not tougher and made tough choices all through her life and saved lives multiple times and therefore is someone that they might admire if they're not afraid of her." Mr. Alonzo suggests that he is, by virtue of being a man, able to help some boys access the female experience; whereas, some of his female colleagues experience waves of rejection when trying to teach the same novel. They are accused of "picking a girly book" and "throwing it in [their] faces." In this situation, Mr. Alonzo describes what he understands to be his potential as a role model: "it's like the opposite of the sisterhood. Some of them perceive me as a role model, I guess. I mean, I think they buy the fact that it is manly to read; it is manly to love books; it is manly to recite poetry; it is manly to jump around in plays, and that sort of thing." For some boys, Mr. Alonzo's engagement with a novel is understood to be more appropriate for girls and his ability to deconstruct the text without reducing it to gender binaries authorizes their engagement in the English classroom. It is an "agent of practice …forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined" (Connell, 1995 p. 61; also see Martino, 2008a). Mr. Alonzo, through his practice, suggests that he embodies the potential to destabilize norms of masculinity by offering an alternative model. This notion calls into question essentialist masculinity and suggests that "if gender is not tied to sex, either causally or expressively, then

www.manaraa.com

gender is a kind of acting that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex" (Butler, 1990, p. 143). This performance of masculinity, for some boys, makes engaging in English class a safer place because "significations of the body exceed the intentions of the subject" (Butler, 2004, 199); however, Mr. Alonzo does not suggest that his performance guarantees achievement and does not even suggest that it ensures a connection with the boys in his class:

> I'm quite aware that students react to me in a variety of ways right, so there are students who love and idolize me. There are students who tolerate me. There are students who can't stand the sight of me. There are students who go through a variety of those experiences in a day, in a class, in a period.

To clarify, I asked him to clarify if these boys and girls, because of their sex, relate to him differently. He responded with a resounding "no." Once again, Mr. Alonzo draws attention to the problem of resorting to facile notions of gender affiliation as an explanatory framework to account for boys' achievement and motivation in the English language arts classroom. The complexities highlighted by Mr. Alonzo will be further examined through the detailed, context-specific accounts of the boys in this case.

The Boys

In this section, I have created "space" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 23) for the boys in this particular case to speak from their gendered positions about their experiences in the secondary-school English classroom. In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of the boys' understandings of the influence of male English teachers on boys' achievement in English language arts without providing detailed contextual information about the boys themselves. In

www.manaraa.com

that chapter, I included their responses to my inquiry into whether or not they understand the gender of their teachers to be an influential factor for their achievement; however, no further analysis of their responses is offered there. In this chapter, the stories I gathered (Patton, 2002, p. 341) are set within their specific context. During the interview, I asked the boys to tell me about their English teachers, both current and past. What follows is an unpacking of their responses to this prompt.

I begin with the following chart which is included to provide a brief introduction of the boys in this case. My intention is not to reduce the identities of these boys to the information provided here, but rather to efficiently begin the process of unpacking who they are.

Name	Ethnic Background	Course and Marks	Favourite Subjects	Least favourite subjects	Interests	Future Education/Careers
Aaron	White-Anglo-Canadian	ENG 4C – granted 50%	Technology Studies	English	Working out at a gym, hanging out with friends, plays in a band	Farm Equipment Repair or Auto Mechanics
Jack	White-Anglo-Canadian	ENG 4C – 30% (stopped attending)	Art	Physical Education	Art, writing, playing video games	Visual art at a community college and eventually a Bachelor's degree in Art History
Evan	White-Anglo-Canadian	ENG 4C – 39%	Automotive Course/Technology Studies	Art	Reads/Surfing on the computer	Automotive Industry
Jason	White-Anglo-Canadian	ENG 4C – 79%	Mathematics/ history/ gym	English	Loves music; plays the guitar; hangs out with friends; likes football but does not play	Police work
Berk	White-Anglo-Canadian	ENG 4C – 71%	History and Music	Science and Mathematics	Music; writes song lyrics	Wants to go to Berkley in California to study music

www.manaraa.com

Michael	White-Anglo-Canadian	ENG 4C – 30% (poor attendance)	Physical Education and Cosmetology	Chemistry	Soccer, plays drums, guitar, bass, violin and brass and woodwind, hangs out with friends and likes to draw	Hairdresser or Welder

All of the boys in Mr. Alonzo's case come from his ENG 4C (grade twelve college English) class, making it a case of interest. According to EQAO, the boys at the greatest risk of failure on the OSSLT are those in the applied stream in English. Three of the boys in this case have always been in the applied/college stream in English, and three of them transferred from the academic/university preparation stream at some point during their secondary-school career. In addition, although this group of boys as a whole was the lowest achieving group that I observed for this research, none of them indicated that the gender of the teacher influences their literacy achievement, again making it a case from which a great deal can be learned (Patton, 2002).

Of all the cases I studied for this research, this is the most homogeneous group in terms of ethnic background; however, they do vary according to interests, favourite subjects, least favourite subjects, future education and career aspirations. As a whole, they are not particularly interested in traditional team sports: only Michael plays soccer for both the school and a city team. Four of the six boys are extremely interested in music and play in a band. Two of them like to write and two them like art. One even identified reading as his favourite pastime. Although all of the boys had successfully completed the OSSLT by the time of the interview and only one achieved this requirement by taking the OSSLC, four of the six boys in this class struggled to achieve their grade twelve English credit. Three of them were unsuccessful in their attempt, and one was granted the credit by his teacher, meaning that the mark he achieved was close enough

www.manaraa.com

to 50% (a passing grade) that his teacher could not justify failing him, so his mark was raised by the teacher to 50%.

Berk and Jack. These two boys are both eighteen year old students in Mr. Alonzo's grade twelve college English class. Jack is currently in his fifth year of secondary school, and Berk plans on returning for a fifth year to pick up some credits next year. Both boys are avid readers, and both like to write. Berk is particularly interested in poetry and writes song lyrics for his band. Jack loves to write fiction, although he struggles to finish his stories because he is a bit of a perfectionist and easily distracted. Both of these boys love English and appear to have the skills to be successful in the academic stream, and yet both have had their struggles. Jack describes himself as an underachiever because of his "short attention span." Jack did not complete his second attempt at grade twelve English (his teacher thought he was taking the course for a second time to upgrade his mark) and ended up with a mark of 30%. Berk was successful in obtaining his grade twelve English credit (71%); however, he struggled on the OSSLT and ended up fulfilling this graduation requirement by taking the OSSLC.

Berk's and Jack's teachers. The experiences of both Jack and Berk in English language arts provide a lens for understanding the qualities of effective teaching that looks beyond the "singularity of gender" (Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010). Both of these boys have had only one female English teacher in secondary school. All of their other three English courses were taught by male teachers. Mr. Alonzo taught them both in grade eleven and grade twelve, although in grade eleven they were in different courses. They both spoke highly of Mr. Alonzo and their female English teachers, which suggested was evidence that the gender of their teachers is immaterial.

www.manaraa.com

Berk's grade nine English teacher was a female teacher with whom he connected through music. He described her as "cool" because she gave him the academic freedom to experiment with writing:

> I remember my first project. We had to write a horror story, but everyone seemed to go along the route of the genericism Freddy Krueger and Jason Voorhees from the *Friday the 13th* series and *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, and I wanted to put a twist on it. So they made quite the amount of films with Jason Voorhees in the 80's and 90's, and so I decided to make a Jason Voorhees goes to the mall just because you know who would do that? So I kind of wanted to portray the Frank Zappa of music but you know in English – be different completely.

There are a few points worth making here. First, Berk's use of language (allusions to actors and musicians and words like "genericism" to describe this writing exercise) is fairly sophisticated given he was unsuccessful on two attempts at writing the OSSLT. Secondly, his enthusiasm and pride as he reflects on this piece of writing are worth noting. Berk appreciated the opportunity to not only write about something he knows but also to do something he believed to be original. His current teacher, Mr. Alonzo, sarcastically suggested that this desire to do something different, or as he called it his "brilliance," might have contributed to his inability to pass the OSSLT, something that his teacher could not understand. Jack also had a positive learning experience with his one female English teacher. For him, it was the fact that she was "more interested in what she was teaching." Jack explained that her "enthusiasm" and the "way she said things" were indicators that she cared about what she was doing.

www.manaraa.com

Both boys also described negative experiences with one of their male English teachers. They seemed to agree that this teacher did not appear to care about what he was doing. They described his pedagogical approach as "boring." Berk said that he brought no "energy" to his lessons because the focus of the course was watching movies and answering questions on them. Jack said that he was not very good at teaching and struggled to control the class: "His classes are a lot like that [students are not listening or participating], and I don't know if it is the students that he gets or just the way that he teaches but everyone just seems to be more engaged in the class I am in right now [Mr. Alonzo's class]." Jack suggested that this particular male teacher's ineffectiveness stems from the fact that he did not seem to care. When I asked what they felt they learned in that class, they were ambivalent. Berk suggested that he did well in the course because it was easy. He was also adamant that it is possible to learn even when a teacher is boring: "Well you learn no matter what you take. It's just I don't base what I learned off of how boring something is. Like to me, like I don't know, it's hard to explain. It doesn't matter if it is boring or not I'm still learning. It's just I'm not having fun when I'm doing it." Berk has a very mature attitude about school and learning. He told me that he just makes up his mind to like his teachers and do the work he is assigned because that is what school is. Jack also takes a lot of responsibility for his own successes and failures in school; however, when he was assigned for a third time to this particular male teacher, he was glad to be given more hours at his place of employment which meant he had to transfer to a different English class with a different teacher.

These boys pinpoint a number of reasons to explain why they believe this male English teacher is ineffective: he lacked enthusiasm, struggled to control the class and did not seem to care. Interestingly, they did not blame the teacher for any lack of learning that might have resulted. Rice (2003) contends that the quality of the teachers is "the most important school-

www.manaraa.com

related factor influencing student achievement" (p. v); however, the question of how to evaluate teacher quality remains a contentious issue (see Dudley-Marling *et al.*, 2006). That being said, the qualities of an effective teacher, as identified by Jack and Berk, are supported by the literature. Borich (2000) explains:

> A teacher who is excited about the subject being taught and shows it by facial expression, voice inflection, gesture, and general movement is more likely to hold the attention of students than one who does not exhibit these behaviors. This is true whether or not teachers consciously perceived these behaviors in themselves (p. 25; also see Thompson, Greer & Greer, n.d.).

Other research on the enthusiasm of the teacher is also strongly connected to student success (see Bettencourt, Gillett, Gall, & Hull, 1983; Cabello & Terrell, 1994). The importance of control or class management is also identified as critical in a number of studies (Anderman, Andrzejewski, Allen, 2011; Crocker & Brooker, 1986). Many students in this study identified caring as an important quality in teachers, a teacher trait that is again well documented in literature (King, 1998; Noddings, 2003; Thompson, Greer & Greer, online). The localized context for their learning experiences in English language arts contradicts claims about male teachers being better equipped to address their learning interests and needs. In each case, they presented evidence that undermines such claims and highlights the importance of sound pedagogical knowledge and practices.

Capital and achievement. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Small Town School is situated in a working-class community and according to Stats Canada, only 2.5% of the population living in this community reports having completed a university certificate, diploma or degree (www.statcan.gc.ca). Despite this statistic, both Berk and Jack expressed their intentions

www.manaraa.com

of attending university one day: one to pursue a degree in art history and one in music. Jack is a talented artist who hopes to be admitted into a community-college program, which in turn will open up the possibility of his being accepted into university. Berk intends to go to the University of California, Berkeley to study music, a passion of his. He is a self-taught musician who writes his own song lyrics and plays in a band.

Although I was struck by the insights, confidence and use of language of both boys during their interviews, their educational aspirations are incongruent with their placement in grade twelve college English. Jack contended that he had only recently decided to go to university, so when he entered secondary school, he did not think it necessary to be in the academic stream. When his educational aspirations changed, he found himself in the wrong courses: "I guess I haven't been able to take university-level courses because I started out the first two years of high school taking college levels." Berk finds himself in a similar situation; however, it is unclear whether or not he is aware of it. He seemed to believe that his musical talent would speak for itself. The disjuncture between these boys' current registration in college-level English and their intention to attend university draws attention to a lack of social or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). For some students, knowledge about university admission requirements and the importance of keeping one's educational options open by taking academic courses in secondary school is seamlessly transferred by parents to their children. For others, like Jack, it is a capital that must be acquired from others such as teachers and guidance counsellors.

In Berk's case, he was in the academic stream for English up until grade twelve. He transferred to college-level English because he was struggling to juggle the demands of his university-preparation English course and his job: "It interfered with work, like I couldn't get my homework done because of work, and I couldn't get, like I'd have to take days off because of

www.manaraa.com

homework, so this is getting in the way, and applied doesn't give that much homework." Although he does not miss studying Shakespeare in the university-preparation course, he did suggest that he would have preferred to stay in that stream: "It sucks that I had to drop, but you know I got to make money." Curtis *et al.* (1992) points to how common it is to find capable students from working-class families streamed into "general programs" because of the "heavy demands of after-school jobs" (p. 99). Jack's progress in school was also affected by the demands of his job. As mentioned above, he transferred to Mr. Alonzo's morning class because his job required that he work in the afternoons. The necessity to hold a part-time job was a recurrent theme for the participants in this case. I do not wish to suggest that only students living in working-class communities hold part-time jobs; however, for these boys it is something they felt they had to do, and it most definitely affected the nature of their schooling. In both cases, the requirements of their jobs took precedent over school scheduling and expectations. These boys' lack of capital (social, cultural and perhaps financial) is understood as a critical factor for affecting their achievement in English.

Michael. This participant is eighteen years old and lives on his own for reasons that were not disclosed. At the time of his interview, he was struggling in Mr. Alonzo's grade twelve college English class. He claimed that he was behind because he had the flu which resulted in his having to miss three weeks of school. I did not confirm this story with his teacher, but his teacher did indicate that poor attendance was interfering with his progress in the class. In fact, Michael was not successful in this English course; he achieved only 30% in the course.

Although he made many claims during his interview about the nature of boys and girls, he was quite clear about his opposition to the idea that male English teachers might be better

www.manaraa.com

equipped to facilitate boys' literacy achievement. When asked if the gender of the teacher influences his achievement, he answered as follows:

> I think we should have the best educators educating to the minds to make them as best as possible. If it is a male so be it. If it's a female so be it. I think by saying that it's a very sexist comment, actually by saying we should bring in male teachers because males are doing poorly I don't think it's the teachers' fault …. There's a certain level where it could be the teachers' fault if they're not teaching anything, but it's also the choice of the student to be a student, and having a male teacher is not going to change the atmosphere. It's the personality that comes out that's going to change the atmosphere.

These ideas about the student having the choice to take responsibility and the teacher's personality influencing the learning atmosphere of the class are reflected in his accounts of his experiences with his English teachers and one of his favourite teachers, his cosmetology teacher.

