

**Culture Wars and Language Arts Education:
Readings of *Othello* as a School Text**

by

Farouk Mitha

B.A., University of Toronto, 1984

M.A., University of London, 1986

M.A., McGill University, 1993

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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University of Victoria

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Abstract

Relationships between the terms culture and education are often taken for granted in educational research. This study challenges some of the taken for granted assumptions around the term *culture* in educational contexts, particularly in secondary language arts education. It examines these assumptions through an analysis of three debates from the contemporary culture wars in education. The implications of these debates on uses of the term culture in secondary language arts education are examined through *Othello* as a secondary school text. I am arguing that these debates, namely, on the literary canon, multicultural education, and cultural literacy, represent intractable conflicts over definitions of the term culture. In light of these conflicts, the aim of this study is to provide language arts educators with analytical tools for developing greater theoretical rigour when defining the term culture in language arts education. Drawing on recent theoretical writings on culture, concepts of cultural capital, cultural rights, and cultural reproduction are proposed as analytical tools. I then apply these to develop a methodological approach by which to structure my analysis of *Othello* as a school text. The study makes a theoretical contribution by bringing into sharper focus ways in which the ideological opposition between expressions of cultural right versus cultural left perspectives is articulated in language arts education, as well as illustrating that claims about culture in the canon debate reflect competing normative assumptions; in the multicultural education debate they reflect competing essentialist constructions; and in the cultural literacy debate they reflect competing empowerment goals. Such cultural

debates have a long history and thus the study also situates the contemporary culture wars in education within a wider historical context by tracing related conflicts in the history of literary criticism on and performances of *Othello* over the past four centuries.

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Acknowledgements

Looking back at the twists and turns that I have had to navigate on the long road to completing this study, I am filled with gratitude and nostalgia. This is not the place to write about my nostalgia. Suffice it to say that it has been a privilege to live in the company of *Othello* over the past few years. The life-affirming music of Shakespeare's words kept me going, especially when I felt completely lost in what seemed like an intellectual wilderness that opened up every time I tried to examine uses of the term culture.

Dr. Alison Preece, my supervisor, has been no less life-affirming at every stage of this study. Her unwavering conviction in the value of this project (and her gift for asking the hard questions) continually inspired me to keep at it. Dr. Edward Pechter, *Othello* scholar extraordinaire, has been an exemplary and generous intellectual mentor. His detailed and perceptive comments on every chapter greatly improved the final draft. Dr. Deborah Begoray and Dr. David Blades have also been unstinting in their support. Their respective feedback kept me strongly grounded in the field of education. I want to thank Dr. Roy Graham, Dr. W. John Harker, Dr. Thomas Fleming, and Dr. William F. Pinar for offering timely encouragement during the early stages of my research. My most enduring debt of gratitude is to Mehmooona. Words fail me, so let me borrow Othello's words:

It gives me wonder great as my content
To see you here before me! O my soul's joy,
If after every tempest come such calms
May the winds blow till they have wakened ... (2.1.181-184)

Readings of *Othello* as a School Text

Introduction

This study examines three contemporary culture war debates (the literary canon, multiculturalism, and cultural literacy) and analyzes their significance for secondary language arts education (henceforth also referred to as English education). *Othello* as a secondary school text informs the structure of the study by serving, on one hand, as a bridge linking the traffic of ideas between culture war debates and language arts education, and on the other, as a funnel through which to interrogate competing claims inside the debates. The canon, multicultural education, and cultural literacy debates are, I am arguing, rooted in intractable conflicts over definitions of the term culture. Therefore the aim of this study is to provide language arts educators with analytical tools for examining why these conflicts remain intractable, and in the process contribute to developing greater theoretical sophistication and self-awareness around uses of the term culture in language arts education. The proposed analytical tools are developed in relation to concepts of cultural capital, cultural rights, and cultural reproduction. Frames of cultural capital, cultural rights, and cultural reproduction analysis are then applied to *Othello* as a school text in order to examine expressions of the ideological opposition between cultural right versus cultural left perspectives in the debates, as well as in language arts education. Writings on *Othello* in literary criticism and on *Othello*'s performance history are also reviewed in relation to these frames of analysis.

Othello as a school text is at once a repository of and a meeting point for these conflicts. Thus the teaching of *Othello* offers language arts educators opportunities to rigorously think through issues and questions arising from the culture wars, as well as to connect these issues and questions with the lives of their students. This should provide a sobering reminder that the culture wars are not only symptoms of misguided abstract theories but reflect failures of practices through which we construct and preserve cultural self-definitions and differences. These failures are particularly evident in this age of globalization where we are all bearing witness to tragic conflicts defined in terms (e.g., "clash of civilizations") that mirror anxieties fuelling culture wars in education (Huntington, 1996, 2004).

My guiding research question is: How do contested definitions of culture assumed in contemporary culture war debates inform uses of the term culture in secondary language arts education?

Chapter one provides an overview of the methodological challenges entailed in examining the term culture in language arts education, namely, that definitions of culture are open-ended, historically contingent, and ideologically contested. In response to these challenges I am proposing a methodological approach which integrates the objectives and intellectual strands of this study. The study comprises three interrelated strands. One is a philosophical investigation of why the concept of culture is, following W.B. Gallie (1956), an “essentially contested concept.” Another strand is an investigation of theories of culture—Bourdieu (1984) on cultural capital, Kymlicka (1989, 1995) on cultural rights, and Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) on cultural reproduction – that can be applied to analyzing debates about the canon (Bloom, 1994), multicultural education (Banks & McGee Banks, 2003), and cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1987). Yet another strand focuses on deriving analytical tools (and frames of analysis) from these theories that can help contribute to developing greater theoretical rigour when defining the term culture in language arts education. The methodological approach can be described as an interdisciplinary conversation among researchers concerned with: a) theories of culture b) culture wars and c) culture and language arts education. This approach can be pictured as movements within concentric circles:

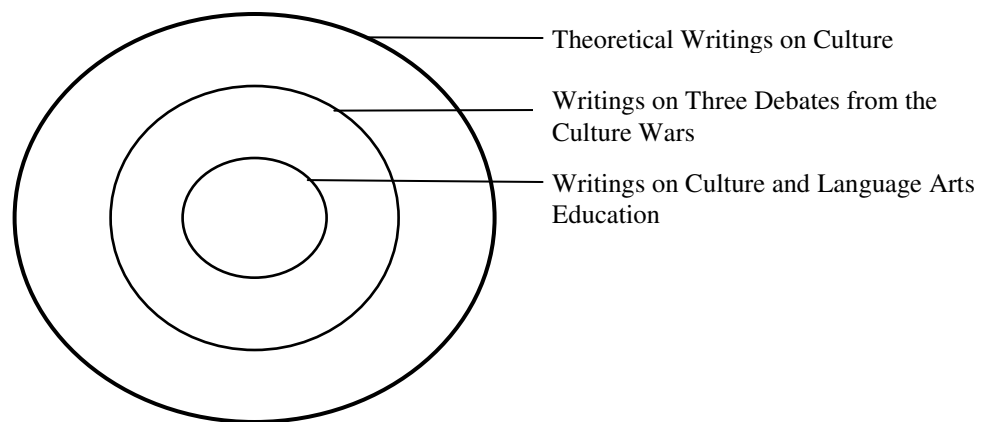


Figure 1. Methodological Approach: Concentric Circles

Clifford Geertz (1973) would refer to these as “webs of significance” spun around culture wars in education.

Chapter two examines the canon debate through cultural capital analysis. I review distinctions between ahistorical claims for canonical value and historical processes of canon formation as well as between intrinsic and instrumental approaches to aesthetics in order to argue that *Othello* as cultural capital complicates the terms of the canon debate. Furthermore chapter two illustrates how constructions of *Othello* as a school text reflect these complexities.

Chapter three examines multicultural education debates using cultural rights analysis. Beginning with a review of arguments for and against cultural rights-based theories of multiculturalism and concomitant approaches to multicultural education, I then examine ways in which *Othello* has been similarly subject to a politics of recognition and representation associated with definitions of cultural rights. Drawing on my experiences of teaching *Othello*, I explore how *Othello* as a school text can contribute to rethinking the politics of multiculturalism.

Chapter four examines the cultural literacy debate through cultural reproduction analysis. I critique traditionalist and progressive educational assumptions about cultural reproduction in order to demonstrate the extent to which conceptions of culture are poorly theorized in educational research. By tracing the influence of John Dewey’s writings on theories and practices of language arts education, I further illustrate ways in which research on language arts education continues to inadequately theorize culture. Teaching *Othello* constitutes a compelling example of cultural reproduction, the implications of which are examined in detail, specifically in relation to understanding the politics of cultural reproduction in language arts education.

The concluding chapter summarizes my findings and re-describes them in terms of their contribution to the larger project of theorizing relationships between education and culture.

Chapter One

Culture and Language Arts Education: Toward a Methodological Approach

Background Context and Methodological Challenges

We write with an audience in mind. When researching and writing this study I had in mind someone rather like myself, wearing multiple hats of a secondary language arts teacher, a language arts teacher educator, and a literacy researcher; moreover, someone who has become increasingly obsessed, as I have, with tracking varied uses of the term culture in research on language arts education. This obsession is stoked by a compelling contradiction discernible not only in language arts education but across all areas of education, namely, there is no consensus around a definition of culture and yet there is overwhelming consensus that concepts of culture play a central role in how we understand educational practices. This study is an inquiry into the reasons for this contradiction and the concomitant implications of this contradiction for theories and practices of secondary language arts education. I am arguing that this contradiction arises not only in the field of education but mirrors contradictions inherent in definitions of culture. Yet in education these contradictions are somewhat pronounced as they have become the source of polarizing and intractable conflicts called the culture wars.

Drawing on writings from the canon, multicultural education, and cultural literacy debates, I review uses of the term culture in each debate. Thereafter by drawing upon writings on *Othello* I highlight how conflicting interpretations of *Othello* mirror conflicts in the culture wars, and finally I connect the implications of these conflicts for language arts education through an analysis of different approaches to teaching *Othello*. This study travels across fairly large intellectual territories, encompassing interdisciplinary writings on theories of culture, the culture wars, *Othello* and Shakespeare in general, language arts education, and literacy. The justification for this interdisciplinary approach is dictated by the methodological challenges that are posed by the term culture. As such the rationale of this study is to offer language arts educators the concepts of cultural capital, cultural rights, and cultural reproduction as analytical tools for thinking through these

methodological challenges. The selection of *Othello* has been dictated by the types of questions that this text has generated in literary criticism and through its performance history. The relevance of these questions for examining uses of the term culture in language arts education will be explored in detail once a map of the theoretical problems informing this study has been laid out. Although I will refer to my experiences of teaching *Othello*, I have not undertaken field research for this study and my key arguments are not linked to field observations.

Before introducing my proposed analytical tools, let me review what I consider to be three key methodological challenges associated with the term culture and ways in which they will be addressed through this study. First, as alluded to at the outset, there is the challenge of arriving at a definition of the concept (or concepts) of culture to be examined. This challenge is not specific to educational research but emerges in relation to all uses of the term culture. Historically, beginning with the conceptual distinction framed between nature versus culture (in particular human nature versus human culture), the intellectual history of the term culture reflects, as it were, its etymological roots in Latin (from the noun *cultura* and the verb *culturare*), connoting a process of ongoing cultivation, more specifically a process of continuing conceptual cultivation. The first methodological challenge is thus rooted in the fact that the term culture is open-ended. That the term culture carries many definitions is a truism. It is, simply put, an unresolved concept. Despite this unresolvedness the term culture continues to exercise widespread influence as both an explanatory and an analytical concept. The implications of this state of affairs are aptly brought out in a recently edited four-volume anthology on the most influential 20th century writings on the concept of culture written by humanists and social scientists. In his introduction, Chris Jenks, (2003) the editor of this anthology, offers some observations pertinent for the purposes of this study:

Culture is an incredibly difficult ideaThe idea of culture embraces a range of topics, processes, differences and even paradoxes, many of which cannot be resolved. The concept is at least complex and at most so divergent in its various applications as to defy the possibility, or indeed the necessity, of any singular designationIt [concept of culture] is nevertheless real in its significations both in every day language and in its increasingly broad currency within the fashionable discourses of the modern academy globally. Indeed culture has come to provide an intellectual meeting point across languages and disciplinesIt has

not been invented in the latter part of the twentieth century, however, the contemporary upsurge in interest centered on the idea of culture must surely tell us something about the times we are living through. (p. 1)

In this light it appears that the challenge of arriving at a satisfactory definition of the concept of culture is a perennial, if not an elusive, quest. This study addresses the definition predicament in language arts education by examining different uses in order to shed light on the times that language arts educators are living through. Arguably the issue of open-endedness might seem to be rendered non-problematic by simply positing a formal definition of culture and thereafter undertaking a quantitative or qualitative analysis on the extent to which this formal definition fits inside (or maps out) the landscape of language arts research as embodied, say, in the coverage represented in the *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts* (Flood, Jensen, Lapp, & Squire, 2002), or in the summary review of literacy research approaches covered in the reference compendium entitled *Methods of Literacy Research* (Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, & Barr, 2002). Such an approach can be of value, but it necessarily entails avoiding a primary question about why different uses of the term culture are subject to such vociferous debates, most visibly expressed through what since the early 1990s have been referred to as the culture wars in North American education (Graff, 1992; Hunter, 1991; Zimmerman, 2002). I will be arguing that this methodological challenge cannot be avoided yet it needs to be rigorously examined in order to understand how and why the term culture matters for language arts education.

Second, there is the challenge of identifying a specific focus within language arts education. The term culture pervades and impinges on almost every aspect of language arts research. It is a landscape of research that includes, for example, research on the types of cultural assumptions shaping the articulation and application of literacy standards (Heath, 1996; IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts, 1996; Purcell-Gates, 2002); on approaches to teaching Shakespeare using resources from contemporary popular culture (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Salomone & Davis, 1993, 1997); and on how to effectively address challenges of cultural diversity inside language arts classrooms (Cazden, 2000; Fecho, 2004; Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Willinsky, 2001). To be sure, appeals to the term

culture take on varied accents and formulations within each of these research areas. However, what also becomes clear is that these uses and approaches have a history. The second methodological challenge derives from the fact that the term culture is historically contingent and thus the examination of its uses demands bringing to bear a historical self-consciousness of the shifts and continuities that are at play. A sense of historicity informs my methodological approach, especially as it involves tracing changing interpretations of *Othello* over the past four centuries. I will be arguing that in large part it is a lack of historical self-consciousness that accounts for the taken for granted and unexamined uses of the term culture in language arts education.

Finally, the third methodological challenge, building on earlier challenges, is that the term culture is ideologically contested; or rather it is an example of what W.B. Gallie (1956) has referred to as an “essentially contested concept.” Although Gallie did not refer to the concept of culture, nonetheless his argument that certain concepts carry philosophical (hence not reducible to empirical definition) and ideological connotations (hence reflecting vested interests) aptly captures what I have in mind when referring to contested definitions of culture:

My main thought with regard to them is this. We find groups of people disagreeing about the proper use of the concepts, e.g., of art, of democracy, of the Christian tradition. When we examine the different uses of these terms and the characteristic arguments in which they figure we soon see that there is no one clearly definable general use of any of them which can be set up as the correct or standard use Now once this *variety* of functions is disclosed it might well be expected that the disputes in which the above mentioned concepts figure would at once come to an end. But in fact this does not happen. Each party continues to maintain that the special functions which the term “work of art” or “democracy” or “Christian doctrine” fulfills on *its* behalf or on *its* interpretation, is the correct or proper or primary, or the only important, function which the term in question can be plainly be said to fulfill This is what I mean by saying that there are concepts which are essentially contested, concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users. (Gallie, 1956, pp. 168–169)

Gallie anticipates Raymond Williams’ related approach developed in his remarkably learned book, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1981), where he illustrates the evolution of definitions of keywords in the humanities and social sciences, such as culture, as being driven by changing contexts of argument (or problematization):

Culture, the original difficult word, is an exact example ... Every word which I have included has at some time, in the course of some argument, virtually forced itself on my attention because the problems of its meanings seemed to me inextricably bound up with the problems it was being used to discuss. (pp. 12–13)

The relatively recent historical emergence of the term *culture wars* is a product of such disputes. Culture wars refer to a climate of ideological polarization between the cultural right and the cultural left which has old historical roots. Ralph Waldo Emerson's caricature of this perennial polarization is well worth recalling: "There are always two parties, the party of the Past and the party of the Future: the Establishment and the Movement" (Emerson, 1883/1981, p. 594). The contemporary usage of the phrase *culture wars* can be traced to the German term *kulturkampf* (literally culture struggle) which was coined around late 19th century conflicts in the German empire between the rising power of Otto von Bismarck's secular state policies and the declining authority of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly with respect to the Church's authority in shaping educational policies (Ross, 1998). Variations of related conflicts under different labels can be traced throughout European history. For example, in 17th century France there erupted an intellectual debate referred to as "*la querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*," on whether the arts and literature of the modern era had achieved more than the illustrious writers and artists of antiquity (Adam, 1958). In England this debate was popularized by Jonathan Swift (1704/1999) under the slogan: "Battle of the Books."

Seen in this perspective the culture wars in North American education reflect variations on the continuing legacy of how the contest between right-wing and left-wing public education policies (referred to broadly as conservative versus progressive educational agendas) are played out. The contemporary culture wars also hark back to the 19th century *kulturkampf* context where what was (and is) at stake are questions about the role of different models of authority around competing ideological visions for public education. Is it simply a case of who holds political power that will determine whether conservative or progressive agendas for public education are implemented? Or is there room to shape public education policies on the basis of a systematic analysis of conservative and progressive education ideologies? In this study I argue for the value of

elbow room to critically examine different ideological claims about the role of culture in education.

The debates that I am analyzing represent respectively ways in which such philosophical and ideological differences emerge around the term culture within educational contexts. It is through polarized expressions of the contestation inside each debate that demarcations between the cultural right and cultural left acquire sharper definition. In the canon debate the contestation is framed around how to define evaluation criteria for institutionally establishing a canonical list of literary texts to be taught (Bloom, 1994; Gates, 1992; Graff, 1992; Guillory, 1993; McCarthy, 1993; Willis, 1998); while in the multicultural education debate it is around how to recognize and accommodate cultural differences between students (Appiah, 1996; Banks, 1994; Banks & McGee, 2003; Fullinwider, 1996; Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999); and finally in the cultural literacy debate it is around how educational institutions should reproduce cultural identities (Friere, 1970/1993, 1998; Gardner, 2002; Hirsch, 1987, 1996, 2002, 2006; Ravitch, 2002, 2003).

To undertake, in the course of a single study, an analysis of how each of these large, unwieldy debates can contribute to a critical understanding of the ways in which the term culture informs language arts education, is an undertaking that certainly runs the risk of becoming unmanageable, of opening doors, as it were, into an overcrowded room. Yet I am arguing that only by undertaking such a broad overview, in the first instance, will language arts researchers be able to fully appreciate the deep and wide impact of the term culture in language arts education. As such I am here seeking to make this impact visible and at the same time examine why a significant aspect of this impact is exercised through the types of debates engendered by the term culture. Nonetheless, the potential risk of unmanageability will I hope be mitigated by the methodological approach for this study. To elaborate the details of this approach let me turn to the historical emergence of the field of cultural studies in order to explicate how I selectively draw on its methodological assumptions for this study, while at the same time illustrate significant differences between my methodological approach and a cultural studies approach.

Cultural Analysis and Language Arts Education

In a special reprint issue of the *Harvard Education Review* (Gaztambide-Fernandez, Harding, & Sorde Marti, 2004) entitled *Cultural Studies and Education: Perspectives on Theory, Methodology and Practice*, the editors collected together *Harvard Education Review* articles from the 1980s onwards on themes such as popular culture and youth studies, post-colonial and ethnic studies, and gender and queer studies with the aim of arguing that:

This book portrays the intersection of two impressive currents in contemporary intellectual life, cultural studies and educational research ... Despite important contributions from a number of scholars, commerce between these two fields has, until recently, been disappointingly scarce. These essays suggest that such collaboration can greatly enrich both fields ... As a field, cultural studies is difficult to define largely because scholars within it draw from an amalgam of disciplinary perspectives while resisting traditional academic demarcations. It can generally be characterized as a scholarly movement that draws on theories of culture from various disciplines, such as literature, anthropology, sociology, and psychoanalysis, to understand issues regarding cultural phenomena—including academic culture itself. (p. 1)

One can read the above excerpt as making a case for the hitherto unexplored research value of drawing connections between questions about education and about culture. Even though cultural studies is advocated as a disciplinary framework for examining these questions, the editors concede that the disciplinary boundaries of cultural studies research are difficult to define and that its guiding methodology can be best defined as an interdisciplinary approach rooted in various theories of culture.

Henry Giroux's (2004) article ("Doing Cultural Studies: Youth and the Challenge of Pedagogy") in this collection articulates more explicitly not only the specific interdisciplinary characteristics of cultural studies research in education but also the Marxist and Neo-Marxist modes of ideological criticism which inform research approaches in the field of cultural studies, and which are particularly relevant for understanding educational practices. These methodological approaches of ideological criticism are best exemplified in the influential studies on working class culture by British historians and cultural theorists such as Richard Hoggart (1957), E.P. Thompson

(1961), and Raymond Williams (1961). Giroux's description of the educational significance of cultural studies research follows in this tradition:

Moreover, educators frequently pride themselves on being professional, scientific, and objective. Cultural studies challenges the ideological and political nature of such claims by arguing that teachers always work and speak within historically and socially determined relations of power Since cultural studies is largely concerned with the critical relationship among culture, knowledge, and power, it is not surprising that mainstream educators often dismiss cultural studies as being too ideological, or simply ignore its criticisms regarding how education generates a privileged normative space for some social groups and a space of inequality and subordination for others. (2004, p. 234)

What is the relevance of these excerpts for the purposes of this study? To begin with they contain salient descriptions of the methodological characteristics of cultural studies research in education, namely that it is interdisciplinary in approach because it draws on various theories of culture, and that, broadly speaking, it is informed by a commitment to an ideological critique of power relations rooted in Marxist analysis, demonstrating, for example, how concepts of culture are constructed to maintain hierarchies (e.g., high versus low culture) and how these hierarchical distinctions generate educational effects of inclusion and exclusion. The advocacy for cultural studies research in education can be said to reflect a process of self-consciousness about changes in educational practices that present not only complicated conceptual challenges (hence interdisciplinarity) but also embody strongly vested ideological interests (hence ideological critique). Although theories of culture referred to in cultural studies research do not resolve the definition predicament associated with the term culture, nonetheless it is interesting to note that concepts of culture are appealed to when labeling certain types of changes and ideological differences embedded in educational practices. In a similar vein this study seeks to examine specific debates from the culture wars with a view to demonstrating not only ways in which they reflect changes in language arts educational practices, but to also demonstrate that our understanding of the links between these debates and language arts education entails a methodological approach that is interdisciplinary and self-conscious of the competing ideological perspectives that are at play.

While drawing on these broad characteristics of cultural studies research, the methodological approach of this study differs in some significant respects from cultural studies approaches, especially around applying Marxist modes of ideological criticism. These differences can be brought into sharper relief through a reiteration of this study's objectives and rationale. The key research objective is to offer analytical tools for understanding ways in which the term culture informs secondary language arts education, and the guiding rationale is to enhance ways in which the role and significance of culture is theorized in English education. Since the scope of language arts research around the term culture is quite wide, I am focusing on strands of language arts research which directly engage with or reflect ideological conflicts fuelling debates stemming from the cultural wars in education. That these debates are ideological in character is assumed and hence, in contrast to an ideologically committed cultural studies approach, my aim is not to take sides on these debates (as in the Marxist mode), but rather to clarify and explore more fully the historical conditions, theoretical questions and educational factors shaping ideological polarizations provoked by these debates. I am not claiming that this study transcends ideology because that is not possible. Just as one cannot step outside culture, it is not possible to step outside ideology. Yet notwithstanding this conceptual conundrum, I want to argue that it is defensible to try to stand back and ask how the adjective *cultural* is being used to define these debates. However the results of such an examination will of necessity be interpretive in nature because as Clifford Geertz, a leading cultural anthropologist, eloquently reminds us:

The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (1973, p. 5)

Geertz, however, in a recently published collection of essays (2000) sounds less self-assured as he highlights methodological challenges that I have been circling around:

The trouble is that no one is quite sure what culture is. Not only is it an essentially contested concept, like democracy, religion, simplicity, or social justice; it is a multiply defined one, multiply employed, ineradicably imprecise. It is fugitive, unsteady, encyclopedic, and normatively charged, and there are those, especially those for whom only the really real is really real, who think it vacuous altogether,

or even dangerous, and would ban it from the serious discourse of serious persons. (p. 11)

Notwithstanding Geertz's caution about the difficulties of writing on the term culture—which, ironically, did not deter him, judging from his prolific output of theoretical and ethnographic writings spanning over five decades—I find his metaphor for the concept of culture as humanly spun “webs of significance” compelling and a useful description of what I want to accomplish through the proposed analytical tools, namely, to better understand the “webs of significance” spun by (and spun for) language arts educators around the term culture.

The proposed methodological approach is built around three bodies of textual data, diagrammatically pictured as three concentric circles. The innermost circle represents writings on culture and language arts education (e.g., Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; *IRA/NCTE Standards for the English language arts*, 1996; Langer, 1987; Luke, 2001, 2005; Smagorinsky, 2001; Street, 1993, 1995, 2005; *Western Canadian Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts K-12*, 1998; Willinsky, 2001), while the next circle represents writings on the three debates from the culture wars (e.g., Banks, 2001, 2004; Bloom, 1994; Fullinwider, 1996; Graff, 1992; Guillory, 1999; Hirsch, 1987, 1996, 2006; McCarthy, 1993; Ravitch, 2002, 2003; Stotsky, 1999; Willis, 1998; Willis, Garcia, Barrera & Harris, 2003), and the outermost circle represents theoretical writings on culture (e.g., Appiah, 2005, 2006; Bhabha, 1994; Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1916/1966; Egan, 1997; Geertz, 1973, 2000; Kuper, 1999; Kymlicka, 1995, 1998, 2001; May, Modood, Squires, 2004; Said, 1978, 1993; Sen, 2006; Taylor, 1994).

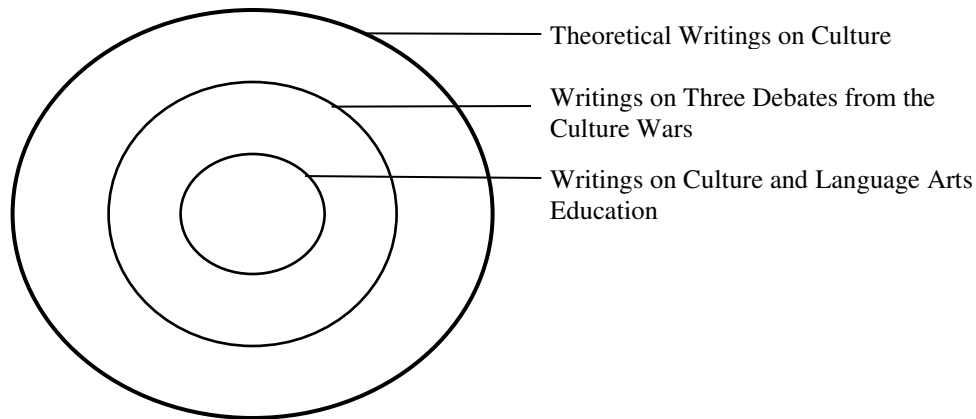


Figure 1. Methodological Approach: Concentric Circles (repeated)

The purpose of this methodological approach is to build bridges between these circles, so that moving from the inner circle outwards, language arts educators can see ways in which questions about the significance of the term culture in language arts education reflect wider ideological and theoretical contexts. Analogously by moving from the outermost circle inwards, cultural theorists can appreciate how language arts education constitutes a significant site for examining ideological tensions and theoretical questions associated with the term culture. This methodological approach embodies both post-structuralist assumptions (i.e., the term culture is historically constructed and thus cannot be reduced to a single objective definition) and neo-Marxist assumptions (i.e., the term culture serves vested interests), yet it also motivated by a more general philosophical interest in tracing how theories translate into practices, and how an examination of practices in turn complicates our understanding of theories.

The Methodological Approach and Othello as a School Text

The process of anchoring my findings in the landscapes of language arts education will be facilitated through the primary unit of analysis selected to drive the study, namely, William Shakespeare's *Othello* as a school text. The teaching of *Othello* provides me with a circumscribed and tangible point of reference around which to define the thematic and conceptual bridges linking the data found in each of the three circles.

These bridges will be built by linking *Othello* as a school text to each debate and then analyzing these linkages through relevant data from each circle, with a view to drawing out the implications for language arts education.

Othello and the Canon Debate

Starting, for example, with the first circle of language arts research my aim will be to draw out links to the canon debate. Because *Othello* is recommended to be taught as part of the secondary language arts curriculum (Christenbury, 1997), questions can be asked about the type of criteria being applied in support of this recommendation, and these questions about establishing evaluation criteria in relation to literary texts are at the centre of the canon debate (thus linking the innermost circle to the second circle). Distinctions between, for example, aesthetic versus non-aesthetic, intrinsic value versus instrumental value, and even between non-ideological versus ideological claims are some of the prominent frames within which evaluation criteria for a literary canon are debated. Since literary texts are, borrowing Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) formulation, perceived as forms of *cultural capital*, the teaching of *Othello* raises questions about how the evaluation and teaching of literary texts reflect what I will refer to as the theoretical problem of normativity (Foucault, 1984; Hacking, 2002) associated with definitions of culture (thus linking all three circles). As such, I will draw on the concept of cultural capital as an analytical tool to examine how questions about the politics of the canon debate arise in secondary language arts education through the teaching of *Othello*.

Othello and Multicultural Education Debates

There is a comparable trajectory of links with multicultural education debates and all three concentric circles. My focus will be on the teaching of *Othello* in public education systems situated within nation states that not only have culturally diverse populations but uphold commitments to multiculturalism, a significant expression of which are articulations of multicultural education initiatives in order to ensure that public education institutions are inclusive and able to address challenges of teaching culturally diverse student bodies. In this context questions can be asked as to how or whether the teaching of *Othello* contributes to goals of multicultural education. Competing

perspectives on what constitute inclusive as opposed to exclusionary educational policies are at the centre of multicultural education debates.

Multicultural education debates differ across nation-states, and hence the focus in this study will not be limited to a specific national context but will draw from educational research on multiculturalism in Australia (Castles, Cope, Kalantzis & Morrissey, 1992; Hill & Allan, 2003); Britain (Figueroa, 2003; Modood, 2005); Canada (Connelly, Phillion, & Fang, 2003; Dei, 1996; Dei, Muzzuca, McIsaac & Zine, 1997; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Joshee, 2004; Phillion, 2002); New Zealand (May, 1994; Smith, 1997, 2003); and United States (Bennett, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Nieto, 2005; Reich, 2002). These countries share a family resemblance. Apart from the fact that *Othello* is taught in the secondary language arts education curricula in each of these majority English-speaking countries (Salomone & Davis, 1997), Kymlicka (2004) describes them as major countries of immigration founded either by conquest and colonization of indigenous peoples or, in the case of Britain, by the history of having governed an empire with colonial subjects in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. From the beginning of the 20th century onwards the historical development of societies in these countries has been significantly shaped through a continuous process of immigration and, as a result, they are today comprised of diverse cultural communities, though with certain communities positioned as cultural minorities in relation to a dominant cultural majority (Gurr, 2000). Articulations of the multicultural education debate may vary across these national contexts, yet I will be arguing that they nonetheless all reflect engagements with a common theoretical problem, namely, that of defining what are the *cultural rights* of minority communities in multicultural, liberal democracies (Habermas, 2004; Kymlicka, 2001). The concept of cultural rights can serve as a useful analytical tool for examining ways in which key ideological tensions fuelling multicultural education debates are reflected in language arts research on cultural diversity. These ideological tensions can be described broadly in terms of an opposition between, on one hand, an activist liberal cultural left perspective (Benhabib, 2002; Kymlicka, 2001, 2004; Nieto, 2005) advocating the equal recognition of cultural rights of minorities and immigrants and, on the other hand, a traditionalist conservative cultural right perspective (Bisoondath, 2002; Huntington, 2004; Schlesinger,

1992; Stotsky, 1999;) advocating assimilationist policies toward immigrants and minorities.

Furthermore since the application of the concept of cultural rights entails recognizing distinct group identities, it is a concept that presupposes theoretical questions about cultural identity, more specifically questions about how definitions of cultural identity embody essentialist (stereotypical) constructions of difference. These questions about cultural identity can be summarized as reflecting what Charles Taylor (1992) calls the “politics of recognition” (e.g., recognition on whose terms?), as well as what Edward Said (1978) calls the “politics of representation” (e.g., representation on whose terms?).

Spanning almost four centuries, the history of literary criticism as well as the performance history associated with *Othello* bears witness to an engagement with similar questions on the politics of cultural identity, revolving around interpretations of cultural and racial difference attributed to Othello as a character (Kolin, 2002; Neill, 2006; Pechter, 1999, 2004), and representations of Othello’s character on the stage (Potter, 2002; Rosenberg, 1961). Thus in this study I examine the types of theoretical questions about the politics of cultural identity that arise through the teaching of *Othello* in culturally diverse secondary language arts classrooms, and how such an examination can contribute to ways in which language arts educators critically think about the implications of multicultural debates (and the fact of cultural diversity) for language arts education.

Othello and the Cultural Literacy Debate

Before drawing out the links between the cultural literacy debate, *Othello* as a school text and the three circles, it may be helpful to describe the specific genesis of the term *cultural literacy*. With the publication of E.D. Hirsch, Jr.’s bestselling book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987), and the subsequent establishment of the Core Knowledge Foundation which publishes textbooks, curriculum materials (currently used in about 400 American schools), and research based on Hirsch’s recommendations, the term *cultural literacy* has become emblematic of a conservative educational agenda that seeks to turn the tide on what Hirsch diagnosed as shortcomings, if not failures, of progressive educational policies. Hirsch’s primary criticism is that the

emphasis of progressive educators on skills-based and process-centred learning has been at the expense (and devaluation) of content-based learning, resulting in the gradual erosion of a shared knowledge base on which to develop curricula, establish sound educational standards and most importantly to transmit a sense of belonging and participation in a common culture:

If shared background knowledge is necessary for full participation in the larger national society, the same reasoning must also hold for full participation in a smaller social group, and most especially that of the classroom itselfSuch universal participation by students cannot occur unless they all share a core of relevant background knowledgeIn emphasizing shared knowledge, *Cultural Literacy* attacked the formalism that currently dominates American educational thought. Educational formalism is based on the idea that inculcating formal skills is much more important than the transmission of knowledge ... (Hirsch, 1996, p. 14)

Hirsch's advocacy of cultural literacy arguably reflects anxieties about the types of cultural identities that are being reproduced by public education institutions. Hence the cultural literacy debate is in effect a debate between competing cultural reproduction strategies in the context of culturally heterogeneous societies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Martin, 2002). Hirsch appeals to a reproduction strategy defined around empowering participation in a common culture (i.e., in Hirsch's case, a common American culture), which he argues is most effectively achieved through foundational content-based (as opposed to skills-based) learning and teaching. As such a student's cultural identity, for Hirsch, is defined primarily in relation to a body of knowledge that is inculcated and mastered. Although Hirsch's polemical tone is directed towards attacking caricatured versions of progressive educational thought going back to John Dewey, nevertheless Hirsch's formulation of cultural literacy perceptively articulates the terms of debate between *product versus process* models of pedagogy, the central thrust of which is aptly captured in Howard Gardner's rebuttal of Hirsch:

It is important to stress that one can only learn to think historically—or scientifically or artistically—by delving deeply into specific topics. I differ from Diane Ravitch and E.D. Hirsch, Jr. ... in my belief that the particular topics or courses do not matter nearly so much as the ways of thinking that are (or are not) taught in those courses. Once equipped with these ways of thinking, students can go on to master whatever content they wish; bereft of disciplined minds, they can only continue to accrue what Alfred North Whitehead called “inert knowledge.”

My critique of the “standards movement” does not reflect discomfort with standards, but rather unhappiness about the excessive “content” thrust of most standards. (Gardner, 2002, p. 24)

This study seeks to examine the implications of the cultural literacy debate for approaches to teaching *Othello*; and I draw on modes of cultural reproduction analysis to examine yet another set of perspectives and questions on the significance of culture for language arts education. For example, what sort of cultural literacy (in Hirsch’s specific connotation of a foundational and shared body of knowledge) is reproduced through teaching *Othello*? How does the theory of cultural reproduction in John Dewey’s writings differ from Hirsch’s theory? How can approaches to teaching *Othello* contribute to reproducing strong identifications with a common culture? Alternatively, can *Othello* be taught in ways by which definitions of a common culture are complicated, let alone empower participation in a common culture? In this debate, the references, explicit and implied, to the notion of empowerment provide a generative lens for analyzing competing definitions of empowerment goals in education (Freire, 1970/1993, 1998; Hirsch, 2006).

In addition to the reasons already cited for selecting *Othello* as an entry point into the landscape of language arts education, methodologically the focus on *Othello* grounds this study in a historical approach to the term culture. Doing so underscores one of the central premises of this study, namely, that definitions of culture are conditioned by the historical contexts in which they are articulated and hence the application of my methodological approach will also help map out, through an examination of *Othello* as a school text, the historical factors shaping definitions and uses of the term culture in contemporary language arts education.

Historical Perspectives and Analytical Tools: Readings of Othello as a School Text

A historical mode of analysis emerges through my review of different readings of *Othello* as a school text. By applying the analytical frame of *cultural capital* to *Othello* I draw on the history of literary criticism on *Othello* as a literary text in order to understand how this history reflects questions about *evaluation* that arise in relation to the term culture, and furthermore exploring ways in which *Othello* as a school text both carries the

weight of this history and serves as a specific illustration of the manner in which a capital-based (evaluative) perspective on culture is contested in the canon debate.

Similarly, applying the analytical frame of *cultural rights* to *Othello* calls for an examination of how the performance and film adaptation history of *Othello* reflects questions about the politics of recognition and representation that arise around the term culture. *Othello* as a school text, I argue, serves as a generative example through which to explore ways in which a rights-based perspective on culture is contested in multicultural education debates. Finally, by applying the analytical frame of *cultural reproduction* to *Othello* I draw on the history of textbook versions and teaching and learning resources developed to teach *Othello* in the secondary language arts curriculum, with the aim specifically of analyzing the pedagogical strategies reflected in these instructional materials. Textbook editions used in secondary classrooms include publications by Signet (Kernan, 1986), Folger (Mowat & Werstine, 1993), Cambridge University Press (Coles, 2001), and Oxford University Press (Gill, 2002). I argue that an analysis of pedagogical approaches to teaching *Othello* along these lines illustrates how a reproduction-based perspective on culture is contested in the cultural literacy debate.

Applying the Analytical Tools: The Term Culture in Language Arts and Literacy Research

Tracking, as it were, these historically evolving readings of *Othello* through the filters of cultural capital, cultural rights, and cultural reproduction analysis will, I hope, serve as a useful springboard for spurring critical conversations among language arts educators and researchers about the theoretical and ideological complexities that attend uses of the term culture. The need to account for these complexities in language arts education can be brought home by simply observing the amorphous and taken-for-granted range of references to culture in the writings of prominent language arts and literacy scholars. A team of literacy researchers calling themselves the New London Group, comprised of scholars from Australia, Britain, and North America, such as Courtney Cazden, Bill Cope, Norman Fairclough, James Gee, Mary Kalantzis, Gunther Kress, Alan Luke, Carmen Luke, Sarah Michaels, Martin Nakata, and Joseph Le Bianco, developed a comprehensive pedagogical model around the term *Multiliteracies* (New

London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) aimed at addressing what the group identified as the two key contemporary challenges confronting language arts and literacy education in their respective countries: first, radical and rapidly shifting changes in communications media where the written word is increasingly part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns, and second, the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity in schools and society characterized by local diversity and global connectedness (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). The following references to the concept of culture in the description of their pedagogical goals are instructive [emphasis in italics added]:

A pedagogy of Multiliteracies, by contrast, focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to *culture* and context, and have specific cognitive, *cultural*, and social effects. In some *cultural* contexts—in an Aboriginal community or in a multimedia environment, for instance—the visual mode of representation may be much more powerful and closely related to language than ‘mere literacy’ would be ever be able to allow. 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 uses as they work to achieve their various *cultural* purposes. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5)

This passage contains four references to the concept of culture in the space of four sentences (once as a noun and thrice as the adjective, *cultural*). Each of these references begs questions such as: how is the term culture being used to differentiate it from the term *context*? and what exactly is meant by referring to certain effects, purposes and even contexts as being *cultural*? My reason for citing this passage is not to critique the goals of the *Multiliteracies* project, to which this passage does not do justice, but to illustrate traces of the tension between the centrality attributed to the concept of culture, on the one hand, and the concomitant vagueness of what it signifies for language arts or literacy research, on the other.

Ascertaining what, for the New London Group, counts as the achievement of “cultural purposes” can be fruitfully linked to a mode of cultural capital analysis, where the emphasis moves away from defining cultural purposefulness to better understanding the nature of the contested evaluation criteria used in demarcating more purposeful from less purposeful expressions of culture— analogously, distinguishing more valuable from less valuable forms of cultural capital. References to culture as context arguably embody

the most common usage of the term culture in language arts research, used as shorthand for giving primacy to the situated contexts (as opposed to a decontextualized view) of learning and teaching processes. This strand of research has its roots in the writings of Lev Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and through the influential elaboration of Vygotsky's thought in the writings of Jerome Bruner (1986, 1996). The term context, for example, in reference to the Aboriginal community, is here arguably also used to mark cultural differentiation. The theoretical questions that arise when demarcating boundaries to define different cultural contexts can be fruitfully examined through a mode of cultural rights analysis with its emphasis on bringing into sharper focus the politics of recognition and representation that inevitably arise. As for distinguishing among cultural, cognitive, and social effects of literacy pedagogy, a mode of cultural reproduction analysis can at least help methodologically ground and establish useful parameters around what would otherwise turn into an intractable philosophical inquiry, a prospect clearly not intended by the authors of the passage.

Unpacking the above passage in this manner brings to light connections between terms culture and literacy. Definitions of literacy are no less contested especially when applied to processes of using and learning to use language after the stage of acquiring basic alphabetic decoding skills, the lack of which becomes the basis for measuring illiteracy rates in a population group. Yet once we move past the relatively less contentious definitions of functional literacy associated with the ability "to read and write in a basic mechanical sense" (Carter, 1995, p. 98), definitions of literacy are vigorously debated be it in terms of institutionalizing literacy standards (Fisher, Brooks, & Lewis, 2002), advocating for critical literacy practices (Muspratt, Luke, & Freebody, 1997), or, as in the Multiliteracies project, developing pedagogical models for accommodating and validating multiple literacies (Beach & Myers, 2001; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). These debates carry uncanny resemblances with educational debates around the term culture, in large part because when literacy is no longer solely conceived in terms of cognitive processes or skills but rather as a set of practices, then, as manifest in the passage on Multiliteracies, references to culture become unavoidable in descriptions of literacy.

An inquiry into the term as well as the concept of culture is an enterprise with a voracious appetite, the web of implications that can be drawn are open-ended, and the above linkages with literacy practices are but one example of this open-endedness. By proposing a methodological approach based on readings of *Othello* as a school text in relation to modes of cultural capital, cultural rights and cultural reproduction analysis, I am attempting, in effect, to bring a semblance of intellectual coherence or rather to define more sharply the types of incoherence that arise in the face of this open-endedness. Moreover by not critically interrogating this open-endedness, language arts educators and researchers, all too often, end up using the term *culture* or *cultural* in unexamined ways, hence running the risk of rendering the term meaningless. The following description of the links between culture and literacy by Judith Langer, a prolific and influential language arts researcher, is an instructive example of the potential risks that accompany unexamined usage [emphasis added]:

Just as *culture* affects the intellectual effects of literacy, so too does *culture* affect the process of learning to be literate. Detailed studies of literacy from historians and anthropologists have been *culture*-specific ... attempting to explain relationships between particular *cultures* and ways of learning. This has provided an understanding of literacy uses and developments within and across certain *cultures* at particular points in time. However, educators and development planners often fail to consider literacy in similar ways, as *culturally* specific phenomenon. (Langer, 1987, p. 7)

Despite the many questions (rather than prescriptions) that I will be posing throughout this study, I am hoping that it will strike a chord among fellow secondary language arts teachers who every year have to fulfill the requirement of teaching a Shakespeare play, and to them I am proposing that teaching *Othello* carries the potential of not only critically engaging our students but ourselves as we try to address the challenges of teaching in culturally diverse classrooms, where we cannot afford to define cultural differences in taken for granted ways. For fellow teacher educators I am hoping that this study will provoke a desire to argue about ways in which we teach and think about culture. I am also addressing literacy researchers, particularly by putting myself out on a limb and arguing that we need to seriously rethink the ways in which we use the term culture in literacy research.

Chapter Two

***Othello* and the Canon Debate: Toward a Cultural Capital Analysis**

Chapter one laid out in broad terms the methodological approach guiding this study and the types of questions I will pursue when examining debates around the term culture, as well as implications of these debates for secondary language arts education. This chapter focuses on the canon debate, beginning with an overview of key claims framing the debate as highlighted in Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* (1994). Thereafter I review the impact of these claims on language arts education in North America, especially as expressed in debates around establishing standards. Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital is introduced as an analytical tool for examining the nature of the cultural conflicts played out through the canon debate. By approaching *Othello* as a form of cultural capital I illustrate how the history of its reception in literary criticism and its circulation as a school text complicates our understanding of canonical texts and concomitant uses of the term culture in the canon debate.

The Canon Debate and Language Arts Education

The canon debate carries connotations which have the ring of being at once an old historical quarrel as well as a very contemporary conflict. It is undoubtedly an old predicament as conveyed by the use of the term *canon*, which in its early historical usage harkens back to the context of early Christian churches where canon referred to the officially recognized books that constituted the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible. From this usage emerges the distinction between canonical and non-canonical (apocryphal), connoting in effect the boundaries between authoritative and non-authoritative texts. The concept of canon law developed out of the same ecclesiastical context, referring to sacred and immutable norms legitimating the institutional authority of the Church in medieval European societies. Connotations of newness, then, surrounding the canon debate as framed in the context of contemporary culture wars reflect variations on a perennial theme.

The central preoccupation in the contemporary canon debate continues to be the authority of texts, though the variations consist of a shift away from religious scriptures and laws to the evaluation of secular literature, as well as a move away from the Church to the authority of secular educational institutions to establish the boundaries of canonical literature that should be taught. The prolific amount of writing and publicity on the canon debate in North American educational institutions over the past three decades gives the impression that the debate about secular literature is a contemporary educational challenge without historical precedents. It certainly carries a contemporary significance which I want to examine. It should, however, be noted that issues around a canon of secular literature have a long history in Europe and in what is generally referred to as Western culture. In addition to the Christianity-centred usage of the term canon, there is a tradition stretching back to classical Greece of applying the term canon (*kanon* in Greek, a straight measuring rod or exemplar) to lists devised of the most “distinguished writers in various genres ranging from poetry and philosophy to oratory and history” (Kolbass, 2001, p. 15).

Writing about the canon debate in all its historical connotations and manifestations is beyond the scope of this study. My focus in the first section of this chapter will be to delineate the competing assumptions attributed to the term culture in writings on the contemporary canon debate and thereafter to examine ways in which these assumptions inform secondary language arts education. I then analyze how these assumptions play out and are complicated through the teaching of *Othello* in the secondary curriculum.

Harold Bloom’s popular, witty, and elegantly written book *The Western Canon* is a useful, though unabashedly partisan, point of entry into the key theoretical assumptions and contextual factors shaping the contemporary canon debate in North American educational institutions. Although Bloom’s focus is primarily on education in post-secondary institutions, his assumptions are equally relevant to understanding the significance of the canon debate for secondary language arts education.

The Western Canon reads in part like an autobiographical record of Bloom’s lifelong passion for reading great works of what he calls “imaginative literature” (p. 23).

His tone of celebration is also tinged with irony as conveyed in the first and last chapters, entitled respectively: 'An Elegy for the Canon' and 'Elegiac Conclusion.' Bloom uses the term *elegy* to refer to what he sees as an impending death of the capacity in educational institutions to teach great works of literature. Signs of mortality are how he interprets the trends in university departments of English to open up the canon on the basis of non-literary criteria, specifically around claims rooted in what he perceives as ideological agendas of feminism, Marxism, multiculturalism, anti-racism, and Queer theories. Bloom does not oppose these agendas *per se*; rather for him they should be treated as subordinate to the more fundamental claims of literary excellence guiding the evaluation and study of literature. Bloom argues that educational institutions have to establish and teach around a literary canon, and the selection process should be guided primarily by aesthetic criteria:

... aesthetic choice has always guided every secular aspect of canon formation, but that is a difficult argument to maintain at this time when the defense of the literary canon, like the assault against it, has become so heavily politicized. Ideological defenses of the Western Canon are as pernicious in regard to aesthetic values as the onslaughts of attackers who seek to destroy the Canon or 'open it up,' as they proclaim. Nothing is so essential to the Western Canon as its principles of selectivity, which are elitist only to the extent that they are founded upon severely artistic criteria. (1994, p. 22)

Bloom's claim that "aesthetic choice has *always* guided ... canon formation" is historically questionable, as it overlooks varied claims of ethnic nationalism and even ethical appeals that also played a significant role in defining the boundaries of the literary canon in European history (Kolbass, 2001). Nonetheless a substantial portion of *The Western Canon* is devoted to arguing on behalf of a specific conception of aesthetics as providing the fundamental rationale for establishing a literary canon. Bloom does not define aesthetic criteria in any formal or systematic way, but in rather broad terms as representing a source of intrinsic value as opposed to instrumental value, and he further posits a more contentious distinction between non-ideological (e.g., aesthetic interests) versus ideological (e.g., political interests):

The movement from within the [literary] tradition cannot be ideological or place itself in the service of any social aims, however morally admirable. One breaks into the canon only by aesthetic strength, which is constituted primarily of an

amalgam: mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of diction. The final injustice of historical injustice is that it does not necessarily endow its victims with anything except a sense of their victimization. Whatever the Western Canon is it is not a program for social salvation. (p. 29)

Bloom is aware of arguments that could be leveled against such claims about aesthetics as an autonomous category which transcend ideology, yet his response betrays an aggressive polemical bent:

Ideology plays a considerable role in literary canon-formation if you want to insist that an aesthetic stance is itself an ideology that is common to all six branches of the School of Resentment: Feminists, Marxists, Lacanians, New Historicists, Deconstructionists, Semioticians. There are, of course, aesthetics and aesthetics, and apostles who believe that literary study should be an overt crusade for social change obviously manifest a different aesthetic from my own post-Emersonian version of [Walter] Pater and [Oscar] Wilde. (p. 527)

Bloom's arguments for the primacy of intrinsic aesthetic value and the concomitant claims for non-ideological autonomy of literary texts reflect not only theoretical assumptions that are at the heart of what fuels the contemporary canon debate, but they also point to historical developments to which the contemporary canon debate is responding. Bloom's outlook on aesthetics can be more generally related to 19th century articulations of European Romanticism which, as frequently represented, contributed to the development of views such as those found in the writings of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde on aesthetics as an end unto itself (i.e., art for art's sake) rather than a means toward other ends (i.e., political, social or moral instrumentalism) (Berlin, 2001). Bloom's references above to approaches developed in 20th century schools of literary criticism, which he lumps together as the 'School of Resentment,' represent challenges to what are perceived as universalist, ahistorical, Eurocentric, and male gender-biased assumptions underlying a solely aesthetic-centered evaluation of literary texts. Though the competing assumptions underlying distinctions between aesthetic versus non-aesthetic or non-ideological versus ideological may appear as highly abstract concerns, they nonetheless translate into overheated political conflicts when seen in light of their educational implications.

The first educational implication concerns the content of the curriculum to be taught. What sort of curriculum can be developed from *The Western Canon*? Each chapter in Bloom's book is devoted to a specific author and together twenty-six authors form his canonical list, with each author selected on the basis of his or her aesthetic strength. Bloom does not define how he is using the term Western in relation to these authors; presumably it is because their works are written in European languages, though the inclusion of the Russian novelist Tolstoy does not, strictly speaking, fit this criterion. Bloom begins with a chapter on Shakespeare, who for Bloom centres the Western canon; he thereafter lists authors in chronological order around categories borrowed from the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (d. 1774). The 'Aristocratic Age' (pre-19th century) includes chapters on Dante, Chaucer, Cervantes, Montaigne, Molière, Milton, Samuel Johnson, and Goethe; the 'Democratic Age' (19th century) includes William Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Leo Tolstoy, and Henrik Ibsen; and finally, the 'Chaotic Age' (20th century) includes Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Fernando Pessoa, and Samuel Becket. There is also an extensive appendix listing more authors around these Vician categories broken down by country of origin, and where he also lists over four hundred 20th century authors who carry the potential to compete for a place in the Western canon as it evolves into the future.

Focusing on the twenty-six authors, it reads more like a list that would inform the great books of Western civilization curriculum rather than an English literature or any literary studies curricula. The list encompasses several languages (e.g., English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian), so either the students would have to know these languages or, in the context of North America, the non-English works would be taught in English translation. Though the majority includes fiction writers, the writings selected of Montaigne, Sigmund Freud, and Samuel Johnson are works of non-fiction. Arguably, then, Bloom's passionate defense of a canon refers in the end to a very general and perhaps even arbitrarily conceived construction. In relation to this construction Bloom develops another no less caricatured picture of the challenges (or threats) facing literary studies:

I do not believe that literary studies as such have a future, but this does not mean that literary criticism will die. As a branch of literature, criticism will survive, but probably not in our teaching institutions. The study of Western literature will also continue but on the much more modest scale of our current classics departments. What are now called 'Departments of English' will be renamed departments of 'Cultural Studies' where *Batman* comics, Mormon theme parks, television, movies, and rock will replace Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Wallace Stevens." (1994, p. 519)

It has been twelve years since Bloom wrote *The Western Canon* and his almost apocalyptic vision of the future of literary studies in our teaching institutions has not yet come to pass. However what is interesting is how Bloom's assumptions about an aesthetic versus non-aesthetic conflict in the canon debate is here framed in terms of an opposition between the study of literary texts versus studying the products (including texts) of popular culture. Establishing distinctions between high (canonical) and low (popular) culture is, to be sure, a problematic undertaking. If we, say, take the example of Shakespeare's plays, their initial reception was as popular entertainment in London and, though they continue to be enjoyed as popular plays, the text of Shakespeare's plays are today read as representing high culture. This point brings to light how definitions of what counts as canonical culture change historically as is reflected in the concept of canon formation. Bloom refers to the phrase *canon formation* without providing any sense of the institutional and historical processes involved in canon formation. Instead Bloom defines the processes of canon formation as resembling something akin to a Darwinian process of natural selection where:

Tradition is not only a handing-down or process of benign transmission; it is also a conflict between past genius and present aspiration, in which the prize is literary survival or canonical inclusion (1994, p. 8).

The issue is the mortality or immortality of literary works. Where they have become canonical, they have survived an immense struggle in social relations, but those relations have very little to do with class struggle. Aesthetic value emanates from the struggle between texts: in the reader, in language, in the classroom, in arguments within a society ... successful literary works are achieved anxieties, not releases from anxieties. Canons, too, are achieved anxieties, not unified props of morality (1994, p. 38).

These passages replay Bloom's Freudian-based arguments developed in an earlier book, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), arguing that the Western literary tradition is shaped by

the anxiety of influence experienced by each strong writer in relation to earlier canonical writers:

There can be no strong, canonical writing without the process of literary influence, a process vexing to undergo and difficult to understand ... the anxiety of influence is not an anxiety about the father, real or literary, but an anxiety achieved by and in the poem, novel, or play. Any strong literary work creatively misreads and therefore misinterprets a precursor text or texts (Bloom, 1994, p. 8).

This idiosyncratic theory about anxiety of influence refers to a history of canon formation in a very general almost abstract way, yet the notion of anxiety is appropriate for characterizing the range of historical tensions generated around the aesthetic versus non-aesthetic divide in the canon debate. In this light although Bloom projects himself as the defender of the canon against its enemies ('School of Resentment'), it is perhaps more accurate to see Bloom as offering one among many other possible theories of canon formation. Thus the canon debate in education reflects not so much an opposition between canonical versus non-canonical concepts of culture, but rather the ways in which perennial contestations (anxieties) around conceptual definitions of culture become educationally significant. E. Dean Kolbass (2001) aptly describes the historical range of these significations:

The Western literary canon is either pedagogically useful or socially oppressive, a source of enlightenment or of deception, a fetish disguising political interests or an instrument of democratic humanism. The individual works it comprises are either socially committed or aloof, historically autonomous or heteronomous, politically populist or elitist, representative of society or removed from it, products of the dominant culture or independent of it. Yet each of these antinomies has served to obscure the actual ideological affinities between them. For all the diverse claims that have been made about the canon, characteristic of each is an idealistic conception of the role of aesthetic judgment in the appraisal of canonical works or a pragmatic notion of their political and pedagogical functions, both of which ... are inherent to the concept itself, but neither of which accounts for the material constraints of canon formation as a social and historical process. (p. 140)

The possible material constraints that Kolbass alludes to are quite wide-ranging but for the purposes of this study I will focus solely on the overarching educational implication of the canon debate, namely the establishment of institutionalized educational standards around which the study of English literature was constituted as an academic

subject, initially in the universities from the late 18th century and then in schools with the emergence of mass public education in Europe and North America during the 19th century (Kernan, 1987; Kolbass, 2001). Research approaches to documenting the institutional history of English language arts education have varied from comprehensive macro-historical studies such as Arthur Applebee's *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History* (1974) to more focused case studies, informed by sociology of knowledge approaches, on the development of English education standards and syllabi within specific countries, best exemplified in the writings and edited works of Ivor Goodson (1985, 2005; Goodson & Medway, 1990). These approaches illustrate the ways in which English standards are constructed and negotiated among competing institutional interests; a significant part of it involves examining the educational implications for literary texts which are:

... set for study by examination boards, syllabus designers and teachers teaching particular courses; in turn these books are then categorized by publishing houses as canonical or classic texts and the whole process even serves to define what is considered to be literature. (Carter, 1995, p. 18)

The publication, jointly sponsored by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), of the influential *Standards for the English Language Arts* in 1996 (henceforth referred to as *Standards*) belongs to the this historical genealogy of institutionalization and it also provides a useful point of reference to examine the impact of the canon debate on language arts educational practices, especially in North America. Although the *Standards* were developed in the United States they have been influential internationally, as is evident in the subsequent framing of similar documents in the Canadian context, particularly the *Western Canadian Common Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts K-12* (henceforth referred to as *Western Canadian Framework*) published in 1998. However, it is instructive, as a way of understanding the politics of establishing standards, to observe the specific political dynamics within the United States that informed the formulation of the IRA/NCTE *Standards*. This document has its genesis in the standards movement that was set into motion after the publication of the report (*Nation at Risk*, 1983) on the state of public education in America, commissioned under the Republican administration of President

George Bush, Sr. The commission report set alarm bells ringing about declining standards in American education and recommended the formulation and implementation of clear and high academic standards for all subject areas as the most effective means for rejuvenating the public education system. There is an interesting irony that the language arts standards, which, in relation to other subject disciplines were the last to be published, were initiated as part of a conservative Republican education agenda, yet, by the time that they were published in 1996, they exemplified a progressive educational outlook supported by the subsequent Clinton administration. The most salient expression of the progressive education ethos in the Standards is in its emphasis on learner-centred processes (arguably stemming from the writings of John Dewey):

The perspective that informs the English language arts standards... places the learner at the core. The centrality of the learner is significant: our goal is to ground the standards in the experiences and activities of students as they read, write, speak, listen, view, and visually represent. Because the standards are learner-centered, they focus on the ways in which students participate in their own learning, acquire knowledge, shape experience, and respond to their own particular needs and goals through the English language arts. (Standards, 1996, pp. 12–13)

This learner-centred ethos informs all twelve standards (see Appendix A) and the cumulative effect is of widening the concept of literacy to go beyond reading and writing skills, thus also emphasizing the skills of speaking, listening, viewing, and representing (visually). Throughout the *Standards* there is not a single reference to the term canon nor to a list of core literary works that need to be taught. Unlike the standards published for the other subject areas, which are quite explicit about core content, the language arts standards do not prescribe any content to be taught but, as can be gleaned from standards 1–3 listed below, they refer in very broad categories to types of texts and literacy approaches to be taught:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace, and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context and graphics). (Standards, 1996, p. 25)

Since their publication the *Standards* have been very influential, as they continue to be endorsed through the research activities and journals of the IRA and NCTE and by extension they have also influenced English language arts education policies in other countries. As mentioned earlier this influence is clearly discernible in the language arts standards' documents developed in Canada. For example, the *Western Canadian Framework* (1998) does not contain a list of recommended literary texts. It simply describes general goals:

Reading and writing are powerful means of communicating and learning. They enable students to extend their knowledge and use of language, increase their understanding of themselves and others, and experience enjoyment and personal satisfaction. Reading provides students with a means of accessing the ideas, views, and experiences of others. By using effective reading skills and strategies, students construct meaning and develop thoughtful and critical interpretations of a variety of texts. Writing enables students to explore, shape, and clarify their thoughts, and to communicate them to others. By using effective writing strategies, they discover and refine ideas and compose and revise with increasing confidence and skill. (p. 3)

The debates in Canada share something of a family resemblance to those in the United States, yet the politics of consensus building are necessarily different, reflecting the different demographic and political contexts in Canada (Belanger & Bentley, 1997). My aim here is not suggest a grand narrative theory about the politics of standards in language arts, since it varies across national contexts. Rather I am drawing on the *IRA/NCTE Standards* as a highly visible and influential example of such politics. This visibility is evident through ways in which the *Standards* became a lightning rod for conservative critics. Diane Ravitch, projecting herself as a spokesperson for conservative educators, has been the most vociferous critic of the *Standards*:

The new consensus that undergirds the contentless curriculum is built on certain assumptions: that America lacks any common, shared culture worth speaking of, much less preserving; that there are no particular literary works that should be read by all students; that historical studies are problematic insofar as they require students to memorize and recall certain facts (this is derided as ‘rote learning’). The traditional curriculum could have been expanded to make it more inclusive of women and minority groups, but instead critics attacked its very nature. They derided it for emphasizing a ‘canon’ and for expecting students to master a “body of knowledge” (the notion of ‘mastery’ was itself suspect). Once the very idea of mastering a specific set of facts and texts was discredited, there was nothing left to teach but various methods, such as “basic skills,” “discovery learning,” “critical thinking,” and problem solving.” (Ravitch, 2002, p. 16)

Ravitch’s criticisms are both an expression and a product of the culture wars in education. Although she is writing out of a specifically American context the differences between conservative and progressive education policies that she has been examining in her writings over the past three decades (1978, 1985, 1995, 2000, 2002, and 2003) are not limited to America. Variations on these differences are discernible in language arts education within Canada, Great Britain, and Australia (Belanger & Bentley, 1997; Doecke & Gill, 2001; Jones, 1992). As mentioned earlier, the educational debates in the context of culture wars become intractable and polarized, in large part through caricatured representations of what each side in the debate is opposing. To take the example of Ravitch’s claims, it is a gross misrepresentation to assert that learner-centred teaching approaches (e.g., ‘discovery learning,’ ‘critical thinking,’ and ‘problem solving’) result in content-less curricula. This assertion can be countered by simply pointing to the widespread and continued teaching of Shakespeare’s plays in American secondary schools (Applebee, 1993), and the emphasis on what Ravitch would consider canonical literary texts in high-stakes examinations at the secondary level (Beach & Marshall, 1991). However, Ravitch is correct in pointing out that language arts education policies and research have shifted away from prescribing a fixed list of canonical works to be taught.