Michael's English teachers. He described his grade nine academic English class as easy because his teacher was a young female teacher in her first year of teaching. According to Michael, she "wasn't very good at running a class" and "she wasn't very confident," again pointing to the importance of a teacher's pedagogical knowledge and degree of expertise. Michael admitted that he took advantage of this situation and "slacked off." In grade ten, he had a more experienced female teacher from whom he claimed he "learned stuff" because she made it "very clear," but in that class, he also discovered that he was not "at the same level as everybody else," which led to his decision to switch to the applied stream. His grade eleven teacher was male and his soccer coach, which fostered an

www.manaraa.com

immediate connection between them, but he was quick to point out that his higher achievement in this course had more to do with his placement in the appropriate level, applied as opposed to academic, than it did with his teacher's gender. Mr. Alonzo was his grade twelve English teacher. Michael indicated that Mr. Alonzo is "different. He's funny … he gets my attention, he makes me come back … he connects with us better than a more strict teacher." In each case, Michael highlights the personality and/or pedagogical differences that he has observed in his English teachers. These differences have created either a positive or less than positive learning environment for him as a student. He does not make distinctions according to gender, but instead points to experience, expertise, interests (i.e., soccer) and personality (see Francis *et al.*, 2008). He also indicates that he is responsible for his success when he points to his decision to slack off in a class he understood to be easy and to switch to the applied stream to increase his opportunities for success in English.

When Michael talked about his female cosmetology teacher, he also draws attention to the limitations of notions of gender affiliation as a remediation strategy to address boys' learning needs and interests. Michael is the top student and the only boy in his cosmetology class. He described his female teacher in this way:

> We are very, very good friends. I say we're friends, and she's a lot like Mr. Alonzo: very outgoing, very funny, you know, brings her personality to the class, always smiling. You would never see her having a bad day so that also helps.

By drawing parallels between this female teacher and Mr. Alonzo, Michael draws attention to the limitations associated with gender affiliation that relies on a certain degree of essentialism, which he clearly discounts. Rather he suggests that both male and female teachers who are effective in

www.manaraa.com

his eyes and to whom he relates share some commonalities in terms of their personalities and their teaching styles. In this sense, he appears to challenge discourses that overemphasize the importance of gender affiliation for boys and their teachers as an explanatory basis for understanding achievement and participation in the English language arts classroom.

Essentialist discourses. Although Michael transgresses norms of hegemonic masculinity by being the only male to enrol in the cosmetology course at Small Town School, he also draws on essentialist discourses to explain differences between the engagement and achievement of boys and girls as literacy learners:

> From what I've heard, from what I've seen women actually do excel more in English studies, but I feel that's just because of a basis of, as a male. Like I said before if you didn't have a good teacher, males usually tend to skip because they get bored. It's not what they like, it's not, doesn't have to do with sports or anything like that, so unless you really like to write or read, you really wouldn't, don't want to be in the class.

Michael begins by acknowledging that his understanding comes from what he has "heard," which speaks to the power of discourses to construct a certain "truth" (Foucault, 1984, 1987). He also suggests that girls are outperforming boys because they are boys: "a basis of, as a male." He continues by talking about males as a homogeneous group who get bored in English class without a good teacher because the subject does not have anything to do with sports. Michael's comments are understood to be drawing on discourses that have been legitimized or normalized through repetition. They are not merely describing reality but instead "ordering" it (Foucault, 1972). These claims which are clearly grounded in essentialism become even more salient when made by a boy whose own situated history involves challenging gender norms by pursuing his interest in hairdressing.

www.manaraa.com

Michael explicitly challenges social constructionist theories as a way of explaining boys' reluctance to read and again attributes it to biology:

> I think a lot of people would say they blame it on technology where TV and stuff like that kind of closes people's minds from reading, but from what I've seen and my theory behind it is that I think it pretty much has to do with probably our testosterone because like we, us guys, from what my friends are, we don't stay, we go to the gym and we're always kind of moving, doing something.

Again, Michael draws on a certain kind of knowledge that conflates biology and action; boys because of their bodies need to be active. This knowledge goes unchallenged because it carries the "authority of truth," (Foucault, 1977). Michael has "internalized" this understanding of what is normal for boys, even when his non-discursive acts contradict it. Francis (2000) argues that boys may use "different strategies (consciously or unconsciously) in their ways of 'doing' gender" (p. 16). Perhaps through the act of articulating these dominant discourses, Michael regulates his own masculine identity to conform to gender norms, understanding full well the power of the "gaze" (Foucault, 1977). He engages in a type of surveillance of his own masculinity by discursively positioning himself as a non-reader who needs to be active because of his testosterone. This positioning counteracts his non-discursive act of transgressing what is understood to be "properly masculine" (Skelton & Francis, 2011).

Finally, Michael theorizes that boys' literacy underachievement has historical roots. He contends that boys do not think school is important because their "pride" is in doing "hard" labour (see Willis, 1977):

> When it comes to boys' literacy I do think that women because I find most women can slow themselves down and process things better and think more I guess. That's

www.manaraa.com

> what makes their education more, like they achieve more because I think us as guys have our minds on other things other than academics as where females they find I just find that they think that that's more important than guys that I've seen. My friends don't find school's very important even though it is in their lives. They just don't recognize it … I think what influences guys to think that way is the way it used to be. Like when I just find guys now are like. Lifestyle now is going back to the way it was when men do hard work. And you know women are going now to be the ones in the office and we're the ones doing all the hard work and hard labour. I think that's where we find our pride is in.

Michael's assertion that school is not as important for boys is worth noting here. He claims that for "guys" other things such as being able to do physical labour are more important and a source of pride (see Willis, 1977). Faludi (1999) suggests that, "masculinity is shaped by society" (p. 14), so perhaps in his localized context, a context in which 49% of the experienced labour force reported working in agriculture or the trades (www.statcan.gc.ca), Michael is drawing on a conception of masculinity, although clearly outdated, that serves to legitimatize his disengagement and failure in school, and his own masculinity (see Francis, 2000a).

Berk also points to history to explain why girls are outperforming boys in the English classroom:

> I think guys in general are just lazy. I mean it shows. You could use the example such as typical marriages, you know. The girls are always the one doing the, I hate to be stereotypical, but the girls are always the ones you know doing the house cleaning. Guys are on the couch you know doing whatever. Guys are just lazy. When

www.manaraa.com

> it comes to guys and girls being in groups, guys want to sit at home and play their video games and girls are like ok let's get our stuff done and you know it's just guys are, we're the masters of the excuse. We'll come up with anything. I just think guys are lazy in general … Yeah, oh yeah, they [women] always have [worked hard]. Women went through a lot so I guess I don't know just trying to, I guess it's kind of like to one up us now. They've gone, well women suffrage in the 20's and just you know being known as the housewife for 100s of 1000s of years, and you know the dominant male is now the one who sits on the couch and watches hockey and drinks beer while girls do everything.

He begins by suggesting that men are innately lazy, and points to normative divisions of labour in a traditional family unit. He draws on a largely undisputed assumption that women do more housework than men (see Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson, 2000). He then explains that women's historical position of subordination is a source of motivation to achieve in school. Men, he suggests, are complacent because they have historically held positions of power in society. The way that Berk speaks about women and men suggests historical structures stem from innate characteristics without acknowledging the workings of power relations and their historical specificity, particularly given the current post-industrial conditions of changing labour markets and configurations in terms of the demise of the manufacturing industry as a site for conferring a valorised traditional masculinity through participation in the workforce.

It is important to note that some of Michael's peers contested this position of boys and his notions of legitimacy of dominant masculinity. Jack says,

> Because guys may feel like they are supposed to do worse at it, like worse in school because there are other things that they are supposed to do better … like playing

www.manaraa.com

> football … And as far as I can remember or as far as I can tell, school has always been considered more of a girl thing than a guy thing. I think because it is not a very masculine thing, but it is a stereotype that I have not really held true to.

Jack's references to what "guys" are "supposed" to do is resonant of discursive practices that perpetuate regimes of truth and regimes of power beyond the classroom context about how boys are expected to engage in school (Foucault,1984). Even though his own experiences as a boy challenge these assumptions about what boys are supposed to do, he is well aware of the gender norms and how they incite boys to act according to dominant versions of masculinity.

Michael is understood as a boy who embodies contradictions. He is both an athlete and a musician. His favourite subjects are physical education and cosmetology. He claims to like school, but does not read. He is contemplating becoming either a hairdresser or a welder. He performs both hegemonic and subordinate versions of masculinity. This subjectivity stands in stark contrast to the essentialist discourses he draws on to explain why girls tend to do better in the subject of English and school in general. Although I do not pretend to understand the multiple and complex influences underpinning Michael's discursive and non-discursive act, I could not help but wonder about the "not said" as I attempted to make sense of his story. I cannot help but wonder about the role the power of the "gaze" plays in modifying what he says to conform to more favourable constructions of masculinity as prescribed by gender norms. As Connell (1995) points out being a man means "enacting a general set of expectations which are attached to one's sex (p. 22).

Aaron. He describes himself as a "very hands on type of person" who told me that he wants to repair farm equipment in the future, not because he was raised on a farm but because farm equipment is "bigger" and he finds it "hard to get into little places." His least favourite

www.manaraa.com

conducive to achievement (see Gore, 2010). For as Dzubak (2007) points out, "Effective teaching and learning are dependent on the transmission of information and discussion requiring listening, thought, and active discussion."

Aaron's English teachers. For three of Aaron's four required English language arts credits, he has had male English teachers. In grades nine and ten, he had the same male English teacher. He described this experience as "frustrating" because the teacher kept losing his assignments. He claimed that he handed in several assignments multiple times for evaluation. He also suggested that he got in trouble a lot because of talking too much and that very few students were accomplishing anything in that class. In grade eleven, he had a female English teacher who was "new" and "subbing" for another teacher. Aaron described this teacher as someone who "had no clue what she was doing" and seemed "kind of spacious." As a result, the students "walked all over her." These three years of English instruction for Aaron were "kind of lame" because of his teachers' incompetencies. Being in Mr. Alonzo's English class has been the most positive learning experience for Aaron. Although Aaron admitted that kids including him do not generally like Mr. Alonzo because he is big on rules, he really likes him in class because he makes class "fun." According to Aaron, a good teacher has to have "multiple ways of explaining something" if students do not understand. For a student like Aaron who has struggled as a reader and to generate ideas as a writer, different pedagogical approaches and in particular the ability to communicate ideas are understandably important. He also identified the ability to control a class as an important quality in a teacher. Again this trait might be directly connected to his experiences with two English teachers (one male and one female) who were unable to control their students. In grades nine and ten, Aaron indicated that his male English teacher was ineffective because the students were socializing and not doing any work. The inexperience of

www.manaraa.com

Aaron's grade eleven female teacher, as he explained, contributed to her inability to manage or control the class.

Control is a necessity. Discourses about male teachers as disciplinarians permeate boys' literacy debates (see Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Francis, 2008; Haase, 2008; Keddie, 2007a, 2007b; King, 1998; Lingard *et al.*, 2009; Mills *et al.*, 2008; Skelton, 2001a). Arguments in support of the call for more male teachers claim that men are needed in schools as disciplinarians; however, Aaron was adamant that he does not understand the ability to control a class as a trait unique to either sex: "No it doesn't really matter if the teacher is a man or woman as long as they have control over the class. I understand that it is sometimes harder for a female teacher to take control over a class of stupid teenagers but as long as they like know what they are doing and can control it." Here, he suggests that the authority of female teachers is sometimes undermined; however, he continued by identifying some female teachers who teach in other subject areas who are very good at controlling their classes and a male teacher whom students "pretty much just fluff him off." Through these examples, Aaron points to discipline as a performance rather than an innate trait that lies in the body (see Francis, 2008, p. 110) and illustrates how the attribution of aspects of behaviour as masculine or feminine is highly problematic (see Maclinnes, 1998; Francis, 2000a; Francis, 2008). In reference to Mr. Alonzo, he pointed out that he is not exactly the type of teacher that students are afraid of, but sometimes students do pay attention more to male teachers: "Umm … I am not really sure. I am thinking it is more than … just because the male is the stronger of the sexes, so they might pay attention … they might show a little more respect which I don`t understand why. " Keddie (2007a) points out that as,

www.manaraa.com

> students associate power and legitimate authority with the hegemonic masculine body and dominant masculine characteristics, and conversely, powerlessness with the female body and femininity, the professionalism of young female teacher, particularly in the areas of discipline and behaviour management, is frequently undermined (p. 24).

Mr. Alonzo, through his explicit disruption of gender norms, is not understood as a strong disciplinarian or a man to be feared, and yet as pointed out by Aaron, he is shown respect, a benefit of the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell, 1995, p. 79). In this way, Aaron draws attention to the "unsaid" that underpins discourses about the need for more male teachers; boys are more likely to listen to male teachers because they are understood to be natural disciplinarians (Foucault, 1972). He shows his awareness of this societal norm even though it is not entirely consistent with his personal experience. As Connell (2002) points out: "People growing up in a gendered society unavoidably encounter gender relations, and actively participate in them" (p. 98).

Jason. During my time in Mr. Alonzo's class, I did not observe any overt participation (i.e., answering questions, contributing to group discussions) from Jason. He had a very quiet presence in the class. That is not to say that he was not completing the required tasks, but signs of engagement were not evident. Perhaps the fact that English is his least favourite subject and the fact that he was frustrated by his teacher's pedagogical approach to the course serve, at least in part, as explanations for this appearance of disengagement. Jason told me that despite the fact that English is not his "strong point," he is a reader outside of school and does not mind writing. Up until grade twelve, Jason had been in the academic/university preparation stream in English language arts. In fact, his grade twelve English credit is the only college-level course on his high-

www.manaraa.com

school transcript. Although he achieved a mark in the seventies in both grades nine and ten, he struggled in grade eleven. As a result, he transferred from grade eleven university-preparation English to grade twelve college English because he wants to go into police work and thought that a higher mark in college-level English would serve him better than a low mark in the university-preparation course.

Jason's English teachers. Like Aaron, three of Jason's four English teachers have been male. As mentioned above, Jason's marks, other than in grade eleven, have been consistently in the seventies. Jason does not attribute his success or lack of it to his teachers' genders: "it just depends on how they teach it to me" (see Francis *et al.*, 2008). His narratives also suggest that his achievement is tied to his own interests and motivation.

In grade nine, Jason had a female teacher whom he described as "quite strict" and "right to the book." He said that she seemed to be "following the guidelines exactly," and admitted that he found it tough. In grade ten, Jason had a male English teacher who showed a lot of movies in his class: "It was mostly movies and stuff and then you'd watch a movie and then talk about the movie." Although this approach made achieving in the course easy for Jason, he did not like it: "Just sitting there. I don't feel like I gained anything just sitting there watching a movie and then telling him what I saw in the movie on a piece of paper." For Jason, grade eleven seemed to be a blur. He told me that he had Mr. Alonzo as a teacher, but he could not remember what books they read or what they studied. He said, "I guess you remember what you want to remember." He did remember, however, that he did not "do the work," that it was his "own fault" and that he "did well on the exam which brought [his] mark way up." Although Mr. Alonzo was also his teacher in grade twelve, Jason found his teacher's pedagogical approach to be dramatically

www.manaraa.com

different. These differences are attributed to the expectations associated with the different streams, which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section.