Rather than taking sides on whether or not the shift away from explicitly defining a canon or the shift towards opening up the canon entails the dire educational consequences envisioned by Ravitch and Bloom, I want to instead examine why the literary canon has become emblematic of such polarized debates. The contemporary

canon debate is, I will argue, fundamentally about issues of evaluation that are intrinsic to how cultural traditions define themselves. Constructions of a literary canon are based on evaluative judgments and they are rendered problematic by virtue of the contradiction between, on the one hand, the fact that constructions of a literary canon represent historical processes and are thus subject to ongoing evaluation, while on the other hand definitions of a literary canon necessarily entail establishing authoritative evaluative judgments based on ahistorical evaluation criteria. For example, Bloom's aesthetic criteria are authoritative precisely because they are projected as being beyond historical contingencies rather than as the product of a way of thinking about literary texts that has identifiable historical sources. As a result, even though Bloom's arguments accommodate for historical processes of canon formation, his evaluation criteria (i.e., aesthetic strength) guiding canon formation are not subject to historical evolution. Historical perspectives on the canon also raise questions about the nature of consensus that is represented in, for example, Bloom's construction of the Western canon. In effect, it raises questions about whose evaluation judgments are being applied and whose have been excluded. Arguably the challenges of arriving at a consensus in culturally pluralistic societies such as United States and Canada accounts in large part for the fact that, for example, the *Standards* document or the *Western Canadian Common Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts* do not prescribe a fixed canon but rather offer guidelines for negotiating the processes of canon formation. Yet for Ravitch there is already sufficient consensus and to deny this amounts to nothing less than the abdication of standards in language arts education—to accepting mediocrity:

As our common culture becomes constricted, so too does the possibility for informed citizens to debate the shape of their shared future. What we risk losing is part of the common fund of knowledge needed to sustain a truly democratic society. I do not wish to sound like a Cassandra (a word that may appear biased because it suggests a fearful female), so I will not despair. Nor do I intend to be a Pollyanna (another word that may appear gender-biased). But I do not believe that we should accept mediocrity as our fate. As scholars, as teachers, as parents, as citizens, we must reclaim our common culture—or risk seeing it disappear. (2002, p. 21)

Cultural Capital, Othello, and the Canon Debate

As is evident from this review, the politics of the canon debate is about large issues on which agreement will arguably remain elusive. Literary texts are at the centre of the canon debate, and their cultural and educational significance can be examined from different perspectives. From one vantage point the debate is about how correlations between the evaluation of literary texts and cultural values are conceived. Thus ways in which literary texts are evaluated represent different approaches on how cultural identity is defined (e.g., high versus popular culture, and concomitant distinctions between aesthetic and non-aesthetic). From a slightly different vantage point the debate is about how correlations between the selection of literary texts to be taught and the transmission of cultural values are conceived. In this framing, the teaching of literary texts become emblematic of different perspectives on how cultural identity is preserved (e.g., relatively fixed versus relatively open processes of acculturation through educational institutions). Both these correlations are linked and simply represent different points of emphasis. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (1984, 1990), formulated in light of his attempt to develop a comprehensive sociological methodology (reflexive sociology) which could complement and extend Marxist modes of class-based sociological analysis, provides a generative framework for analyzing the politics of the canon debate (in both correlations), and for bringing into sharper focus the contradictions at play, particularly as rooted in the different conceptions of culture, inside the canon debate.

Bourdieu's most elaborate formulation and application of the concept of cultural capital is found in his ambitious field research study, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), in which 1,217 participants in France were surveyed about their consumption patterns of what he designated as "cultural goods"—a broad designation referring to literary texts, artworks, music, films, cultural events, and TV shows (pp. 13–18). The aim of this study was to identify the range of definitions of what constituted "cultural competence" for the participants, and to analyze the correlations that can be inferred between these definitions and the economic class backgrounds of the participants. It is in this context that Bourdieu distinguishes the role of cultural capital

from economic capital, and seeks to examine the social effects arising from how cultural capital is exchanged (i.e., exchange value) and its modes of circulation (i.e., preservation and distribution of cultural capital through educational institutions) (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 80–85). For Bourdieu the concept of cultural capital opens up more comprehensively textured ways of understanding the formation of hierarchies (and inequalities) in social relations than can be accounted for by simply focusing, as in classical Marxist analysis, on economic capital (specifically the ownership or lack of it in relation to modes of production and distribution in a given economic context). The canon debate is a case in point of a struggle in which literary texts function as cultural capital. Analyzing the canon debate solely in terms of economic class struggles would either end up reducing the cultural terms in which the debate is framed as symptomatic of economic capital interests or it would simply overlook the cultural dimensions as irrelevant.

Although Bourdieu (1984) does not structure his analysis around a formal definition of culture, he nonetheless is at pains to emphasize the ideological and social significance of the ways in which definitions of culture are legitimated through educational institutions:

The definition of cultural nobility is the stake in a struggle which has gone on unceasingly, from the seventeenth century to the present day, between groups differing in their ideas of culture and of the legitimate relation to culture and to works of art, and therefore differing in the conditions of acquisition of which these descriptions are the product. Even in the classroom, the dominant definitions of the legitimate way of appropriating culture and works of art favours those who have had early access to legitimate culture, in a cultured household ... (p. 2)

If the same volume of educational capital (guaranteed cultural capital) may correspond to different volumes of socially profitable cultural capital, this is first because although the educational system, by its monopoly of certification, governs the conversion of inherited cultural capital into educational capital, it does not have a monopoly on the production of cultural capital. It gives its sanction to inherited capital to a greater or lesser extent ... (p. 80)

John Guillory (1993, 1995) has drawn on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in his path-breaking theoretical and historical examination of the canon debate, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993), where he argues that:

The canon debate signifies nothing less than a crisis in the form of cultural capital we call literature ... In the case of the literary curriculum, I propose that the problem of what is called canon formation is best understood as a problem in the constitution and distribution of cultural capital, or more specifically, a problem of access to the means of literary production and consumption. The “means” in question are provided by the school ... (pp. viii–ix)

I will now focus on *Othello* as a form of cultural capital in order to illustrate the tensions and contradictions in the canon debate. In particular I will review the history of *Othello*'s exchange value in literary criticism as a way of examining the challenges of drawing distinctions between aesthetic and non-aesthetic evaluation criteria for literary texts. I will also focus on how the circulation of *Othello* as a school text brings to light the challenges of ascertaining the ways in which literary texts are considered to be representative of cultural values and cultural identities.

Othello is taught in secondary schools because it is a play written by William Shakespeare (d. 1616). This may be stating the obvious, but it raises the question whether, hypothetically, *Othello* would be taught or even be considered a canonical text had it been written by any of the other lesser known Elizabethan dramatists. *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and selected sonnets are among Shakespeare's most commonly taught works in English-speaking language arts education contexts (Applebee, 1993; Davis & Salomone, 1993; Leach, 1992; Salomone & Davis, 1997). The continuous presence of Shakespeare in secondary English language arts education curricula since the 19th century beginnings of public education has arguably been rooted in variations of the type of criteria highlighted in Brian Cox's influential recommendations (DES, 1989) for redesigning Britain's national curriculum:

Professor Cox has four main reasons for wanting Shakespeare in the National Curriculum: first, the belief that the kind of 'great' literature written by Shakespeare encompasses wisdom; second, that these great works are part of our cultural heritage, are central to our culture, and that every child has the right to be introduced to them; third, that Shakespeare uses language in a way beyond that of any writer, and his language has been influential beyond that of any other writer. Lastly, that Shakespeare has greater insight into human character than other writers. (Leach, 1992, pp. 22–23)

Cox's recommendations clearly reflect the status accorded to Shakespeare in English history; however, similar claims about Shakespeare's uniqueness can also be heard in North America. For example, the above criteria resonate strongly with Bloom's assumptions about aesthetic strength and especially with his claims about Shakespearean exceptionalism and universalism which he elaborated, rather boldly, in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998):

What the Bible and Shakespeare have in common actually is rather less than most people suppose, and I myself suspect that the common element is only a certain universalism, global and multicultural. Universalism is not now much in fashion, except in religious institutions and those they strongly influence. Yet I hardly see how one can begin to consider Shakespeare without finding some way to account for his pervasive presence in the most unlikely contexts: here, there, and everywhere at once ...Libraries and playhouses (and cinemas) cannot contain him; he has become a spirit or "spell of light," almost too vast to apprehend. High Romantic Bardolatry, now so much disdained in our self-defiled academies, is merely the most normative of the faiths that worship him. (p. 3)

Cox's criteria also reflect Ravitch's claims about the crucial role of education in transmitting and preserving a cultural heritage—about which she is currently rather pessimistic:

We are not at that point of cultural amnesia yet. But our schools are moving perceptibly in that direction – and no one seems to know how to reverse the trend. (2002, p. 5)

In contrast to the strong aesthetic-centred and heritage-based justification for teaching Shakespeare in general, the recommendations for teaching *Othello* are conspicuous by their dominant emphasis on issues of social relevance, in particular race and gender. For example, the literary critic Robert Scholes was commissioned to design what resulted in the highly regarded Pacesetter Curriculum (1998)—an advanced secondary English curriculum for American schools—and he recommended *Othello* as the required Shakespeare play because:

A play by Shakespeare chosen for this course, for example, should be studied both as a voice from another culture, another time, and as a voice that addresses human concerns that are still important and alive for us ...We have also chosen a play, *Othello*, in which the issues of cultural conflict are in the foreground ...In the play Shakespeare himself has made racial and gender differences the pivots on which the tragedy turns. It is also a play about reason and emotion, about

evidence and argument, about truthfulness and deceit. And finally, because it is a play written four centuries away from our own time, with a history of productions and performances, it offers an opportunity to consider performance as interpretation, performances as “readings” of the play, readings that changed over time to suit different audiences in different cultures. The simple question of whether the role of this dark-skinned Moor would be played by a black man or by a white man in blackface—or whether Desdemona would be played by a woman or a boy—turns out not to have been so simple in certain times and places. (Scholes, 1998, pp. 136–137)

Leila Christenbury (1997), a language arts researcher, is even more direct about the contemporary relevance for teaching *Othello*:

It is my belief that race does indeed matter in *Othello*. And that intransigent, uncomfortable fact is, I think, one of the major reasons that Shakespeare’s great and grave play is not taught more frequently in high school English classes. *Othello* raises the specter of race and that fact, for many teachers, overshadows its literary merit, its relative difficulty, or even its relevance to secondary students ... my point here is that teachers need to be aware of race, the topic of racism, and must be prepared to let their student explore, argue, and debate not just the themes of the tragic flaw, of trust, innocence, friendship, and self-deception, but, inescapably also the theme of race. (p. 183)

Examining the range of these recommendations for teaching *Othello*—divided between, on the one hand, teaching it because the play represents canonical literature while, on the other because it reflects timely social issues—opens up compelling perspectives for assessing the significance of the canon debate in language arts education. For example, the above recommendations for teaching *Othello* accommodate both aesthetic and non-aesthetic criteria and thus one can either argue that this serves as a counter-example for rethinking (or further complicating) the validity of the aesthetic/non-aesthetic distinction in the canon debate; or that this serves as an illustration of how assumptions framing the canon debate shape approaches to teaching literary texts in language arts education. A tension, for example, is constructed around differentiating the merits between an aesthetic as opposed to a non-aesthetic approach to teaching *Othello*, and also between approaches to teaching *Othello* that reflect the values of a common culture as opposed to those that critique the values attributed to the wider common culture.

The different and even contradictory perspectives available for examining *Othello* as a school text have their roots in the history of literary criticism on *Othello*, spanning almost four centuries. For the remainder of this chapter I situate the significance of *Othello* as a school text in relation to the canon debate by undertaking a summary review of the competing traditions of interpretation informing critical writing on *Othello*. In other words I bring into sharper focus ways in which the role of *Othello* as cultural capital in language arts education is both shaped by and different from *Othello* as cultural capital outside the school context.

Over roughly the past three decades there has been growing interest in synoptically tracing the variety of critical opinions and literary interpretations that *Othello* has generated since its first stage performances in 1604 and subsequent publication in 1622 (known as the Quarto edition) and 1623 (as part of the First Folio collection) (Gardner, 1977; Kolin, 2002; Neill, 2006; Pechter, 1999, 2004; Vaughan, 1995). In this chapter I am restricting my focus to themes contained in the literary critical heritage and in the next chapter to issues arising from its performance history. What is most conspicuous about the literary critical heritage on *Othello* as mapped out in the comprehensive studies by Edward Pechter (1999, 2004) and Michael Neill (2006) is the degree to which it is intensely contested. These divisions can be located around the phrase “Noble Moor” (3.4.22), which Desdemona declaims as a description of Othello’s character, almost immediately after a key turning point in the play when Iago has inflamed Othello’s jealousy by convincing him of Desdemona’s adulterous infidelity with Cassio. This phrase can arguably be seen as an iconic code referring to a central divide in *Othello* criticism, namely, the interpretation of Othello’s character as either heroic or anti-heroic. This dovetails with attitudes expressed towards Othello’s perceived cultural and racial difference as a Moor in Venice.

The earliest and arguably one of the most influential critics to articulate the anti-heroic perspective is Thomas Rymer in his *A Short View of Tragedy* (1693):

The Character of that State [Venice] is to employ strangers in their wars; but shall a Poet thence fancy that they will set a Negro to be their General, or trust a Moor to defend them against the *Turk*? With us a *Black-amoor* might rise to be trumpeter, but Shakespeare would not have less than a Lieutenant-General. With us a Moor might marry some little drab, or small-coal wench: Shakaspeare would

provide him the daughter and heir of some great lord or Privy-Councillor, and all the Town should reckon it a very suitable matchNothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lye; and certainly never was any Play fraught like this of *Othello* with improbabilities. (Rymer, 1693/2003, p. 46)

Rymer's arguments represent thematic as well as formal aesthetic concerns, variations of which were later taken up by T.S. Eliot (1927) and F.R. Leavis (1952). Thematically, Rymer argues that Othello's identity, which he describes using references that include "Negro," "Moor," and "Black-amoor," is marked by an intrinsic inferiority that is in contradiction to the heroic stature and emotions attributed to him by Shakespeare. Written in late 17th century England, these comments illustrate the ways in which conceptions of cultural difference and allied prejudices began to shape readings of *Othello*. By the nineteenth century, with the expansion of European empires in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, along with the rise of biologically-based classifications of racial differences, these prejudices became even more pronounced in readings of *Othello*. Mary Preston's frequently cited comments from her book *Studies in Shakespeare* (1869) is a disturbing example of a blatantly racist reading of *Othello*:

In studying the play of Othello, I have always imagined its hero a *white* man. It is true the dramatist paints him black, but this shade does not suit the man. It is a stage decoration which my taste discards; a fault of colour from an artistic pointShakespeare was too correct a delineator of human nature to have coloured Othello black, if he had personally acquainted himself with the idiosyncrasies of the African race. (cited in Ogude, 1996, p. 153)

Rymer cites aesthetic criteria from Horace's *Ars Poetica* on compositional and narrative consistencies in order to argue that *Othello* fails as a tragedy due to its many internal inconsistencies. On closer examination what Rymer classifies as inconsistencies turn out not to be compositional or structural flaws, strictly speaking, but rather variations on his thematic objections. He argues, for example, that *Othello* fails to embody the requisite nobility and dignity appropriate to the subject matter of classically defined tragedies because the plot is set in a domestic (as opposed to a public) setting, which is how he characterizes Othello's conflict with Desdemona, memorably referring to the play as "The Tragedy of the Handkerchief":

So much ado, so much stress, so much passion and repetition about a handkerchief. Why was not this called “The Tragedy of the Handkerchief?” What can be more absurd? (Rymer, 2004, p. 208)

Similarly, Rymer refers to thematic inconsistencies arising from casting a Moor (blackamoor) as a supreme military commander, or having Desdemona as a Senator’s daughter marry below her social station—arguing that these inconsistencies reflect failures in developing and sustaining narratives that correspond with conventional expectations, leading instead to “jarring effects” (Pechter, 2004, p. 166). Pechter (2004) has persuasively illustrated how Rymer’s arguments have set the terms of the debate for much of *Othello* criticism to this very day, especially in spurring counter-arguments around how *Othello* succeeds aesthetically and in terms of thematic complexity. There is perhaps no better example of an alternative to Rymer’s reading than Samuel Johnson’s (1765) high praise of *Othello*:

The beauties of this play impress themselves so strongly upon the attention of the reader, that they can draw no aid from critical illustration. The fiery openness of Othello, magnanimous, artless, and credulous, boundless in his confidence, ardent in his affection, inflexible in his resolution, and obdurate in his revenge; the cool malignity of Iago, silent in his resentment, subtle in his designs, and studious at once of his interest and his vengeance; the soft simplicity of Desdemona, confident of merit, and conscious of innocence, her artless perseverance in her suit, and her slowness to suspect that she can be suspected, are such proofs of Shakespeare’s skill in human nature, as, I suppose, it is vain to seek in any modern writer. (Johnson, 1765/2004, p. 220)

Along the so-called heroic or pro-Othello strand of critical writing, A.C. Bradley’s book *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on “Hamlet,” “Othello,” “King Lear,” “Macbeth”* (1904/2004) marks an influential turning point, in large part because Bradley contextualizes his comments against the terrain of disagreements that have marked *Othello* criticism beginning with Thomas Rymer (d. 1713). By the time Bradley was writing, such commentary included contributions from prominent figures such as Samuel Johnson (d. 1784), William Hazlitt (d. 1830), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (d. 1834), Algernon Charles Swinburne (d. 1901), and lesser known American critics whom Bradley refers to sarcastically as “very amusing” (Bradley, 1904/2004, p. 241) because of their preoccupations with Othello’s racial background and the horrors of inter-racial

miscegenation. By bringing into sharper relief some of the key tensions shaping critical responses to *Othello*, Bradley introduces a tone of self-consciousness that has since become a salient characteristic of 20th and 21st century writing on *Othello*. This self-consciousness manifests itself in the highly partisan character of *Othello* criticism, at once positioning critics as either personally invested advocates or detractors. The competing positions in the so-called politics of *Othello* criticism can be vividly overheard, for example, when placing Bradley alongside T.S. Eliot (1927):

The character is so noble, Othello's feelings and actions follow so inevitably from it and from the forces brought to bear on it, and his sufferings are so heart-rending, that he stirs, I believe, in most readers a passion of mingled love and pity which they feel for no other hero in Shakespeare Yet there are some critics and not a few readers who cherish a grudge against him. (Bradley, 1904/2004, p. 239)

I have always felt that I have never read a more terrible exposure of human weakness—of universal human weakness—than the last great speech of Othello What Othello seems to me to be doing in this speech is *cheering himself up*. He is endeavouring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself Othello succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure, by adopting an *aesthetic* rather than a moral attitude, dramatising himself against his environment. (Eliot, 1927/2004, p. 244)

What is the relevance of the concept of cultural capital for examining this conflicted and self-consciously partisan heritage of *Othello* criticism? As a form of cultural capital the history of *Othello*'s variable exchange value poses challenges for drawing correlations between evaluation criteria for literary texts (in terms of the canon debate) and definitions of cultural value and cultural identity. Attempts to infer a correlation on the basis of *Othello* are confronted with a contradiction. On the one hand, *Othello* is attacked on aesthetic grounds and as being culturally incongruent, while on the other, *Othello* is praised for its aesthetic qualities and for the cultural significance of its key themes. What conclusions can we draw from this contradiction?

Othello as a form of cultural capital renders problematic claims, such as those espoused by Ravitch, about a common cultural heritage that is preserved and transmitted through the teaching of canonical texts. In fact the literary critical heritage of *Othello* brings to light ways in which the application of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital further illustrates unresolved and ideologically contested definitions of culture (as in the

canon debate) that come into play in relation to *Othello*. Thus the presence of *Othello* as a school text in language arts curricula complicates, as it were, the polarizing terms of the canon debate, where heritage-based claims for teaching canonical literature are pitted against claims for opening up the literary canon as a way of introducing more inclusive, historically dynamic, and critical perspectives on how a cultural heritage is defined. Recommendations for teaching *Othello* accommodate and support both of these competing claims, and thus offer a compelling example through which language arts educators can begin unpacking the underlying conceptual contradictions taken for granted in uses of the term culture. Secondly, the range of polarized responses among different literary critics on the aesthetic merits and flaws of *Othello* further illustrates that formulating distinctions between aesthetic as opposed to non-aesthetic criteria is highly problematic. The problematization in the case of *Othello* as a form of cultural capital revolves not only around disagreements about its aesthetic value, but also around competing frameworks of evaluation applied to cultural capital.

In addition to writings on *Othello* focusing on formal aesthetic criteria, *Othello* criticism is also conspicuous by embodying competing interpretive approaches to the play's content. These competing approaches typically revolve around questions of race, gender and Shakespeare's morality. Race is a central and contested theme. For example, does Shakespeare's representation of Othello as a Moor constitute a racist stereotype or a critique of racist thinking? In addition to the term "Moor," which appears 55 times in the play (*Oxford Shakespeare Concordances: Othello*, 1971, pp. 188–189), Othello is also referred to by others in the play through the use of derogatory adjectives such as: "thick lips" (1.1.63) "an old black ram" (1.1.89), "sooty bosom" (1.2.70), and "blacker devil" (5.2.133). Othello's final lines, where he attempts to redeem his reputation by projecting himself as a loyal servant of Venice and as an ensnared victim of Iago's evil machinations, have been the subject of some of the most divided responses among critics (see T.S. Eliot's observations cited earlier). After his most often quoted lines, "Then must you speak/ Of one that loved not wisely but too well" (5.2.348–9), Othello ends his speech, beside Desdemona's corpse and just before taking his own life, with a reference to how he killed a "turbaned Turk" in "Aleppo" who had attacked a Venetian:

Othello: ... Set you down this;
 And say besides that in Aleppo once,
 Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
 Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
 I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
 And smote him—thus ! (5.2.356–361)

Millicent Bell (2002) offers a subtle reading (in contradiction to T.S. Eliot) of the complex racialized connotations of these lines:

Already when we first meet him, he is a Christian and a “self-made man” who has made the most of opportunity and his own genius and has overcome the handicaps of being foreign and black in the white Venetian world in which he has found a place ... At the last, Othello surrenders himself to the prison of race he thought he had escaped. He is not able, in the end, to cast away the role and character which societal convention prescribed to him at the beginning of his career in the white colonial world. He recalls an exploit of his adopted Venetian identity when he remembers how, “in Aleppo once” This has generally been taken as splendid *coup de theatre*—but it is more. Reenacting that killing of an infidel by his transformed Christian self, Othello becomes again what *he* was before his conversion and enlistment in the service of Venice. His magnificent self-making has been undone and he now kills, again, the irreversibly circumcised, uassimilable racial other that he is. (pp. 2–14)

The theme of gender is similarly contentious. For example, does Shakespeare’s portrayal of Desdemona’s violent victimization reflect an unquestioning acceptance of patriarchal norms or does it succeed as a critique of patriarchal ideologies? In this context Othello’s references to Desdemona as a “whore” and a “strumpet” along with Desdemona’s moving but ineffective protestations are vivid examples of the sexist discourses in the play:

Othello: Are not you a strumpet?
 Desdemona: No, as I am a Christian!
 If to preserve this vessel for my lord
 From any other foul unlawful touch
 Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.
 Othello: What, not a whore?
 Desdemona: No, as I shall be saved!
 Othello: Is’t possible?
 Desdemona: O heaven forgive us!
 Othello: I cry you mercy then.
 I took you for that cunning whore of Venice

That married with Othello. — You! Mistress!
 That have the office opposite to Saint Peter
 And keeps the gate of hell. You, you! (4.2.83–93)

Further along in the play we hear Desdemona movingly recount to Iago her sense of utter bewilderment and vulnerability:

Desdemona: ... Unkindness may do much,
 And his [Othello's] unkindness may defeat my life,
 But never taint my love. I cannot say "whore."
 It does abhor me now I speak the word.
 To do the act that might the addition earn
 Not the world's mass of vanity could make me. (4.2.161–166)

Karen Newman (1987/2003) perceptively reviews the complexities that can be read into the way issues of gender (and race) are played out in *Othello*:

The task of a political criticism is not merely to expose or demystify the ideological discourses which organize literary texts, but to reconstitute those texts, to reread canonical texts in noncanonical ways which reveal the contingency of so-called canonical readings Shakespeare was certainly subject to the racist, sexist, and colonialist discourses of his time, but by making the black Othello a hero, and by making Desdemona's love for Othello, and her transgression of her society's norms for women in choosing him, sympathetic, Shakespeare's play stands in a contestatory relation to the hegemonic ideologies of race and gender in early modern England The case of Desdemona is more complex because the fate she suffers is the conventional fate assigned to the desiring woman. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's representation of her as at once virtuous and desiring, and of her choice in love as heroic rather than demonic, dislocates the conventional ideology of gender the play also enacts. (p. 77)

Pinning down Shakespeare's moral point of view is always a challenge, because as aptly expressed by Iris Murdoch (1989): "Shakespeare has a recognizable style but no [authorial] presence" (p. 234). In relation to *Othello* this opens up another interesting question. For example, does Shakespeare's ambivalence in spelling out the motives driving Iago's villainous acts represent an expression of moral relativism (even moral nihilism) or does Shakespeare succeed in critically illustrating the complex nature of human evil? Coleridge's description of Iago's character as reflecting "motiveless malignity" (2004, p. 231) has exercised considerable influence in subsequent *Othello* criticism, shaping not only interpretive approaches to Iago's character but problematizing

the larger issue of how to define Shakespeare's ideological and moral commitments. Iago's lengthy speeches and especially his soliloquies punctuating the play end up giving Iago more lines than Othello in the play and thus arguably allowing for a more intimate encounter with Iago's personality. This, for example, is Iago's famous description of virtue followed by Coleridge's commentary:

Iago: Virtue? a fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners. So that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many—either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry—why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. (1.3.317–324)

This speech comprises the passionless character of Iago. It is all will in intellect, and therefore he is here a bold partisan of a truth, but yet of a truth converted into a falsehood by the absence of all the necessary modifications caused by the frail nature of manThe last speech, [Iago's soliloquy, 1.3. 374-395] the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity—how awful! (Coleridge, 2003, p. 49)

This review of *Othello*'s capacity to generate contradictory and contentious readings resembles uncannily ways in which the term culture is contested inside the canon debate. As a form of cultural capital, *Othello* not only reproduces responses which can be mapped onto the ideologically vested interests dividing the cultural right (e.g., pro-canonical, non-ideological aesthetic criteria) from the cultural left (e.g., opening up the canon around ideologically engaged criteria) but, more significantly, opens up ways for rethinking the oppositional binaries framing the canon debate. For example, contradictory responses to *Othello* reflect how interpretations of canonical texts are not only subject to intractable debate, but in large part replay the contradictions within which the concept of the canon (i.e., historical versus ahistorical) and concomitant uses of the term culture (i.e., culture as consensus versus culture as diversity) are entrapped. Interestingly, a sense of entrapment is how Pechter (1999) describes the conflicted legacy of *Othello* critics:

Working on *Othello* means inhabiting a contaminated site; you want to say the right thing, but it comes out sounding terribly wrong. (p. 181)

Constructions of Othello as a School Text

I now examine the implications of this sense of entrapment for the construction of *Othello* as a school text. School textbooks, when examined historically, are rich historical artifacts, not only representing aspects of material culture from the past (e.g., state of printing and book production technologies), but also serving as archival resources for examining intellectual assumptions, curricular goals, and pedagogical strategies of the educational systems in which a given textbook is being used (Apple, 1991). It is arguably more challenging to examine the educational worldviews of textbooks currently in use because they do not afford the alleged advantages that come with historical distance—in particular, the advantage of being able to approach the boundaries of an educational worldview represented through textbooks from the past as being relatively fixed and settled. Boundaries of educational worldviews in contemporary textbooks are less distinct because as educational researchers we, to varying degrees, either inhabit or are contesting these worldviews and thus the boundaries are in flux, subject to ongoing negotiations. These boundary definition challenges represent variations on challenges entailed in defining the boundaries of one's cultural identity in the present tense.

I here focus on contemporary school textbook editions published by Signet (Kernan, 1998), Folger (Mowat & Werstine, 1993), Cambridge School Shakespeare (Coles, 2001), Oxford School Shakespeare (Gill, 2002), and Penguin (Muir, 2005) in order to briefly review the different ways in which these editions negotiate the challenges of, on one hand, affirming *Othello*'s canonical status while, on the other, addressing the contentious issues of race raised by the play.

Signs of these negotiations are clearly visible in the jacket design illustrations and images chosen for each of these editions. They include: a cartoon-like illustration in the Signet of a dark-skinned Othello, with earrings, strangling Desdemona in bed; the Folger has a coloured drawing of a brown-skinned, curly-haired, bearded Othello standing in the foreground staring at the reader while a blonde-haired, vulnerable looking Desdemona is in the background staring into empty space; the Cambridge school edition has a black ink drawing of Othello portrayed as an elderly African man, whose face, seething with rage, conveys the impression of an almost deranged state of mind; the Oxford school edition

has a colour photograph of a young black actor playing Othello with a clean-shaven head, eyes closed and both hands raised up in helpless desperation; and finally the Penguin edition offers another cartoon illustration of Othello as a relatively huge man with an expressionless pitch black face standing over the dead and petite body of Desdemona. Arguably students from all backgrounds picking up any of these editions for the first time and without any prior knowledge of the play would pick up the signifiers of racial difference represented in the covers, yet moving beyond the front cover it is only the Cambridge edition that explores explicitly and in detail the question about whether or not *Othello* is a racist play (pp. 224–229). In all the other editions, Othello’s racial and cultural difference is cursorily treated as one among several sub-themes in the play, and none of them alludes to questions about whether Shakespeare is constructing or critiquing racial stereotypes. In contrast, the Cambridge edition contains three appendices with the following headings: ‘*Far more fair than black*’: *Language, Race and Culture in the Play*; *Is Othello a racist play?*, and *Culture and Identity*. Each of these sections recommends classroom activities around issues and questions of racism, such as:

1. Definitions (in pairs)

Look up the word ‘black’ in a dictionary. Note down how many different uses there are of the word. Now do the same for ‘white’ and ‘fair’. Divide the definitions into positive and negative uses. If you look up these words in the Oxford English Dictionary, in your school or college library, you could also research the earliest recorded dates of particular usages. Discuss your findings with the whole class, making links and comparisons between the three sets of definitions.

2. Meanings

Discuss in what sense the Duke is using the word ‘black’ in:

‘If virtue no delighted beauty lack

Your son-in law is far more fair than black.’ (1.3.285–6)

Then talk together about how you think Othello is intending ‘black’ to be interpreted in the following two examples:

‘... Her name, that was as fresh

As Dian’s visage, is now begrimed and black

As mine own face ...’ (3.3.387–9)

‘Arise black vengeance...’ (3.3.448)

Identify other uses of black in the play and discuss their meanings in the context of who uses the word, and when. (Coles, 2001, p. 224)

These differences between more or less conspicuously detailed discussions of race are also visible in the latest critical editions (used at the university level) of *Othello* published by Arden (Honigmann, 2001), Norton (Pechter, 2004), and Oxford University Press (Neill, 2006). Once again the front covers are highly suggestive. The Arden edition has a blurred grainy photograph of a white handkerchief floating in mid-air against a grayish background. The Norton edition has a striking oil painting portrait (dated 1600) of ‘Abd-al-Wahīd bin Mas‘ūd bin Muhammad ‘Annourī, the Moorish ambassador from North Africa at the court of Elizabeth I. In making this choice Pechter (or perhaps the publisher) is presumably suggesting, following Honigmann (2001, pp. 2–4), that the presence of this ambassador in London would not have escaped Shakespeare’s notice. Honigmann is more explicit:

I would go further: The Ambassador’s intense and aristocratic face seems to me right for Othello, and his age (42, inscribed on the portrait together with the date, 1600) about right as well. Is it too fanciful to suppose that this very face haunted Shakespeare’s imagination and inspired the writing of his tragedy [*Othello*]?
(pp. 3-4)

One cannot help thinking that non-Arab and non-Muslim spectators then (early 17th century) and today (post-9/11) would most likely describe the olive-skinned, bearded figure of the painting in highly generalized terms such as ‘a Muslim prince dressed in Arab costume’ (i.e., referring to his turbaned head cover, flowing black and white robes and an ornamented scimitar buckled at the waist). Finally, the most recent Oxford critical edition has a young black knight in shining silver armour, a red cross on his breastplate, standing against the background of a busy battlefield. The figure in the painting is Saint Maurice (d. 287) and the painting is attributed to the school of Lucas Cranach, dated 1529. According to legend, Saint Maurice and his legion were all Christians from Egypt who were massacred at Agaunum, France for disobeying the orders of the Roman Emperor Maximian Herculeus to participate in pagan ritual rites.

Not only the covers but the contents in each of these critical editions convey the diverse range of associations attributed to Othello and the ways in which *Othello*’s significance as cultural capital is framed and exchanged. Michael Neill (2006) in the Oxford edition arguably gives the theme of race the most detailed emphasis, situating

(though not reducing) readings and performances of *Othello* around the evolving politics of race, referring respectively to historical contexts and effects of “Reading Blackness” (p. 113) and “Playing Black” (p. 40). Pechter (2004) in the Norton edition astutely unpacks the historical and continuing significance of how constructions of racial difference have shaped responses to *Othello*, yet his dominant emphasis is on approaching themes of race and gender in the play not so much as explanatory categories that can be transcended through critical self-awareness but rather as sites of conflicted and inescapable anxieties:

We all need some sense of participating in a process, however long and gradual, of getting somewhere better than where we (or our ancestors) were. But some forms of reassurance are more sturdy than others; and even the sturdy ones need to be supplemented on occasion with less sunny prospects. *Othello* is one such occasion. Of all the many interpretive conclusions available to us in an attempt to understand *Othello* historically, a secure confidence in our power to escape the benighted errors of the past doesn't seem among the more plausible. (pp. 146–147)

In contrast to Neill and Pechter, Honigmann (2001) in the Arden edition adopts the most aesthetic-centred approach, at pains to argue that *Othello* deserves to be ranked alongside *Hamlet* and *King Lear* as among Shakespeare's greatest tragedies. The representation of *Othello* as a Moor, a non-European, is for Honigmann an expression, in the first instance, of “artistic daring”:

Yet in *Othello* Shakespeare also set himself new targets: to explore, from the inside, human nature on the very verge of its confine, man as devil, woman as angel. In the center, between them, he placed human nature mysteriously right and not right, familiar and yet unknown—a non-European. The artistic daring of this choice is now easily missed. Shakespeare, at the height of his powers, exerting himself to the utmost, achieved perfect command of his material and—let us put it unaggressively—gave the world a tragedy as magnificently Shakespearean as any in the canon. (p. 111)

The format and content of school editions of Shakespeare are influenced by critical editions, illustrating the ways in which developments in English studies (as represented by the critical editions) are transferred into English education. Thus it will be interesting to observe how and to what extent these recent critical editions will inform future school editions of *Othello*. Though questions about the nature and scope of

intellectual transfer between English studies and English education demands another study altogether, I simply want to suggest that there is an opening here to compare and contrast school texts with critical editions.

The Canon Debate, Othello, and the Problem of Cultural Normativity in Language Arts Education

Extrapolating from the politics of the canon debate reviewed in this chapter, my aim has been to illustrate the challenges and contradictions attending ways in which conflicting cultural perspectives are defined in language arts education. The claims, on one hand, for teaching canonical culture through a literary canon and, on the other, for critically interrogating canonical culture through opening up the canon, are both equally confronted with challenges of establishing criteria for evaluating definitions of culture. Evaluating definitions of culture presents first of all a philosophical challenge, since the means for arriving at evaluation criteria are indefinite, hence resulting in open-ended or unresolved definitions of culture. Definitions of culture also pose an ideological challenge, in that the terms in which evaluation criteria are established will always serve certain interests while excluding others, hence resulting in intractable debates (e.g., canon debate). By focusing on *Othello* as a form of culture capital my aim has been to illustrate the historical character of these challenges and, more importantly, to offer language arts researchers an entry point through which to explore the relevance and complexity of these challenges for ways in which the term culture is used, evaluated and debated in language arts education.

By signalling that the term culture informs language arts education in a philosophically unresolved and ideologically contentious manner, I intend also to point towards the problem of normativity that the term culture raises, especially in the context of the canon debate. Michel Foucault's writings (1984) can be very generative for analyzing the politics of the canon debate, in particular his analysis of how institutional practices, discourses, and human behaviour are historically classified around what constitutes normality (attributed with normative authority) as opposed to deviance (subject to disciplined control and exclusion). By shifting from Bourdieu to Foucault I might be accused of trying to straddle opposing intellectual agendas. In turning to

Foucault my aim is to simply illustrate that the concept of cultural capital is itself open to philosophical investigation. Simply put, Bourdieu's use of cultural capital is rooted in a sociological framework while Foucault's historical-philosophical approach opens up additional perspectives for interrogating assumptions implied by the concept of cultural capital. I would argue that Bourdieu and Foucault do not represent competing intellectual agendas but rather they are posing different types of questions, and that these differences can be complementary.

Definitions of canonical culture are rooted in normative claims, be it in terms of privileging the aesthetic, or appealing to ideals of authority associated with terms such as tradition and heritage, or, following a Foucauldian reading, by institutionalizing normative standards for distinguishing between canonical versus non-canonical (high versus popular) forms of cultural capital. Critiques of canonical culture, be they in terms of analyzing how claims of normativity attributed to a literary canon are historically constructed and hence its normative authority is relative and variable, or, by extension, that these taken for granted canonical norms represent ideological interests with exclusionary effects which need to be addressed—these critiques, whether explicitly articulated as such, resonate with a Foucauldian outlook.

Yet since these critiques of the literary canon are themselves not less normative in character, they end up replacing one set of criteria for normativity with another (i.e. a non-normative critique of normativity is not possible). This feature of unavoidable normativity in definitions of culture and cultural practices reflects a general conundrum inherent in Foucault's critique of normativity, articulated in his influential essay "What is Enlightenment?" (1984). Foucault frames the critique around what he describes as the axes of *knowledge*: "How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge?" (p. 49); *power*: "How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations?" (p. 49); and *ethics*: "How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?" (p. 49). These axes fit like a glove the definitional and ideological challenges associated with the term culture, and which I have attempted to examine here through the canon debate and as played out through the different ways in which *Othello* has been historically constituted. The term culture, let alone canonical culture, is problematic not

only because it is subject to ongoing constitution, but, more significantly, because its constitution is implicated in Foucauldian questions such as: what sort of knowledge does the term represent about ourselves?; how does this term shape “power relations,” leading to practices of exclusion and inclusion?; and what sort of moral influence does the term exercise over our own actions? It is in the very nature of these questions, pointing as they do to issues of cultural self-definition, that they become caught in competing normative claims, and hence subject to intractable contestation as in the canon debate.

Ian Hacking (2002), a leading and eclectic contemporary philosopher influenced by Foucault, has coined the term *dynamic nominalism* as a way of engaging with the predicament of definitional practices being trapped inside the circle of normativity:

... I think of myself as a “dynamic nominalist,” interested in how our practices of naming interact with the things that we name—but I could equally be called a dialectical realist, preoccupied by the interactions between what there is (and what comes into being) and our conceptions of it. (p. 2)

This description could be read as referring to just another version of constructivism, yet Hacking’s version differs in that it does not simply reflect on the problem of how ideas and practices are historically constituted but is equally concerned with what he calls the dialectical “looping effect” of our naming practices on the formation of intellectual disciplines. The following extended quotation gives a more detailed picture of how Hacking has applied this *dynamic nominalist* mode of analysis, and points to the types of approaches which language arts researchers can fruitfully follow when examining the uses of the term culture in language arts education:

Foucault was concerned with how “we” constitute ourselves. I shall generalize, and examine all manner of constitutings. To mention only some that I have looked into: how what we now call probability emerged. How chance, once the ultimate other, the unknowable, was tamed and became the increasingly favored means for predicting and controlling the behavior of people and things. How something as painful as the abuse of children was made and molded into a focus for action, a vehicle for judgment, a lament for a generation’s lost innocence, a scapegoat for the end of the nuclear family, and a ground for repeated interventions, the policing of families. How transient mental illnesses lurch into our consciousness and fade away, creating new ways to express uncontrollable distress, ways to absent ourselves from intolerable responsibility, and legitimating exercises in both constraint and liberation. But above all, how these various concepts, practices,

and corresponding institutions, which we can treat as objects of knowledge, at the same time disclose new possibilities for human choice and action ... (2002, p. 4)

Transposing this analytical approach in relation to language arts educators and their uses (“constitutings”) of the term culture, we might ask the question: what new possibilities for human choice and action in language arts education can be disclosed around uses of the term culture? This sounds perhaps a bit too grand a way of putting things. Yet as this chapter has shown it is not only through an examination of the canon debate but more specifically through the acts and choices shaping constructions of *Othello* as a school text, that practices of using the term culture matter and carry significant implications for how language arts education is constituted. By this I do not mean to argue that critical awareness of uses of the term culture will necessarily lead to better ways of constituting language arts education, but rather that it will enrich and deepen ways in which culture is theorized in language arts education, and in the process lead to more critically informed responses by language arts educators to the intractable culture wars in education. The problematization of culture as expressed through culture war debates belongs to what Foucault refers to as “histories of the present” (1984, p. 12) in which, though we are all equally trapped, yet we can choose to respond either in terms of self-righteous polarizations, or move towards an awareness of how this sense of entrapment is shared, regardless of our ideological differences. In his recent book on the canon debate, the literary critic Frank Kermode (2004) perceptively articulates the contradictions that inevitably attend such awareness:

Changes in the canon obviously reflect changes in ourselves and our culture. It is a register of how our historical self-understandings are formed and modified. At the simplest level, we know about the differences between our understandings of old texts and the understandings of our predecessors, or even those of contemporaries in disagreement because of generational differences, or contrary political presumptions. We may attribute our grasp of the issue to our superior understanding generally, yet it is just that assumption we are likely to say we feel an urgent need to question if we want to rid ourselves of the historically embedded prejudices that are the main support of our conviction that we are historically privileged. (p. 36)

I have drawn on the concept of cultural capital in this chapter in order to critically engage, as it were, with such contradictions. Thus in proposing the concept of cultural

capital as an analytical tool for language arts educators, my aim here is to develop not only a theoretically rigorous understanding of the politics of the canon debate, but more importantly to develop capacities for examined (as opposed to unexamined) uses of the term culture.

Chapter Three

***Othello* and Multicultural Education Debates: Toward a Cultural Rights Analysis**

Research on multicultural education has grown over the past three decades to the point where it is now recognized as a distinct, institutionally funded area of research. The profile and range of this research are comprehensively documented in the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks & McGee Banks, 2003), particularly within majority English-speaking countries with high levels of immigration, namely Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. Yet what is equally conspicuous today is that theories and practices of multicultural education along with the very concept of multiculturalism have become subject to deeply polarizing debates in each of these countries (Benn Michaels, 2006; Bissoondath, 2002; Fullinwider, 1996; Kymlicka, 2001; May, 1999; Parekh, 2005; Rieder & Steinlight, 2003; Schlesinger, 1992; Stotsky, 1999). These debates are not limited to differences dividing cultural left (liberal integrationist) versus cultural right (conservative assimilationist) perspectives toward indigenous and immigrant minorities, but also encompass divisions amongst advocates of multiculturalism on how to resolve the contradictions inherent in theoretical definitions and practical applications of multicultural policies.

In this chapter I examine how debates about multiculturalism are played out in language arts education, and more specifically through teaching *Othello* in the public education system. Beginning with an overview of key tensions and contradictions framing theories of multiculturalism, I thereafter analyze how these tensions and contradictions inform the pursuit of multicultural goals in language arts education. The concept of cultural rights as elaborated by Will Kymlicka, an influential Canadian theorist of multiculturalism, is used as an analytical tool to illustrate key challenges facing multiculturalism. I argue that these challenges are rooted in the politics of how the term culture is defined in culturally pluralistic nation states. This entails negotiating, on one hand, the challenge of accommodating diversity as it arises through the presence and claims of minority groups and, on the other, the challenge of concomitantly defining national unity in terms of a common culture. Connecting these challenges to the concept

of cultural rights gives rise to the following question: how are cultural rights to be distinguished from citizenship rights? The implications of this question for language arts education in public education school can be translated as: how is cultural diversity to be accommodated in schools while at the same time upholding common educational standards? Following Charles Taylor (1994) I will refer to these challenges of accommodating cultural diversity and defining a common culture as the *politics of recognition*.

There are also other challenges, which I will refer to as constituting the *politics of representation*, that arise in theories and practices of multiculturalism. These entail negotiating, on one hand, the challenge of defining or representing minority groups in terms of distinct cultural identities and, on the other, the challenge of not reducing the identities of individual citizens to simply members of minority cultural groups. Applying the perspective of cultural rights the following question emerges: what are the implications for individual rights arising from the attribution of cultural rights to minority groups? For language arts education the related questions are: how is multicultural content in the curriculum defined? how are multicultural pedagogical approaches in the classroom defined? do these definitions run the risk of cultural essentialization, and, if so, what are these risks?

Othello is implicated in an analogous politics of recognition and representation. This chapter reviews the trajectories of these politics particularly as they mark *Othello*'s performance history and literary criticism written by non-white scholars, with a view to exploring how teaching *Othello* in light of these perspectives offers language arts educators opportunities for critically engaging with the politics of multiculturalism. As will become evident the politics of multiculturalism is just as intractable as the politics of the canon debate.

The Politics of Multiculturalism and Language Arts Education

Multicultural goals and guidelines for language arts education are articulated, rather conspicuously, in official standards and policy documents. For example, the

Western Canadian Common Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts, K-12

(1998) defines a key educational outcome (No. 5) as:

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to celebrate and build community.

Students use language to build community within the home, school, workplace, and the wider society. In a multicultural country, students need to value diverse ideas and show respect for various languages, cultures, customs, and beliefs. (p. 65)

The NCTE/IRA Standards (1996) elaborates a similar guideline in some detail in its Standard No. 9 (of 12):

Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social issues.

The capacity to hear and respect different perspectives and to communicate with people whose lives and cultures are different from our own is a vital element of American society. Language is a powerful medium through which we develop social and cultural understanding, and the need to foster this understanding is growing increasingly urgent as our culture becomes more diverse. Students deserve and need learning environments that respect cultural, racial, and ethnic differences. Celebrating our shared beliefs and traditions is not enough; we also need to honor that which is distinctive in the many groups that make up our nation. (p. 41)

Britain's *National Curriculum* guidelines, comprising the English education recommendations published in 1989 and 1990 (also known as the 'Cox Report' after Professor Brian Cox who headed the commission), adopt a more cautious approach to cultural diversity. On one hand there is an unambiguous recommendation that:

Standard English is the language of wider communicationPupils should be able to take the roles in which spoken Standard English is conventional: radio presenter, interviewer, expert in front of lay audience, etc. (DES, 1989, cited in Jones, 1992, p. 71)

while on the other hand it concedes that:

English teachers should seek opportunities to exploit the multicultural aspects of literature. Novels from India or Caribbean poetry might be used for study of differing cultural perspectives, for example. Not only should this lead to a broader awareness of a greater range of human 'thought and feeling', but—through looking at literature from different parts of the world and written from different

points of view—pupils should also be in a position to gain a better understanding of the cultural heritage of English literature itself. (DES, 1989, cited in Owens, 1992, p. 108)

These policy formulations suggest how the acknowledgement of cultural diversity is translated into educational goals. Some of the verbs used in relation to cultural differences, such as “celebrate,” “respect,” and “understand,” can be interpreted in rather open-ended ways. In part, multiculturalism is contested because of this potential open-endedness around how exactly to pursue (and even ascertain) goals for respecting, celebrating and understanding cultural differences. It is this contestation related to translating theory into practice that fuels the politics of recognition.

The above documents reflect another contested dimension of multiculturalism related to classification categories used, on one hand, to define cultural difference and, on the other, to define a shared, common culture. In both cases the term culture runs the risk of being applied so loosely that it can cease to remain meaningful. For example, in the *Western Canadian Common Curriculum Framework* (1998) it is difficult to discern what the term “cultures” refers to in the following usage: “students need to value diverse ideas and show respect for various languages, cultures, customs, and beliefs” (p. 65). Similarly, the use of the term cultural in the *IRA / NCTE Standards* (1996) is ambiguous: “Students deserve and need learning environments that respect cultural, racial, and ethnic differences” (p. 41). Furthermore, the same passage contains taken-for-granted references to a common culture through the multiple uses of the possessive pronoun *our*: “communicate with people whose lives and cultures are different from *our* own ... as *our* culture becomes more diverse ... we also need to honor that which is distinctive in the many groups that make up *our* nation” (p. 41, emphasis added). Defining who is included or excluded in this usage of *our* is increasingly a point of contention in predominately multicultural societies such as United States and Canada. This issue is experienced differently in each nation state as, for example, by the more confident affirmation of a common “Standard English” in the British guidelines. Yet the British guidelines also acknowledge that the English language, particularly through the evolution of English literature, is now marked by different “cultural perspectives” (p. 108).

Classifications of cultural differences and commonalities certainly vary in relation to specific contextual and historical factors, yet I am arguing that the challenges facing classificatory (or definitional) practices impinge on all multicultural societies. The variable intensity and complexity of these challenges shape the politics of multiculturalism inside nation states. Before turning to an examination of research in language arts education which both engages with and plays out these challenges, I will first sketch out the theoretical and ideological landscape in which competing approaches to multiculturalism are situated.

Will Kymlicka's writings (1989, 1995, 2001) serve as a useful reference point from which to review different ideological positions on multiculturalism. Kymlicka is a liberal theorist and hence his starting points are the principles of neutrality (as an attribute of the liberal democratic nation state that aspires to treat all its citizens equally) and autonomy (as defining the rights of liberty of individual citizens). In contrast to classical liberalism which emphasizes the procedural neutrality of the state and the primacy of individual rights, Kymlicka's writings belong to the tradition of communitarian liberalism which argues that, because modern nation states contain minority groups (who are subject to the dynamics of majority–minority relations), the presumed neutrality of the state needs to be interrogated for its majoritarian biases and, moreover, the presence of minority groups calls for the recognition of their cultural rights (as a marker of group rights), in addition to recognizing individual rights of citizens. Kymlicka's tightly argued and intricate theory of multiculturalism is here summarized by Bhikhu Parekh in his book *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (2005):

If a society happens to be culturally homogeneous, all its members enjoy the benefits of a stable cultural community. The problem arises when it is multicultural for the majority community then exercises its cultural rights but minorities do not. One could ask them to assimilate as the classical liberals had done, but Kymlicka rightly rejects that view on both theoretical and practical grounds. His theoretical argument is twofold. Since culture is vital to human development, minorities have a right to their culture. Secondly, the principle of justice requires that minorities and majority should enjoy equal cultural rights and be able to exercise these equally effectively. Kymlicka here takes over the Rawlsian theory of justice, extends it to relations between cultures, and makes it the basis of his theory of multiculturalism. At the practical level he argues that

enforced assimilation never works and tends to lead to the psychological and moral disorientation of those subjected to it. (p. 101)

Kymlicka's anti-assimilationist, egalitarian-based proposals for recognizing cultural rights as a way of governing majority-minority relations can be contrasted with conservative cultural right as well as radical cultural left critiques. For conservative critics such as Arthur Schlesinger (1992), Neil Bissoondath (2002), and Samuel Huntington (2004), multiculturalism as conceived along the lines of Kymlicka's communitarian liberalism inevitably undermines national cohesion by reinforcing divisions between different groups, rather than developing a sense of belonging based on ideals of national citizenship. Moreover, there are practical limits to fully recognizing the cultural rights of all groups. There are limits, for example, to how many official languages can be taught in public schools. Hence these critics argue that well-intentioned multicultural policies will inevitably generate discontent and conflict as minority group claims fail to be adequately recognized in practice. Instead they advocate assimilationist policies toward minorities (indigenous and immigrant) around an allegedly acultural concept of citizenship (in contrast to Kymlicka's multicultural citizenship) as the only effective way to realize a just society (through upholding the neutrality of the state) and an egalitarian society (through the equal distribution and protection of individual rights).

Critics from the radical cultural left such as Henry Giroux (1992), Barry Troyna (1993), Peter McLaren (1997), and Walter Benn Michaels (2006) argue that the concept of culture as defined in liberal theories of multiculturalism functions as a rhetorical abstraction which is used by nation states as a way to avoid addressing economic inequality and race-based discrimination experienced by minority groups, particularly visible minority groups. Related yet distinct from these Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives is the critique of liberal multiculturalism by postmodern theorists of culture such as Stuart Hall (1996) and Homi Bhabha (1994) who argue that the uses of the term *cultural*, when referring to identities and rights, lead to purist, static, and ahistorical constructions of group identity which obscures the plural (hybrid), fluid, and historically evolving nature of cultural identities. This essentialization revolves, they argue, around false notions of cultural purity and the emphasis on difference and otherness.

This cursory overview of liberal multiculturalism and its critiques reveals different ways in which the concept of culture is once again (as in the canon debate) a site of contestation. These contestations are framed within competing criteria for defining inclusionary versus exclusionary effects of how the term culture, particularly the adjective cultural, is used. For Kymlicka, recognizing cultural differences through the attribution of cultural rights becomes the basis for building an inclusive liberal democratic nation state. However, for opponents of multiculturalism the attribution of cultural rights generates exclusionary and divisive effects by giving primacy to particular differences at the expense of more universally-based ideals of common citizenship. And for critics from the left the attribution of cultural rights fails to address (or strategically avoids confronting) systemic inequalities rooted in class and race relations. Furthermore, cultural rights as a concept contribute to the construction and legitimation of essentially incommensurable definitions of cultural differences.

These disagreements remain intractable because the empirical evidence required for conclusively measuring inclusionary, as opposed to exclusionary effects of multicultural theories in society, will always remain elusive. The example of Canada is instructive. In 1971 Canada implemented an official policy of ‘Multiculturalism Within a Bilingual Framework’ which aimed to support minority ethnic communities to not only preserve their heritage but also overcome barriers to their full participation in Canadian society. In 1982 this policy commitment was given constitutional and legal recognition through the adoption of the ‘Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms’ which specified that the courts were to interpret the Charter “in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canada” (Canadian Charter, 1982). Thereafter in 1988 the legal and political implications of this officially sanctioned multiculturalism were further elaborated and formalized through the establishment of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act which in Section 3, Article h affirmed that:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to foster the recognition and appreciation of the diverse cultures of Canadian society and promote the reflection and the evolving expressions of those cultures. (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988)

Canadian policy formulations of multiculturalism can be read, on one level, as reflecting the evolution of a political project of national inclusion—a project which is always an unfinished process. It is unfinished in the same spirit as are political projects or goals for achieving justice and equality. On another level, the historical evolution of these policies reflects responses to the rapidly changing composition of the Canadian population. A recent nationwide study on immigration patterns in Canada aptly describes the changing face of Canadian society:

The shift toward non-European sources of immigrants to Canada after the late 1960s was marked. Immigrants arriving before 1970 were overwhelmingly from Europe, and in the 1950s and 1960s, many came from southern and eastern Europe, as well as northern Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States. Of those arriving in the 1960's or before, only 10.2 percent were racial or visible minorities (based on 2001 census data). However, this figure rises dramatically to 51.8 percent for 1970s arrivals, 65.4 percent for 1980s arrivals and nearly 75 percent for 1990's arrivals. As a result, racial or visible minorities have grown from constituting less than 1 per cent of the population in 1971 to 13.4 percent in 2001. The largest groups are Chinese (3.4 percent), South Asians (3.1 percent) and Blacks (2.2 percent). The increasing impact of racial diversity in Canada is magnified because of the concentration of minorities in certain immigrant-intensive cities, especially Toronto and Vancouver. In the Toronto Metropolitan Area, racial minorities constituted only about 3 per cent of the total population of 2.6 million in 1971, but by 2001 the figure had grown to 36.8 percent of 4.6 million. (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007, pp. 1–2)

This study, based on a review of 40,000 respondents drawn from a 2002 Statistics Canada survey, sought to analyze levels of self-identification as 'Canadian' among immigrants from white and non-white backgrounds. The *Globe and Mail's* summary and commentary on the findings, in the editorial pages, serves as an informative indicator of the attitudes and anxieties associated with the Canadian multicultural project:

It's disturbing to discover the extent to which second-generation immigrants of colour feel less Canadian than their white counterparts in the same generation of immigrants. The divide between racial minorities and whites, almost nil when they arrive, actually grows among their children. That's the opposite of how this country is supposed to work. A report on this racial divide, drawn from a Statistics Canada survey from 2002, did not say why it exists or what should be done about it. Do visible-minority immigrants feel more excluded or discriminated against than white immigrants? Yes, but it was not clear how much of a role this played when second-generation immigrants were asked about their ethnic or cultural identity and just 56.6 per cent of visible minorities identified

themselves as Canadian, compared with 78.2 per cent of whitesIt is in Canada's interest that all immigrants commit themselves to an over-arching set of Canadian values—democracy, respect for human rights, tolerance of others—and to Canada itselfA more diverse society needs to ensure that it does not wake up one morning and find that walls have gone up everywhere. That has been Britain's experience, and the walls are much more difficult to knock down than put up. (Globe and Mail, A12, 2007)

Canada's demographic profile will continue to change and these changes, as suggested by the recent study, continually demand new ways of engaging the politics of multiculturalism. Working towards building an inclusive and equitable multicultural society is not only a work in progress but it is, more importantly, shaped by changing contextual factors. Theorizations of multiculturalism, whether rooted in liberal, conservative or cultural left perspectives, are thus best viewed as engagements with these evolving and contextual complexities. Kymlicka's writings (1989, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004) represent an influential example of such an engagement. He has been continually refining and adjusting his conception of cultural rights in relation not only to the evolving multicultural profile and policies in Canada, but also internationally, where arguably nation states with culturally diverse populations are now the norm. For example, Kymlicka (2004) has become increasingly alert to how claims concerning cultural rights may vary in relation to different types of cultural minorities across different models of the nation state, ranging from national minorities (e.g., Aboriginal communities and Quebecois in Canada), voluntary immigrants, refugees, and yet others forcibly brought to a country (e.g., slaves and indentured or imported labourers). Kymlicka's refinements and adjustments have also been motivated by critiques of liberal multiculturalism. However, Kymlicka's responses do not point to tidy resolutions but rather illuminate perennial dilemmas confronting theoretical formulations of liberal multiculturalism. A key dilemma, as mentioned earlier, derives from the conflict between affirming national unity versus recognizing cultural diversity. Are there limits to recognizing and accommodating cultural diversity in relation to nation-building goals, and if so, how are these limits defined? The other key dilemma derives from the conflict between protecting individual rights and advocating for group rights. How are representations of group rights

different from representations of individual rights? Are these differences necessarily incommensurable or can they be defined as being complementary?

These dilemmas and questions raised by multiculturalism can be analyzed in terms of what Isaiah Berlin (1969) refers to as value pluralism conflicts, where, for example, the claims of two or more equally desirable values or principles (in Berlin's example, liberty and equality; and with multiculturalism, unity and diversity) collide. Berlin argues that there is no theoretical way past these collisions (e.g., how much liberty at the expense of equality and vice versa?, how much unity at the expense of diversity?, etc.). Ultimately one has to resign oneself to the fact of unavoidable trade-offs and tragic (as opposed to rational) choices. The *Globe and Mail* editorial cited earlier articulates a version of this dilemma in terms of a dual yet contradictory emphasis of recognizing cultural diversity ("visible minorities") while advocating a common Canadian identity which can serve to transcend differences. Theorizations and practices of multiculturalism reflect variations on such trade-offs. The politics of recognition and representation are attempts to work out and think through these trade-offs.

Approaches to multicultural education are now gradually beginning to acknowledge these dilemmas and trade-offs. However, the more dominant emphasis in multicultural educational research, as represented in the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks, 2003a), is on addressing the exclusionary effects of schooling experienced by visible minority students. James Banks (2003b) identifies the following five thematic areas through which multicultural education practices can effect change in the public education system:

1. *Content Integration*: teaching all subjects with references to content from a variety of cultures rather than teaching about cultural diversity through a separate subject.
2. *Knowledge Construction*: interrogating the "manner in which the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways that knowledge is constructed [and taught]" (p. 4).
3. *Prejudice Reduction*: examining and challenging racist attitudes and dehumanizing representations of visible minorities.

4. *Equity Pedagogy*: “An equity pedagogy exists when teachers use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups.” (p. 4)
5. *Empowering School Culture*: “the process of restructuring the culture and organization of the school so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups experience educational equality and cultural empowerment.” (p. 5)

The activist orientation underlying Banks’ approach to multicultural education has its roots in the American civil rights movement and the struggles beginning in the 1950s to end racially segregated schools (Ogletree, Jr., 2004; Kozol, 2005). It is an orientation which informs the editorial policies of influential education journals such as the *Harvard Educational Review* and *Race, Ethnicity and Education*. Undoubtedly these social justice movements and struggles contributed significantly to addressing inequalities and barriers confronting minority groups in the United States, particularly as experienced by African Americans. However the changes have not gone far and deep enough since serious structural inequalities persist of which the most visible manifestations are the school completion rates of African American students in the United States (Kozol, 2005). In Canada, similar levels of low educational achievement hold true for Aboriginal (Wotherspoon, 2002) and black Caribbean-Canadian students (Dei, Mazzuca, & McIsaac 1997).

It is in the context of these inequalities divided along certain culturally or racially-based group identities that social justice-based conceptions of multicultural education (referred to also as ant-racist education) have become influential, particularly in majority English-speaking multicultural societies. In language arts education research an influential and relatively early model of activist scholarship is the ethnographic writings of Shirley Brice Heath (1983, 2000) who advocated a shift away from cultural deficit-based to cultural assets-based approaches to understanding literacy practices of minority communities. Her work brought to light the strong exclusionary effects exercised by institutionally sanctioned definitions of standard literacy. In contemporary language arts research the influence of activist multicultural education approaches are most conspicuous in the areas of curriculum reform and culturally sensitive pedagogy.

The focus of curriculum reform proposals is to introduce selected literary texts (in English or English translation) written by authors from minority cultural backgrounds. A representative example of such a proposal is a book edited by Arlette Willis, *Teaching and Using Multicultural Literature in Grades 9–12: Moving Beyond the Canon* (1998). The book covers literature written in the United States by authors from minority backgrounds with a view to demonstrating the evolving cultural diversity in American literature. It contains chapters on literary traditions defined as: African American, Puerto Rican, Asian/Pacific American, Native American, Mexican American, Caribbean-/American (the inconsistent use of the hyphen and back slash is left unexplained). The editor defines the rationale of the book in terms of filling a gap to provide teachers and teacher educators “additional cultural and social knowledge as they work with increasing numbers of students from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds” (p. x). The social justice agenda informing the book is also spelled out:

Though different in country of origin, culture, and language, each group [represented in the book] has experienced the harsh realities of oppression in the United States from the forced abandonment of its language and culture to the assimilation into a Euro-American way of life in order to survive. However, each group also has miraculously been able to gain literacy skills, record its American experience, and produce a plethora of literature Their works illustrate the unique melding of diverse cultures with Euro-American culture in the United States and its territories. Literature produced in the past, present, and future will continue to challenge the resistance to the inclusion of works by non-whites in school curricula. (pp. xi–xii)

The articulation of such an agenda, laudable though it is, raises some thorny questions. To begin with, what would be the effects on student understandings of group identities when literary (as opposed to non-fictional) texts for a multicultural curriculum are selected based on criteria that primarily classify these texts as representing “harsh realities of oppression” or as “survival” narratives? Do not such criteria run the risk of being too narrow, if not reductive? What would be the effects of applying such criteria to all literary texts that portray human conflicts, struggles, and tragedies? Arguably the use of such criteria for designating multicultural literature betrays double standards when compared, for example, to the more generic aesthetic and learner-centred literacy criteria used in selecting other literary texts to be taught in the language arts curriculum.

Moreover the conception of multiculturalism that emerges through this book is vulnerable to similar challenges confronting formulations of liberal multiculturalism, namely, the risks of constructing essentialist definitions of group identities and particularly of the themes in writings of non-European immigrant authors. Adopting this approach in the Canadian context the risks would be further compounded when, for example, teaching prominent Canadian immigrant novelists such as Dionne Brand (from Trinidad; 1996, 1999), Rohinton Mistry (India; 1991, 1995), Michael Ondaatje (Sri Lanka; 2000), and M.G. Vassanji (Tanzania; 1989, 2003), all of whose novels are set in their countries of origin. Their novels would certainly introduce students to life as lived in other societies, yet their work is in English and the authors identify themselves and are recognized as Canadian writers. In what ways, then, would the inclusion of their novels in secondary language arts education achieve the goals of multicultural curriculum reform? This question leads us back to the vexing tensions about the uses of the term culture in relation to conceptions of multiculturalism and more particularly on how these conceptions inform multicultural education practices. On one hand, Canadian students, by reading the novels of these writers would encounter different cultures (acknowledging diversity), while, on the other, Canadian students would also encounter new ways of understanding what it means to be Canadian and what constitutes Canadian culture (acknowledging unity).