Despite a majority of male English teachers in secondary-school for Jason, he believes that he received the best education from his female teacher. According to Jason, the tendency for male teachers to be a lot more "lenient" with their students is not conducive to learning. He suggested that although some students might respect a teacher who gives them more "leeway," many students "use it to their advantage whenever they can," which might foster better relationships between some boys and their teachers but not achievement. This perception of male teachers as more laid back is consistent with the research of Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012). Although he later back tracked and pointed out that not all female teachers are strict, he maintained that from "an educational standpoint, it would be better" to have female teachers because all of the male teachers he has had have been "really lenient." To support this claim, he draws attention to his experience in grade ten English with a male teacher who showed movies, and his inability to remember what happened in grade eleven.

The impact of streaming. The streaming of students into ability or destination groups has been a contested issue (see Curtis *et al.*, 1992; Osborne, 1999; Pinto, 2006). Students in academic or university-preparation courses in Ontario are understood to be "academic" learners; whereas, students in applied, college and workplace courses are considered "practical" learners (Pinto, 2006, p. 79). Jason's experience in both streams is particularly illuminating, given the overwhelming number of students in applied English who fail the OSSLT.

Jason, up until grade twelve, had always taken academic English. In fact, his grade twelve English credit is his only college-level credit. When I asked him why he made the switch

www.manaraa.com

from university-preparation to college English, he told me that English isn't his "strong point": "I didn't do so well, so I figured this would be a better fit for me." He confessed that it is not so much that he finds English difficult, but rather that he finds it "hard to focus" because he loses "interest quickly." Although Jason likes to read outside of school, he claims that the reading he is required to do for English is not relevant: "I think I lose interest because it's not relevant to anything I would normally read." Jason did not enjoy the core reading materials, such as Shakespearean plays and poetry, in his academic English courses: "I was told there was less Shakespeare and less poetry and stuff in the college course which made me want to take it even more. I don't know. I just figured if I could get a higher mark and that it would look better than a poor mark in university [university-preparation English]." Although Jason was happy about not having to read Shakespeare in his grade twelve college English course, he was frustrated with the course materials and his teacher's pedagogical approach. He found it difficult to follow at times and very difficult to engage with the texts being studied because they are chosen for students who are understood to be "practical" learners and non-readers (Pinto, 2006, p. 79). He was frustrated with the number of different learning exercises assigned within each lesson and disengaged because of the lack of carry-over from class to class: "With this course specifically, it jumps around a lot from topic to topic which also makes it harder to focus but you lose track of what you were doing before and then there's something else and then it gets confusing sometimes." My observation of this college English class, and other applied English courses at different school sites, supports Jason's claim. During my observation period at Small Town School, the class studied or engaged with non-fiction "business" texts, magazine and news articles, poems, advertisements, one-act plays and detective novels. Most of the writing required was short enough to be finished within a single class period and in response to a text read and

www.manaraa.com

discussed in class. The students were assigned next to no homework. This approach is in keeping with strategies suggested by *Me Read? No Way: A practical guide to improving boys' literacy skills*, an Ontario Ministry of Education endorsed publication. Based on my observation of other applied classes in other school sites, these materials are not unique. Magazine articles, media, news articles, graphic texts and in some cases novels that are read to the class by the teacher were mainstays in the applied and college English classes I observed. Little to no homework was also commonplace. On the other hand, core texts in the academic and university-preparation English courses tend to be more traditional, and entire units stemming over several weeks that focus on a single text common. In the academic English courses that I observed, the students were studying Shakespearean plays, novels, essays, poetry, films, short stories, author's biographies and in one case an advertisement. Jason suggested that although he finds achievement easy at the college level, he does not feel that he is learning anything and would actually prefer a more traditionally academic approach:

> I would rather do essays than what we're doing now, yeah. Like jumping around and … cause we do like a paragraph and then it will just sort of switch to something else which would be just completely irrelevant, look at pictures, talk about it and then go back to something else and it doesn't seem like we're actually accomplishing anything.

Jason draws attention to the differing expectations between the two courses and suggests that his teacher's approach in this particular college level class is unproductive. Pinto (2006) writes,

> … academic students tend to have access to more or better resources and often more challenging coursework that emphasizes education for the 'whole student'. By

www.manaraa.com

> contrast, those dealt out of academic courses tend to be exposed to curriculum considered to be more practical in nature – and lose out on exposure to a 'liberal education' which focuses on intellectual and social development (p. 79).

The nature of the course work in the applied/college level English class and its implications for the development of skills and engagement of students needs further investigation, especially given test data that very clearly pinpoints students in the applied stream of English as unsuccessful (EQAOb, 2011, p. 68-69). Jason's insights into the differences between the two streams are particularly poignant because Mr. Alonzo was his teacher in both cases, so the differences between the two courses cannot be attributed to differences in teachers. In grade eleven university-preparation English, he had "a great deal more work" – more assignments and a more sustained study of texts and writing forms. This finding is consistent with the research of Gamoran and Carbonaro (2003) in the United States who found significant differences in the amount of reading, writing and homework completed in the different streams: students in general or in Ontario applied/college streams did significantly less reading and writing and received less homework (p. 6). They also found important differences in content between the streams: "students in high tracks are more likely to be in classes that emphasize literature study, analytical writing and formal writing than students in lower tracks" (p. 6). Perhaps the type of extended study of texts and ideas pursued in the academic English stream influences students' prospects for success with the English curriculum and the OSSLT. Gamoran and Carbonaro (2003) found that "a student's track position was the best predictor of the type of English instruction s/he received" (p. 7). The findings of this research supports the work of Gamoran and Carbonaro and suggests that streaming needs to be understood as a significant factor of influence, as there are different expectations of students depending on the stream of English.

www.manaraa.com

Evan. This boy sat at the front of the classroom by the door. He was very quiet in class, so as an observer it was difficult to assess his learning and engagement. What set him apart from his peers was his voracious reading habit. He often spent his time quietly reading in class, even when he was supposed to be engaged in another learning exercise, and he spent many of his lunch hours in the classroom reading a book from Mr. Alonzo's classroom library. Despite his reading habit, Evan did not achieve his grade twelve college English credit. When I asked Mr. Alonzo about Evan's poor achievement in the course, he said, "Despite his voracious reading. He just retreats into books. Too bad, he's a nice lad, and I thought there was hope that we'd hold on to him unlike an older brother who just disappeared eventually from the school.**"** Neither Mr. Alonzo or Evan provided me with any details that would explain why he "retreats" into books or why his older brother "disappeared" from school, but his teacher did allude to the "difficulties" he faces on a couple of occasions. All Evan told me about his life outside of school is that in his spare time, he does "housework and stuff like that," reads if he can "find a decent enough book to read" and spends time "searching up stuff" on topics of interest such as cars on the computer.

Despite the fact that Evan has only had male English teachers, he maintained that the gender of the teacher is not a significant factor for him. Although he sometimes finds English boring, he did not blame the teachers. He is a student who sometimes struggles to complete assignments because he does not enjoy writing his ideas down. Although he feels quite confident in his ability to gather information and summarize it in his own words, the reality is that his reluctance to complete assignments interferes with his achievement in English.

The qualities of a good teacher. Evan, like most of the participants in this case, spoke highly of Mr. Alonzo's teaching style. Evan feels he is a good teacher because he helps his students make connections through story-telling; he is flexible with deadlines; he helps his

www.manaraa.com

students one-on-one as necessary; he knows his subject matter; he is able to explain ideas; he is funny, and he cares. When I asked Evan if he thinks Mr. Alonzo is an effective teacher because he is a man, he said, "I think it is because he is a teacher, so like he understands exactly what's going on in his classrooms, so he knows exactly what needs to be done and if a person needs help or not." He then continued to draw a comparison between Mr. Alonzo and a female mathematics teacher who always has time to help her students: "she takes it out of her lunch time to make sure you understand it." These qualities of a good teacher were recurrent in the interview transcripts for this case and many of the others. Evan did not care about the gender of his teacher. For him, he wants teachers who know what they are doing and care (see Francis *et al.*, 2008).

All of the boys in this particular case indicated that the "way" teachers teach is more important for their achievement than their gender, making Evan's position far from unique; however, I include a discussion of his case to draw attention to the qualities that this boy who is an avid reader, who has only ever had male English teachers, and who failed grade twelve college English understands to be important. The qualities of good teaching are not gender-specific. He identified both a female teacher and his male English teacher, Mr. Alonzo, as two teachers who possess the qualities of effective teaching. For Evan, however, his teachers' sound pedagogical knowledge is still not enough, as Evan was unable to achieve his English credit. This particular case draws attention to the multiple factors that can either contribute to or detract from a student's success both within and beyond the school walls. For Evan, the issues that prevented achievement in his grade twelve English class could not be rectified by a female teacher, a male teacher, or good pedagogy. This case, in particular, highlights not only the limitations of reform strategies advocating the recruitment of male English teaches, but also the

www.manaraa.com

futility of any quick-fix solutions to a complex phenomenon such as boys' literacy underachievement.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the analysis of one of the five cases studied for this research. Throughout this thesis, I have argued for the need for more nuanced, context-specific evidence to understand the factors influencing boys' underachievement in secondary-school English beyond the singularity of their teachers' genders.

By focusing on a single, information-rich case, a more in-depth understanding of the particularities of one male English teacher and some of the boys in his classroom has been gained. Mr. Alonzo's pedagogy cannot be reduced to the "singularity of gender" (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). That is not to say that gender does not play a part in his teaching practices, but the gendered acts he performs in his English classroom are only part of his subjectivity (see Butler, 1990). In addition, his teaching practices are also understood to be influenced by his personal and professional history and biography (Smulyan, 2006). His working-class background and age are understood to, on one hand, facilitate a connection and, on the other, distance him from the boys in his classroom. His history as a French teacher has been influential in the way he understands language, language learners and the practice of reading. This history has influenced his philosophy as an English teacher: a philosophy that embraces a *Progressive English* model and *English as Critical Literacy* and fostered little attachment to Canonical literature. Finally, his own personal politics of masculinity challenge hegemonic notions of what it means to be a boy and a man, and are understood to be an integral part of his teacher identity. His embodiment of complexity draws attention to the limitations of the sex role model theory that has been adopted

www.manaraa.com

to inform reform strategies (Connell, 1995; Martino 2008b). This dominant approach is defined by a particular regime of truth (Foucault, 1984) that for the most part goes unchallenged because it is informed by ideology rather than empiricism.

By giving voice to the boys in this case and unpacking their understandings of the influential factors for their achievement in English language arts beyond the "singularity of gender" (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010) , this thesis highlights the salience of factors such as the differential capital associated with social class, streaming, and the impact of essentialist discourses and gender norms. It resoundingly indicates that a teacher's pedagogical knowledge and practice are more significant than a teacher's gender.

Berk identified trustworthiness, responsibility, energetic, talkative, knowledgeable, and reliability as effective teacher traits. Jack wanted a teacher who was enthusiastic about the subject and cared about what s/he was doing. Aaron wanted a teacher who could control the class and Evan wanted a teacher who could explain things in a way that he would be able to understand. Such qualities are not exclusive to either male or female teachers. This finding also supports other research. For example, Ashley and Lee (2003) found that the boys in their study wanted their teachers to be firm but fair, able to control the class, know their subjects and be enthusiastic about that subject, and be able to explain ideas clearly (also see Lahelma, 2000; Lingard *et al.*, 2002). Thus, the qualities associated with effective teaching, and in this case effective literacy instruction are understood to be gender non-specific.

The particulars of this case raise questions about the common sense assumption that the recruitment of male English teachers, on the basis of their sex, is an effective reform strategy to address boys' literacy underachievement (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004; for a critique of

www.manaraa.com

this strategy, see Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Carrington *et al*., 2008; Coulter & McNay, 1993; Francis, 2008; Francis *et al*., 2008; Martino & Frank, 2006; Martino & Kehler, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a). They give voice to the perspectives of the boys in a specific, contextualized location which creates the opportunity for new understanding of the factors influencing their engagement and achievement in English language arts. The in-depth understanding (Patton, 2002) gained from undertaking case study research is critical as it offers "complexities for further investigation" that are currently not addressed in current policy discussions about the influence of male teachers (Stake, 2000, p. 448).

www.manaraa.com

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Obviously before you did anything of that nature [replace female English teachers with male English teachers], you would have to know as an absolute fact that male teachers actually did influence boys positively and that it was actually gender that was the variable and not just skill as a teacher. If hypothetically, it was found that yes boys do respond better to a male teacher if an equivalent female teacher is female then I am not quite sure what you do with that. I think that it would be smart to try to understand why before taking any action.

(Raymond at Upwardly Mobile School)

Less than four years ago when I requested a leave from my position as an English Department Head to do this research, I could not have foreseen where this journey into academia would take me. I knew from my previous research (Watson, 2007), the factors influencing the literacy achievement of both boys and girls cannot be reduced to simplistic, essentialist notions of gender and that quick-fixes such as the inclusion of more boy-friendly materials and teaching methods are counter-productive. I did not know, however, what I, as a female English teacher turned academic researcher, would find as I entered the world of male English teachers and the boys in their classes. I had no idea that it would take me to a place where I would meet bright and insightful boys like Raymond (above) who would be able to succinctly articulate key issues that need to be addressed if effective reforms for boys' achievement are to be implemented. First, we must determine that the singularity of a teacher's gender is indeed a critical factor of influence for boys' achievement as literacy learners. Secondly, if we find that it is, we must try to understand why before taking any action. This research, through its qualitative case-study methodology, focused on dominant policy reforms and media-generated rhetoric about the

www.manaraa.com

influence of male English teachers, on the basis of gender affiliation, to improve boys' literacy achievement (see Ontario College of Teachers, 2004, for example). By engaging with feminist poststructuralist, Foucauldian and masculinities frameworks, this research has attempted to interrupt dominant discourses that endorse such common sense notions that inform policy decisions, by providing nuanced, information-rich empirical evidence that draws attention to social, cultural and pedagogical factors that shape teacher-student relationships and interactions in the classroom and their capacity to influence student achievement. In essence, it attempted to do what Raymond suggested needs to be done: try to build more in-depth knowledge about the extent to which the gender of teachers influences boys' achievement in the English classroom. This research has explicitly responded to the recommendation that more research concerning the influence of male teachers on boys' achievement be conducted (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004). Its detailed case analysis enabled me to interrogate dominant framings of the problem and build a more sophisticated theorization of teacher influence that moves beyond role modeling and simplistic essentialist notions of gender.

In this concluding chapter, I summarize and synthesize my findings, discuss the significance and implications of this research for education policy stakeholders, address the limitations of the study, suggest opportunities for further research and offer some final reflections in light of having conducted such a qualitative inquiry.