The exclusionary implications of cultural difference for students inside language arts classrooms are more directly addressed in research around culturally sensitive pedagogy. In a recently edited book, *Making Race Visible: Literacy Research for Cultural Understanding* (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003), some of the leading literacy researchers on multicultural and anti-racist education such as Courtney Cazden (2000, 2001), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1998, 2003); Sonia Nieto (1999, 2004, 2005), and Arlette Ingram Willis (1998, 2003), argue that multicultural educational practices cannot be disconnected from issues of racism. By focusing on race these researchers aim to critique conceptions of multicultural education which, by emphasizing relatively open-ended goals for inclusion, fail to adequately address the experiences of exclusion and discrimination facing visible minority students. Recommendations for changes in

classroom pedagogical strategies are thus seen as the most significant starting point for identifying and addressing these experiences. The framework guiding this approach is referred to as critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998; West, 1993), focused on making explicit the systemic dimensions of inequity that need to be addressed through multicultural education practices. The editors of this collection, Stuart Greene and Dawn Abt-Perkins, highlight the specific links between this theoretical framework, literacy research and language arts classrooms:

All too often equated with the color of one's skin, race is a powerful determinant of social status, where one lives, works, or goes to school; race is also a process of social stratification that may be, paradoxically, transparent in literacy research ... Race is a social construction, indeed. But 'race' in a racist society bears profound consequences for daily life, identity, social movements, and the ways in which most groups *other* [emphasis in text]. The real question is how we can talk and write about race We do not wish to diminish the recent history of literacy research on cultural differences. However we do not believe this body of work addressed the concerns of the teachers in that crowded room—concerns about cross-racial communication in multi-racial literacy classrooms, achievement and tracking issues; and about establishing classroom cultures where race, discrimination, and privilege could be *safely and productively addressed* [emphasis added] ... we argue that, as teachers and researchers, we need to engage more fully in the process of making race visible, both as a mark of difference and privilege, and ways that the institutions of schooling and society have placed minority students in poverty at distinct disadvantages in achieving access to quality education, housing, health care, and employment. (pp. 2–3)

It is difficult to discern how the authors in this collection are differentiating between racial and cultural backgrounds, yet what is clear is that they take for granted that intersections of race, culture and class produce exclusionary effects which remain unexamined in literacy and language arts research. To affect change, then, entails making teachers and researchers aware of these intersections and their effects. It would be instructive to speculate on what would be different about this collection if the same data were analyzed primarily around class as a central theme. To be sure such speculation runs the risk of contributing to the acts of denial and silence that perpetuate racism. Yet this is a risk that is seemingly inevitable when critically interrogating approaches to multicultural education. For example the rich case studies in this collection on African American and Latino students (Larson, 2003; Sternglass, 2003) certainly demonstrate the

usefulness of critical race theory analysis. Yet it bears asking how generalizable is this analytical framework, especially when taking into account the educational experiences of other visible minorities such as Asian and South Asian Americans (Li, 2005, 2006; Rangaswamy, 2000).

In the Canadian context, more specifically the Toronto context, sharply contrasting approaches within activist multicultural education research are discernible when comparing the ethnographic findings of George Sefa Dei and his research colleagues (Dei, 2005; Dei, Muzzuca, McIsaac & Zine, 1997;) with the findings of Michael Connelly and his collaborators (Connelly, Phillion, & Fan He, 2003; Phillion, 2002). Dei's research on the experiences of black students in Toronto has led him to recommend the establishment of separate black (Afrocentric) schools as the most effective way to address the almost 40 percent drop-out rate among black students in the Toronto public school system. Connelly's longitudinal study (spanning 30 years) is focused on a single inner-city school in Toronto (Bay Street Community School), where the majority of the students today are Chinese along with students from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Somalia, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Connelly and his colleagues take a more optimistic view of the cross-cultural encounters unfolding between teachers and students, recounting that the preconceived notions of multicultural education with which they began their research failed to do justice to the vital and creative "ebb and flow" of the lived experiences inside these culturally diverse classrooms. Thus they are advocating a method of research which they refer to as "narrative multicultural inquiry" (Phillion, 2002) as a way of moving beyond the ideologically polarized (and theoretically abstract) positions on multiculturalism.

By critically reviewing these varied approaches to multicultural education my aim has been to highlight theoretical and practical challenges that continually attend the ways in which we engage with issues of cultural difference in our societies—particularly in our educational institutions. In no way do I mean to undermine the value and significance of this engagement. On the contrary, it is precisely because I believe that the ideals of multiculturalism are so central and urgent for our times that there is a concomitant need

not to rest easy with superficial thinking but rather to think through the challenges with the highest standards of rigour and honesty.

The writings of Bob Reich (2002) and Stephen May (1999, 2001) are breaking new ground in building bridges between the wider theoretical literature on liberal multiculturalism and research on multicultural education. Reich's claims for recognizing "minimal autonomy" (pp. 89–102) of all students as a starting point for multicultural education, and May's conception of a continually self-reflexive "critical multiculturalism" (2000) are positions that have been developed out of a systematic engagement with Kymlicka's concept of cultural rights and its accompanying dilemmas. In this light it is noteworthy to observe that James Banks has recently edited a book entitled *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives* (2004, Reprinted 2007) which, in addition to articles by leading scholars of multiculturalism and multicultural education, includes a perceptive opening summary of the collection by Kymlicka. The impression one gets from this book is that Banks is advocating the use of the term *citizenship education* as a more comprehensive alternative to the term *multicultural education*:

The increasing racial, ethnic, cultural, and language diversity in nation-states throughout the world, and the growing recognition and legitimization of diversity, are causing educators to rethink citizenship education. The worldwide ethnic, cultural, and language revitalization movements are challenging assimilationist notions of citizenship education and are insisting that diverse cultures be reflected in the school, college, and university curriculumConsequently, an important goal of citizenship education in a democratic multicultural society is to help students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to make reflective decisions and to take actions to make their nation-states more democratic and just ... [and to teach] toleration and recognition of cultural differences. (Banks, 2004, pp. 3–4)

It may be premature to exaggerate the implications of this shift in Banks' terminology, yet it is certainly worth reflecting on how theorizations of citizenship education are or would be different from those of multicultural education. The term *citizen* is arguably more amenable to formal (systematic) definitions than the term *culture*, yet even though formal definitions may lend a sharper focus to the ways in which debates about national unity and inequality are articulated, the issues and effects stemming from the fact of

majority-minority relations remain unchanged. Definitions of citizenship rights are no less prone to essentialist and exclusionary constructions than are cultural rights, though perhaps the processes of essentialization and exclusion are more readily visible in relation to the term citizen as opposed to the more open-ended uses of the term culture. One can either read James Banks' references to citizenship education as building on his prolific research in multicultural education, or one can read him as acknowledging the limitations in theoretical paradigms of multiculturalism—an acknowledgement process that Bryan Turner, a leading sociologist of citizenship studies, refers to as “citizenship and the crisis of multiculturalism” (Turner, 2007). Anne Phillips unpacks the contemporary expressions of this crisis in her provocatively titled book *Multiculturalism without Culture* (2007). It is worth reflecting on what, a century from now, will be the legacy of multicultural projects of our times. My hunch is that regardless of the re-descriptions that we will undertake in relation to this political project, the challenges of living with differences (referred to as cultural) will not disappear. At this point it may be worth listening to an adaptation of Juliet's counsel to Romeo: “What's in a name? That which we call multicultural/ By any other name would smell as sweet.” On this note I will now turn to the thorny sweetness that *Othello* brings to the politics of multiculturalism in language arts education.

Teaching Othello and the Politics of Multiculturalism

From the earliest staging on record, November 1st 1604, *Othello*'s performance history has across four centuries continually engaged with questions on how Othello's difference is to be represented on stage. Furthermore British imperial rule made possible the performance and teaching of *Othello* in African and Asian colonies, and thus the contemporary history of *Othello* criticism has become the source for new forms of recognition, especially through critical responses of non-white writers and scholars for whom Shakespeare's characterization of Othello's difference conveys new anxieties.

Teaching *Othello* in classrooms with culturally diverse students offers opportunities for examining questions related to changing stage representations and cultural interpretations of the play. It is through teaching with an eye on these questions

that *Othello* becomes a generative school text for critically understanding the challenges of living in multicultural societies. The following extended quotation from the literary critic and historian Lisa Jardine perceptively describes how the process of preparing to teach *Othello* provoked her into rethinking the educational implications of these challenges:

It was as a result of taking four different paperback editions of *Othello* home and reading through their lengthy introductions to prepare my lecture that it dawned on me (but only slowly) that in every one of the editions we were looking at the twentieth century editor make the tacit assumption that the reader of the play-text is white. What I mean is the following. All the introductions to modern editions of *Othello* are reasonably sophisticated in their treatment of race in the play. They devote considerable space to presenting available evidence on the presence (or rather, for the most part, the absence) of Africans and Arabs in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries ... Nevertheless, at the end of such learned discussion, each editor positions us, the readers of the edition, with the Venetians. Sensitive as the discussion of race tends increasingly to be, the readers who carefully resist Elizabethan stereotypical responses are unhesitatingly white, while the play's hero, Othello is 'other' ... For no Afro-Caribbean or Asian student had registered (as far as I have been able to establish) that they were not addressed by their editor. They were, after all, entirely used to the idea that the books they picked up in the classroom were designed for students other than themselves. I was simply voicing concern over something they had learned to live with, something which in some real sense defined their participation in our educational system—participants, but not participants on precisely the same terms as 'ordinary' or 'traditional' students. (Jardine, 1994, pp. 98–100)

Jardine is here simply registering a truism: that teaching requirements vary according to context. The context of cultural diversity in our classrooms, then, carries implications for how *Othello* is or can be taught. Jardine does not quite spell out these implications but alludes to them through a critique of the majoritarian (white reader/student) assumptions in printed editions of *Othello*, in particular the assumptions informing the analysis of stereotypes associated with Othello's identity, be it as a Moor, a black man, an immigrant outsider, or as a victim of racial discrimination. By drawing attention to the contextual implications of majority-minority relations, not only our readings and performances but the teaching of *Othello* are all inevitably marked by the dilemmas of multiculturalism.

Teaching the performance history of *Othello* opens up an entry point for exploring the politics of multiculturalism within language arts classrooms. Analogies can be drawn between the theatre and the public school in multicultural societies; both are public spaces where approaches to recognizing and representing cultural differences carry political significance. By linking the stage and classroom implications, I am arguing that *Othello*'s unique contribution to multicultural language arts education is in the potential it carries to engage secondary students to think critically about the complex challenges and tensions associated with living in multicultural societies. In large part the uniqueness of this contribution lies in the fact that as a work of fiction (as opposed to an ideologically committed non-fiction work on multiculturalism) *Othello* invites different readings of the challenges and tensions—hence underscoring their complexity. The Cambridge and Oxford school editions (Coles, 2001; Gill, 2002) contain information on *Othello*'s performance history, though the coverage is cursory. The historical information is slightly more detailed in the student guides published by York Notes (Britain's equivalent to Coles Notes; Warren, 2003) and the Cambridge Student Guide (Mason, 2003). However, both school editions contain a wide selection of photographs from 20th century stage and film productions of *Othello*. It is these photographs that tangibly convey to students the different ways in which the character of Othello has been represented. For example, the photographs of actors who have played Othello include: the tall African American actor Paul Robeson (1930 London production), the white British Actor Laurence Olivier in blackface make-up (1964, London and 1965, film), the light brown-skinned Ben Kingsley who is part Indian (1985 Stratford-upon-Avon), the African American actors James Earl Jones (1981, New York) and Lawrence Fishburne (1995, film). A photograph I would be keen to include is that of the white American actor Patrick Stewart playing a white Othello with an all-black cast in what has been referred to as the photo-negative production (1998, Washington DC; Iyengar, 2002). For a student approaching *Othello* for the first time, these photographs would certainly convey the ambiguities associated with representing Othello's racial and cultural background. If there is a common motif in these photographs it is that each of the actors is dressed in flowing, Middle Eastern style robes (except Patrick Stewart).

Using films in the classroom brings alive the ambiguities about Othello's identity. To illustrate this I will describe my own experiences of teaching *Othello*. As part of a course on critical literacy that I have been teaching in the faculty of Education at the University of Victoria over the past three years, I spent two weeks (four classes) on approaches to using film versions of Shakespeare's plays in secondary language arts classrooms. I focused predominately on teaching *Othello* by reviewing three film versions and one film adaptation. These versions include the performances of Orson Welles (Welles, 1952), Laurence Olivier (Burge, 1965), and Lawrence Fishburne (Parker, 1995). The film adaptation is entitled *O* (Nelson, 2001) in which a teenaged African American actor, Mekhi Phifer, plays a high school basketball star named Odin who is in love with Desi (played by Julia Stiles). Odin is cruelly manipulated by Hugo (fellow team player and son of the team coach, played by Josh Harnett) into suspecting Desi's fidelity.

One extended classroom activity involves showing clips from each film of Othello's final lines:

Soft you; a word or two before you go.
 I have done the state some service, and they know't;
 No more of that. I pray you in your letters,
 When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
 Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
 Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
 Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
 Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,
 Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
 Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
 Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
 Albeit unused to the melting mood,
 Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
 Their medicinable gum. Set you down this;
 And say besides that in Aleppo once,
 Where a malignant and a turbanned Turk
 Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
 I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
 And smote him—thus! [*He stabs himself*] (5.2.343–361)

In chronological sequence, the class first watches Orson Welles as an olive-skinned Othello looking down, in a dreamlike state, at a murdered Desdemona and slowly enunciating the above lines, while the camera gradually fades into a voyeuristic aerial

shot as if spying through a hole in the ceiling above the bed. Then comes Laurence Olivier (Burge, 1965) painted black—the colour of boot polish—crying out his lines while hysterically shaking Desdemona’s pliant corpse in his arms. This is followed by Lawrence Fishburne whose rendition is more naturalistic and emotionally controlled. Finally they watch Mekhi Phifer as Odin surrounded by policemen as he recites the following lines before shooting himself with a handgun:

Odin: Now somebody here knows the truth
 Somebody needs to tell the goddamn truth
 My life is over. That’s it.
 But while you’re all out here living yours,
 sitting around, talking about the nigger
 who lost it, back in high school,
 you make sure you tell them the truth.
 You tell them I loved that girl. I did.
 But I got played. He [Hugo] twisted my head up.
 He fucked it up.
 I ain’t no different than none of you all.
 My mom ain’t no crack head.
 I wasn’t no gangbanger.
 It wasn’t some hood rat drug dealer that tipped me up.
 It was this white, prep school motherfucker standing right there.

Police Officer: Put the gun down! Come on, son! Drop it! Put it down!

Odin: You tell them where I’m from ... [shoots himself in the chest]. (Nelson, 2001)

One of my objectives for this activity is to have the students make group presentations on the strengths and weaknesses of each performance. Over the past three years this activity has consistently provoked discussions (and even arguments) about what sort of criteria should be applied in assessing these performances. These discussions are revealing because the students struggle between, on one hand, responding to the performances in relation to which actor comes closest to realizing their personal image of Othello, and, on the other, responding as film critics applying aesthetic or technical criteria (e.g., clarity in delivery of lines, physical projection, interpretation of emotions, scene direction, and sets, etc.). A majority of the students, though, are much more invested in arguing about who they feel reflects a believable and compelling Othello. In

other words, who is the real Othello? Lawrence Fishburne's performance consistently receives the highest approval rating followed (in rank order) by Mekhi Phifer, Laurence Olivier, with Orson Welles being the least popular. Is it significant that the black actors are ranked higher than the white actors? Is it significant that contemporary film productions are ranked higher? Is it significant that of the 127 students that I have taught so far only seven have been from visible minority backgrounds? Is it also significant that I come from a visible minority background (Ugandan-born Indian Canadian Muslim) and that I am teaching an almost all-white class? Responses to these questions entail engaging with the politics of multiculturalism in education, especially as they are loaded with assumptions about the significance of majority-minority relations, of racial and cultural differences, and more specifically of teaching *Othello* in light of these assumptions. With increasing success every year I have made this engagement explicit in the classroom by debriefing different ways to read the significance of this activity and student responses, in effect, different ways to understand the question: Who is Othello? Once again I want to underscore the point that what makes *Othello* particularly effective as a pedagogical text in this regard is that its ideological stance on racial or cultural differences is not transparent as say in the writings of Toni Morrison, V.S. Naipaul or the non-fiction writings of Frantz Fanon. This lack of transparency has an enabling effect by making possible difficult conversations about race and racism.

Just as the literary critical heritage of *Othello* can be said to turn around the question "what is Othello about?" the critical performance history turns around "who is Othello?" Beginning with Marvin Rosenberg's influential study *The Masks of Othello: the Search for the Identity of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona by Three Centuries of Actors and Critics* (1964), several scholars have since contributed to writing critical and synoptic histories of *Othello* on stage (Kolin, 2002; Pechter, 1999; Potter, 20002; Vaughan, 1995). Lois Potter's book, published as part of the Shakespeare in Performance Series, is the most detailed. Potter refers to the performances by the African American actor Paul Robeson (1898–1976) as constituting a historical fault line, and she divides the chapters in her book into two sections: 'Part One: Othello before Robeson;' Part Two: Robeson and after.' In addition to highlighting the central significance of

Robeson's performances, Potter is also using Paul Robeson as a marker demarcating 20th from pre-20th century performances. The key turning points in the pre-20th century record can be cursorily summarized around the performances of the English actor Edmund Kean (1789-1833) and the African American actor Ira Aldridge (1806–1867) who is the first black actor to play Othello.

Edmund Kean became famous for his Othello which he performed on the London stage during 1814 to 1833. Up until the end of the eighteenth century Othello was played in blackface without objections or anxieties. Kean was the first actor to abandon blackface for a light brown make-up and arguably this innovation reflects the growing racial self-consciousness in nineteenth century European thought (Pechter, 1999). It is worth noting that Kean is a contemporary of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) whose influential yet much debated observations on *Othello* are now seen as setting into motion the continuing debate as to whether Othello is a black African or a tawny Moor:

No doubt Desdemona saw Othello's visage in his mind, yet as we are constituted, and most surely as an English audience was disposed in the beginning of the seventeenth century, it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro. It would argue disproportionateness, a want of balance in Desdemona, which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated ...Othello must not be conceived as a negro but a high and chivalrous Moorish chief. (Coleridge, 1819/2004, pp. 231–232)

Kean may have been influenced by such critical opinions into playing Othello as a tawny Moor, yet it is worth noting that in critical responses to his London performances this innovation is seen as merely incidental to Kean's interpretation of Othello's personality. For example, William Hazlitt's review from 1816 registers different, more aesthetic-centred anxieties:

Mr. Kean's Othello is his best character and the highest effort of genius on the stage. We say this without any exception or reserve. Yet we wish it was better than it is. In parts, we think he rises as high as human genius can go: at other times, though powerful, the whole effort is thrown away in a wrong direction, and disturbs our idea of the character. There are some technical objections. Othello was tall; but that is nothing: he was black, but that is nothing. But he was fierce, and that is everything. It is only in the last agony of human suffering that he gives way to his rage and despair, and it is in working his noble nature up to that extremity, that Shakespeare has shown his genius and his vast power over the

human heartHe [Kean] is too often in the highest key of passion, too uniformly on the verge of extravagance, too constantly on the rack. This does very well in certain characters, as Zanga or Bajazet, where there is merely a physical passion, a boiling of the blood, to be expressed; but it is not so in the lofty-minded and generous Moor. (Hazlitt, 1816/2000, pp. 140–141)

Less than a month after Kean's final performance of *Othello* in April 1833 (the year he died), Ira Aldridge played *Othello* on the London stage. As the first black actor to play the role his performances mark another turning point, influencing the way *Othello*'s blackness is seen as having an almost naturalized fit for the role. Furthermore, discussions about *Othello* in blackface henceforth became charged with political significance. The details of Aldridge's upbringing in the United States are not known, particularly as to whether or not he was born into slavery. In fact, as Aldridge became relatively famous performing throughout Europe and Russia, exotic stories about his origins began circulating (at times initiated by himself, perhaps imitating *Othello* in what Stephen Greenblatt (1980) has referred to as "narrative self-fashioning") about his roots as an African prince from Senegal (Potter, 2003). Reaction to his performances once again taps into the anxieties of recognition and representation. These anxieties can be read into Potter's description of critical responses to his performances in Russia:

It was in Russia, also, that the question of racial casting first inspired serious discussion. Zvantsev declared that, once he had seen Aldridge as *Othello*, he felt that he would never want to see any white actor, however famous, play the part. On the other hand, a letter to a newspaper in September 1862 argued that identity of colour between actor and character would be an identity of skin rather than spirit—the antithesis of an aesthetic approach to acting. Since the letter-writer goes on to say that an *Othello* black only in his skin would be a source of revulsion ... Théophile Gautier, on the same principle, preferred Aldridge's *King Lear* to his *Othello* because 'In the former he acted; in *Othello* he was just himself' ... (Potter, 2001, p. 116)

After Aldridge, Paul Robeson's performances in London (1930) and United States (1943 and 1958) strongly influenced subsequent stage and film representations of *Othello*. Edwin Hoyt in his biography, *Paul Robeson: The American Othello* (1967), describes the wider political significance of Robeson's performances for American society:

Never before in America had a Negro played the role of *Othello* in a cast of whitesAs they saw Paul Robeson in the role for the first time many of them realized how deep and ingenious had been William Shakespeare's writing, for the

Moor, like Robeson, was different from others—the whites—and the play, with all its overtones of racial conflict in sixteenth-century Venice, took on a new life four centuries later ... audiences sensed that in this four-hundred-year old melodrama lay the wellsprings of the emotional and racial conflict which was even in 1943 and 1944 burgeoning in America. (Hoyt, 1967, pp. 2–3)

In sketching out this historical overview my aim has been to illustrate the family resemblances between questions arising from this history and the questions facing conceptions of a multicultural society. Responses to the questions “who is Othello?” and “what constitutes a multicultural society?” are subject to similar critiques on, for example, unexamined majoritarian assumptions (Théophile Gautier: “... in *Othello* he [Aldridge] was just himself”), essentialising tendencies (William Hazlitt: “Othello was tall; but that is nothing: he was black, but that is nothing”), and overlooking systemic causes of exclusion (Edwin Hoyt: “Never before in America had a Negro played the role of Othello in a cast of whites”).

In making these claims about a family resemblance between the politics of multiculturalism and the politics of performing *Othello*, I could be accused of being too academic (if not smugly detached) about the pressing crisis in multicultural societies. Quite the contrary, I am arguing that because contemporary thinking about multiculturalism and correlated educational implications have become, as it were, overloaded with intractable tensions, the teaching of *Othello* offers handles by which students can critically grip and learn about these tensions and complexities, rather than being offered what can easily amount to either rhetorical platitudes or ideologically reductive positions on the virtues and vices of multiculturalism. Teaching about the performance history of *Othello* in the classroom not only offers students vivid examples of what the politics of recognition and representation entail, but it also teaches students that the challenges associated with understanding and accommodating cultural differences (e.g., Othello’s difference on stage or visible minorities in school and society) are not new, or at least they are older than the coining of the term *multicultural*.

For language arts educators the teaching of *Othello* opens up yet another set of perspectives for understanding the significance of the concept of culture in education. In the previous chapter I linked the concept of cultural capital with *Othello* as a school text

in order to illustrate how the term culture is used and debated around questions of evaluation, particularly in relation to hierarchical (high and popular) and normative (canonical and non-canonical) distinctions. In this chapter I link the concept of cultural rights with *Othello* as a school text in order to foreground how the term culture is used and debated around questions of recognition and representation, particularly in reference to majority-minority relations and exclusionary versus inclusionary outcomes. In this light the teaching of *Othello* offers student from both majority and visible minority backgrounds an opportunity to engage with more politically activist conceptions of multiculturalism.

Othello is inscribed with an overtly political significance in the context of post-colonial (and post-slavery) societies, specifically through responses by non-white writers to the question: who is Othello? Most school editions of *Othello* include a section highlighting excerpts from prominent literary critics. In the Cambridge and Oxford school editions the critics cited include: Thomas Rymer, Samuel Johnson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, A.C. Bradley, as well as twentieth century critics F.R. Leavis, John Bayley, and the feminist scholar Germaine Greer. Future editions can now widen this list to include non-white voices. The edited collection entitled *Othello: New Essays by Black Writers* (Kaul, 1997) contains a compelling range of responses to *Othello* by African American, African, and Indian scholars, the significance of which is described by Mythili Kaul, the Indian editor, as:

Taken together, the essays constitute not a chorus but a wide-ranging debate involving diverse perspectives, approaches, and conclusions. The one thing that all the contributors do share in common, however, is the recognition that the issues raised by the play are, indeed, of utmost relevance today in terms of politics, colonial exploitation, cultural relativism, and, above all, race. From the other side, the essays collectively also make clear the extent to which an engagement with *Othello* can enable black writers to discuss these pressing contemporary issues in ways that are both pointed and complex. (1997, pp. xi–xii)

A particularly powerful example of such a pointed and complex response is by the Nigerian novelist Ben Okri in his essay ‘Leaping Out of Shakespeare’s Terror: Five Meditations on Othello’:

Those who hate black people and those who romanticize them mean the same thing when one speaks of the colour as ugly and the other speaks of it as

attractive. Both of them deny black its own unique condition and existence unto itself. The weirdest thing about *Othello* is that his colour is empty of history. It is the accepted thing to comment on *Othello*'s jealousy, but few critics seem to realize that his colour, his otherness, must imply a specific history in white society. It seems that into the vessel of *Othello*'s skin, Shakespeare poured whiteness. It is possible that *Othello* actually is a blackened white man In three centuries of *Othello* committing murder and suicide on the stage no significant change in attitude towards black people has occurred. I doubt that *Othello* really disturbs people as much as it should. Society has become smothered by complacency. Add to this the fact that *Othello* as a lone black man on the stage is not threatening. White audiences must merely look upon his phenomenon. It is a basic truth of literature that if you can't enter the centre of a work, then it can't really shake you. How can white people imagine themselves in *Othello*'s skin? The black person's response to *Othello* is more secret and much more anguished, than can be imagined. It makes you unbearably lonely to know that you can empathise with them, but they will rarely empathise with you What matters is that because of Shakespeare's genius *Othello* haunts the English stage. He won't go away. He is always there on the stage, a reminder of his unexplained presence in the white consciousness, and a symbol of the fact that black people and white are bound on the terrible bed of history. (1997, pp. 78–86)

What would be the effects of introducing Okri's observations to secondary students? Would the effects differ depending on whether or not the class is predominantly white? What are the risks associated with either unquestioningly accepting Okri's reading or attempting to critique Okri? For language arts educators to confront these sorts of questions connects them with the activist edges of multicultural (and anti-racist) education research. Moreover, students are thus introduced to a significant strand of literary criticism that has emerged over the past four decades, namely, post-colonial thought. However, it is important to note that *Othello* was written before the establishment of British colonies (and white settler societies) and thus it complicates the claims of post-colonial theorists such as Edward Said (1978, 1993) who has persuasively demonstrated how colonial rule constructed representations of those ruled as the *other*—as inferior, uncivilized, and exotic, thus dialectically defining the culture of colonizers with opposite attributes. "Shakespeare's genius" (borrowing Okri's words) can be seen in the ways in which *Othello* anticipates and complicates the politics of representation (representation on whose terms?), a core perspective of post-colonial criticism. *Othello* will, I am sure, continue complicating our understanding of the politics of representation

a hundred years from now when the term *post-colonial* will in all likelihood carry very different connotations (Loomba, 1998, 2002). However, it would be invaluable to introduce students to the influential legacy of what I will refer to as the *Othello sub-text* in fictional writings of African, Middle Eastern, Asian, and visible minority immigrant writers.

The Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih's Arabic novel translated as *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) is a haunting example of the *Othello* sub-text. The novel has an unnamed narrator who, after studying in London, returns to his village in Sudan where he meets Mustafa Sa'eed, the novel's protagonist and another London returnee. Mustafa Sa'eed commits suicide, and as the details of his life in London are pieced together he emerges as an Othello-like figure, having committed and been tried for a crime of passion—stabbing to death his young English wife, Jean Morris. Mustafa Sa'eed's several enigmatic references to Othello—"I am no Othello, Othello was a lie" (Salih, 1969, p. 95)—illustrate the need on the part of Tayeb Salih to both borrow the figure of Othello and more importantly to re-write him from a non-white perspective. These attempts to re-write the so called "Othello myth" (Daileader, 2005) function as sub-texts in the fictional works of quite a few writers, among whom Salman Rushdie's re-writings in his novels (1988, 1995, 2001) are probably the most widely read. A lyrical and visceral response which could be pedagogically effective in the classroom is the poem 'Goats and Monkeys' by the black St. Lucian and Nobel prize winning poet Derek Walcott. Halfway into the poem Walcott declaims:

Virgin and ape, maid and malevolent Moor,
Their immortal coupling still halves our world.
He is your sacrificial beast, bellowing, goaded,
a black bull snarled in ribbons of its blood. (1988, p. 84)

In addition to these voices, students could be fruitfully introduced to the tensions and ambivalences expressed by contemporary black actors. On the one hand, the distinguished black British actor Hugh Quarshie has argued that a black actor playing Othello runs the risk of confirming racist stereotypes:

When a black actor plays a role written for a white actor in black make-up and for a predominantly white audience, does he not encourage the white way, or rather the wrong way, of looking at black men, namely that black men, or 'Moors', are

over-emotional, excitable and unstable, thereby vindicating Iago's statement, "These Moors are changeable in their wills" (1.3.346)? Of all the parts in the canon, perhaps *Othello* is the one which should most definitely not be played by a black actor. (cited in Potter, 2002, p. 169)

On the other hand, the African American film and stage actor James Earl Jones has written extensively on the professional challenges and personal rewards of playing *Othello*:

I have always taken *Othello* personally—perhaps too personally—and I am not alone ... *Othello* and this play interlock to form a puzzle that has intrigued actors, directors and audiences across four centuries. I confess that *Othello* the play is still a mystery to me, and I am content that it always will be. It is the mystery of it that makes the mountain interesting. I have played *Othello* in seven productions over twenty-five years, and studied and thought about the character and the play for many more years than that. (Jones, 2003, pp. 3–4)

By stitching together these varied responses and readings of *Othello* I have hopefully succeeded in showing that there is more than meets the eye when thinking of *Othello* as a school text. The *more* in this case refers to its power in generating more critically engaged responses to the intellectual and political challenges of implementing multicultural educational goals. More importantly by thinking through the varied approaches and implications of teaching *Othello*, language arts educators are able to better understand how their practices are implicated in addressing one of the key challenges of our times, namely, living with cultural differences.

The Multicultural Education Debate, Othello, and the Problem of Cultural Essentialism

In the analysis of the canon debate we saw that the term culture is used, on one hand, to affirm normative authority, while on the other it is used to critique normative assumptions. The critique challenges the projection of these normative assumptions as ahistorical and universal, and hence argues for a perspective on the term culture as historically constructed and as serving particular ideological interests. However, as I pointed out both affirmations and critiques of normative authority in relation to uses of the term culture are trapped in what I referred to as the problem of normativity, whereby all definitions of culture reflect, to varying degrees, normative assumptions. Thus a non-normative definition of culture is difficult to define. As such the canon debate is in the

end a debate between competing normative criteria—rather than a debate between normative versus non-normative criteria.

The multicultural educational debate is similarly entrapped. I will refer to this entrapment as the problem of essentialism. Group identity-based theories of multiculturalism defined around cultural rights have been critiqued for essentialist constructions of cultural identity (cultural purity) or difference (cultural otherness), yet it is difficult to articulate non-essentialist definitions of cultural identity or difference. Definitions of cultural rights reflect, to varying degrees, essentializing assumptions about cultural distinctiveness and, as it were, definability. It is this particular and central paradox of multiculturalism of, on one hand, defining and acknowledging differences and, on the other, defining and acknowledging commonalities that renders multicultural education debates intractable. In this chapter I have attempted to show how *Othello* holds up a mirror to this paradox, and that the teaching of *Othello* offers opportunities for critically exploring the political challenges and intellectual complexities attending this paradox. That is where hope lies, namely in the ways we attend to the challenges and complexities of defining cultural rights in the context of culturally pluralistic societies—a process of attending that will always be a work in progress. And as we attend to *Othello*, Pechter (2004) reminds us of an analogous work in progress:

Given the consistently transformative history that has characterized Othello's image since the beginning, the only prediction that we can confidently make is that if we are lucky enough to become the object of future historians' interests, the Othello imprinted in our mind's eye is bound to look strangely remote from the truth. (p. 176)

As I write this, the post-9/11 world today seems to perfectly exemplify the wrong or shall I say tragic way of living with cultural differences. The prevailing talk of a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 1996) between Islam and the West has begun to provoke a new set of readings on *Othello*'s cultural significance:

Shakespeare lives when he is read and performed in ways that are simultaneously tuned to the present and true to the text. In our not so brave new millennium, as the battle-lines reinflect those of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean, waging the forces of global capitalism against the imperatives of Islamic fundamentalism, few literary questions will be more significant than that of how best to interpret and perform this play. (Bate, 2001, p. 15)

This reading strikes a strong chord though I would like to propose the following minor amendments:

Shakespeare lives when he is read and performed [**and taught**] in ways that are simultaneously tuned to the present and true to the text ... few literary questions will be more significant than that of how best to interpret and perform [**and teach**] this play. (Bate, 2001, p. 15)

In this light, cultural rights as an analytical tool presents language arts educators with opportunities to move beyond the polarizing politics of multiculturalism and begin generating conversations about the shared and unfolding challenges that come with increasing cultural diversity inside our schools. Just as *Othello* resists simple readings, the most salient challenge facing language arts educators is that there are no simple solutions.