Research Questions

In this dissertation I reported on qualitative case-study research that investigated male English teachers and their capacity to positively influence the literacy achievement of boys in the secondary-school context. Although male teachers are currently being targeted to address the underachievement of boys in schools (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004), making this research

www.manaraa.com

both timely and relevant, this approach appears to be grounded more in ideology than empiricism. Truth claims about male teachers being naturally equipped to address the learning needs and interests of boys on the basis of their supposed gender affiliation propel current reform initiatives even though a growing body of research challenges this approach (see Lam *et al.*, 2010; Neugebauer *et al.*, 2011; Sokal *et al.*, 2005; Sokal *et al.*, 2007; Sokal & Katz, 2008). This study further adds to this body of research. It addressed the need for more research on "the correlation between the achievement of boys and the presence of male teachers in Ontario classrooms" (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004, p. 27) by gathering context-specific, information-rich data to understand more deeply the multiple factors of influence for boys who are understood to be the "new disadvantaged" literacy learners (Epstein *et al.*, 1998: Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Martino, 2008a; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Rowan *et al.*, 2002; Titus, 2004). The following questions made possible a production of knowledge that extends beyond numbers as they are reported by high-stakes tests such as the OSSLT. They are:

1. What evidence exists to support or challenge the claims that male teachers influence positively boys' achievement as literacy learners?
2. What can we learn from boys themselves about the influence of male teachers in terms of their capacity to improve their literacy achievement? For example, do high achieving boys attribute their literacy achievement to the influence of a teacher on the basis of gender affiliation? How do low achieving boys explain the factors that contribute to their underachievement?
3. What are the factors that influence male English teachers' pedagogy?
4. How do male English teachers understand their capacity for influence concerning boys' achievement in English?

www.manaraa.com

5. What can be learned through a detailed case analysis of one male English teacher and the boys in his class about the significant factors contributing to boys' underachievement in English language arts?

These questions were designed to "create spaces" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 23) for both the male English teachers and the boys in their classrooms who participated in this research to share their experiences and insights as men in English, a subject that is understood to be feminized (Martino, 1997; 1997; 2001; Millard, 1997; Simpson, 1974). Overall, the research was conceived as a response to a pervasive policy- and media-fuelled discourse about the role and capacity of male teachers to influence boys' literacy achievement and overall engagement with schooling.

Research Findings

The findings of this research are organized under three headings: (a) boys' understanding of their teachers' gender as a source of influence, (b) male English teachers' subjectivities and practice, and (c) the importance of context-specific data in informing education policy. These headings enable me to discuss the research questions for this study in a focused and readable manner (Patton, 2002). Ultimately, the findings as they are presented here serve as a means by which to address the central questions for this research - Is there any evidence to support or challenge the claims that male English teachers influence positively boys' achievement as literacy learners? To what extent does case study research enable a deeper understanding of the influences that impact both male English teachers and male students as they interact and learn in the English language arts classroom?

Boys' understanding of their teachers' gender as a source of influence. This research study found that the majority of boys who participated (twenty-five out of twenty-nine) indicated that the gender of the teacher does not influence their achievement in English. These boys

www.manaraa.com

pointed to their own experiences with particular teachers, both male and female, to identify a number of factors not specific to gender to account for their connections or disconnections with their teachers and the potentiality of such pedagogical relations to influence their literacy achievement. What also emerged from a close analysis of the interview transcripts of the four boys who did understand their teachers' gender to be linked to achievement was evidence of other significant factors whose influence cannot be denied. These boys' complex and sometimes contradictory accounts often stemmed from meta-narratives about gender affiliation (common interests or shared experiences) as a source of connection; however, their particular narratives about their relationships and interactions with their male teachers suggested that such connections do not translate into better achievement. The perspectives of the boys in this study also disrupted commonly accepted understandings of male teachers as role models that are grounded in gender normalization. Joel, for example, identified his male English teacher as his role model based on their mutual interest in the arts, in particular the theatre. Joel also identified his female drama teacher as a role model for the same reason. Joel's understanding of these two teachers as role models raises questions about the validity of using a sex role model of socialization to understand his relationship with such teachers and to inform educational reforms designed to address the literacy achievement of boys.

Male English teachers' subjectivities and practice. When the media and educational stakeholders proclaim that male teachers are needed to offset notions about English language arts being a feminized subject area and to address the literacy interests and achievement of boys, the qualities of such male English teachers are seldom discussed or explicitly identified (see Mill *et al*., 2004). This research found that the male English teacher participants embody multiple masculinities (see Butler, 1997, 2004; Connell, 1995). Their histories, biographies, geographical

www.manaraa.com

locals, teaching contexts, masculinity politics and philosophies as English teachers are intertwined and complex, calling into question essentialist claims in which teacher effectiveness or influence is reduced to a biological basis of embodiment. A number of male English teachers in this study identified personality traits and circumstances in their own lives that fostered connections with their teachers which influenced their understanding of their capacity to influence the boys in their own classrooms. A careful analysis, of these cases, however, suggested that these connections, like the connections they foster with their own students, stem from multiple, complex factors beyond gender such as personalities, interests, sound pedagogical content knowledge and a pedagogy of caring (see Francis *et al*., 2008; Francis & Skelton, 2001; Gilligan, 1977; King, 1998; Noddings, 2003). Solis (2009) writes,

> At the heart of effective content teaching is the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. If we are to improve the quality of teaching and learning in critical core content areas, we need to resist some old traditions in professional learning. Instead, we should acknowledge and expand the insights of experts who develop competence in subject matter teaching. We should additionally commit to high quality professional development targeted to develop this expertise. When we do this, we support the growth of the teacher as a person and a professional who can expertly lead a student to academic success.

This research concludes that if effective reforms to address boys' literacy underachievement are to be implemented, we must turn our lens away from biology as a critical factor of influence to address the significance of pedagogy. The pedagogical practices of teachers which are influenced by multiple and complex factors are understood to be critical factors for boys' engagement and

www.manaraa.com

achievement in secondary-school English language arts (also see Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a).

The importance of context-specific data to inform education policy.

Patton (2002) points out that "qualitative inquiry elevates context as critical to understanding" (p. 63). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) suggests that, "we have no idea how to decipher or decode an action, a gesture, a conversation, or an exclamation unless we see it embedded in context" (p. 41). This research study grew out of a concern that numbers are inadequate to explain the complexities associated with literacy achievement. High-stakes literacy test results report a decontextualized measure. These results, through the way they are categorized and reported, silence a number of critical influential factors. They are presented in generalized terms beyond the limits of time and space and devoid of contextual details (Luke *et al.*, 2010). This research, through its case study design, drew attention to the importance of context-sensitive understandings of individual cases (Patton, 2002). This research found that local school contexts are linked to male teachers' understanding of their capacity for influence. It illustrated the significance of how subjectivities relate to local community and school contexts and how individual male teachers come to understand themselves as a necessary basis for building a deeper understanding of student achievement that moves beyond essentialist understandings of gender affiliation (see Crichlow, 1999; Carrington and McPhee, 2008; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). It also found that when the boys were understood within their contexts, a number of critical factors of influence for their engagement and achievement in secondary-school English language arts were made visible. For example, the boys at Small Town School identified multiple pedagogical factors that contributed to their achievement: pedagogies of discipline and control, pedagogy of care, pedagogical content knowledge and differences in

www.manaraa.com

learning expectations as a result of course streaming. By attending to contextual details, social issues such as the demands of part-time jobs, the lack of social and financial capital and evidence challenging claims about boys' natural predisposition toward gender norms were raised. These nuanced, context and school-related details are understood to be critical if effective school reforms are to be implemented to target the boys and girls who continue to underachieve in our schools.

Research Significance and Implications

This research is understood to contribute to a body of research that calls into question claims about the capacity of male teachers, by virtue of being male, to positively influence boys' achievement as literacy learners (see Lam *et al*., 2010; Neugebauer *et al*., 2011; Sokal *et al*., 2005; Sokal *et al*., 2007; Sokal & Katz, 2008). By privileging a single framing of the boys' literacy underachievement and not exploring others, reform initiatives risk being ill-informed and misdirected. This research, by embracing the concept of theoretically-informed empiricism (Anyon, 2009), "helps us understand, expand our understanding of, and critically judge what counts as relevant knowledge" (p. 8). It has made a significant contribution in that it crosses a number of fields: boys' education and policy, English language arts education and critical sociology of masculinities. First of all, it called into question current reform strategies targeting male teachers as central to the remediation of boys' literacy underachievement. The boys in this study very clearly pointed to a number of mediating factors to explain their connections or disconnections with their male English teachers and their achievement in English. What also emerged from this research is the need to disaggregate the achievement data collected from high-stakes testing not just along gender lines, and to collect data from multiple sources to achieve a more nuanced understanding of which boys are underachieving. Clearly, not all boys are failing,

www.manaraa.com

and yet education policy and media continue to make claims about the failure of generic boys. Many of the boys in this study who struggled as English language arts students had less capital than others (Bourdieu, 1984) and were enrolled in applied and college-level English classes, a category of influence confirmed by EQAO data (EQAO, 2012b). The findings of this research suggest that greater attention needs to be paid to the factors of influence including the learning expectations for and pedagogical approaches used in these streams (see Curtis *et al.*, 1992).

Secondly, this research raised questions about the nature of English language arts education. The male English teachers who participated in this research embraced a mixture of different models for the teaching of English (Ball *et al,* 1990). Their personal philosophies as English teachers stem from a number of complex and interwoven factors attributable to their own subjectivities and histories. English continues to be a contentious subject, as its purposes are sometimes traditional, sometimes liberal, and sometimes explicitly political (see Ball *et al.*, 1990; Fleischer and Fox, 2005; Hawthorne *et al.*, 2012; Peim, 1993 Wixon *et al.*, 2004). The inattention to the quality and nature of the subject of English and its teachers is understood to be problematic, given the important role English language arts plays in literacy instruction (see Ruggles Gere & Berebitsky, 2009). This study has implications for English education and professional learning communities. English teachers require training to prepare them to address "shifts in culture and community, flows of capital and discourse, emergent technologies and communications media" in addition to literature and language instruction (Luke, 2004, p. 86). In the subject of English, teachers are faced with expanding their repertoires to include intercultural texts and learning, media analysis, multiliteracies, technologies, and critical literacy skills in addition to print skills required by high-stakes testing (Colarusso, 2009, 2010; Heron-Hruby *et al.*, 2008).

www.manaraa.com

This research also has implications for critical sociology of masculinities, by drawing attention to power/knowledge (Foucault, 1972) that underpins assumptions about gender affiliation and role modelling. Discourses about gender regimes and norms play a role in the mediation of classroom practice and "self-fashioning" of male teachers in English language arts, which either perpetuate heteronormative versions of masculinity or "ruptures" them (Sondergaard, 2002), drawing attention to the limitations of essentialist notions about what male teachers bring to the English classroom. This research provided a lens to rethink assumptions that underpin the call for male English teachers as a remediation strategy. It challenged concepts of masculinity that are "fixed" (Connell, 2002, p. 4) and embraced masculinities as "configurations of practice structured by gender relations" (Connell, 1995, p. 44). The male English teachers and boys in this research cannot be placed in "static containers" (Kimmel, 1987, p. 12). They actively negotiated and renegotiated their subjectivities to either subscribe to or challenge gender regimes within their local contexts. Thus, masculinities are understood to be constructed, multiple and steeped in power relations. This conception of masculinities raises serious concerns about claims that male teachers are needed as role models to improve boys' achievement by drawing attention to multiple masculinities (Connell, 1995). More broadly, this research points to the limitations of a social imaginary (Apple, 2001; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a) that is defined by a politics of gender essentialism and a reification of hegemonic heteronormative masculinity. Building cultures that question such binary gender essentialism need to be understood as part of broader political and curricular project involving a commitment to critically questioning such social arrangements and their institutionalization, building acceptance and supporting alternative versions of masculinity.

www.manaraa.com

Finally, this research raises questions about the policy research gap. We need more critical frameworks that question the essentialist basis of sex role socialization. This research points to the need to address broader political, critical and philosophical questions related to the perpetuation and re-traditionalizing tendencies in schools, school boards and in the popular culture to reassert hegemonic and binary constructions of gender.

Neoliberal agendas are connected to the strategic mobilization of knowledge about brain-sex differences, for example, and justify the industry that has emerged to address boys as the "new disadvantaged" (Epstein *et al.,* 1998: Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Martino, 2008a; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Rowan *et al.,* 2002; Titus, 2004). By establishing this evidentiary basis, strategies to remasculinize the English classroom are adopted, and the source of the problem is considered to be related to the feminine nature of both schooling and the subject of English language arts.

Limitations

This dissertation collected data from twenty-nine boys, eleven male secondary-school English teachers and one female secondary-school English teacher; however, given the scope of this thesis, I was unable to report on all of this data. I struggled with decisions concerning what to include in this dissertation: which voices would be heard and which ones would remain silent.

I originally intended to unpack and report on two cases in a single analysis chapter (six cases in three chapters); however, as I began to write these chapters, I found that I was unable to achieve the depth required to illustrate the layers of complexity in the individual cases. Although I struggled with this decision to unpack only one case in a holistic manner, the space is this dissertation was inadequate to include further in-depth analysis. In the end, I selected Small Town School for a detailed case analysis, a critical case in that the boys who participated in this

www.manaraa.com

study from that school were the lowest achieving, as a group, of all of boys in this research. This decision freed up space to devote one chapter to the boys. It facilitated a more in-depth focus on the central question for this thesis regarding whether the boys considered their teachers' gender to have any influence on their interest and achievement in English language arts, and yielded significant data about the boys' overwhelming resistance to such claims. It enabled me to attend to the voices of the boys, those who are directly affected by education policy initiatives (see Cook-Sather, 2002, Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1992). This organizational design also enabled me to attend to the pedagogy of the male English teachers that might have been lost through the unpacking of entire cases within three separate chapters. Rather, focusing on boys across various school contexts enabled me to gesture towards the various differences and similarities of the pedagogical contexts in which the boys and their different teachers are situated. The influential factors that play a part for both the boys and their male teachers are so numerous, complex and interwoven, I feared that I would not be able to disentangle them enough to illustrate the importance that models for teaching English play for individual teachers and how such philosophical orientations are embedded or enmeshed in biographical and historical trajectories and specificities. Subscription to thesis models is considered to be gender-neutral, and yet receives little to no attention in male teacher debates.

Another limitation of this study is the absence of female voices. Jones (2006) suggests that acquiring the perspectives of female teachers would greatly enhance our understanding of the issues surrounding boys' underachievement and that there would be much to gain by listening to women. Unfortunately, although I concur, there simply was not time or space to adequately deal with female perspectives in this study.

www.manaraa.com

Research Opportunities

In light of the findings, implications, and limitations, the openings for further research in the fields of boys' education, English education and critical sociology of masculinities are numerous. This research has begun the process of identifying other critical factors of influence for boys' achievement; however, there is still much work to be done. Large scale longitudinal research with mixed methods has the potential to generate deeper understandings of the complex relationships and interactions between male teachers and their students. Further investigation into the nature of the subject of English and its association with the "feminine" is warranted. Many of the boys in this research disrupted this notion, and yet it continues to underpin the targeting of male English teachers and attempts to remasculinize the subject of English. In addition, a closer examination of the pedagogies of English teachers, both male and female, is understood to be worthy of further investigation. An understanding of English as a subject and the various models that teachers adopt are understood to play a critical part in informing classroom practice; however, the nature of this influence needs further investigation. Also, I had originally intended to create space for the voices of female English teachers in this study, for as Jones (2006) points out, much can be learned from the female perspective. Given the scope of this thesis, those female voices were not included, opening up an important opportunity for future research. Finally, this research does not wish to suggest that male English teachers should not be recruited. On the contrary, initiatives to recruit a diverse teaching population – according to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation – should be embraced; however, further research into how the cultural and social norms governing conceptions of teaching as women's work is needed (Acker, 1995/96; Williams, 1993). In addition, research examining alternative explanatory frameworks

www.manaraa.com

beyond role modeling to remasculinize the subject of English and improve boys' literacy achievement is needed.

Final Thoughts

At the beginning of this chapter, I included words from Raymond, one of the boys who participated in this study, because the maturity and wisdom presented in his words resonate with me. He points to the importance of determining that gender and not the quality of teaching is indeed the most significant variable, prior to taking action. In our current education climate, boys are identified as disadvantaged and male teachers are proclaimed their rescuers, on the basis of on a single, decontextualized measure (high-stakes testing); however, this measure focuses the category of gender and silences other potential categories of influence (see Luke *et al*., 2010). Martino (2011) cautions it is important that we "critically evaluate the evidentiary bases for many of the claims about failing boys" (p. 1). Connolly (2008) also contends that we need to "scrutinise" number-based evidence, suggesting that qualitative research has the potential to add much insight and understanding to the numbers produced through quantitative work. In addition, the male teacher shortage has been used by education policy and media to explain boys' underachievement as literacy learners, and male teachers are actively being recruited for the classroom (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004). These actions are being undertaken without a clear empirical basis for such an approach (see Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Carrington *et al.*, 2008; Francis *et al*., 2008; Francis, 2008; Jones, 2006, 2007; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012a; Mills *et al*., 2004; Ontario College of Teachers, 2004; Pepperell & Smedley, 1998; Skelton,2002, 2007).

Raymond also suggests that he believes "it would be smart to try to understand why before taking any action." This research, through its qualitative approach, has attempted to gain

www.manaraa.com

such understanding by allowing male English teachers and the boys in their classes to tell their stories and to understand that their specific contexts, biographies and histories are important in making sense of their particular perspectives. It has raised questions about educational reform initiatives and media rhetoric about the capacity of male English teachers, on the basis of gender affiliation, to improve boys' achievement in the secondary-school English language arts classroom by examining context-related factors that are missing from explanatory frameworks grounded in sex role theories of socialization. It has attempted to understand the "more" of discourses that claim to report the "truth" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Without acknowledging the belief systems and agendas that inform certain truths or even acknowledging other truths that might exist, our understandings are impoverished at best. Finally, it has attempted to be "smart" (see Raymond's quote introducing the chapter) by attending to "why people responded as they did, the context in which they responded, and their deeper thoughts and behaviors that governed their responses" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40).

www.manaraa.com

References

Acker, S. (1995/96). Gender and teachers' work. *Review of Research in Education, 21,* 99-162.

Alloway, N. & Gilbert, P. (1997). Boys and literacy: Lessons from Australia. *Gender and Education, 9*(1) 49-61.

Alloway, N., Freebody P., Gilbert, P. & Muspratt, S. (2002). *Boys, Literacy and Schooling: Expanding the Repertoires of Practice.* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Education, Science and Training.

Alloway, N., & Dalley-Trim, L. (2006). Success for boys: Boys and literacy module. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, Curriculum Corporation.

Alvermann, D. E. (2001). Some "wonderings" about literacy teacher education. *Journal of Reading Education, 27*(1), 9-13.

Alvermann, D. E. (2002). Effective literacy instruction for adolescents. *Journal of Literacy Research, 34,*189-208.

American Association of University Women. (2008). Where the girls are: The facts about gender equity in education. Washington, DC: AAUW Educational Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.aauw.org/research/whereGirlsAre.cfm

American Federation of Teachers. (2008). *Becoming a teacher.* Retrieved from http://www.aft.org/pdfs/tools4teachers/becomingateacher0608.pdf

Anderman, L., Andrzejewski, C.E., & Allen, J. (2011). How do teachers support students motivation and learning in their classrooms? *Teachers College Record, 113*(5), 969-1003.

Anderson, D., Imdieke, S. & Standerford, N. S. (2011). Feedback please: Studying self in the online classroom. *International Journal of Instruction, 4*(1), 3-15.

www.manaraa.com

Anderson, J. (2006). A proposed step in closing the gap. Paper presented at the Ontario Ministry of Education Research Symposium, Airport Hilton Hotel, Toronto, January 20-21.

Anyon, J. (1981). Social class and school knowledge. *Curriculum Inquiry 11*(1) 3-42.

Anyon, J. (2009). *Theory and educational research: Toward critical social explanation*. New York: Routledge.

Apple, M. (2001). *Educating the "Right" way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality*. New York & London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Archer, J. & Macrae, M. (1991). Gender perceptions of school subjects among 10-11 year olds, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *61*, 99-103.

ASCD. (2012). How to teach boys. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/SearchResults.aspx?s=how%20to%20teach%20boys&c=1&n=10&p=0

Ashley, M. & Lee, J. (2003). *Women teaching boys: Caring and working in the primary school.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham.

Ball, S. (2006). *Education policy and social class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Ball, S., Kenny, A., & Gardiner, D. (1990). Literacy, politics and the teaching of English. In I. Goodson & P. Medway (Eds.), *Bring English to order* (pp. 47-86). London: Falmer Press.

Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.* (C. Emerson, Ed. & Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Barcan, A. (1986). English: Two decades of attrition. In D. O'Keeffe (ed.), *The wayward curriculum* (pp. 30-42). London: Social Affairs Unit.

www.manaraa.com

Barritt, L. (1986). Human sciences and the human image. *Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 4*(3), 14-22.

BBC News (2005, October 13). *Call for male primary teachers.* Retrieved from http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/l/hi/education

Bettencourt, E., Gillett, M., Gall, M., & Hull, R. (1983). Effects of teacher enthusiasm training on student on-task behavior and achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 20*, 435-450.

Bianchi, S.M., Milkie, M.A., Sayer, L.C., & Robinson, J.P. (2000). Is anyone doing the housework? Trends in the gender division of household labor. *Social Forces 79*(1), 191-228.

Biddulph, S. (1998). *Raising boys: Why boys are different—And how to help them become happy and well-balanced men.* Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts.

Biddulph, S. (1994). *Manhood: An action plan for changing men's lives*, 2nd ed. Sydney: Finch.

Bly, R. (1991). *Iron John: A book about men.* Dorset: Element.

Booth, D. (2002). *Even hockey players read: Boys, literacy and learning. Markham*, ON: Pembroke Publishers.

Borich, G. (2000). *Effective Teaching Methods,* 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Bouchard, P., Boily, I., & Proulx, M. (*2003*). *School success by gender: A catalyst for masculinist discourse*. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of judgement of taste.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.

www.manaraa.com

Boy friendly books. (2012). Good Reads Inc. Retrieved from http://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/boy-friendly

Boy-friendly books. (2012). Boston Public Library. Retrieved from http://bostonpl.bibliocommons.com/list/show/81342249_pigspen/81665600_boy-friendly_books

Boy-friendly classrooms. (n.d.). *Boys' project: Helping boys become successful men.* Retrieved from http://www.boysproject.net/classrooms.html

Brennan, R. (1995, September 13). Minister plotted 'to invent crisis. Toronto Star.

Bricheno, P., & Thornton, M. (2007). Role model, hero, or champion? Children's views concerning role models. *Educational Research, 49*(4), 383-396.

Britzman, D. (1993). Beyond rolling models: Gender and multicultural education. In S. K. Biklen & D. Pollard (Eds.), Gender and education (pp. 25–42). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Brown, M.D. (2007). I'll Have Mine Annotated, Please: Helping Students Make Connections with Texts. *The English Journal, 96*(4), 73-78.

Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture.* Cambridge: Polit Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. In K. Conboy, N. Medina & S. Stanbury (Eds.). *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory* (pp. 401-417). New York: Columbia University Press.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender.* New York: Routledge.

www.manaraa.com

Cabello, B., & Terrell, R. (1994). Making students feel like family: How teachers create warm and caring classroom climates. *Journal of Classroom Interaction, 29,* 17-23.

Canadian Teachers' Federation. (2012). *Teaching in Canada.* Retrieved from http://www.ctf-fce.ca/TIC/Default.aspx?SID=626067

Carrington, B., Francis, B., Hutchings, M., Skelton, C., Read, B., & Hall, I. (2007). Does the gender of the teacher really matter? Seven- to eight-year-olds' accounts of their interactions with their teachers. *Educational Studies, 33*(4), 397–413.

Carrington, B., & McPhee, A. (2008). Boys' underachievement and the feminization of teaching. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 34*(2), 109–120.

Carrington, B. & Skelton, C. (2003). Re-thinking 'role models': Equal opportunities in teacher recruitment in England and Wales. *Journal of Education Policy, 18*(3), 253-265.

Carrington, B., Tymms, P., & Merrell, C. (2008). Role models, school improvement and the 'gender gap'—do men bring out the best in boys and women in girls? *British Educational Research Journal, 34*(3), 315–327.

Carrol-Kelly, M. (2009). *Addressing boys' under-achievement in literacy for the foundation stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2*. Isle of Man: Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www.sch.im/boysachievement/Site/Home_files/BOY%20FRIENDLY%20UNITS%20FINAL.pdf

Carson, T. & Johnson, I. (2000). The difficulty with difference in teacher education: Towards a pedagogy of compassion. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 46*(1), 75–83.

Cealey Harrison, Wendy, & Hood-Williams, John (1998). More varieties than Heinz: Social categories and sociality in Humphries Hammersley and beyond. *Sociological Research*

www.manaraa.com

Online, *3*(1). Retrieved from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/3/1/8.html#hood-williams1998

Chege, F. (2006). Teachers' gendered identities, pedagogy and HIV/AIDS education in African settings within the ESAR. *Journal of Education, 38,* 25-44/

Cherryholmes, C.H. (1988). *Power and Criticism: Poststructural Investigations in Education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1993). *Inside/outside: Teacher research and knowledge.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Coffey, A., & Delamont, S. (2000). *Feminism and the classroom teacher*. New York: Routledge.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th Ed.). London: RouteledgeFalmer.

Cohen, M. (1998). 'A habit of healthy idleness': Boy's underachievement in historical perspective. In D. Epstein, J. Elwood, V. Hey, & J. Maw (Eds.), *Failing Boys? Issues in gender and achievement* (pp. 19-24). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Colarusso, D. M. (2009). Teaching English in the global age: Cultural conversations. Toronto, ON: Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Colarusso, D. M. (2010). Teaching English in multicultural society: Three models of reform. *Canadian Journal of Education, 33*(2), 432-458.

Collins, C., Kenway, J. & McLeod, J. (2000). *Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and Their Initial Destinations after Leaving School*. Adelaide: Deakin University, Geelong Vic. & University of South Australia.

Connell, R. W. (2002). *Gender.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

www.manaraa.com

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities.* Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Connolly, P. (2008). A critical review of some recent developments in quantitative research on gender and achievement in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of the Sociology of Education, 29*(3), 249-60.

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher, 31*(4), 3–14.

Coulter, R.P., & Greig, J.G. (2008). The man question in teaching: An historical overview. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 54*(4), 420-431.

Coulter, R., & McNay, M. (1993). Exploring men's experiences as elementary school teachers. *Canadian Journal of Education, 18*(4), 298-413.

Cox, E. (1997). Boys and girls and the costs of gendered behaviour. In *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools.* Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crichlow, W. (1999). "Be like who?": The end of innocent role model in higher education. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 15*(4), 13–26.

Crocker, R.K., & Brooker, G.M. (1986). Classroom control and student outcomes in grades 2 and 5. *American Educational Research Journal, 23*(1), 1-11.

Cummings, R. (1994). 11th graders view gender differences in reading and math. *Journal of Reading, 38*(3), 196-199.

Cumming-Potvin, W. (2007). Scaffolding, multiliteracies and reading circles. *Canadian Journal of Education, 30*(2), 483-507.

www.manaraa.com

Curtis, B., Livingstone, D.W., & Smaller, H. (1992). *Stacking the deck: The streaming of working-class kids.* Montreal, Quebec: Our Schools/Our Selves Education Foundation.

Cushman, P. (2008). So what exactly do you want? What principals mean when they say 'male role model'. *Gender and Education, 20*(2), 123–136.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). *Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

Davies, B., & Saltmarsh, S. (2007). Gender economies: Literacy and the gendered production of neo-liberal subjectivities. *Gender and Education, 19*(1), 1-20.

Deleuze, G. (1988). *Foucault.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deslandes, R., Royer, E., Turcotte, D., & Bertrand, R. (1997). School achievement at the secondary level: Influence of parenting style and parent involvement in schooling. *McGill Journal of Education, 32*(3), 191-207.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Diamond, I., & Quinby, L. (1988). *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on resistance*. Boston: Northeastern UP.

Dudley-Marling, C., Abt-Perkins, D., Sato, K., & Selfe, R. (2006). Teacher quality: The prespectives of NCTE members. *English Education, 38*(3), 167-193.

www.manaraa.com

Dutro, E. (2002). "Us boys like to read football and boy stuff": Reading masculinities, performing boyhood. *Journal of Literacy Research 34*(4) 465-500.

Dzubak, C. M. (2007). Classroom decorum: What's happening and does it matter? Retrieved from http://www.myatp.org/Synergy_1/Syn_8.pdf

Earl, L., Levin, B., Leithwood, K., Fullan, M., Watson, N., Torrance, N., Jantzi, D., Mascall, B., & Volante, L. (2003). Final Report of the External Evaluation of England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Retrieved from http://www.pgce.soton.ac.uk/ict/NewPGCE/IWB/PNS/content/downloads/publications/literacy/t_z/dfes_watchlearn010103summary.pdf

Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2010). *Towards an understanding of gender differences in literacy achievement*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.eqao.com/Research/pdf/E/FINAL_ENGLISH_Gender_Gap_Report_As_of_May_11_2010.pdf

Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2011a). *Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test: OSSLT Curriculum Connections* [web version]. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/11/Ccurrcon_Xe_0611_WEB.pdf

Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2011b). *EQAO's provincial secondary school report: Results of the grade 9 assessment of mathematics and the Ontario secondary school literacy test, 2010–2011* [web version]. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/11/EQAO_ProvincialReport_Secondary2011.pdf

www.manaraa.com

Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2012a). *About the EQAO.* Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.eqao.com/AboutEQAO/Mandate.aspx?Lang=E

Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2012b). *School, board, and provincial results.* Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.eqao.com/results/?Lang=E

Edwards, R., & Nicoll, K. (2001). Researching the rhetoric of lifelong learning. *Journal of Education Policy, 16*(2), 103-112.

Eliot, L. (2009). *Pink brain, blue brain*. Boston & New York: Mariner Books.

Eng, J. (2004). Male elementary teachers: Where are they? *Educational Insights, 8*(3). Retrieved from http://www..ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v08n03/articles/eng.html

Epstein, D., Elwood, J., Hey, V., & Maw, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Failing boys? Issues in gender and achievement.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Esplanada, J. E. (2009, June 28). Male teachers an endangered species? *Philippine Daily Inquirer.* Retrieved from http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/learning/view/20090628-212873/Male-teachers-an-endangered-species

Faludi, S. (1999). *Stiffed: The betrayal of modern man.* London: Chatto & Windus.

Fausto-Sterling, A. (1997). Beyond difference: A biologist's perspective. *Journal of Social Issues*, *53*(2), 233-258.

Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). Sexing the brain: How biologists make a difference. In *Sexing the Body*. (pp. 115-145). New York: Basic Books.