Chapter Four

***Othello* and the Cultural Literacy Debate: Toward a Cultural Reproduction Analysis**

E.D. Hirsch, Jr.'s book *The Knowledge Deficit* (2006) marks the latest strike in Hirsch's crusade to save the public education system in the United States from the ills and damage caused by progressive education ideologies. This crusade began twenty years ago with the publication of Hirsch's manifesto-like books *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987) and *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (1988). Hirsch's reformist agenda has since grown into a national movement coordinated through the Core Knowledge Foundation which actively engages in an impressive range of educational research and curriculum development work. The detailed and sophisticated K–8 Core Knowledge sequenced curriculum is currently used in over 400 American schools.

Over the past twenty years Hirsch's project has been the subject of highly publicized and controversial attention, in part spurred by the exaggerated tone of Hirsch's polemical attacks on disciplinary and professional associations connected with American public education. This tone can be heard, for example, in the title of his other significant book on educational reform, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (1996). Yet in large part the attention garnered by Hirsch's books can be explained by the fact that they reflect and fuel what we now refer to as the culture wars in education. Cultural right perspectives in education can be broadly based on the strong correlations that Hirsch draws between educational achievement (especially high reading scores from grade 8 onwards, once formal decoding skills have been learnt) and the teaching of "traditional content" through a core curriculum; and between effective civic participation and the possession of "shared background knowledge." Hirsch's arguments for these correlations are formulated by way of a critique of progressive educational assumptions about the nature of learning and the role of educational institutions. As such Hirsch's writings also bring into sharper relief ways for examining differences between cultural right (traditionalist) and cultural left (progressive) perspectives in education.

I will here examine these differences by focussing on how the term culture and so-called culturalist assumptions inform ways in which the opposition between traditionalists and progressives in education is framed. Hirsch's conception of cultural literacy carries connotations associated with cultural capital (through proposals to teach canonical texts) as well as cultural rights (through defining goals in relation to democratic citizenship). By bringing together issues from the both the canon and multicultural debates, Hirsch's project in turn shifts our attention to another intractable debate from the culture wars, namely, between competing goals and strategies for cultural reproduction. I examine the cultural literacy debate by drawing on some of the assumptions of cultural reproduction analysis as developed in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 1979), particularly his representation of cultural reproduction through institutionalized public education as constituting a *field* of relations, struggles and competing interests. However, I will also be referring to cultural reproduction in its more generic sense, used as a way of defining culture in opposition to biology—i.e., cultural reproduction as opposed to biological reproduction.

Hirsch's books articulate a formal program for cultural reproduction framed by a struggle between cultural literacy and cultural illiteracy, yet in spite of the centrality attributed to the term culture, Hirsch fails to address fundamental tensions and contradictions inherent in his conception of culture. By highlighting his opposition to progressive educational thought, Hirsch inadvertently brings to light ways in which the concept of culture is also inadequately theorized in the writings of John Dewey. Hence I also critically examine cultural reproduction goals of progressive education by briefly reviewing the under-theorized culturalist assumptions informing Dewey's conception of aesthetics and democracy, and trace their concomitant influence on learner-centred and social reconstructionist strands of progressive education, particularly as expressed through research on language arts education.

Othello has been and continues to be subject to cultural reproduction through literary criticism and stage performances, and significantly it is subject to cultural reproduction every time it is taught. What then are the cultural reproduction goals and strategies for teaching *Othello*? In the final section of this chapter I begin unpacking this

question in order to illustrate how the teaching of *Othello* offers language arts educators opportunities to reflect critically on the politics of cultural reproduction. More pointedly I conclude by reflecting on how this study, by inviting self-consciousness around uses of the term culture in language arts education, might spur creative thinking about challenges facing the changing identity (or identities) of language arts education in the twenty first century. To speak about the identity of a school subject is in effect to begin a process of acknowledging the role that we as educators play in reproducing this identity.

Politics of Cultural Reproduction and Education

In a review of Hirsch's book *Cultural Literacy* (1987), Richard Rorty perceptively sums up the differences between political right and political left approaches to education:

When people on the political right talk about education, they immediately start talking about the truth. Typically, they enumerate what they take to be familiar and self-evident truths and regret that these are no longer being inculcated in the young. When people on the political left talk about education, they talk first about freedom. The left typically views the old familiar truths cherished by the right as a crust of convention that needs to be broken through, vestiges of old-fashioned modes of thought from which the new generation should be freed. When this opposition between truth and freedom becomes explicit both sides wax philosophical and produce theories about the nature of truth and freedom. (Rorty, 2001, p. 107)

Granted that Rorty's description can be taken to task for possible generalizations, the opposition between truth and freedom that he constructs can be generatively applied to understand Hirsch's arguments for cultural literacy. Incidentally, it should be noted that Rorty's description does not contain the term culture.

Before turning to Hirsch's elaboration of cultural literacy and to an analysis of his assumptions about culture, I should point out that Hirsch's professional background is not in education but English literature. Prior to writing *Cultural Literacy*, Hirsch (b. 1928) had an already established reputation as a scholar of Romantic poets with books on William Wordsworth and Friedrich Shelling (1960) and William Blake (1964); thereafter he wrote two widely cited theoretical books on literary interpretation (or hermeneutics), *Validity in Interpretation* (1967) and *The Aims of Interpretation* (1976). In providing this brief biographical background my intention is simply to acknowledge his distinguished

academic pedigree. To be fair to Hirsch, an examination of his educational thought has to be undertaken on educational grounds as he himself bases his arguments on educational criteria.

The following quotations illustrate key uses of the term culture in Hirsch's educational agenda. First, Hirsch's primary assumption is that there is a clear consensus on what counts as necessary cultural information to be transmitted through public education, and that it is the questioning of this consensus that has led to education inequities:

To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world. The breadth of that information is great, extending over the major domains of human activity from sports to science. It is by no means confined to "culture" narrowly understood as an acquaintance with the arts. Nor is it confined to one social class. Quite the contrary. Cultural literacy constitutes the only sure avenue of opportunity for disadvantaged children, the only reliable way of combating the social determinism that now condemns them to remain in the same social and educational condition as their parents ... Cultural literacy is represented not by a prescriptive list of books but rather a descriptive list of the information actually possessed by literate Americans. (Hirsch, 1987, pp. xiii–xiv)

In all of Hirsch's writings we find variations on the above claim, namely, that there is a core body of cultural information, access to which defines what is required to be culturally literate. In this study my aim is not to take a position on this claim, but rather to examine the criteria that Hirsch offers for making such a claim. This brings to light the central limitation in Hirsch's arguments, because he does not offer any systematic criteria for defining the boundaries of his core knowledge let alone provide a defense of the assumptions on which these boundaries are established. Questions raised earlier around the critique of the canon debate apply equally to Hirsch's claims: who decides and who evaluates? Hirsch arguably also projects an ahistorical sense, as there is no discussion in his writings on processes of historical formation and conflict that have shaped what is included and excluded from his core curriculum. These are, to be sure, contentious questions and issues which are ideologically charged (even intractable), yet this does not excuse Hirsch from not addressing them, let alone for projecting his claims as being objective and even as ideologically neutral. A tone of alleged objectivity informs Hirsch's definition and critique of progressive education:

The theories that have dominated American education for the past fifty years stem ultimately from Jean Jacques Rousseau, who believed that one should encourage the natural development of young children and not impose adult ideas upon them before they can truly understand themHe [Rousseau] thought that a child's intellectual social skills would develop naturally without regard to the specific content of education. His content-neutral conception of education has long been triumphant in American schools of educationIn the first decades of this century, Rousseau's ideas powerfully influenced the educational conceptions of John Dewey, the writer who has most deeply affected modern educational theory and practiceDewey assumed that early education need not be tied to specific content. He mistook a half-truth for the whole. He placed too much faith in children's ability to learn general skills from a few typical experiences and too hastily rejected "the piling up of information." Only by piling up specific, communally shared information can children learn to participate in complex cooperative activities with other members of their community. (Hirsch, 1987, pp. xiv-xv)

The above claims are central to Hirsch's project. Leaving aside for a moment Hirsch's reading of John Dewey's ideas, what is conspicuously missing in Hirsch's critique of progressive education is any serious consideration of alternative pedagogical ideas. Hirsch gives the impression that the content versus pedagogy divide is in the end irrelevant or even meaningless. Extrapolating from this assumption, hypothetically speaking Hirsch's cultural literacy can be achieved independently of schools, especially now that we can dispense and pile unlimited information through cyberspace. Furthermore Hirsch describes (or re-describes) progressive educational thought as revolving around the tenets of "formalism" and "naturalism":

By "formalism" I mean the belief that the particular content which is learned in school (the content I have called "intellectual capital") is far less important than acquiring the formal tools which will enable a person to learn future contentFormal intellectual tools like "learning to learn," "accessing skills "and" critical-thinking skills"By the second term, "naturalism," I mean the belief that education is a natural process with its own inherent forms and rhythms, which may vary with each child, and is most effective when it is connected with natural, real-life goals and settingsBoth formalism and naturalism are half-truths—the most pernicious kinds of errors because they appear so plausible. (Hirsch, 1996, pp. 218-219)

Undoubtedly Hirsch's description conveys the spirit and rationale of progressive education, yet progressive educational theorists do not use the terms "formalism" and "naturalism" to define their theoretical positions. Arguably these terms connote the exact

opposite meanings in the writings of, say, John Dewey, whose preferred term “experimentalism” (i.e., problem-solving learning and related associations with “instrumentalism” or “pragmatism”) is defined in opposition to formalized learning methods; and Dewey uses the term “progressive” to define educational goals of personal growth which stand in opposition to a positivistic naturalist view of human development (Dewey, 1966; Ryan, 1995). The philosopher Morton White (1949/1957) famously characterized Dewey’s opposition as a “revolt against formalism.” Similarly the psychologist Jerome Bruner’s corresponding terms, “meaning making” and “cultural psychology” (i.e., emphasis on learning as situated experience) would sound anomalous if re-described as “formalism” and “naturalism” (Bruner, 1996).

As this highly variable use of terms to describe progressive pedagogical approaches suggests, based on our current state of knowledge about human learning capacities (Fodor, 2006), we do not yet have a universal (let alone objective) theory for defining effective pedagogy. Not only do learning capacities vary according to individual learners but learning outcomes are continually shaped by contextual factors. If it were otherwise we could in effect simply design and universally apply a technological solution to realize Hirsch’s conception of cultural literacy. In this light I do agree with Hirsch that attempts to formulate comprehensive educational panaceas, including “cultural literacy,” will inevitably result in “half-truths.” A compelling example of one of Hirsch’s half-truths is found in his reference to a so-called “anthropological theory of education”:

The corrective theory might be described as an anthropological theory of education, because it is based on the anthropological observation that all human communities are founded upon specific shared information. Americans are different from Germans, who in turn are different from Japanese, because each group possesses specifically different cultural knowledge. In an anthropological perspective the basic goal of education in a human community is acculturation, the transmission to children of the specific information shared by the adults of the group or polisThe anthropological view stresses the universal fact that a human group must have effective communications to function effectively, that effective communications require shared culture, and that shared culture requires transmission of specific information to childrenOnly by accumulating shared symbols and the shared information that the symbols represent, can we learn to communicate effectively with one another in our national community. (Hirsch, 1987, pp. xvi–xvii)

Hirsch provides no references to which anthropological theory he is citing, as if there is some generic “anthropological theory,” which would be just as meaningless as referring to a generic “cultural theory of education.” It appears that Hirsch’s intention here is to draw correlations between a theory about education and the concept of culture. As far as I can ascertain, Hirsch does not use the phrase “cultural reproduction” (perhaps because it is redolent of neo-Marxism), yet he is in effect making a generalized argument about the role of education in shaping cultural reproduction, or what he labels “acculturation”—which in educational research is often used interchangeably with the term socialization. The difficulty here is that Hirsch approaches the concept of culture as if it embodies an empirical or taken for granted definition. For example, if there is such a thing as an anthropological theory of education, why is there deep disagreement about what constitutes acculturation between cultural anthropologists (Geertz, 2000), rooted in interpretive methodological approaches, and social anthropologists, rooted in functionalist approaches (Gellner, 1988)? Furthermore, Hirsch refers to American culture (“our national community,” p.xvi) without any serious consideration of internal cultural differences within the United States, let alone addressing the challenges of accommodating cultural differences in relation to a national identity. Thus Hirsch’s half-truth here arises not through acknowledging the phenomenon of cultural reproduction, but by assuming that there is only one theory of cultural reproduction.

In a similar vein Hirsch’s conception of literacy is similarly uncomplicated. He defines literacy tautologically—“Literacy ... depends upon a literate culture” (p. xvii), and, moreover, around narrow functionalist assumptions:

Literacy, an essential aim of education in the modern world, is no autonomous empty skill but depends upon literate culture. Like any other aspect of acculturation, literacy requires the early and continued transmission of specific information. (Hirsch, 1987, p. xvii)

My critique of Hirsch’s claims can be summarized in terms of the following oversights: a) not spelling out content selection criteria; b) undervaluing pedagogical factors; and c) inadequately theorizing acculturation. All relate, in different degrees, to issues and questions around how the significance of the term culture in education is conceived. These significations, I am arguing, can be fruitfully analyzed in light of the

politics of cultural reproduction—a politics that impinges on all educational theories. I now turn to an examination of how issues of cultural reproduction are reflected in theories of language arts education, specifically those theories that emerged out of the dominating legacy of progressive educational thought.

Let me first specify how *Othello* as a school text foregrounds and complicates my analysis of cultural reproduction. By focusing on the teaching of *Othello* I am satisfying, as it were, the goals driving Hirsch's version of cultural literacy, yet my reasons for teaching *Othello* are guided by very different ideas about literacy. For Hirsch the teaching of *Othello* arguably contributes, in the first instance, to developing a connection with the shared canonical culture of Western civilization, while I have been arguing that it could do a lot more. For example, teaching *Othello* offers opportunities to unpack taken-for-granted assumptions about a unified canonical culture and to engage with challenges of living with cultural differences. Here the idea of critical literacy may come immediately to mind, yet this label is no less problematic than Hirsch's cultural literacy, since the term *critical* is just as contested as the term *culture*. Not only is it a relative term (critical according to whom?), it is ideologically charged (critical for serving which ends?). Yet the idea of critical literacy is conspicuous by its prolific use in language arts educational research (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Willinsky, 2001). Something of the oppositional spirit behind the term *critical* characterizes the historical development of progressive historical thought, particularly ways in which this oppositional spirit was and is harnessed around conceptions of aesthetics and democracy.

The official establishment in the United States of the Progressive Education Association in 1919 serves as a significant turning point in many respects, not least because it helped spread and institutionalize John Dewey's ideas about education. By 1919, Dewey had already published what were to become foundational books for defining the broad intellectual outlook of progressive theories and practices. Beginning with his widely cited article 'My Pedagogic Creed' (1897/1972), key early books on education include *The School and Society* (1899/1978), *How We Think* (1910/1978), and *Democracy and Education* (1916/1966), which is arguably the most influential. Dewey had intended *Democracy and Education* to be used as a textbook and that in large part

may account for the fact that it is his most systematically written book, in which he elaborates a comprehensive framework for demonstrating ways in which formal education enables the child to become a full member of society. At the risk of simplifying, this book can be read as propounding a general theory of socialization. Dewey's view of the child is conceived, at one end of the theory, as possessing "interests" which teachers (and educational institutions in general) need to address in order to stimulate the child's "growth," while at the other end of the socialization theory Dewey upholds a view of democracy conceived around aspirations for effective and freely deliberated "association" and "communication" (Dewey, 1916/1966).

A central intellectual concept in all of Dewey's writings is that of a "problem," the many layered connotations of which are succinctly summarized by the philosopher Alan Ryan (1995):

Individuals and societies alike are stirred into life by problems: an unproblematic world would be a world not so much at rest as unconscious ... Problem solving is the condition of organic life. Societies, like individuals, solve problems and, like individuals, must do so by acting on the environment that causes the problem in the first place. Interaction with the environment alters the society or the individual that acts on the environment, with the result that new problems arise and demand new solutions. To the degree that this process gives the organism more control over itself and its environment, more ability to rethink its problems, and the potentiality for fruitful changes along the same lines, we may talk of progress. Dewey's preferred expression was always "growth." (p. 28)

In this light socialization theories of the progressive education movement can be examined as a response to the problems of education arising from the evolution of democracy in the United States—problems demanding new solutions. Some of the so-called articles of faith from Dewey's 'My Pedagogic Creed' lucidly articulate the child-centred premise guiding Dewey's solutions. Moreover they can be read as translations of the above problem-centred framework into an educational context:

I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself. Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling, and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs. Through the responses which others make to his own activities he comes to know what these mean in social terms. The value which they have is reflected back into them. For instance,

through the response which is made to the child's instinctive babblings the child comes to know what those babblings mean; they are transformed into articulate language and thus the child is introduced into the consolidated wealth of ideas and emotions which are now summed up in languageThe child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education. (Dewey, 1897/1972, pp. 84–85)

I have cited Dewey at some length in order not only to provide a fuller picture of the enemy targeted by Hirsch's cultural literacy crusade, but more importantly to illustrate the field of competing ideological interests and contradictions framing the politics of cultural reproduction (following Bourdieu). Dewey's contradictions, in turn, arise from the fact that his conceptions of children's socialization processes and "experiences" are just as inadequately theorized as Hirsch's conception of acculturation. These inadequacies can also be fruitfully analyzed around Dewey's uses of the term culture. Compared to Dewey's prolific usage of the terms society and social, references to culture and cultural are insignificant in Dewey's writings. The exception is his book *Freedom and Culture* (1939/1985), which argues for a generalized model of American democratic culture as a more effective vehicle for social reconstruction than the rising authoritarian ideologies of Marxism in Russia and Fascism in Europe. Apart from briefly referring to the rise in self-consciousness around the concept of culture among American political writers, Dewey does not develop any formal definition of culture nor does he use it systematically. It is uncharacteristic of Dewey that he fails to address let alone admit the attendant theoretical complexities associated with the term culture, as he does when using the term *society*. For example, in *Democracy and Education*, one can discern a methodological self-consciousness at work in Dewey's observation that: "Society is one word, but many things" (Dewey, 1916/1966, pp. 81–82). Even though Dewey does not elaborate a conception of the cultural dimension, his connotations of what constitutes the social dimension of education—e.g., "Not only is social life identical with communication but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative" (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 5)—are interchangeable with Hirsch's description of a "common literate culture."

Turning to Dewey's contradictions, they arise from his attempt to define socialization in both pragmatic (experimentalist) and progressive (idealistic) terms.

Viewed pragmatically a child is socialized through her experimental problem-solving responses to the environment, while viewed progressively her socialization goals are defined in terms of achieving “growth” and “adjusting” to social life. Thus Dewey’s conception of problem solving is not as free and open-ended as he would like us to believe, but rather it is evaluated in relation to pre-determined goals of what counts as “growth” or “life-adjustment.” Dewey does not develop any systematic or formal criteria for what he means when he refers to “proper social life” or “right social growth,” except to assert them as normative reproduction goals of education:

I believe, finally, that the teacher is engaged, not simply in the training of individuals, but in the formation of the *proper social life*.

I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the *right social growth*. (Dewey, 1897/1972, p. 94, emphasis added)

Another way of stating this contradiction is that Dewey not only, as is the general view, emphasizes learning processes over product learning outcomes, but on closer examination he in effect only elaborates learning processes in detail while simply affirming (without elaboration) highly generalized product goals. Thus Dewey’s system fails to provide evaluation criteria for determining what would, say, constitute failure in relation to “growth” or “life-adjustment” goals, but rather posits these as intrinsic normative values. Apart from thorny questions around whose normative values are represented here and how established, these intrinsic goals are pursued and validated through instrumental means. “Ay, there’s the rub” (*Hamlet*, 3.1.67).

This rub runs goes all the way down to how the term culture is used: is culture a product or a process? For example, cultural reproduction can, on one hand, refer to an unfolding empirical process (as in acculturation) or it can on the other, refer in evaluative terms to what is achieved, to product outcomes (as in cultural literacy). An analogy can be drawn with ways in which the term gender and the concept of gender identity have been interrogated. Can we establish fixed criteria for defining gender identities or are gender roles constructed (rooted in performance)? Attributions of cultural identity are open to similar questions. For all his emphasis on process, Dewey’s thinking betrays some significant product-centred assumptions and no place is this more evident than in

his writings on aesthetics, which arguably have exercised the deepest influence on theories of language arts education.

In *Art and Experience* (1934/1985), Dewey labours to differentiate between aesthetic experience and the formal (material) properties of a work of art. In other words he argues for a distinction between the subjective process of experiencing art as opposed to art works perceived as empirically verifiable objects in time and space:

As a piece of parchment, or marble, of canvas, it remains (subject to the ravages of time) self-identical throughout the ages. But as a work of art, it is recreated every time it is aesthetically experienced. (Dewey, 1934/1985, p. 10)

The following is a more concrete formulation of this central claim, in relation to, for example, a specific artwork:

By common consent, the Parthenon is a great work of art. Yet it has aesthetic standing only as the work becomes an experience for a human being. (1934/1985, p. 115)

Before moving on to trace the influential legacy of this distinction on language arts education, let us try and understand what exactly is being claimed by Dewey and whether or not it is free of contradictions. I will concede that the foundations of all conceptual systems rest on assumptions which can be critiqued as being contradictory or as being assented beliefs rather than empirical claims. Thus my aim here is not to single out Dewey's conceptual system as being illogical (or non-empirical) but rather to highlight the beliefs informing the foundations of his thought. On re-reading *Art and Experience*, two questions come to mind: a) how does Dewey distinguish between aesthetic versus non-aesthetic experiences?; b) how does Dewey define which objects are artworks and which are not? Sticking strictly to Dewey's writings as opposed to his faithful interpreters, I found myself unable to answer these questions with any degree of confidence. Dewey's conception of the aesthetic dimension is all-encompassing, and he does not so much as offer formal or analytical criteria for distinguishing aesthetic experience but simply asserts its normative qualities as a phenomenon rooted in and pointing to universal "ultimate values" which, moreover, are individually affirmed through what he calls "consummatory experience":

In order to understand the aesthetic in its *ultimate* and *approved* forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd—the fire-engine rushing by, the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth, the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts. (1934/1985, pp. 10–11)

Dewey's expressivist vision of aesthetics with its overtones of Romanticism is coupled with a Kantian universalism about the nature of artworks that also renders difficult the task of pinning down what for Dewey constitutes a work of art:

Since art is the most universal form of language, since it is constituted, even apart from literature, by the common qualities of the public world, it is the most universal and freest form of communication. Every intense experience of friendship and affection communicates itself artistically. (Dewey, 1934/1985, p. 275)

It is this normative belief and open-ended conception of aesthetics that has arguably become orthodoxy in theories and practices of language arts education. To cite one central manifestation, during the period beginning with Louis Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* published in 1938, now in its fifth edition (1996) with significant revisions in each new edition (see Dressman & Webster, 2001), followed by her *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978), there emerged something akin to the institutionalization of reader-response research in language arts education (Attwell, 1998; Farrell & Squire, 1990; Galda & Liang, 2003; Karolides, 1992; Langer, 1995; Willinsky, 1990). This strand of research represents variations on justifying the centrality of encouraging an aesthetic stance when teaching fictional literary texts of all genres. The modes of justification have revolved around developing distinctions between what constitute aesthetic versus non-aesthetic stances. These distinctions, influential among which include Rosenblatt's (1978, pp. 24–25) opposition between aesthetic (private or “inward attention”) versus efferent (public or “outward attention”), or James Britton's (1970, p. 8) opposition between spectator role (“use language to contemplate”) versus participant role (“use language to interact with people and things”) stances, and also David Bleich's (1975, 1978) opposition between subjective criticism (primary emotional responses) and objectivity (distancing effects of

intellectual interpretation)—can all be examined as elaborations of Dewey's idealist and subjectivist conception of art:

A new poem is created by everyone who reads poetically—not that its raw material is original for, after all, we live in the same old world, but that every individual brings with him, when he exercises his individuality, a way of seeing and feeling that in its interaction with old material creates something new, something previously not existing in experience. (Dewey, 1934/1981, p. 115)

There is, to be sure, something compelling about this outlook, and its institutional reproduction within theories of progressive and particularly language arts education can in part be explained by the implied valorization of individual freedom (to borrow Rorty's description). Yet it is not without contradictions and tensions. To begin with, Dewey, on one hand, elaborates processes of personal aesthetic experience while, on the other, fails to elaborate in any serious or systematic way the specific properties in artworks that make aesthetic experiences possible. In other words, there is a seeming emphasis on process over product. Perhaps this reflects a limitation or a critique applicable to all writings on art and aesthetics, yet my point here is that Dewey does not acknowledge this limitation as a philosophical problem. Rather Dewey confidently affirms an *a priori* perspective on artworks from which he elaborates an abstract universalism in relation to aesthetics. A deeply disconcerting consequence of this universalism, particularly when reading *Art and Experience*, is that formal distinctions between whether a specific artwork is a poem, a novel, a play, a piece of music, a painting, a sculpture etc. seem merely incidental (if not irrelevant) to what Dewey considers the object's primary designation as a work of art. The application of reader-response theories in education can arguably lead to similar consequences as, for example, in Rosenblatt's (1978) description of reading *Othello*:

At the aesthetic end of the spectrum, in contrast, the reader's primary purpose is fulfilled *during* the reading event, as he fixes his attention on the actual experience he is living through. This permits the whole range of responses generated by the text to enter into the center of awareness, and out of these materials he selects and weaves what he sees as the literary work of art. Most discussions of the literary experience are concerned with what one might call the substance of experience ... that the reader attend not to the concept of emotion but to the actual experiences that the text signals ... not to broad abstractions about jealousy and guilt and human tenderness that might be enunciated but the actual moment-to-moment participation in *Othello*. What, after all, is the reader describing as he talks about a literary work of art? Has he not drawn on his own

inner resources to create the experience designated as the poem or novel or play? ... if he cannot out of his own past experiences with life and language, no matter how paltry they may seem to him, find the substance for responding to the great structures of Shakespeare's texts and what they point to, they will be for him no ode, no *Othello*. (p. 28)

The irony here is that Rosenblatt, arguing against "broad abstractions about jealousy and guilt and human tenderness," ends up simply defending a different set of broad abstractions about "a literary work of art ... [and]experiences with life and language." In the process Rosenblatt's cultural reproduction of *Othello*, inside and outside the classroom, is emptied of all characteristics that have contributed to its conflicted interpretations and performances. This prevalent outlook on aesthetics in progressive language arts education results in a view of culture and cultural reproduction which is arguably just as limited as Hirsch's. Whereas Hirsch's particularistic and prescriptive conception of cultural literacy, on one hand, leads to a didactic understanding of cultural reproductions goals and strategies, the Deweyan legacy of a universalistic and open-ended conception of aesthetic experience on the other, leads to a similarly didactic understanding of cultural reproduction, precisely because it fails to seriously address, let alone acknowledge, contradictions and conflicts shaping the politics of cultural reproduction. In this light Bourdieu's contribution is to remind us that processes of cultural reproduction through educational institutions are not exempt from power relations, and that the projection of these processes as apolitical (following Dewey and Hirsch) is never innocent:

In traditionally defining the 'system of education' as the sum total of the institutional or customary mechanisms ensuring the transmission from one generation to another of the culture inherited from the past (i.e., the accumulated information), the classical theories tend to sever cultural reproduction from its function of social reproduction, that is, to ignore the specific effect of symbolic relations in the reproduction of power relations. Such theories ... rely on the implicit premiss that the different PA's [pedagogical authorities] at work in a social formation collaborate harmoniously in reproducing a cultural capital conceived of as the jointly owned property of the whole 'society'. In reality ... they correspond to the material and symbolic interests of groups or classes differently situated within the power relations ... (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, pp. 10–11)

I am not yet willing to accept all of Bourdieu's neo-Marxist assumptions, at least not the determining role he attributes to class-based interests. Nonetheless I find his description of symbolic relations and struggles over cultural capital compelling for understanding culture wars in education, particularly when applied to conflicts between traditionalists and progressives over cultural reproduction goals and strategies.

Because of Dewey's emphasis on the concept of democracy, I assumed that he would have explored in some detail the issue of power relations or at least the issue of internal conflicts inside democracies. Yet I found, as with aesthetics, that Dewey's conception of democracy and the role of educational institutions in a democracy is highly generalized to the point of being simplistic, especially when one recalls that *Democracy and Education* (1916/1966) was published eighty one years after Alexis De Tocqueville's (d. 1859) *Democracy in America* (1835/1945) which, by contrast, continues to astonish with its prophetic insights in anticipating contemporary conflicts facing the democratic project in America. Dewey's conception of democracy is articulated through civic ideals of "association," "cooperation" and "communication," in relation to which, moreover, he defines what he refers to as a "philosophy of education":

The emphasis [teaching] must be put on whatever binds people together in cooperative human pursuits and results, apart from geographical limitation. The secondary and provisional character of national sovereignty in respect to the fuller, freer, and more fruitful association and intercourse of all human beings with one another must be instilled as a working disposition of mind. If these applications seem to be remote from a consideration of the philosophy of education, the impression shows that the meaning of the idea of education previously developed has not been adequately grasped. (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 98)

In Dewey's conception there are no irreconcilable conflicts or intractable debates of the sort arising from contemporary culture wars, and if they arise, Dewey's solutions seem to betray a naïve social engineering approach as, for example, when discussing in 1916 the problems of cultural diversity in America:

The way to deal with hyphenism [German-American, Jewish-American, and so on] ... is to welcome it, but to welcome it in the sense of extracting from each people its special good, so that it shall surrender into a common fund of wisdom and experience what it especially has to contribute. All of these surrenders and contributions taken together create the national spirit of America. The dangerous

thing is for each, to live off its past, and then to attempt to impose itself upon other elements, or, at least, to keep itself intact and thus refuse to accept what other cultures have to offer, so as thereby to be transmuted into authentic Americanism. (cited in Menand, 2001, pp. 400–401)

Can we draw any strong inferences from the above on what hypothetically would be Dewey's position on multiculturalism today? I can foresee objections claiming that my analysis of Dewey is based on partial or skewed readings, especially in the eyes of faithful Deweyans (for a judicious review of Dewey's thought see Peters, 1977). My intention here is not to attack Dewey but to invite critical self-awareness from language arts educators when using Deweyan-inspired formulations of the terms *aesthetic* and *democratic*.

Even a quick perusal of NCTE and IRA journals such as *English Education*, *Language Arts*, *Research in the Teaching of English* and *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* will reveal the deeply institutionalized extent to which these formulations of aesthetics and democracy guide contemporary language arts research. In fact, the entire catalogue of publications on language arts and literacy by Teachers College Press at Columbia University not only carries the imprint but derives its rationale from this Deweyan outlook on aesthetics and democracy (see titles in the influential *Language and Literacy and Diversity & Reading/Literature* series (<http://www.teacherscollegepress.com/browse.html>). I do not want to be misunderstood as calling into question the value of this scholarship, in fact the cumulative contribution of research published by Teachers College Press, beginning with the first issue of *Teachers College Record* in 1900, has had a rich and transformative impact on contemporary educational thought. My point is that this strand of research needs to be more critically rigorous when articulating its theoretical and ideological assumptions, and that the relative absence of this rigor is most visible in its conceptions of culture and linkages drawn with aesthetics and democracy.