Fielding, N. G. and Fielding, J. L. (1986). *Linking Data*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

www.manaraa.com

Fine, C. (2010). *Delusions of gender: How our minds, society, and neurosexism create difference.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Fine, M. (1994). Dis-stance and other stances: Negotiation of power inside feminist research. In A. Gitlin (Ed.). *Power and method: Political activism and educational research* (pp. 13-35). New York: Routledge.

Fleischer, C., & Fox, D. L. (2005). Beginning words: Envisioning the future of English education. *English Education, 37*(4), 255-261.

Foster, V., Kimmel, M. & Skelton, C. (2001). What about the boys?: An overview of the debates. In W. Martino & B. Meyenn (Eds.). *What about the Boys?: Issues of Masculinity and Schooling.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Foucault (n.d.) Retrieved from http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock//theory/foucault.htm

Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archæology of Knowledge.* New York: Routledge. Retrieved from http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/foucault.htm

Foucault, M. (1974). 'Prisons et asiles dans le mécanisme du pouvoir' in *Dits et Ecrits, II.* Paris: Gallimard.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison.* New York: Vantage Books.

Foucault, M. (1980). Truth and power. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977, Michel Foucault* (pp. 109-133) Brighton: Harvester.

Foucault, M. (1982). Afterword: The subject and power. In H. Dreyfus, & P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and Hermeneutics* (pp. 208-226). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1984). Truth and power. In P. Rabinow (Ed.). *The Foucault Reader* (pp. 51-71). New York: Pantheon.

www.manaraa.com

Foucault, M. (1987). The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom. *Philosophy of Social Criticism, 12*, 113-131.

Foucault, M. (1988). Practicing criticism (trans. A. Sheridan et al.). In L.D. Kritzman (Ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984* (pp. 152-158). New York: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1993). About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self: Two lectures at Dartmouth. *Political Theory, 21*(2), 198-227.

Foucault, M. (1994). An interview with Michel Foucault. In J.D. Faubion (Ed.), *Power, III* (pp. 239-297). New York: The New Press.

Foucault, M. (2003). *Abnormal*: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975.* London, Verso.

Foucault, M. (2007). *Security, territory, population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977—1978.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Francis, B. (2000a). The gendered subject: Students' subject preferences and discussions of gender and subject ability, *Oxford Review of Education, 26*(1), 35-48.

Francis, B. (2000b). *Boys, girls and achievement: Addressing the classroom issues.* London: Routledge.

Francis, B. (2001). Beyond postmodernism: Feminist agency in educational research. In B. Francis & C. Skelton (Eds.), *Investigating gender: Contemporary perspectives in education* (pp. 65-76). Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Francis, B. (2008). Teaching manfully? Exploring gendered subjectivities and power via analysis of men teachers' gender performance. *Gender and Education, 20*(2), 109–122.

Francis, B., & Skelton, C. (2001). Men teachers and the construction of heterosexual masculinity in the classroom. *Sex Education, 1*(1), 9-21.

www.manaraa.com

Francis, B., & Skelton, C. (2005). *Reassessing gender and achievement: Questioning contemporary key debates*. London: Routledge.

Francis, B., Skelton, C., Carrington, B., Hutchings, M., Read, B., & Hall, I. (2008). A perfect match? Pupils' and teachers views of the impact of matching educators and learners by gender. *Research Papers in Education, 23*(1), 21–36.

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Froese-Germain, B. (2006). Educating boys: Tempering rhetoric with research, *McGill Journal of Education, 41*(2), 145-155.

Gamoran, A., & Carbonaro, W.J. (2003). High school English: A national portrait. *The High School Journal, 86*(2), 1-13.

Giampapa, F. (2010). Multiliteracies, pedagogy and identities: Teacher and student voices from a Toronto elementary school. *Canadian Journal of Education, 33*(2), 407-431.

Gee, J.P. (2004). *Situated Language and Learning: A critique of traditional schooling.* New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Gee, J.P. (2005). *An introduction to discourse analysis theory and method* (2nd Ed.). New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: towards an interpretive theory of culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.). *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books.

Gidney, R.D. (1999). *From Hope to Harris: The reshaping of Ontario schools.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated.

Gilbert, R. & Gilbert, P. (1998). *Masculinity goes to school.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Gilgun, J.F. (2005). "Grab" and good science: Writing up the results of qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 15,* 256-262.

www.manaraa.com

Gilligan, C. (1977). In a different voice: Women's conception of the self and morality. *Harvard Educational Review, 47,* 481-517.

Giroux, H. (1992). *Border crossing: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York: Routledge.

Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies of qualitative research.* Chicago: Aldine.

Goodwyn, A. (1992). English teachers and the Cox models. *English in Education, 26*(3), 4-10.

Gore, J.M. (1995). On the continuity of power relations in pedagogy. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 5*(2), 165-188.

Gore, L. (2010). Relationship between high school students' use of cell phones and iPods and their effect on classroom grades. Retrieved from http://digital.lib.odu.edu:8000/dspace/bitstream/123456789/538/1/Gore_Lynsey_Thesis7_30.docx

Grabill, J. T., & Hicks, T. (2005). Multiliteracies meet methods: The case for digital writing in English education. *English Education, 37*(4), 301-311.

Graham, L. (2005, November). Discourse analysis and the critical use of Foucault. Paper presented at Australian Association for Research in Education, Sydney.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1990). "Can there be a human science?" *Person-Centred Review, 5*(2), 130-54.

Gurian, M. (2002). Where it all begins: The biology of boyhood. In *The Jossey-bass Reader on Gender in Education* (pp. 101-124). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

www.manaraa.com

Haase, M. (2008). 'I don't do the mothering role that lots of female teachers do': Male teachers, gender, power and social organization. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 29*(6), 597–608.

Hall, C., & Coles, M. (2001). Boys, books and breaking boundaries: Developing literacy in and out of school (pp. 211-221). In W. Martino & B. Meyenn (Eds.), *What about the boys? Issues of masculinity in schools.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Harding, S. (Ed.). (1987). *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues.* Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Hawthorne, S., Goodwyn, A., George, M., Reid, L., & Shoffner, M. (2012). Extending the conversation: The state of English education: Considering possibilities in troubled times *English Education, 44*(3), 288-311.

Hearn, J. 2004. From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men. *Feminist Theory, 5*(1), 49–72.

Heck, R. (2009). The effectiveness and student achievement: Investigating a multilevel cross-classified model. *Journal of Educational Administration, 47*(2), 227-249.

Herman, J. L., & Golan, S. (1993). The effects of standardized testing on teaching and schools. Educational Measurement.' *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 12*(4), 20-25.

Heron-Hruby, A., Hagood, M. C., & Alvermann, D. E. (2008). Switching places and looking to adolescents for the practices that shape school literacies. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 24*(3), 311-334.

Heron-Hruby, A., Wood, K. D., & Mraz, M. E. (2008). Introduction: Possibilities for using a multiliteracies approach with struggling readers. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 24*(3), 259-263.

www.manaraa.com

Hetzner, A. (2003, March 17). As fewer men teach, educators bemoan loss of male models. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.* Retrieved from http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p_action=list&p_topdoc=5

Hibbert, K. (2004). *Examining 'enunciative space' in an online community of practice.* Unpublished doctoral thesis. London, ON: University of Western Ontario.

Hicks, D. (2002). *Reading lives: Working-class children and literacy learning.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Hinchman, K., A., Alvermann, D. E., Boyd, F. B., Brozo, W. G., & Vacca, R. T. (2003/2004). Supporting older students' in- and out-of-school literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 47,* 304-310.

Hinchman, K.A., Payne-Bourcy, L., Thomas, H. & Chandler Olcott, K. (2002). Representing adolescents' literacies: Case studies of three white males. *Reading Research and Instruction 41*(3) 229-246.

Hinchman, K.A., & Young, J.P. (2001). Speaking but not being heard: Two adolescents negotiate classroom talk about text. *Journal of Literacy Research, 33,* 243-268**.**

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training. (2002). Boys: Getting it right. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=edt/eofb/report/fullrpt.pdf

Humes, W., & Bryce, T. (2003). Post-structuralism and policy research in education. *Journal of Education Policy, 18*(2), 175-187.

Hunter, I. (1997). After English: toward a less critical literacy. In S. Muspratt, A. Luke & P. Freebody (Eds.), *Constructing critical literacies* (pp. 315-34). Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

www.manaraa.com

Hurrell, G. (2001). Masculinities in the English classroom: Fracturing the stereotypes. *English in Australia, 131,* 49-61.

Hursh, D. (2007) Assessing no child left behind and the rise of neoliberal education politics. *American Educational Research Journal*, *44,* 493-518.

Hursh, D. (2001). Neoliberalism and the control of teachers, students, and learning: The rise of standards, standardization, and accountability. *Cultural Logic*, *4*(1). Retrieved from http://clogic.eserver.org/4-1/hursh.html

Ingalls, R. (2006). Unmasking the brilliant disguise: Smallness, authority and the irony of a teacher's body. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy and Curriculum Studies, 28,* 239-252.

Ireland, J. (2010). Gender agenda. *Canberra Times.* Retrieved from http://www.cordeliafine.com/Delusions_of_Gender_Canberra_Times.pdf

Jones, K. (1993). *Compassionate authority: Democracy and the representation of women*. New York: Routledge.

Jones, D. (2006). The 'right kind of man': The ambiguities of rendering the key stage one environment. *Sex Education, 6*(1) 61-76.

Jones, D. (2007). Millennium man: Constructing identities of male teachers in early years contexts. *Educational Review, 59*(2), 179–194.

Jordan, W. (2010). Defining equity: Multiple perspectives to analyzing the performance of diverse learners. *Review of Research in Education, 34,* 142-178.

Keddie, A. (2007a). Issues of power, masculinity, and gender justice: Sally's story of teaching boys. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education 28*(1), 21-35.

Keddie, A., & Mills, M. (2007b). *Teaching boys: Developing classroom practices*

www.manaraa.com

that work. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Kelly, U. A. (2000). Juggernauts of desire: Troubling the romance in English education. In B.R.C. Barrell and R.F. Hammett (Eds.), *Advocating change: Contemporary issues in subject English* (pp. 78-89). Toronto: Irwin Publishing.

Kennedy, M. M. (1999). The Role of Pre-service Teacher Education. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), Teaching as a learning profession: Handbook of Teaching and Policy (pp. 54-86). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kessler, S., Ashenden, D. J., Connell, R. W., & Dowsett, G. (1985). Gender relations in secondary schools. *Sociology of Education, 58*, 34–48.

Kimmel, M. (Ed.). (1987). *Changing men: New directions in research on men and masculinity.* London: Sage Publications.

Kincheloe, J.L., & McLaren, P. (2005). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 303-342). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kindlon, D., & Thompson, M. (1999). *Raising Cain: Protecting the emotional life of boys.* London: Michael Joseph.

King, J. R. (1998). *Uncommon caring: Learning from men who teach young children.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age.* London: Routledge.

Krueger, L. (1995, September 15). What crisis? John Snobelen explains. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A16.

Lahelma, E. (2000). Lack of male teachers: A problem for students or teachers?. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 8*(2), 173-186.

www.manaraa.com

Lam, Y.H.R., Tse, S.K., Lam, J.W.I., & Loh, K.Y. (2010). Does the gender of the teacher matter in the teaching of reading literacy? Teacher gender and pupil attainment in reading literacy in Hong Kong. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26,* 754-759.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (1997). Literacies, texts and difference in the electronic age. In C. Lankshear, *Changing literacies* (pp. 133-163). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lather, P. (1986). Research as praxis. *Harvard Education Review, 56*(3), 41-60.

Lather, P. (1991a). *Feminist research in education: Within/against.* Geelong, Vic.: Deakin University.

Lather, P. (1991b). Deconstructing/Deconstructive inquiry: The politics of knowing and being known. *Education Theory, 41*(2) 153-173.

Laurie, N., Dwyer, C., Holloway, S. and Smith, F. (1999). *Geographies of New Femininities.* Harlow: Longman.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1997). Illumination: Framing the terrain. In S. Lawrence-Lightfoot & H. Davis (Eds.), *The art and science of portraiture* (pp. 41-59). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lewis, E., Butcher, J., & Donnan, P. (1999). *Men in primary teaching: An endangered species?* Australian Catholic University. Retrieved from http://www.aare.edu.au/99pap/but99238.htm

Lingard, B. (2003). Where to in gender equity policies after recuperative masculinity politics? *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 7(1), 33-56.

Lingard, B. & Douglas, P. (1999). *Men Engaging Feminisms: Pro-Feminism, Backlashes and Schooling.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

www.manaraa.com

Lingard, B., Mills, M., & Hayes, D. (2000). Teachers, school reform and social justice: Challenging research and practice. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 27*(3), 99-115.

Lingard, B., Martino, W., Mills, M., & Bahr, M. (2002). *Addressing the educational needs of boys.* Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training. Retrieved from http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/publications/2002/boyseducation/index.htm

Lingard, B, Martino, W. & Mills, M. (2009). *Boys and schooling: Beyond structural reform.* London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Love, K. & Hamston, J. (2004). Committed and reluctant male teenage readers: Beyond bedtime stories. *Journal of Literacy Research 36*(3) 335-400.

Lucey, H. (2001). Social class, gender and schooling. In *Investigating Gender: Contemporary Perspectives in Education.* (pp. 177-188). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Luke, A. (2004). At last: The trouble with English. *Research in the Teaching of English, 39*(1), 85-95.

Luke, A., Green, J., & Kelly, G. (2010). What counts as evidence and equity? *Review of Research in Education, 34*, vii–xvi.

MacInnes, J. (1998). *The end of masculinity.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Madden, N.A., Slavin, R., Karweit, N., Dolan, L., & Wasik, B. (1993). Success for All: Longitudinal effects of a restructuring program for inner-city elementary schools. *American Educational Research Journal 30* 123-148.

www.manaraa.com

Martin, A., & Marsh, H. (2005). Motivating boys and motivating girls: Does teacher gender really make a difference? *Australian Journal of Education, 49*(3), 320–334.

Martino, W. (1997). Gendered learning practices: Exploring the costs of hegemonic masculinity for girls and boys in schools. In *Proceedings of the promoting gender equity conference* (pp. 343-64). Canberra: Publications and Public Communication.

Martino, W. (2003). Boys, masculinities and literacy: Addressing the issues. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy 26*(3) 9-27.

Martino, W. (2004). "The boy problem": Boys, schooling and masculinities. In R. Transit (Ed.), *Disciplining the child via the discourse of the professions* (pp. 19-33). Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.

Martino, W. (2008a). Male teachers as role models: Addressing issues of masculinity, pedagogy and the re-masculinization of schooling. *Curriculum Inquiry, 38*(2), 189-223.

Martino, W. (2008b). The lure of hegemonic masculinity: Investigating the dynamics of gender relations in two male elementary school teachers' lives. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 21*(6), 575-603.

Martino, W. (2011). *Failing boys and the politics of the gender achievement gap: Addressing what counts as evidence.* Roundtable Discussion, Learning Policy Directorate, Strategic Policy and Research Branch, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Martino, W. & Berrill, D. (2003). Boys, schooling and masculinities: Interrogating the 'right' way to educate boys, *Educational Review 55*(2) 99-117.

Martino, W. & Frank, B. (2006). 'The tyranny of surveillance': Male teachers and the policing of masculinities in a single sex school, *Gender and Education, 18*(1), 17-33.

www.manaraa.com

Martino, W. & Kehler, M. (2006). Male teachers and the 'boy problem': An issue of recuperative masculinity politics, *McGill Journal of Education, 41*(2), 113-131.

Martino, W., & Kehler, M. (2007). Gender-based literacy reform: A question of challenging or recuperating gender binaries. *Canadian Journal of Education, 30*(2), 406-431.

Martino, W., Lingard, B. & Mills, M. (2004). Issues in boys' education: A question of teacher threshold knowledges?, *Gender and Education, 16*(4), 435-454.

Martino, W., & Meyenn, B. (Eds.). (2001). *What about the boys? Issues of masculinity in schools.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Martino, W., & Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2005). *Being normal is the only way to be: Adolescent perspectives on gender and school*. Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press.

Martino, W. & Rezai-Rashti, G. (2012a). *Gender, race and the politics of role modeling: The influence of male teachers*. New York: Routledge.

Martino, W., & Rezai-Rashti, G. (2012b). Neo-liberal accountability and boys' underachievement: Steering education policy by numbers in the Ontario context, *International Journal of Inclusive Education 16*(4), 423-440.

McHoul, A., & Grace, W. (1993). *A Foucault primer: Discourse, power and the subject.* Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press.

McKay, B., & McKay, K. (2010). The all-time best (and worst) TV dads. *The art of manliness.* Retrieved from http://artofmanliness.com/2008/06/10/the-all-time-best-and-worst-tv-dads/

Mead, S. (2006). *The truth about boys and girls*. New York: Education Sector.

www.manaraa.com

Meyer, E. J. (2008). A Feminist reframing of bullying and harassment: Transforming schools through critical pedagogy. *McGill Journal of Education, 43*(1), 33-48.

Millard, E. (1997). *Differently literate: Boys, girls and the schooling of literacy.* Washington, DC: The Falmer Press.

Mills, M. (2003). Shaping the boys' agenda: The backlash blockbusters. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 7*(1), 57-73.

Mills, M. (2004). Male teachers, homophobia, misogyny and teacher education. *Teaching Education, 15*(1), 27-39.

Mills, M., Haase, M., & Charlton, E. (2008). Being the "right" kind of male teacher: The disciplining of John. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society, 16*(1), 71-84.

Mills, M., Martino, W., & Lingard, B. (2004). Attracting, recruiting and retaining male teachers: Policy issues in the male teacher debate. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 25*(3), 355-369.

Mitchell, A. (2004). Goodbye Mr. Chips. *The Globe and Mail,* January 17, F1.

Moje, E. B. (1996). "I teach students, not subjects": Teacher-student relationships as contexts for secondary literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly, 31*(2), 172-195.

Moreau, M., Osgood, J., & Halsall, A. (2007). Making sense of the glass ceiling in schools: An exploration of women teachers' discourses. *Gender & Education, 19*(2), 237-253.

Morgan, W. (1997). *Critical literacy in the classroom: The art of the possible.* New York: Routledge.

Morrell, E. (2005). Critical English Education. *English Education, 37*(4), 312-321.

www.manaraa.com

Morrison, T. G., Bryan, G., & Chilcoat, G. W. (2002). Using student-generated comic books in the classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *45*, 758-767.

MrCallens.com (2012). *The essay structure*. Retrieved from http://mrcallens.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=611&Itemid=1

National Assessment of Education Progress. (2009, July 21). *The nation's report card*. Retrieved from http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_grade12_2005/s0206.asp

Neugebauer, M., Helbig, M., & Landmann, A. (2011). Unmasking the myth of the same-sex teacher advantage. *European Sociological Review*, *27*(5), 669-689.

Ng, R. (1995). Teaching against the grain: Contradictions and possibilities. In R. Ng, P. Staton, & J. Scane (Eds.), *Anti-racism, feminism and critical approaches to education* (pp. 129ñ152). Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

Nixon, H. (2003). New research literacies for contemporary research into literacy and new media? *Reading Research Quarterly*, 38(4), 407-413.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nystrand, M. (1997). *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Olssen, M. (1999). *Michel Foucault: Materialism and education.* Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

www.manaraa.com

Ontario College of Teachers (2004). Narrowing the gender gap: Attracting men to teaching. Report, Ontario, Canada. Retrieved from http://www.oct.ca/publications/pdf/men_in_teaching_e.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2004). *Me read? No way!: A practical guide to improving boys' literacy skills*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2007). *The Ontario curriculum, grades 9 and 10: English, 2007 (revised).* Toronto: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english.html

Ontario Ministry of Education (2009). *Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from http://cal2.edu.gov.on.ca/april2009/EquityEducationStrategy.pdf

Ontario Public School Board's Association. (2000). Fast reports: Are schools failing boys? *Ontario Provincial School Board's Association Fast Reports, 12*(24). Retrieved from http://www.opsba.org/pubs/fast/2000/00-09-15.html

Ontario urged to counter drop in male teachers. (2004, November 13). *CBC News.* Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2004/11/12/male_teacher_041112.html

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2004). Messages From PISA 2000 [Electronic version]. Paris: OECD Publications. https://www.educare.com.au/research/PISA/documents/PISAinBrief.pdf.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2010). *PISA 2009 results: Learning trends: Changes in student performance since 2000 (Volume V).* Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091580-en

www.manaraa.com

Osborne, K. (1999). *Education: A guide to the Canadian school debate – or who wants what and why?* Montreal: Penguin/McGill Institute.

Paechter, C. (2001). Using poststructuralist in gender theory and research. In B. Francis & C. Skelton (Eds.), *Investigating gender: Contemporary perspectives in education* (pp. 41-51). Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd Ed.). California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Payne-Bourcy, L. & Chandler-Olcott, K. (2003). Spotlighting social class: An exploration of one adolescent's language and literacy practices. *Journal of Literacy Research 35*(1) 551-590.

Pech, M-E., & Figaro, L. (2011, September 14). Where Did All the Male Teachers Go? France Worries That Boy Students May Be Suffering. *Time World.* Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2093252,00.html

Peim, N. (1993). *Critical theory and the English teacher: Transforming the subject.* New York: Routledge.

Pepperell, S., & Smedley, S. (1998). Call for more men in primary teaching: Problematizing the issues. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 2*(4), 341–357.

Phillips, L.M., & Sanford, K.J. (2000). Common curriculum frameworks and assessment in secondary English education. In B.R.C. Barrell and R.F. Hammett (Eds.), *Advocating change: Contemporary issues in subject English* (pp. 281-294). Toronto: Irwin Publishing.

Pillow, W. S. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 16,* 175-196.

www.manaraa.com

Pinto, L. (2006). The streaming of working class and minority students in Ontario. *Our Schools, Our Selves 15*(2), 79-89.

Pirie, B. (2002). *Teenage Boys and Highschool English.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Pollack, W. S. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our boys from the myths of boyhood.* New York: Henry Holt.

Porche, M., Ross, S.J. & Snow, C.E. (2004). In *Adolescent Boys* (pp. 338-360). New York: Uni Press.

Potvin, P., Deslandes, R., & Leclerc, D. (1999). Family characteristics as predictors of school achievement: Parental involvement as a mediator. *McGill Journal of Education 34*(2), 135-153.

Price, J. (1999). Schooling and racialized masculinities: The diploma, teachers, and peers in the lives of young, African American Men. *Youth and Society, 31*(2), 224–263.

Pupils make more effort with male teachers as they are seen as 'more fair'. (2010, November 13). *Mail Online.* Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1324905/Pupils-make-effort-male-teachers-seen-fair.html

Reay, D. (2001). Spice girls, nice girls, girlies, and tomboys: Gender discourses, girls' culture and femininities in the primary classroom. *Gender and Education, 13*(2), 153-166.

Rezai-Rashti, G., & Martino, W. (2010). Black male teachers as role models: The homogenizing impulse of gender and racial affiliation. *American Educational Research Journal, 47*, 6–36.

Rice, J.K. (2003). *Teacher quality: Understanding the effectiveness of teacher attributes.* Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

www.manaraa.com

Robinson, K. (2000). 'Great tits, miss!': The silencing of male students' sexual harassment of female teachers in secondary schools: A focus on gendered authority. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 21*(1), 75–90.

Robinson, K. H. (2005). Reinforcing hegemonic masculinities through sexual harassment: Issues of identity, power and popularity in secondary schools. *Gender and Education, 17*(1), 19-37.

Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N., & Miller, P. (1992). Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government. *The British Journal of Sociology, 43*(2), 173-205.

Rosen, J. (2004). *Defiant negotiations with celluloid colleagues: Broaching pre-service teachers' aspirations for and apprehensions of teaching through a dialogue with teacher images in film.* London, ON: Faculty of Graduate Studies, The University of Western Ontario.

Roulston, K. & Mills, M. (2000). Male teachers in feminished teaching areas: Marching to the beat of the men's movement drums? *Oxford Review of Education, 26*(2), 221-239.

Rowan, L., Knobel, M., Bigum, C., & Lankshear, C. (2002). *Boys, literacies and schooling.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Ruggles Gere, A., & Berebitsky, D. (2009). Standpoints: Perspectives on highly qualified English teachers. *Research in the Teaching of English, 43*(3), 247-263.

Sanford, K. (2002). Popular media and school literacies. In R. Hammett, R. Barrie., &R. Barrell (Eds.), *Digital expressions: Media literacy and English language arts* (pp. 21-47). Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises Ltd.

www.manaraa.com

Sanford, K. (2006). Gendered literacy experiences: The effects of expectation and opportunity for boys' and girls' learning. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 49*(4), 302-315.

Sargent, P. (2005). The gendering of men in early childhood education. *Sex Roles, 52*(3/4), 251–259.

Sax, L. (2005). *Why gender matters.* New York: Doubleday.

Schrock, D., & Schwalbe, M. (2009). Men, masculinity, and manhood acts. *Annual Review of Sociology, 35*, 277-295.

Segal, L. 1990. *Slow motion, changing masculinities, changing men*. London: Virago Press.

Sharpe, S. (1976). *Just like a girl*. London: Penguin.

Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review, 57*(1), 1-22.

Silverman, D. (1985). *Qualitative Methodology and Sociology: Describing the Social World.* Brookfield, VT: Gower.

Simpson, R.L. (1974). Sex stereotypes of secondary school teaching subjects: Male and female status gains and losses. *Sociology of Education, 47*(3), 388-398.

Skelton, C. (2001a). *Schooling the boys: Masculinities and primary education.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Skelton, C. (2001b). Typical boys? Theorizing masculinity in educational settings. In B. Francis & C. Skelton (Eds.), *Investigating gender: Contemporary perspectives in education* (pp. 164-176). Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Skelton, C. (2002). The feminisation of schooling or re-masculinising primary education? *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 12*(1), 77–96.

www.manaraa.com

Skelton, C. (2007). Gender, policy and initial teacher education. *Gender and Education, 19*(6), 677–690.

Skelton, C., & Francis, B. (2011). Successful boys & literacy: Are "literate boys" challenging or repackaging hegemonic masculinity? *Curriculum Inquiry 41*(4), 456-479.

Skelton, C., & Read, B. (2006). Male and female teachers' evaluative responses to gender and the implications of these for the learning environments of primary age pupils. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 16*(2), 105-120.

Smith, M. & Wilhelm, J. (2002). *"Reading don't fix no chevys": Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Smulyan, L. (2006). Constructing teacher identities. In C. Skelton, B. Francis, & L. Smulyan (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of gender and education* (pp. 469-482). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sokal, L., & Katz, H. (2008). Effects of technology and male teachers on boys' reading. *Australian Journal of Education, 52*(1), 81-94.

Sokal, L., Katz, H., Adkins, M., Grills, T. *et al.* (2005). Factors affecting inner-city boys' reading: Are male teachers the answer? *Canadian Journal of Urban Research, 14*(1), 107-130.

Sokal, L., Katz, H., & Chaszewski, L. (2007). Good-bye, Mr. Chips: Male teacher shortages and boys' reading achievement *Sex Roles 56,* 651-659.

Solis, A. (2009). What Matters Most in the Professional Learning of Content Teachers in Classrooms with Diverse Student Populations *Intercultural Development Research Association.* Retrieved from

www.manaraa.com

http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Newsletter/August_2009_Actionable_Knowledge/Pedagogical_Content_Knowledge/

Søndergaard, D. M. (2002) Poststructuralist approaches to empirical analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 15*(2), 187–204.

Speer, S. (2005). The interactional organization of the gender attribution process. *Sociology 39*(1), 67-87.

Stahl, B. C. (2004). *Whose discourse? A comparison of the Foucauldian and Habermasian concepts of discourse in critical IS research.* Retrieved from http://www.cse.dmu.ac.uk/~bstahl/publications/2004_Foucault_Habermas_AMCIS.pdf

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Stake, R.E. (2000). Case Studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd Ed.), (pp. 435-454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Statistics Canada. (2003). *Education indicators in Canada* (3rd ed.). Publication number 81-852-XPE. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, November 25.

Sternod, B. (2011). Role models or normalizing agents?: A genealogical analysis of popular written news media discourse regarding male teachers. *Curriculum Inquiry, 41*(2), 267-292.

Strickland, K., & Strickland, J. (1993). *Un-covering the curriculum: Whole language in secondary and postsecondary classrooms.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Stronge, J.H. (2007). *Qualities of effective teachers* (2nd ed.). Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

www.manaraa.com

Sukhnandan, L., Lee, B. & Kelleher, S. (2000). *An investigation into gender differences n achievement: Phase 2: School and classroom strategies.* London: National Foundation for Educational Research.

Tabb, W. (2002). *Unequal partners: A primer on globalization*. New York: The New Press.

Teacher Support Network. (2007). *Why become a teacher?* Retrieved from http://www.teacherssupportnetwork.com/corporate/KnowledgeCenterArticle.do?id=5

Teese, R., Davies, M., Charlton, M., & Polesel, J. (1995). Who wins at school? Boys and girls in Australian secondary education. Canberra: DEETYA, AGPS.

The complete guide to writing essays: Essay structure (n.d.). Retrieved from http://ww2.rainbowschools.ca/~mcbaina/Class1/Handouts/Essay_guide_revised.pdf

The Fraser Institute. (2010). *Report cards: School performance*. Retrieved from http://www.fraserinstitute.org/report-cards/overview.aspx

The Free Dictionary by Farlex (2012). *Composite school*. Retrieved from http://www.thefreedictionary.com/composite+school

The New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review, (66)*3 60-92.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (2008). *Why consider becoming a teacher?* Retrieved from http://www.unc.edu/uncbest/teacher.htm

Thomas, K. (1990). *Gender and subject in higher education.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Thompson, S., Greer, J.G., & Greer, B.B. (n.d.). *Highly qualified for successful teaching: Characteristics every teacher should possess.* Retrieved from http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol102004/thompson.pdf

www.manaraa.com

Tinklin, T., Croxford, L., Duckiln, A., & Frame, B. (2001). *Gender and pupil performance in Scotland's schools.* Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Education Department.