An instructive example is Jane Roland Martin's book *Cultural Miseducation: In Search of a Democratic Solution* (2002), published by Teachers College Press in the John Dewey Lecture series. Building on Dewey, Martin formulates an opposition between educational transmission of "cultural wealth" and "cultural liabilities" as a way of

theorizing the role of culture in education. Martin offers an intellectually sophisticated analysis, supported with field data, on what constitutes “liabilities” and “wealth” in educational terms. Yet nowhere in the book does she explain why she uses the adjective cultural or what she means when using the term culture (as if no justification is required and the meaning is self-evident). In fact when quoting Dewey, Martin equates Dewey’s use of the terms social and society with her taken for granted conceptions of culture and cultural:

The issues that emerge when a cultural perspective on education is taken are profound, and the questions to which they give rise admit to no easy answers. Perhaps nowhere is evidence of this perspective so readily discernible as in the first pages of John Dewey’s magnum opus, *Democracy and Education*. “Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life,” wrote Dewey in that 1916 treatise. Saying “the fact that some are born as some die, makes possible through transmission of ideas and practices the constant reweaving of the *social* fabric,” he added that the renewal cannot be taken for granted: “Unless pains are taken to see that genuine and thorough transmission takes place, the most civilized group will relapse into barbarism and then into savagery” (Dewey, 1916/1961, pp. 3–4). Yet as one reads on, Dewey’s interest in the transmission of culture from one generation to the next gives way to an individualistic perspective. True, in his philosophy individual human beings are thoroughly *social* creatures and community plays a central role. (Martin, 2002, p. 4, emphasis added)

That a feminist scholar of Martin’s distinction (1985, 1992) can commit such a misreading is arguably a telling example of how under-theorized the concept of culture is in contemporary educational research. It would, for example, certainly be seen as shoddy scholarship were Martin to interchangeably equate Dewey’s use of the terms pedagogy with teacher, or education with school; indeed I think she would not graciously tolerate readings which would equate the uses of the term feminist with feminine. This is not a pedantic objection, since Martin has deliberately chosen the title “Cultural Miseducation” and would surely have objections to renaming her book “Social Miseducation.” In undertaking the foregoing analysis I am working towards a historical and theoretical understanding of how specific conceptions of culture have been culturally reproduced through the disciplinary formation of language arts education, and how these conceptions continue to significantly inform the ways language arts educators think (explicitly and implicitly) about cultural reproduction goals and strategies of their practices.

By pointing out limitations in Hirsch's (traditionalist) and Dewey's (progressive) theories on links between culture and education, I do not thereby mean to imply that I have up my sleeve a better theory of cultural reproduction. Rather my aim here is to make a case for more clear-sighted thinking on the complexities attending uses of (and appeals to) the term culture. Furthermore I have been arguing that the implications of teaching *Othello* not only compellingly illustrate but do not easily let us off the hook in relation to these complexities. For example, *Othello* as a school text carries the potential to render problematic even the most basic educational questions, such as:

- a. Why should we teach *Othello*? (e.g., are we pursuing the objectives of either cultural literacy or aesthetic stance or critical literacy?)
- b. How should we teach *Othello*? (learner-centred or text-centred approaches?)
- c. What are we teaching when teaching *Othello*? (a canonical text, a literary text with deeply conflicting interpretations, or both?)

Before turning to examine the implications of teaching *Othello* in light of the politics of cultural reproduction, I will briefly review some of the reasons why I think the politics of cultural reproduction tends to be inadequately theorized. A striking example is the writings of Jerome Bruner (1996) and Kieran Egan (1997), two distinguished educational theorists for whom ironically the concept of culture has become central to their theorizing. Bruner's *The Culture of Education* (1996) marks a culminating point in Bruner's agon with behaviourist psychological theories of learning against which he has been reacting since the mid-1950s. In the 1960s he was a key figure in launching what came to be known as the cognitive revolution in psychology, the educational implications of which were spelt out through his theories of constructivist pedagogy (1960) and the spiral curriculum (1966). In the 1980s Bruner supplemented his anti-behaviorist theories with an emphasis on the importance of narratives (1986) for understanding distinctive characteristics of human thinking, which led him to write about research methodologies rooted in hermeneutical theories (1990). These turns and twists in Bruner's theoretical journeys are now integrated in a broad conceptual framework referred to as cultural psychology. This framework, for all its emphasis on subjectivity, interpretation and anti-positivistic approaches, reads in effect like a universal and positivistic theory of culture.

Bruner presents his theory as constituting a critique of the assumptions guiding computational and biologically rooted theories of learning and of the mind, yet Bruner uses the term culture without analogously interrogating his own highly speculative, let alone ideological, assumptions guiding cultural psychology:

This brings us directly ... to the nature of mind—call it *culturalism*. It takes its inspiration from the evolutionary fact that mind could not exist save for culture. For the evolution of the hominid mind is linked to the development of a way of life where “reality” is represented by a symbolism shared by members of a cultural community in which a technical-social way of life is both organized and construed in terms of that symbolism. This symbolic mode is not only shared by a community, but conserved, elaborated, and passed on to succeeding generations ... Its individual expression inheres in *meaning making*, assigning meaning to things in different settings on particular occasions. Meaning making involves situating encounters with the world in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to know “what they are about.” Although meanings are “in the mind,” they have their significance in the culture in which they are created ... It is culture that provides the tools for organizing and understanding our worlds in communicable ways. The distinctive feature of human evolution is that mind evolves in a fashion that enables human beings to utilize the tools of culture. Without those tools, symbolic or material, man is not a “naked ape” but an empty abstraction. (Bruner, 1996, p. 3)

This quotation illustrates how the term culture functions as some sort of amorphous yet all-encompassing code for describing the human condition, particularly those features which resist reductive explanations and, as such, points to philosophical questions, where the method (empirical or conceptual) for answering these questions is not given. Yet Bruner’s interest in these questions is not philosophical but methodological. Moreover because of his potentially open-ended conception it is difficult to discern cultural psychology’s methodology, and whether or not it can ever be formally defined. Bruner’s project to resist reductive methodologies in psychology is intellectually compelling, but by tying himself to the concept of culture as a springboard for proposing an alternative methodology he is entering rough waters. At best he manages to ask better questions about the challenges facing psychology as an academic discipline:

Can a cultural psychology ... simply stand apart from the kind of biologically rooted, individually oriented, laboratory dominated psychology that we have known in the past? Must the more situated study of mind-in-culture, more interpretively anthropological in spirit jettison all that we have learned before? Some writers ... propose that our past was a mistake, a misunderstanding of what

psychology is aboutI would like to urge an end to an “either–or” approach to the question of what psychology should be in the future, whether it should be entirely biological, exclusively computational, or monopolistically cultural. (Bruner, 1996, p. 160)

One wishes that Bruner would have paused here and conceded the need for more reflection, but he muddies the water by opening the door to an even more demanding philosophical quandary, related to defining and defending the claims of “intersubjectivity”:

This “next chapter” in psychology ... is about “intersubjectivity”—how people come to know what others have in mind and how they adjust accordingly. It is a set of topics that, in my view, is central to any viable conception of a cultural psychology. (Bruner, 1996, p. 161)

Bruner’s project is best defined as Vygotskian and as in Lev Vygotsky’s writings (1962, 1978) Bruner seeks, on one hand, to transform psychology into a more interdisciplinary field, moving it beyond a solely empirical and scientific frame (thus Bruner’s emphasis on art and narrative links his work to the humanities), while on the other, to develop frameworks for observing behavior that takes into account the interplay between the subject and her social relations. Bruner’s emphasis on intersubjectivity is an elaboration on Vygotsky’s theories of a “zone of proximal development” [i.e., promoting a child’s development through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers] and “inner speech” [i.e., the relation between thought and language as best understood through examining processes of communication which result in the development of word meanings that then form the structure of consciousness]). Research stemming from this Vytgoskian-Brunerian legacy has undoubtedly been highly generative, particularly in humanizing our understanding of learning processes, and it arguably carries the status of an institutional orthodoxy among a significant section of language arts researchers (Smagorinsky, 2001).

Returning to Bruner and his specific appeals to the concept of culture, there are arguably some significant blind spots in this legacy. Cultural psychology maps out difference at the macro-theoretical level between culturalist versus non-culturalist approaches, yet it has little of significance to say about differences and conflicts (such as the culture wars) inside living cultures. Phrasing the question in Brunerian terms, how

can cultural psychology help explain and mediate between competing meaning making claims on boundaries of the literary canon or accommodation of cultural diversity in education? To claim that meaning making is subjective and thus open to variable responses is not only vacuous, but constructs processes of intersubjectivity as being apolitical and devoid of ideological interests. Bourdieu of course would be ready to offer a reading of the ideological interests at play in this denial, since he would argue that cultural psychology cannot step outside of ideology, and Bruner, on the other hand, would perhaps be justified in finding simplistic such expressions of Neo-Marxist self-righteousness. However, the net result of Bruner's apolitical (non-ideological and non-conflictual) framework is that it ends up with a very thin theoretical conception of culture. In this study, by approaching the term culture through an examination of the culture wars in education and inductively through an analysis of the implications of teaching *Othello*, one of my key objectives is to argue for thicker theoretical descriptions of culture. That is, descriptions thick enough not only to accommodate and engage contradictions and conflicts attending uses of the term culture, but, as Geertz (1973) famously argued, a theoretical description that is wary of abstractions:

... one cannot write a "General Theory of Cultural Interpretation." Or, rather, one can, but there appears to be little profit in it, because the essential task of theory building here is not only to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them. To generalize within cases is usually called, at least in medicine and depth psychology, clinical inference. (p. 26)

The case of Kieran Egan is an intriguing example of a different (borderline) version of theoretical thinness. Egan refers to his alternative framework as imaginative education (1997, <http://www.ierng.net>) which has been forged out of his longstanding agon with developmental theories in education influenced by Jean Piaget (Egan, 1983), and more recently he has taken aim at equally misconceived developmental assumptions in the writings of John Dewey, Herbert Spencer and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Egan, 2002, 2005). In his major book, *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape our Understanding* (1997), Egan judiciously draws on Vygotsky to define imaginative education in terms of a theory of "cultural recapitulation." Egan's cognitive tools (analogous to Vygotsky's "mediational means") are represented by five distinctive kinds

of understanding: somatic (pre-linguistic), mythic (oral language), romantic (written language), philosophic (theoretic use of language), and ironic (reflexive use of language). By using (or rather reviving) the term *recapitulation* Egan is arguing for a psychological theory of education which moves beyond a strictly stage development- based view of human learning capacities. Rather he conceives of human learning as shaped by the interplay between, on one hand, the internalization of the above cognitive tools—tools which have accumulated through history—and on the other, the application and mastery of these tools in response to present needs and challenges (emphasis added):

The first trick, which earlier theories fail to pull off, is to identify the nature of the connection between *cultural* development in the past and educational development in the present. How can one locate a common element in the two processes and show a causal relationship between them? Exactly what is recapitulated in education ... at a sufficiently general level all educational theories involve people recapitulating, repeating for themselves, the discoveries and inventions that have accumulated through the history of their *culture*. The five-year-old learning to write recapitulates an invention of a few thousand years ago. The student learning history recapitulates a kind of thinking, a way of making sense of experience whose invention by the ancient Greeks we can trace in some detail. But recapitulation theories go further than this, claiming some precise causal connection between past *cultural* development and present educational development ... how does this help solve our theoretical problem about recapitulation? Well, we can identify what is recapitulated not in terms of knowledge or psychological processes but in terms of mediating intellectual tools and the kinds of understanding they generate. (Egan, 1997, pp. 27–30)

I cannot here do justice to Egan's perceptively elaborated theoretical framework; suffice it to say that the international research program of publications and conferences that it has generated through the establishment of the Imaginative Education Research Group (IERG) based at Simon Fraser University (see <http://www.iERG.net>) is opening up exciting new intellectual directions, which are already percolating down into the field through concurrent development of high quality teaching resources. Yet it is intriguing that Egan, one of the most intellectually eclectic theorists in education today, uses the term culture in a rather inconsistent way. There is no attempt made in any of his writings to spell out and unpack the assumptions guiding his uses of the terms culture and cultural (see, for example, the three references in the above quotation.) Hence what exactly does Egan mean by cultural when arguing for a theory of cultural recapitulation? This gap is

indeed ironic because Egan's distinctive intellectual signature in all his writings is a ceaseless interrogation of taken for granted concepts in education. For some reason Egan has so far exempted the concept of culture from such a process of interrogation, a process about which he is otherwise an eloquent advocate:

It is onerous to think *about* our ideas because they are the things we think *with*. They serve us like lenses that can greatly affect the image that we see. Mostly we take our lenses for granted and assume we see the world directly. We don't, of course, and it is useful frequently to try to reflect on our fundamental ideas. (Egan, 2001, p. 923)

He further underscores the practical educational value of such reflection by claiming:

We behave as we do, design schools of the kinds we have, as a result of the ideas we hold. If we want to improve our schools, it is with the abstract and awkward realm of ideas that we must first deal. (Egan, 2001, p. 940)

In my hunt to track down Egan's thoughts on the term culture, I came across a highly suggestive passage posted on Egan's website. According to Egan, this section on "Culture and Education" was initially intended to be published as part of the introduction to *The Educated Mind* but was in the end omitted. As a result this section is now offered as an exclusively web-based bonus supplement to the published book:

Cultural and educational development remain somewhat mysterious processes, despite our intimate familiarity with them. Recognizing imagination as central to them is simply to acknowledge the element of mystery at their coreThe problem with education, and with cultural history, is that they are *sui generis*; there is nothing else quite like them. And "imagination" is not intended as an answer to the central mystery of educational and cultural development so much as the best available marker I can find for what remains mysterious about them. The major inadequacy of previous conceptions of education is that they forgot to acknowledge what we do not know. (Egan, <http://www.educ.sfu.ca/kegan/omitted3.html>)

The tone of this honourable confession, not found in his published writings, arguably raises different sorts of questions when analyzing Egan's theory of cultural recapitulation. Egan's repeated references to mystery and the mysterious took me back to my formal academic studies in medieval Muslim theology (including readings of some Jewish and Christian theological texts). One of my distinguished teachers suggested that an effective way to understand the outlook of any theologian is to make a note of his or her uses of the terms 'God' and 'divine' (particularly as an adjective) in an extended passage, and

thereafter to analyze what meanings are gained or lost by removing these terms. What meanings, then, are gained or lost by removing the adjective cultural from Egan's references to "cultural recapitulation," "cultural history," "cultural development," and "cultural inventions"? Egan has studied the Classics and thus I trust he would be partial to the value of such close readings.

By my lights it is not the terms in themselves but Egan's inadequately theorized culturalist approach that renders mysterious the terms culture and cultural. For example, the culture wars are certainly open to conflicting interpretations, yet it would hardly make any sense to refer to these conflicts about culture as being mysterious. The examination of culture wars in this study starts with the assumption that it is highly problematic to talk about culture in singular, universalist terms; and that differences and conflicts arising from the plurality of cultures are central to how we think about theories of culture—not least that politics plays a key role in theories that we elaborate. Egan appears to want to have it both ways. By specifying his focus on the development of cognitive tools in "Western cultural history" (1997, p. 63—though without defining what exactly is included or excluded by the term *Western*)—Egan, on one hand, is alluding to particular cultural differences while on the other, his concept of "cultural recapitulation" is offered as part of a universal theory of culture. William Frawley (1998), a leading Vygotskian, has also questioned whether Egan has adequately moved past the developmental assumptions that he is rejecting. "I am still unpersuaded," argues Frawley, "that this [Egan's recapitulation theory] is not traditional stage-theory in disguise" (Frawley, 1998, p. 47). These formal contradictions are arguably symptomatic of the theoretical thinness of Egan's concept of culture and, as with Bruner, the theoretical thinness becomes more visible as a result of Egan's silence about ideological conflicts. The silence is deafening, as there is not even an acknowledgement of the ideological dimension as being one among other key variables shaping processes of "recapitulation." The imagination plays an indispensable role in ideological conflicts such as culture wars, or indeed in conflicted imaginings of *Othello*. Yet in the research agenda of IERG there is very little room for exploring how the imagination in relation to cultural differences is reproduced through

educational institutions. This is a glaring omission, especially in this age of competing hyper-imaginings fuelling the rhetoric on the “war on terror” and “jihad.”

Bruner and Egan’s theoretically thin concepts of culture are cause for surprise, especially when one takes into account that they are writing over two and a half centuries since Giambattista Vico (d. 1744) published *The New Science* (1744/1970) which, Isaiah Berlin has persuasively argued, gave us our “modern concept of culture and of what one might call cultural pluralism” (Berlin, 1990, p. 59). It would be well to recall Vico’s insight that to examine the idea of culture meaningfully requires a comparative study of cultures. Culture is what humans make (*factum*), which includes making theories about how we make and what we have made. Furthermore, Vico argues that we cannot examine our cultural identity from the outside; hence it is only through examining differences (and conflicts) in relation to boundaries of other cultural identities that we achieve self-knowledge.

Theorizing Cultural Reproduction Conflicts and the Teaching of Othello

In 1992, during the height of media-saturated coverage of culture wars in American education (particularly universities), Gerald Graff proposed a thoughtful pedagogical agenda in his book *Beyond the Cultural Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts can Revitalize American Education*. For Graff the idea of “teaching the conflicts” constitutes a productive compromise:

... I argue that the best solution to today’s conflicts over culture is to teach the conflicts themselves, making them part of our object of study and using them as a new kind of organizing principle to give the curriculum the clarity and focus that almost all sides now agree it lacks. In a sense this solution constitutes a compromise, for it is one that conflicting parties can agree on. But it is really a way of avoiding the evasive compromise represented by the pluralist cafeteria counter curriculum, which leaves it up to students to connect what their teachers do not ... In an important sense, academic institutions are already teaching the conflicts every time a student goes from one course or department to another, but they are doing it badly. (Graff, 1992, p. 12)

On first reading this proposed solution sounds like simple common sense, yet it is compelling because he justifies this as a conflict reduction strategy for the culture wars in terms of perceptively framed educational criteria:

Where the university has failed—and here is the point on which many on the right, left, and center should be able to agree—is in making a focussed curriculum out of its lively state of contention. Too much of the current debate is simply irrelevant to the educational problem as it is experienced by the struggling student. The most neglected fact about the culture war is that its issues are clearer and more meaningful to the contending parties than they are to the student. It is not the conflicts dividing the university that should worry us but the fact that students are not playing a more active role in them ... it won't matter much whose list of books wins the canon debate if students remain disaffected from the life of books and intellectual discussion, as too many have been since long before any canon revisionists arrived on the academic scene. It is easy to forget that for most American students the problem has usually been how to deal with books in general, regardless of which faction is drawing up the reading list. Here educators are wasting a major opportunity, for the conflicts that are now adding to the confusions of students have the potential to help them make better sense of their education and lives. (Graff, 1992, p. 11)

The so-called *Othello* conflicts covered in this study seem tailor-made for this pedagogical strategy. Graff's approach can be fruitfully linked to the cultural reproduction debate as a way of illustrating and theoretically complicating the relevance of teaching *Othello*, particularly when using *Othello* conflicts as a lens. To begin with, an analysis of the conflicts trailing *Othello* as a school text contributes to research on modes of intellectual transfer between English studies (a university-based discipline) and English education (a school subject). A significant strand of research (Applebee, 1974; Goodson, 1985; Goodson & Medway, 1990; Graff, 1987; Scholes, 1998; Willinsky, 1991) has gone some distance in revising the mistaken yet widespread assumption that the university discipline (established late eighteenth century) is much older than the public school subject (established mid nineteenth century), and that as a result teaching of English literature in secondary schools is perceived as following a watered down adaptation of criteria (the what and how) guiding the university curriculum (Adler, 1988; Bloom, 1994, 2001; Fiedler & Baker, 1981) This view is historically inaccurate since barely half a century separates the institutionalization of English teaching in the university and the school, and it is also sociologically simplistic by overlooking the institutional autonomy and power of English as a school subject. Detailed and archivally-based historical studies of English education have yet to be written, in order particularly to document the complex trajectories of two-way traffic between universities and schools.

Questions about intellectual transfer in English education are especially relevant for understanding the extraordinary significance attributed to Shakespeare in relation to the history of modern English and English literature (arguably also in relation to world literature). *Bardolatory* (coined in the eighteenth century) has now understandably become a contentious term, yet it continues to signify a larger debate about Shakespeare's enduring appeal and authoritative presence. This is, to be sure, an intractable debate, caught today between the claims of those, on one hand, arguing for materialist explanations (e.g., institutional factors) driving the cultural reproduction of Shakespeare (Eagleton, 1986, 1990) and on the other, idealistic explanations (e.g., aesthetic factors) by contemporary Bardolators such as Harold Bloom (1998) for whom Shakespeare's continuing cultural reproduction is ensured by the incomparable language and insights of the plays and poems. Regardless of where one stands in this debate, even if we accept the astutely articulated mediating position of Jonathan Bate in *The Genius of Shakespeare* (1998), what is undeniable is the verifiable fact of Shakespeare's central presence in English speaking theatre traditions across the globe, in university (English and non-English) research and teaching programs for the study of literature, and in British and North American popular culture as a widely recognized iconic figure.

These manifestations have been studied through allied research traditions on Shakespeare's performance and literary criticism history, yet the significance of Shakespeare's cultural reproduction through the school curriculum has yet to be adequately studied or even acknowledged by literary critics and theatre historians. It may be worth speculating on the consequences if schools completely stopped teaching Shakespeare. Arguably the large book print-runs, local summer Shakespeare festivals throughout North America, and Hollywood film versions are driven by the demand created through Shakespeare's presence in school curricula. Ben Jonson's plays, for example, are still performed and subject to extensive literary criticism, yet Jonson does not come close to enjoying Shakespeare's centrality and presence. What then accounts for the margin of difference? Is it explainable simply by Shakespeare's aesthetic superiority (what Harold Bloom calls "the Shakesperean difference," p. 714), or is it a function of the fact that Shakespeare is officially taught in public schools?

On the other hand, cultural reproduction of Shakespeare (in the original and translation) globally across non-English speaking contexts cannot be fully accounted for solely on the basis of institutional or sociological factors. Analogous canonical European writers such as Dante, Montaigne, Cervantes, and Goethe do not enjoy a comparable global presence. Moving outside Europe, one can explain Shakespeare's presence in parts of Asia and Africa due to British imperialism, yet imperialism cannot fully explain creative adaptation of Shakespeare in indigenous languages and art forms. In South India, for example, the *Othello* story has been adapted and performed through the highly ritualized *kathakali* dance form (Loomba, 1998; Trivedi, 2003), and more recently through a Bollywood film production entitled *Omkara* (Bharadwaj, 2006). In New Zealand there have been controversial Maori language productions of *Othello* (Neill, 1998; Silverstone, 2003). In apartheid South Africa (Johannesburg), Janet Suzman mounted a mixed race (but textually faithful) production in 1987 which sparked violent debates covered in the national media. The assimilation of Shakespeare within Japan and Russia is both deep and wide (see *World Shakespeare Bibliography*, <http://www.worldshakesbib.org/>). Fyodor Dostoyevsky, for example, draws extensively on the *Othello* myth in his final major novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880/2003); while Akira Kurosawa (1957, 1985), the great Japanese film director, has translated Shakespeare's plots (notably *King Lear* and *Macbeth*) in the context of medieval imperial Japan. I am drawing attention to these global manifestations of Shakespeare in order to caution against reductive causal explanations of cultural reproduction and to open up new perspectives for examining questions about aesthetic value in relation to Shakespeare.

Graff's "teach the conflicts" framework, coupled with my focus here on the politics of cultural reproduction, bring to mind two widely cited assessments of Shakespeare's genius and uniqueness. First, Samuel Johnson wrote in the preface to his 1765 edition of the plays (emphasis added):

Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the *poet of nature*; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners of lifeHis persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motionThis therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the *mirror of life* ... (Johnson, 1765/1964, pp. 317–319)

Secondly, John Keats wrote in a letter to his brothers dated December 21st 1817:

I had not a dispute but a disquisition, with Dilke on various subjects; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason ... (Keats, 1817/2002, p. 40, emphasis added)

Johnson is using the term “nature” before the connotations of “storm and stress” (“*sturm und drang*”) were formulated through German romanticism, specifically linking conceptions of nature (human and physical) with aesthetics. Johnson’s usage is also prior to Darwin’s formulation of “survival of the fittest” connotations attributed to biological processes of natural selection. Yet, implied in Johnson’s usage, is a sense that Shakespeare holds up a mirror to conflicts shaping human lives (“minds are agitated”) and to our conceptions of growth and change in life (“whole system of life is continued in motion”). This usage of nature resonates strongly with my analysis of the term culture as inherently subject to conflicting interpretations and as historically contingent and thus subject to continuous evolution and change. Paraphrasing Johnson, we may refer to Shakespeare as the “poet of culture”—of that very culture that gives rise to culture wars, and to which I have been arguing *Othello* holds up a mirror.

Keats’ “Negative Capability,” on the other hand, refers eloquently to a general theory about fictional literature’s (and poets’) responses to conceptual and existential contradictions. For Keats, Shakespeare’s uniqueness lies in his capacity to enter and represent these contradictions in their fullness without attempting to resolve them (“without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”). This claim resembles in part Immanuel Kant’s (d. 1804) influential conception of antinomies (conceptual contradictions or paradoxes) in philosophy (Greek origin: conflict of laws, Kant, 1786/1970). In part Keats’ claim also resembles G.W.F. Hegel’s (d. 1831) conception of dialectic, particularly when Hegel refers to world history as having followed a dialectical path *ad infinitum*, in which internal contradictions were transcended, but gave rise to new contradictions that themselves required resolution. (Hegel, 1824/1967). Hegel’s dialectic was later adapted by Karl Marx (d. 1883) in his influential conception of dialectical materialism driving the history of class struggles (Marx, 2000). Keats is writing before

Marx and it is highly improbable that he had read any Kant or Hegel. Philosophers may want to take note of this as an example of the larger claim put forward by Jan Zwicky, a Canadian philosopher, who adapts Shelley's claim that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" into "Poets are the unacknowledged thinkers of the world" (2003, p. iv). Keats' "Negative Capability" resonates with my analysis of ways in which definitions of culture emerging out of culture war debates in education are entrapped in competing and contradictory claims of normativity (canon debate), of essentialism (multicultural education debate), and, as I will illustrate later in this chapter, of empowerment (cultural literacy debate).

Teaching *Othello*, then, inevitably offers opportunities for teaching according to Graff's "teach the conflicts" strategy. This strategy serves as a corrective to Hirsch's self-assured certainties about what constitutes "cultural literacy," but also as a corrective to the largely conflict-free assumptions informing Deweyan-inspired perspectives on culture, associated with aesthetics and democracy. As language arts educators we are centrally involved in the business of culture reproduction. When teaching alphabetic literacy skills our role in cultural reproduction is relatively easier to ascertain and assess than when teaching fictional literature. What exactly are we culturally reproducing when teaching fictional literature from writers such as Shakespeare and of texts such as *Othello*? Here we find ourselves bumping into one of the first-order questions that continue to exercise leading theorists in language arts education. These theorists have not always come clean on the highly speculative basis of their responses to questions about why we teach fictional literature. The range of speculative responses revolves around claims for cultivating either cognitive capacities or so-called cultural practices. Some of the influential responses include: "aesthetic stance" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 29), "spectator role" (Britton, 1970, p. 168), "imaginative function" (Halliday, 1975, p. 25), "private acts in public places" (Willinsky, 1990, p. 143), and "culturally significant conversations" (Applebee, 1996, p. 40). All these rationalizations can be generatively applied to the teaching of Shakespeare and particularly *Othello*, but they also run the risk of simplifying our understanding of what is entailed in teaching the aesthetic dimension of Shakespeare, and about what sort of cultural practices are enacted through the teaching of Shakespeare.

These considerations bring us back, full circle, to the politics of cultural reproduction in English language arts education.

One of the reasons why English language arts educators are arguably less anxious about the politics of cultural reproduction than educators in, say, non-English speaking contexts, is due to the fact that the future preservation of the English language and English literature is not threatened because of the dominant status of English in the world today. This domination is achieved not so much by military imperialism but by what Edward Said preferred to call “cultural imperialism” (Said, 1993). Cultural imperialism is further heightened today through innovations and expanding powers of global communications and information distribution technologies. Wade Davis (2002), an anthropologist, has coined the term “ethnosphere” to highlight ways in which contemporary globalizing processes toward economic and political integration are destroying cultural diversity, analogous to the destruction of bio-diversity:

There are at present some 6,000 languages. But of these fully half are not being taught to children. Which means that effectively, unless something changes, these languages are already dead ... every language is an old growth forest of the mind, a watershed of thought, an entire ecosystem of spiritual possibilities. (Davis, 2003, <http://www.npr.org/programs/re/archivesdate/2003/may/mali/davisinterview.htm>)

When the politics of cultural reproduction become, as Davis is arguing, implicated with issues of survival, then the debates I am exploring in this study would certainly take on a different type of urgency. My analysis of cultural conflicts and contradictions would I believe be just as relevant for thinking through such fundamental challenges. Contemporary challenges of linguistic survival do not only confront small marginalized communities, but even well established European linguistic communities (Grenoble & Whaley, 2005). As such, examining the implications of teaching *Othello* in light of the politics of cultural reproduction makes a modest contribution to understanding the larger issues and challenges facing theoretical and practical definitions of English language arts education in our globalizing world today. It is a world whose consequences are generating intractable debates about whether neo-Liberal economic (market driven) policies, in particular, is leading to empowering, emancipatory, and culturally creative outcomes (Suárez-Orozco & Quine-Hilliard, 2004), or whether these

policies are further deepening inequalities through disempowering, oppressive and culturally homogenizing outcomes (Apple, 2004; Burbules, 2000).

It has yet to be seen whether Shakespeare will have anything to contribute to the nascent globalization wars in education. So far Ben Jonson has proven prophetic in claiming that Shakespeare's plays are "not of an age, but for all time" (1623/1975, p.634), since every subsequent generation has been appropriating and interpreting Shakespeare in its own contemporaneous terms. Several scholars (Cartelli, 1999; Neill, 2006; Pechter, 2004; Scholes, 1998) have pointed out that *Othello* speaks to our anxieties today in the same way that the absurd bleakness of *King Lear* did after the horrors of second world war, or as *Hamlet* did in the nineteenth century by projecting a model of angst and inwardness associated with the ideal Romantic hero. One of the most clear-sighted explanations that I have come across of Shakespeare's inexhaustible polyvalence, as it were, is by Jonathan Bate, which incidentally mirrors my explanations for the analogous polyvalence of the term culture:

Shakespeare's enduring appeal cannot, however, be said to rest totally on his linguistic virtuosity, nor on the proposition—favored by some of today's politically minded critics—that he achieved world domination simply because of the power of the British empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As he recognized himself, human affairs always embody a combination of permanent truths and historical contingencies, of—to use the terms of his age—"nature" and "custom." At one level, he is "not of an age, but for all time." He works with archetypal characters, core plots, and perennial conflicts as he dramatizes the competing demands of the living and the dead, the old and the young, men and women, self and society, integrity and role-play, insiders and outsiders. He grasps the structural conflicts shared by all societies: religious against secular vision, country against city, birth against education, strong leadership against the people's voice, the code of honor against the energies of erotic desire. But he also addressed the conflicts of his own historic moment: the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism and from feudalism to modernity, the formation of national identity, trade and immigration, the encounter with new worlds overseas, the shadow of foreign powers. (Bate, 2007, pp. 40–41)

Bate's Shakespeare (unraveled through comedies and tragedies) is the poet of conflicts and thus arguably when teaching Shakespeare we are culturally reproducing an outlook on human conflicts. Teaching *Othello*, then, covers only a slice in this cake of conflicts—I mean the proverbial cake conflict about which we are told: 'But you can't

have your cake and eat it too.’ This proverb is a befitting epigraph to any study of either *Othello* or the culture wars. Furthermore, Bate’s explanation of the absorptive capaciousness of Shakespeare is compelling because he does not underplay the historicity of Shakespeare, as Bardolators are wont to do, and yet he is not historically reductive but leaves room for different interpretations. It is impressive that there is not a single use of the term culture in the above description. Through my examination of culture war debates I too have sought, on one hand, to historicize these conflicts while on the other, to argue for different possible approaches to understanding the intractable nature of the conflicts embedded in our uses of the term culture. Teaching *Othello* and the *Othello* conflicts can arguably serve language arts educators (and the discipline as a whole) with opportunities to critically examine the contentious balancing act between defining issues of permanent (subject-centred) value and defining issues of contemporary (learner-centred) relevance (Luke, 2004). In other words, how do our justifications and strategies for teaching Shakespeare take into account the capaciousness as well as the timely relevance of Shakespeare’s plays, particularly the contemporary potency of *Othello*? If we simply take note of how many times and different ways in which we use the term culture in our responses to such a question, that would be reward enough for the efforts expended on this study.