Titus, J. (2004). Boy Trouble: Rhetorical framing of boys' underachievement. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 25*(2), 145-169.

Toptenz.net. (2012). *Top 10 best TV dads.* Retrieved from http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-best-tv-dads.php

Tripp, D. (1993). *Critical incidents in teaching: Developing professional judgement.* London: Routledge.

Vaandering, D. (2009). *Towards effective implementation and sustainability of restorative justice in Ontario public schools: A critical case study.* Unpublished doctoral thesis. London, ON: University of Western Ontario.

VanDeWeghe, R. (2007). What kinds of classroom discussion promote reading comprehension? *The English Journal, 96*(3), 86-91.

Volante, L. (2004). Teaching to the test: What every educator and policy-maker should know. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 35.* Retrieved from http://umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/volante.html

Walkerdine, V., Lucey, H. & Melody, J. (2001). *Growing up girl: Psychosocial explorations of gender and class.* New York: New York University Press.

Watson, M. A. (2007). *More than just a 'boy' problem: The nature and authorization of school-based literacy practices*. London, ON: Faculty of Graduate Studies, The University of Western Ontario.

Weaver, C. (1990). *Understanding whole language: From principles to practice*. Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann

www.manaraa.com

Weaver-Hightower, M. (2003). The "boy turn" in research on gender and education. *Review of Educational Research, 73*(4), 471-498.

Weaver-Hightower, M. (2008). *The politics of policy in boys' education*. New York: Palgrave.

Wedhorn Essex, D. K. (2005). Hearing Voices: An autobiographical journey of discovery. *English Quarterly, 37*(1), 8-12.

Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory* (2nd Ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc.

Wetherall, M. (2001). Debates in discourse research. In M. Wetherall, S. Taylor & S.J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse theory and practice: A reader* (pp. 380-399). London: Sage Publications.

Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1999). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices. *Feminism & Psychology, 9*(3), 335–356.

White, J. (2007, September 25). Male teacher shortage hits home. *The Daily Campus.* Retrieved from http://www.dailycampus.com/2.7440/male-teacher-shortage-hits-home-1.1057032

Whitehead, J. (1996). Sex stereotypes, gender identity and subject choice at 'A' level, *Educational Research, 38,* 147-160.

Williams, C. (1993). *Doing "women's work": Men in nontraditional occupations*. London: Sage.

Willis, P. E., (1977). *Learning to labor: How working class kids get working class jobs.* New York : Columbia University Press, 1977.

Wixon, R.R., Dutro, E., & Athan, R. (2004). The challenge of developing content standards. *Review of Research in Education, 27,* 69-107.

Wilson-Smith, A. & Janigan, M. (1997, November 10). 'This system is broken': Ontario Premier Mike Harris discusses his controversial plan to reform the province's education system.

www.manaraa.com

Maclean's. Retrieved from http://business.highbeam.com/4341/article-1G1-20005230/system-broken

Yahoo Answers. (2012). Help on how to write an essay? Retrieved from http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20101219175711AAi8JIA

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Younger, M., & Warrington, M. (2005). *Raising boys' achievement in secondary schools.* Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Younger, M., & Warrington, M. (2007). Closing the gender gap? Issues of gender equity in English secondary schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 28,* 219-242.

www.manaraa.com

Appendix A

www.manaraa.com

Letter of Information for Teacher Participants

"MEN TO THE RESCUE" – THE INFLUENCE OF MALE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON BOYS' LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Introduction
My name is Anne Watson, and I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the capacity of secondary-school male English teachers to positively influence the literacy achievement of the boys in their classes and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study
The aim of this study is to investigate whether male English teachers play a significant role in improving boys' literacy achievement.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to share your experience and perceptions in a one-hour interview with the researcher in a location within the school that is agreed upon by both the researcher and you, the participant. These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed into written format. You will be provided with the opportunity to read over the transcript and make any changes that you wish. This review process will require an additional hour of your time.

You might also be asked to participate in the classroom observation phase of this study. If selected, I will observe you teaching in the classroom setting once or twice a week over a one-month period. During this phase, I will be taking notes on my classroom observations. These observations will be focused on your teaching strategies, interactions with the boys in your class, constructions of masculinity and the boys' participation and learning in your classroom.

Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information that could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be confidential. Identifying information will not be recorded on the audio devices used to record the interviews. All audio recordings of the interviews will be stored on computer, which will require a password to access it. I, the researcher, will be the only person who will have access to the computer password and the audio files themselves. The physical evidence of data—hand-written field notes, classroom materials and computer storage drives—will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office at The University of Western Ontario. I will release the findings in my doctoral thesis; however, I will ensure that pseudonyms both for the research sites and the participants are maintained. After five years, all of the data including hard copies, coded texts, USB drives and files stored on my computer will be destroyed according to UWO guidelines, again to protect the identity of the participants involved.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks to participating in this study.

المنارة للاستشارات
www.manaraa.com

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 employment status.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. If you have any questions about his study, please contact Anne Watson, Dr. Wayne Martino, or Dr. Michael Kehler. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sincerely,

Anne Watson
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education

www.manaraa.com

Consent form for Teacher Participants

"MEN TO THE RESCUE" – THE INFLUENCE OF MALE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON BOYS' LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

Anne Watson – PhD Candidate

CONSENT FORM

I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

_____
Name (please print)

_____ _____
Signature Date

[If applicable include:]
Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:

www.manaraa.com

Appendix B

www.manaraa.com

Letter of Information for Male Students and their Parents

"MEN TO THE RESCUE" – THE INFLUENCE OF MALE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON BOYS' LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Introduction
My name is Anne Watson, and I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into whether male English teachers influence the literacy achievement of the boys in their classes and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study
The aim of this study is to investigate whether male English teachers play a significant role in improving boys' literacy achievement. I am interested to learn about whether or not you think the gender of your teacher makes a difference to your learning and achievement in secondary-school English.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to share your experience and perceptions in a one-hour interview with the researcher in a location within the school that is agreed upon by both the researcher and you, the participant. This interview, which will be audio-recorded and later transcribed into written format, will be held at lunch time or after school. You will be provided with the opportunity to read over the transcript and make any changes that you wish. This review process will require an additional hour of your time.

Your interactions with your teacher and your participation in the English classroom will also be observed. During this phase, I will be taking notes on my classroom observations. These observations will be focused on your teacher's teaching strategies, his interactions with the boys in his class, evidence that being a male teacher makes a difference for boys and your participation and learning in the English classroom.

I will be observing the class once or twice a week over a one month period; however, if you do not agree to participate, no observational notes will made on you in the classroom.

Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information that could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be confidential. Identifying information will not be recorded on the audio devices used to record the interviews. All audio recordings of the interviews will be stored on computer, which will require a password to access it. I, the researcher, will be the only person who will have access to the computer password and the audio files themselves. The physical evidence of data—hand-written field notes, classroom materials and computer storage drives—will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office at The University of Western Ontario. I will release the findings in my doctoral thesis; however, I will ensure that

www.manaraa.com

pseudonyms both for the research sites and the participants are maintained. After five years, all of the data including hard copies, coded texts, USB drives and files stored on my computer will be destroyed according to UWO guidelines, again to protect the identity of the participants involved.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks to participating in this study.

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 academic status.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario. If you have any questions about his study, please contact Anne Watson, Dr. Wayne Martino or Dr. Michael Kehler.
This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Sincerely,

Anne Watson
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education

www.manaraa.com

Consent Form for Male Students and their Parents

"MEN TO THE RESCUE" – THE INFLUENCE OF MALE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON BOYS' LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

Anne Watson – PhD Candidate

CONSENT FORM

I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree that my son may participate in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

_____
Printed Name of Student

_____ _____
Student's Signature Date

_____
Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

_____ _____
Parent/Guardian's Signature Date

www.manaraa.com

Appendix C

www.manaraa.com

Sample Interview Questions for the Male English Teachers

- Can you tell me about yourself - your experience, background, how long you have been teaching English, why you chose to become an English teacher etc.?
- Can you talk about high achieving students in your class? What factors in your opinion contributes to their achievement? What about students who are struggling in English?
- Can you talk about those students and their particular problems with English or who are not doing very well? Think of individual students that come to mind.
- Do you think your being a man makes a difference? Can you explain? Do you notice any differences in the way that boys and girls respond to you? In terms of your approach to teaching, is there a difference in the way you teach boys? Are you conscious of any differences?
- Are you conscious of responding to boys differently in class in terms of how you teach, text selection etc.?
- Do you think that having a male teacher makes a difference for boys in English? Can you explain? Do you think boys respond differently to a male teacher?
- Why do you think there are more female English teachers? Why aren't there more males going into English teaching?
- There has been some discussion in the media and policy that boys would benefit from having male teachers and that male teachers can actually be instrumental in helping boys to achieve better grades. Do you think that male teachers can help boys to achieve better grades in English?

www.manaraa.com

Sample Interview Questions for the Male Students

- Can you tell me about yourself – i.e., interests, hobbies
- Can you tell me about your school experience – successes, struggles, favourite and least favourite subjects, factors that make a class a "good" or "bad" experience
- Do you enjoy reading? Why/why not?
- What do you think of English as a subject? Explain.
- Do you see yourself as doing well/poorly in English?
- What do you think contributes to your achievement or lack of it?
- What types of activity do you enjoy most in English class? Why?
- Tell me about your English teachers, both your current and past teachers.
- Have you had any English teachers who have made a difference to your achievement or to how you feel as an English student?
- How important is your teacher to your interest and achievement in English? Explain.
- Can you think of any teacher who has really had an impact on your motivation and desire to do well in English? Can you talk about these teachers or explain what they did to influence you in such a positive way?
- Do you think your teacher's gender has any influence over your interest and achievement in English? Explain.

www.manaraa.com

Appendix D

www.manaraa.com

Western Education

Faculty of Education
Graduate Programs & Research Office

FORM A

Print Form

Reset Form

APPROVAL OF Ph.D. THESIS PROPOSAL

If the proposed research does not involve human subjects or the direct use of their written records, video-tapes, recordings, tests, etc., this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal should be delivered directly to the Graduate Programs & Research Office for final approval.

If the proposed research involves human subjects, this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal and Ethical Review Form signature pages (Section 1.1 to 1.7) must be submitted to the Graduate Programs & Research Office for final approval.

IT IS THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (INCLUDING REVISIONS) TO THE THESIS SUPERVISOR AND ALL MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Student's Name: Margaret Anne Watson **Student #:** 000364257

Area of Research: Curriculum Studies and Pedagogy

Title of Thesis: "Men to the Rescue" - The Influence of Male English Teachers on Boys' Literacy Achievement

Name of Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Wayne Martino and Dr. Michael Kehler

Names of Members of the Thesis Advisory Committee: Dr. Perry Klein

DOES THIS RESEARCH INVOLVE THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS: (•) Yes ( ) No

APPROVAL SIGNATURES:

Graduate Student: _____ **Date:** _____

Thesis Supervisor: _____ **Date:** _____

Advisory Committee: *(at least one)* _____ **Date:** _____

Ethical Review Clearance: _____ **Date:** _____

Ethical Review Number: 1010-2

Associate Dean Graduate Programs & Research: _____ **Date:** 2/11/2010

A STUDENT MAY PROCEED WITH RESEARCH WHEN A COPY OF THIS FORM CONTAINING ALL APPROVAL SIGNATURES HAS BEEN RECEIVED.

A copy of this proposal may be made public and kept on a two-hour reserve in the Faculty of Education Library.

Version Date: May 2010

The University of Western Ontario *Faculty of Education* *Graduate Programs & Research Office*

المنارة للاستشارات
www.manaraa.com

Western Education

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

Review Number: 1010-2
Principal Investigator: Michael Kehler
Student Name: Anne Watson
Title: *"Men to the Rescue" – The Influence of Male English Teachers on Boys' Literacy Achievement*
Expiry Date: April 30, 2012
Type: Ph.D. Thesis
Ethics Approval Date: November 2, 2010
Revision #:
Documents Reviewed & Approved: UWO Protocol, Letters of Information & Consent

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Alan Edmunds (Chair)

2010-2011 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board

Dr. Alan Edmunds	**Faculty (Chair)**
Dr. John Barnett	**Faculty**
Dr. Jacqueline Specht	**Faculty**
Dr. Farahnaz Faez	**Faculty**
Dr. Wayne Martino	**Faculty**
Dr. George Gadanidis	**Faculty**
Dr Immaculate Namukasa	**Faculty**
Dr. Robert Macmillan	**Assoc Dean, Graduate Programs & Research (*ex officio*)**
Dr. Susan Rodger	**UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (*ex officio*)**

The Faculty of Education — Karen Kueneman, Research Officer
Faculty of Education Building

Copy: Office of Research Ethics

www.manaraa.com

Appendix E

www.manaraa.com

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Margaret Anne Watson

Post-Secondary Education/Degrees:

Ph.D. Candidate. Education
Western University, 2012

Masters of Education
University of Western Ontario, 2007

Ontario Teacher's Certificate
- Intermediate/Senior, English, French, 1989
- Junior Division, 2002

Additional Qualifications
- Honours Specialist: English, 1991
- Honours Specialist: Special Education, 2001

Bachelor of Education
University of Western Ontario, 1989

Bachelor of Arts
University of Waterloo, 1987
- Honours English with French minor

Honours and Awards:

Doctoral Fellowship
Social Sciences and Research Council, 2010-2012

Graduate Thesis Research Award
Western University, 2012

Art Geddis Award
University of Western Ontario, 2011

Graduate Research Scholarship
University of Western Ontario, 2008-2012

Ontario Graduate Scholarship
2010

W. A. Townsend Gold Medal for Academic Excellence
University of Western Ontario, 2007

Related Work Experience:

Teaching Assistant
Western University, 2010-2012

Research Assistant
University of Western Ontario, 2008-2011

www.manaraa.com

Faculty Advisor
University of Western Ontario, 2005-2007

English Department Head
Thames Valley District School Board
1999-2007

Intermediate/Senior English Teacher
Thames Valley District School Board
1989-1998, 2008-2012

Instructor-Media Education
Faculty of Education, UWO
1998

Publications:

Watson, A. (2011). Not just a 'boy problem': An exploration of the complexities surrounding literacy under-achievement. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 32*(5), 779-795.

Watson, A., Kehler, M., & Martino, W. (2010). The problem of boys' literacy underachievement: Raising some questions. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 53*(3), 356-361.

Watson, M. A. (2009). Boys' literacy underachievement. In S. Steinberg & M. Kehler (Eds.), *Boy Culture: An Encyclopedia* (pp. 42-486). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Watson, M. A. (2007). *More than just a 'boy' problem: The nature and authorization of school-based literacy practices*. London, ON: Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Western Ontario.

Presentations:

Watson, A. (2012). "Does gender influence boys' literacy achievement? – The cases of two secondary-school male English teachers" (paper presentation). *Canadian Society for the Study of Education.* Waterloo, Ontario.

Watson, A. (2012). "'Male delivery': What some boys say about the influence of male English teachers" (round table presentation). *American Educators Research Association.* Vancouver, British Columbia.

Watson, A. (2011). "'Men to the rescue' – The influence of male English teachers on boys' literacy achievement" (paper presentation). *Canadian Society for the Study of Education.* Fredericton, New Brunswick.

www.manaraa.com