Graff’s “teach the conflicts” approach perceptively creates openings, at theoretical and practical levels, for language arts educators to engage with the above balancing act. However, this approach potentially runs the risk of turning the teaching of literature into teaching about ideological conflicts, and thus turning the attention, for example, away from *Othello* as a work of literature to *Othello* as a work embodying conflicting ideological interpretations. Admittedly by making this distinction I am walking on thin ice, since this distinction is dependent on ideological assumptions that I am bringing to the definition of fictional literature. The distinction (literary versus political) is certainly open to serious theoretical objections, but let me illustrate what I have in mind by drawing on my experiences of teaching *Othello* to grade eleven and twelve students in a summer school context (over 6–9 two-hour sessions) in Metchosin, B.C.; London, England; and Kampala, Uganda. In all three settings the classes were racially diverse and

I used the Folger edition of *Othello* (Mowat & Werstine, 1993) along with the detailed lesson plans published by the Folger Shakespeare Library as part of its Shakespeare Set Free series (O'Brien, 1995). Almost all the students had studied another Shakespeare play before, but all of them were coming to *Othello* for the first time. I found it most effective to begin the sessions by playfully summarizing the entire plot. Without fail the students are hooked when I retell the tragic story, placing almost equal emphasis on describing Othello, Iago, and Desdemona's personalities and predicaments. Furthermore, I diagrammatically illustrate, using selected lines, the conflicts shaping their respective relationships with each other and their status inside the Republic of Venice. Students are then asked to draw a similar diagram of how they see their own relationships in society and identify any similarities between their world and the world of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Thereafter over the next two–three sessions the class collectively reads through (in rounds) a bulk of the lines in each Act. Concurrently, for homework, each student is required to read the play by herself and keep a journal organized around responses to reflections on Othello, Iago, Desdemona, as well as Cassio and Emilia.

During this phase of the teaching I have found that the students are primarily responding to the effects of Shakespeare's story telling and to his powers of invention, particularly the invention of distinctive voices for each of his characters. In addition, for over half of the students Shakespeare's language, both the strange novelty and rhythm, is what keeps them hooked, though for a significant number of students (still a minority) the language is more of a hurdle than a point of attraction. One of my key teaching objectives is to ensure that the students have as direct a contact as possible with the texture of the language and the bodily presence of the characters by coming up to the front and performing the lines. It is when performing short scenes from the play while intermittently viewing related excerpts from film versions that discussions of conflicting interpretations are introduced to the class, through reading excerpts from literary critics (*Othello* and Shakespeare criticism in general), as well as comparing differences in direction and acting of filmed scenes. The final sessions are focused on discussing and debating student responses to the following topics listed at the end of the Folger lesson plans:

1. Othello's real problem is his own jealousy.
2. It is very important to the play for Othello to be black.
3. Desdemona is not a wimp. She is a soldier's wife and fit to be so. She has good sense, stubbornness, and courage. She can stand up to Othello for the sake of what she thinks right, even when he is in a dangerous mood and few people would care to face him.

[This topic is accompanied with a discussion of the short essay included in the Folger lesson plans, 'Unfinished Business: An African American Teacher Talks Race and *Othello*' (Denizé, 1995). Students are asked to respond to the following quote from the essay.]

One colleague of mine is White and teaches in a Midwestern public school. His students are all White. Their response to *Othello* was firm: interracial marriage was immoral; some students refused to read the play, and others even threatened to stop coming to class until they had moved on to new material. Another colleague, an African American male teaching in a predominantly male Black southern public school, said that his students were reluctant to read *Othello* because it was another example of a Black man who desired a White woman. (pp. 220–221)

4. Desdemona is not angelically pure. The potential for unrestrained desire must be in her character in order for the drama to work. The more loving she is, the easier it is for Othello to think she has deceived him.
5. Iago is not a "motiveless malignity" as he has been called—a devil who does evil for its own sake. He has a thirst for power and the wit to contrive a way to get it. Desdemona's death is a side effect he did not really intend.
6. Iago's cleverness is not total. He builds into the intricate structure of his plot a piece of terrible stupidity: he fails to understand his wife.
7. The war between Othello and Iago is fundamentally a dispute between the goodness and evil of the world. (O'Brien, p. 213)

Each of these topics not only vividly brings into play explorations of conflicting interpretations, but also serves as springboards for building student confidence for their assigned group presentations and short easy assignment. For group presentations, each group is asked to focus on Othello, Iago, or Desdemona and to creatively explore as many dimensions and interpretations as possible associated with each of these characters. My experience of teaching these units on *Othello* is that they end up reflecting Graff's

approach. However, the more significant observation is that I do not start the unit by introducing *Othello* conflicts as a lens, nor are the conflicts forcibly grafted on to the lessons. Discussions about conflicting interpretations emerge organically, as it were, through examining the structure of conflicts driving the plot and actions of the characters. In other words ideological conflicts generated by *Othello* do not drive the lessons, rather encounters with *Othello* in the classroom inevitably push students to discern the relevance of *Othello* for discussing conflicts shaping their lives and the worlds they inhabit. If I had begun by foregrounding conflicting ideological interpretations, I would have put the cart before the horse. It is in this sense that a distinction can be made between, on one hand, teaching a literary text while also attending to its ideological implications and on the other, teaching about ideological conflicts by using literary texts. I am aware of circular and hair-splitting arguments that can be opened up around such distinctions. Yet living with intractable predicaments is our human lot and arguably our badge of honor as cultural beings.

Theorizations of Culture in Language Arts and Literacy Research

Examining educational goals and institutions in terms of cultural reproduction processes inevitably situates conceptions of both education and culture in a political context. By political I mean relations based on power within a given *polis* (translated as city state in Greek, but my use is broader, referring to any organized activity inside a space, external to the body, with defined boundaries). Therefore education is perceived as entailing negotiations around differential power relationships, and culture as entailing negotiations around self-definition practices shaping relationships between different groups. In other words, responses to questions “Why Educate?” and “According to Whose Culture?” will always be contested and problematic. Cultural reproduction through education, following Bourdieu, is about struggles accompanying and determining the outcomes of these negotiations. In this study I have focused on struggles (which Bourdieu would qualify as “symbolic”) that make up the contemporary culture wars, specifically negotiations and contradictions attending relationships between cultural capital and definitions of the canon; between cultural rights and definitions of

multicultural education; and cultural reproduction and definitions of cultural literacy. In the larger picture, cultural reproduction is similar to biological reproduction in that they both involve the element of competition. However they are alleged to be unlike each other on the basis that human free-will—whether real or illusory is a question for another study—plays no role in the outcomes of biological evolution while it plays a central role in cultural evolution. Thus there is no analogous politics of biological reproduction.

I will here stick to the small-scale, circumscribed picture of the politics of cultural reproduction in language arts education. Richard Rorty's (2001) "freedom versus truth" dichotomy introduced at the beginning of the chapter provides a useful frame not only for distinguishing cultural left from cultural right perspectives on education, but for examining historical interpretations of education reform. These interpretations reflect alternative approaches to theorizing reproduction struggles in education. For example, Egan (2001) has eloquently argued that we have ended up with flawed truths about education:

Thinking about education during this [20th] century has almost entirely involved just three ideas—socialization, Plato's academic idea, and Rousseau's developmental idea. We may see why education is so difficult and contentious if we examine these three ideas and the ways they interact in educational thinking today. The combination of these ideas governs what we do in schools and what we do to children in the name of education. Our problems, I will further argue, are due to these three ideas each being fatally flawed and being also incompatible with one another ... the fatal flaws in each of the foundational ideas have been pointed out, one way or another, before—usually by proponents of one or two of the ideas trying to undercut the value of the third. Educational practice in the 20th century went forward under the assumption that the flaws in each idea would be compensated by the other ideas—that is, three wrong ideas make a right idea. Alas, it doesn't work and hasn't worked that way. (p. 923)

On the other hand, Michael Apple's (2004) reading of Herbert Kliebard's (1995) reading of curriculum debates places the emphasis on whose interests (freedoms) are denied and whose prevail:

In his influential history of curriculum debates, Herbert Kliebard (1995) has documented that educational issues have consistently involved major conflicts and compromises among groups with competing visions of "legitimate" knowledge, what counts as "good" teaching and learning, and what is a "just" society. That such conflicts have deep roots in conflicting views of racial, class and gender justice in education and the larger society is ratified in even more

critical recent work as well (Rury & Mirel, 1997; Seldon, 1999; Teitelbaum, 1996). These competing visions have never had equal holds on the imagination of the educators or the general citizenry, nor have they ever had equal power to affect their visions. Because of this, no analysis of education can be fully serious without placing at its very core sensitivity to the ongoing struggles that constantly shape the terrain on which education operates. (Apple, pp. 14–15)

Underpinning both these historical reconstructions is the idea of competition or struggle, but rather curiously they seem to both imply a way out (or at least a way forward) from the struggles. As with entrapments attending debates about culture, I am inclined to argue that debates about educational reform are similarly entrapped, and that Egan's quest for alternative truths or Apple's quest for justice (rooted in equitable freedom) do not so much resolve perennial struggles but continue them in a different key. By acknowledging unavoidable entrapment and contestation I do not thereby mean that our only recourse is resignation; on the contrary I want to argue for critical self-awareness of ways we think about conflicts and contradictions in education. Isaiah Berlin's description of choosing to settle on "trade-offs" between competing goods (in this case truth and freedom) comes closest to capturing my conception of such self-awareness.

There is to be sure already a sophisticated range of theoretical reflection about definition struggles in language arts education, yet by my lights the current state of theorization on these conflicts is still marred by significant blind spots. The most glaring of these can be phrased in terms of the following paradox: research on competing definitions of language arts education and literacy, on one hand, exhibits a central reliance on the term culture, yet on the other, scant attention is paid to theoretical challenges of arriving at a satisfactory definition of culture, let alone acknowledging attendant conceptual contradictions. This state of affairs is lucidly illustrated in a recent article by Allen Luke (2004), 'The Trouble with English,' and in Brian Street's (2005) "Recent Applications of New Literacy Studies in Educational Contexts." They were both published in *Research in the Teaching of English* as part of a series ("At Last") of invited opinion and review pieces by leading scholars in the field. Luke's (1988, 1994) works are widely cited in critical literacy research, and Street (1984, 1993, 1995, 1999) established the theoretical foundations for what is now referred to as New Literacy Studies (NLS).

Luke's article is on shifting boundaries in English education as an academic discipline and a school subject:

What is the future of English education in the new millennium? How has English education responded to realities of new and culturally diverse student populations, new text and communications media, changing job markets and pathways? What might it mean to teach and to profess English in a multilingual and multicultural, heteroglossic and multimediated world where it is alternatively seen as threat and promise, deficit and capital? (2004, p. 85)

It would be unreasonable to quibble with Luke's references to culture in the above quotation. His questions are relatively clear: the world is changing in various and insignificant ways and what will be the impact on and response of English education to these changes? Furthermore Luke acknowledges that he is posing the problem in terms first raised by Basil Bernstein (1971), that is in terms of "framing" (codification of pedagogic practices) and "classification" (relative strength and weakness of disciplinary boundaries of a given curricular field of knowledge). As the article progresses, Luke's proposed solutions reflect variations on the project of constructing (hence culturally reproducing) English education as an interdisciplinary field:

To examine and understand the optimal ways of shaping and teaching English, that debate should enlist knowledge and insights from a range of fields: cultural studies in all its variants; communications and media studies, sociology and economics; applied psycho- and sociolinguistics, but also critical and functional linguistics; and the host of emergent cognitive and social sciences around multimodalities, multiliteracies, and semiotics. (2004, p. 94)

This interdisciplinary conception of English education is beginning to resemble a generalized conception of culture—an amorphous, all-encompassing sign for almost everything. Such open-ended interdisciplinarity runs the risk of becoming meaningless especially since disciplinary identities are formed in relation to boundaries. Without boundaries a corresponding lack of control ensues, and this is particularly apparent in Luke's concluding and uncontrolled uses of the term culture [emphasis added]:

Curriculum is about the narrative invention and contestations of identity, about the learning and imagining of *bildung* and folk theory of success and failure, life project and social pathway. If indeed literacy education is by definition a historical, *cultural*, and ideological selection, any reinvention will return to this task ... 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 multi-faceted and ambivalent *cultural* force within and across the practices and technologies of economic and *cultural* globalization. (2004, p. 94)

Granted that Luke is here reiterating the nature of changes and challenges impinging on English education, but he describes them at a very high level of generalization and abstraction, particularly when using the adjective cultural: “cultural ... selection,” “cultural force,” and “cultural globalization.”

Luke’s writings and insights have undoubtedly been generative in opening up new, cutting-edge directions in literacy research, and moreover, being based in the communally pluralistic context of Singapore, his research continually addresses challenges of living with cultural differences. His article is not short on stimulating insights, but the article could benefit from greater theoretical rigour. Luke’s description of troubles besetting English education would clearly strike a strong chord with most researchers in the field. However, Luke fails to distinguish clearly between references, on one hand, to culture as a product, and on the other, to culture as a process. He ends up conflating these distinctions, and thus blurs the difference between troubles in English education stemming from defining culture as a subject of change (i.e., the changing cultural practices of English education—a product approach), and defining culture as a causal explanation driving change (i.e., the changing cultural constructions of English education—a process approach). I am not arguing that Luke fails to take a position, because it is not about a simple either/or distinction, but rather that Luke fails to acknowledge the varied connotations and tensions conveyed by the term culture. In the course of a ten-page article Luke uses the terms culture and cultural (as noun, adjective and suffix—e.g. multicultural, monocultural, and intercultural) 28 times. Several citations are central to his argument and yet no attempt is made to define his intended meaning. The centrality is simply taken for granted and thus his usage compounds and reproduces the troubles he is examining. For example (emphasis added):

I, too, believe that English education has reached a crucial moment in its history, that this moment is contingent upon the changing demographics, *cultural* knowledges and practices of economic globalization. (2004, p. 85)

But the lesson should be 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)

The question is how we might reinvent it [English education] in relation to an understanding of its own social and *cultural* complexity and dynamics. (p. 87)

By contrast Street's article (2005) is on new approaches to studying literacy practices:

Firstly, what is NLS [New Literacy Studies], and how might it be relevant to schooling? NLS represents a shift in perspective on the study and acquisition of literacy, from the dominant cognitive model, with its emphasis on reading, to a broader understanding of literacy practices in their social and *cultural* contexts. (Gee, 1996; Street, 1993). This approach has been particularly influenced by those who have advocated an ethnographic perspective, in contrast to the experimental and often individualistic character of psychological studies of reading (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Collins, 1995; Heath, 1993). NLS approaches focus on the everyday meanings and uses of literacy in specific *cultural* contexts and linked directly to how we understand the work of literacy in educational contexts. (p. 417, emphasis added)

Street is more scrupulous in his uses of the term culture and, as in the above quotation, he uses it to argue for a contextualized approach to literacy. Due in large part to his own influential research, the concept of literary practices and contextualism has become a dominant approach in literacy research. In spite of his scrupulousness, a recurrent feature through his writings and in this article is a conspicuous ambivalence around distinctions he develops between the terms social and cultural. For example: "social versus cultural context" (p. 417); or social and cultural meanings (pp. 418–419, 421); or social and cultural practices (p. 421). At times one can with some effort discern that for Street the term social carries the connotation of the relational and ideological dimensions of literacy (reflecting the Latin etymological roots from *socius*, meaning friend), while the term cultural for Street connotes the situational dimension. Yet at other times it is difficult to define the difference he has in mind, as he uses them almost interchangeably. For example, on one hand he refers to "social practices and conceptions of reading and writing," (p. 419) or "engaging with literacy is always a social act" (p. 418), while on the other, he refers to a "culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another" (p. 418). I am not here indulging in a pedantic

exercise, but rather inviting Street to be more transparent in acknowledging the attendant theoretical challenges, and to develop a thicker and nuanced theoretical description for New Literacy Studies and for his ambitious project to define what he calls “social literacies” (1995). I have not yet come across the phrase “cultural literacies” in his writings, and thus it would be instructive to learn about the distinctions, if any, that he would draw between social as opposed to cultural literacies, especially since to speak of definable cultural contexts assumes a semblance of cultural homogeneity, if not purity, and this is increasingly difficult to locate today. My invitation however would bring Street face to face with the task of defining the term culture and undertaking this task would arguably deepen and widen his already significant contribution to language arts and literacy research.

Cultural Reproduction, Language Arts Education, and the Problem of Empowerment

That English education will continue to reproduce itself is not in doubt; however the specific outcomes are somewhat unpredictable. In this chapter I have sketched out an overview of issues and factors impinging not only on reproduction outcomes but more importantly on ways we think about the politics of cultural reproduction in education. The attendant politics, I have argued, encompasses tensions between traditionalist and progressive conceptions of education, between product and process-based conceptions of culture, and between conflictual and non-conflictual conceptions of reproduction. Furthermore I have drawn on *Othello* as a school text to illustrate as well as analyze theoretical and practical implications of these tensions for language arts education. A key implication is the need for language arts educators to become more critically self-aware of the uses of the terms culture and cultural. The cultivation of self-awareness in this context demands not only critical intellectual work but also bolder political engagements. Paulo Freire’s (d. 1997) work continues to serve as a model for such engaged thinking and activism. Perhaps Freire’s enduring legacy is his theorization of connections between institutionalized education and empowerment (or rather disempowerment) of learners. Freire articulated these connections around a theory “conscientization” (in Portuguese, *conscientização*), referring to processes that enable teachers and learners to engage in

dialogues (“dialogical education”) that generate emancipatory outcomes rather than reproducing oppressor-oppressed relationships. Reading Freire in 2007 I must confess to a sense of nostalgia for such high-minded and revolutionary aspirations attributed to educational institutions and practices. We are arguably less idealistic today (or least I am), in part due to the track record of failures of the political left, but also in part because I do not any more believe that goals of empowerment can be neatly packaged in institutionalized educational strategies. Defining empowerment (particularly in our post-slavery age, legally speaking) replays similar tensions and contradictions attending definitions of cultural reproduction: “Empowerment according to whom and for what ends?” In fact, different theories of cultural reproduction can be fruitfully classified as reflecting different goals of empowerment; hence political struggles over cultural reproduction strategies are as much symptoms of competing conceptions of culture as well as of empowerment. In fact, Freire increasingly became preoccupied with the concept of culture, referring to teachers as “cultural workers” (1998) and education as “cultural action” (1970/1993, p. 111) resisting “cultural invasion” (p. 152). Freire’s definition of culture is not without problems, particularly since he at times implies that “authentic culture” belongs to the oppressed while “inauthentic culture” belongs to the imperialist oppressors (see 1970/1993, pp. 152–167). Yet Freire was perceptive in describing the unavoidable ideological contestation associated with the term culture.

The more modest aim of this study is to provoke further conversations about what we want language arts to become, while acknowledging that these conversations will not necessarily lead to agreements, not only because of irreconcilable differences but more significantly because of recalcitrant complexities attending the enterprise. Readings of the term culture and *Othello* as a school text have served as my vehicles to bring home an appreciation of these complexities for language arts education. In some small measure this acknowledgement and appreciation can count, following Freire, as emancipatory—though perhaps not in the eyes of Freire and his followers. Pechter (1995), commenting on comparable effects of the culture wars on Shakespeare criticism and English studies, offers a dose of salutary advice that is equally applicable for guiding the department of language arts educators in the difficult conversations that lie ahead:

The question, anyway, is what we do in the meantime, whichever side we are on, however positioned we are to “feel beset from all sides.” Apart from watching and waiting, St. Mark’s always useful advice for difficult times, reading and teaching and writing should be kept on the agenda. Business as usual, in other words; nothing special. We may think that institutional and disciplinary arrangements that underwrite business as usual do not serve our interests very well, but along with the fundamental and irresolvable disagreements ... they are what we have to work with and within in the unsure and uncertain hope of resurrecting better ones. As a result of this situation, our “conversation” may sometimes seem like a dialogue of the deaf, but keeping it going had better be enough because, like ideology, it is all we have got. (p. 166)

The concept of cultural reproduction as an analytical tool can certainly provide a capacious enough starting point for a common conversation among language arts educators, regardless of ideological differences. In this conversation each begins by simply asking the other to clarify what she means by “cultural reproduction”? It is a conversation which acknowledges that even though the whole picture behind the term culture in education is elusive, every perspective helps piece the puzzle together.

Chapter Five

Culture Wars and Education: The Road Ahead

During the relatively long gestation period that preceded the actual writing of this study, the following piece of advice from my committee members somehow kept me going, kept me hopeful: “The process of writing has a life of its own.” As I now bring to a close the journey that began this study, I am pleasantly surprised to discover patterns and associations which have gradually come to life and were unforeseen when I started out. Before turning to these unforeseen surprises I will briefly review the landscape covered so far.

The animating goal of this study has been to enlarge and deepen theoretical conversations about the term culture in language arts education. I have proceeded by drawing out implications of culture war debates for language arts education, as well as drawing out implications for teaching *Othello* in light of cultural conflicts. The rationale guiding this so-called hunt for implications is to propose cultural capital, cultural rights, and cultural reproduction as analytical tools when thinking about the uses and significance of the term culture in language arts education. These analytical tools serve as frames of analysis which are applied to each of the debates as well as to *Othello* as a school text. The concept of cultural capital is used to illustrate issues of competing evaluation criteria framing the canon debate; similarly the concept of cultural rights illustrates issues of competing criteria for defining and accommodating differences in the multicultural education debate; and the concept of cultural reproduction illustrates issues of competing criteria for defining reproduction goals of education in the cultural literacy debate. By linking the analysis of the debates in relation to *Othello* as a school text I have sought to illustrate ways in which the history of literary criticism, performance history, textbook editions of *Othello*, as well as teaching approaches hold up a compelling mirror to the issues in all three debates. This analysis brings into sharper focus ways in which the ideological opposition between expressions of cultural right and cultural left perspectives is articulated in language arts education. It also demonstrates that the politics of these conflicts is intractable because definitions of culture in these debates reflect

conceptual contradictions. Definitions of culture in the canon debate are entrapped, as it were, in competing normative assumptions (i.e., Can there be a non-normative definition of cultural capital?); in the multicultural education debate they are entrapped in competing essentialist constructions (i.e., Can there be a non-essentialist definition of cultural rights?); and in the cultural literacy debate they are entrapped in competing empowerment goals (i.e., Can there be a non-empowerment-based definition of cultural reproduction?).

Revisiting my analysis of the three debates, I can now discern more clearly the disciplinary boundaries of this study. Stepping outside these boundary lines and contexts of language arts education, my theoretical findings can be seen as making a contribution to the larger project of theorizing relationships between education and culture. This larger project has been latent, as it were, in the preceding chapters. Yet if we situate this study more consciously inside this larger project, new patterns and associations emerge. At the outset, three sets of relationships can be transposed onto the education-culture nexus: relations of power (e.g., canonical versus non-canonical capital), relations of difference (e.g., majority versus minority rights), and relations of production (e.g., product versus process reproduction goals). In this study I have attempted to delineate the types of philosophical questions entailed in each of these relationships. On the basis of this delineation I am arguing that educational research on these relationships lacks rigorous philosophical grounding resulting in unexamined uses of the term culture, as well as under-theorized claims about the role and significance of conceptions of culture.

Harold Bloom makes an illuminating observation: “Reading well is best pursued as an implicit discipline; finally there is no method but yourself, when your self has been fully molded” (2000, p. 19). I am drawn to the suggestive power of this typically Bloomian pronouncement as I try and locate myself inside this study. Though I am not altogether certain that I fully understand Bloom’s representation of the self as a method, I am attracted by the challenge of trying to determine how autobiographical concerns may have informed the writing of this study. Looking into the mirror more closely, as it were, some compelling discoveries emerge. That I was drawn to theorizing about cultural differences is not surprising as I am (or at least see myself as) a mongrel of sorts. I was

born and raised in Uganda within an extended Gujarati- and Kutchi-speaking Indian Muslim family which had migrated from India only two generations earlier. After the age of ten I grew up in Vancouver, having arrived with my family as refugees fleeing Idi Amin's brutal regime, and a civil war that eventually ripped Uganda apart. As an English-speaking Canadian citizen I now carry baggage that connects me to multiple inheritances: to Swahili and formative childhood memories in Uganda; to Indian mother tongues (Gujarati and Kutchi) and Indian cuisine; and to Arabic which I learnt growing up in a Muslim community and through formal academic education in the intellectual history of Islam. The self-definition challenges that I face in relation to these inheritances are certainly not unique and reflect, in varying degrees, juggling experiences common to all first-generation immigrants. These experiences have however taught me to be very skeptical of essentialist (purist) definitions of cultural identity. I have just too much to carry and packing everything into one convenient suitcase is not an appealing option at all.

Let me note that I am not unaware of the potential reactions this self-description may provoke in the minds of some readers. I can conceive of accusations such as: he is being self-serving, he is trying to rhetorically and rather selectively get the reader on his side. But I can also conceive that some may find this as helpful background that complements and adds a human face to the academic objectives and arguments of this study. In relation to either response, I am entrapped, especially since I cannot be held solely responsible for the reactions that my words provoke. However, I believe that such a self-description is possibly contentious not because of what it is saying, but rather because of the context in which it is being said. This predicament, I would argue, applies to all cultural self-definitions. My self-definition could be seen as an attempt to privilege my markers of difference, yet this self-definition would not register as marking difference if read by, say, my family members or even members from the fairly large East African Indian Ismaili Muslim community residing in Canada. They would, to use the jargon, read it as a rather familiar thick description. On the charge of being selective, I plead guilty. Yet I would be interested to know if it is possible to define oneself in a non-selective way. A more interesting question to pose is why I am selecting these features as

opposed to, say, my sexual orientation or class background. There are no simple answers, yet posing such a question pushes us to confront larger questions about why constructed cultural signifiers matter to human beings, or indeed why conflicts arise around perceived cultural differences. For example, what keeps the Quebec nationalist movement alive? What drives Hindu nationalism in India? What is fuelling the anti-immigration platform across a range of political parties in Europe? The complexities and even discomfort associated with these questions are, I would argue, not unrelated to the questions explored in this study. For example: How does Shakespeare see Othello? How does Othello see himself? How do others in the play see Othello? How do we see Othello today? Responses to these questions are all open to the charge of being strategically selective. Facing the entanglements implied in these questions, I am once again reminded of Pechter's (1999) prescient observation:

Working on *Othello* means inhabiting a contaminated site; you want to say the right thing, but it comes out sounding terribly wrong. (p. 181)

At the risk of hitting a false note, I want to claim that I feel a sense of kinship with Othello, as someone no longer able to be an unselfconscious insider anywhere. Like Othello, I now increasingly feel the pressure to define myself around essentializing categories as either a visible minority in Canada, a South Asian immigrant, or as a Muslim in a post-9/11 world. I experience these categorizations not only as deeply dissatisfying but as half-truths. Either the heightened accentuation of cultural differences and conflicts today is a temporary phenomenon reflecting a last-ditch resistance to pressures emanating from a rapidly globalizing and increasingly interdependent world, or it is an ominous harbinger of deeper and longer-term conflicts. The culture war debates examined here are symptoms of this uncertain and violent state of affairs. Public education systems across the globe are arguably the frontlines of these wars. There are no tidy solutions but at the same time we are not without choices. In addressing these conflicts we thus need to be more critically-informed educators, because these conflicts resemble what the distinguished curriculum theorist William F. Pinar (2004) has called a "complicated conversation:"

Subjective and social reconstruction is our professional obligation as educators in this nightmarish moment of anti-intellectualism and political subjugation. Alone

and together, let us participate in *complicated conversation* with ourselves and with colleagues worldwide. Let us construct an increasingly sophisticated and auditory field of education, one worthy of those schoolteachers and students who, each day, nearly everywhere on the globe, labor to understand themselves and the world they inhabit. (p. 258, emphasis added)

Drawing lines demarcating complicated from uncomplicated conversations is an ideologically contentious undertaking. In addition to political connotations, Pinar is here crafting a judicious synthesis between Michael Oakeshott's definition of conversation as "unrehearsed intellectual adventure" (1959, p. 11) playfully attuned to the traffic of diverse voices, past and present; and to Rorty's (1989) definition of conversation as an ongoing negotiation (i.e., "keeping the conversation going") of our historically contingent truth claims. Hence, implicit in Pinar's advocacy for complicated conversations in the field of education (and specifically curriculum studies), is an argument for interdisciplinarity and historical self-consciousness. In some small measure I believe this study reflects the qualities of a complicated conversation, especially through the connections that it has traced between research on culture war debates, *Othello*, and language arts education.

I am willing to take credit for making a contribution to complicating our understanding of culture wars as well as language arts education, yet I doubt very much that I have succeeded in complicating *Othello*. On the contrary *Othello* continues to complicate my theoretical findings in a spirit not entirely dissimilar from Harold Bloom's (1994) audacious claim:

Shakespeare's most idiosyncratic strength: he is always ahead of you, conceptually and imagistically, wherever and whenever you are. He renders you anachronistic because he *contains* you; you cannot subsume him. You cannot illuminate him with a new doctrine ... (p. 25)

If this comes across as a bit hyperbolic, then one can turn to Northrop Frye's (1963) more poised admission of a similar claim (keep in mind that this comes from a scholar who has argued [in 1957] that literary criticism can be effectively harnessed to a formal inductive approach):

Any critic of Shakespeare's sonnets will, to some extent, tell the world more about his own critical limitations than about his subject; and if he starts out with

very marked limitations, the clear surface of the sonnets will faithfully reflect them. (1963, p. 88)

Shifting one level below these admittedly large and contentious claims about Shakespearean exceptionalism, I have in mind the specific complicating powers that *Othello* as a school text brings to bear on my attempts to theorize relationships between education and culture. At a generic level my analysis of *Othello* as a school text throws up questions that are relevant for developing thicker theoretical descriptions and rationalizations for teaching fictional literary texts. For example, explanations for teaching literature continue to challenge our definitions of literacy and aesthetics. What interests me is some of the spillover implications of these challenges for theorizing relationships between education and culture. In relation to education, regardless of whether literacy is theorized as a cognitive skill or a social practice, or evaluated around functional or critical criteria—prevailing definitions of literacy appear inadequate in understanding the processes of teaching, reading or writing literary texts. Similarly, in relation to culture, regardless of whether we ascribe to standards of canonicity, or choose between instrumental or intrinsic criteria—prevailing definitions of aesthetics seem to fall short of adequately explaining the full significance of the aesthetic dimension in human cultures.

There are no tidy answers to the question: What sort of literacy is being developed (or achieved) through teaching *Othello*? As such I want to argue that once we move beyond functional standards of alphabetic literacy, subsequent questions about the role of literacy are in effect questions about epistemology—questions, that is, about how we use language to make meaning and construct knowledge. Thus language arts educators and literacy researchers have to engage with questions about the concomitant relevance of distinguishing between subjective versus objective criteria. Willinsky's scrupulous and eclectic writings on literacy education have been alluding to these philosophical questions, yet arguably more needs to be done to develop systematic philosophical approaches in language arts research. Willinsky (2001) defines the intellectual agenda in very compelling terms:

We need to be students of literacy, to attend to how writing and reading works on us and our comprehension of the world, and we need to understand how this

knowledge roughly defines the scope of what we might owe the young when we teach them to read and write. At issue are the hopes, the promises and pleasures, that come of working language's possibilities ... They [these topics] are about the personal, professional, and public framing of the world in language, rather than student's decoding abilities and related pedagogical concerns. (p. 3)

Similarly there are no simple answers to the question: What are distinctive aesthetic qualities of *Othello*? I have been arguing that a conspicuous philosophical poverty accompanies discussions on aesthetics in language arts research. In part this poverty can be attributed to the fact that the discussions are disproportionately influenced by a very limited strand of thinking in the history of writing and philosophy on aesthetics, namely, the Rousseau and Dewey legacy; and in part it may also be due to the fact that aesthetics is conceived by language arts educators as representing normative claims rather than as an area demanding critical inquiry. This normative outlook is particularly evident in standards documents and reader-response research. I would certainly be at a loss if asked to define (or enumerate) the normative aesthetic qualities of *Othello*. Ron Rosenbaum, in his recent book *The Shakespeare Wars* (2006), argues that there is no scholarly consensus on how exactly to define the adjective "Shakespearean." What, for example, constitute the key aesthetic properties or effects associated with the term *Shakespearean*? In relation specifically to *Othello*, I would like to turn to the term *tragedy* for some help in responding to this elusive question.

Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the *Poetics* still strikes me as the most persuasive and relevant for understanding the enduring aesthetic power of *Othello*. For Aristotle, witnessing the dramatized performance of a tragedy entails experiencing catharsis, by which he means that a tragic play produces, through pity and fear, purification or purgation of our anxieties, particularly anxieties about vulnerability in the face of suffering and extinction. Regardless of the innumerable times that I have read, watched, and taught *Othello*, I have not yet been able to evade its cathartic power. It is always a painful, unsettling experience. The usually unsentimental Dr. Samuel Johnson aptly described the final scene in *Othello*: "It is not to be endured" (cited in Pechter, 1999, p. ix). As a non-white reader and spectator, I find myself empathizing equally with

Okri's (1997) reaction: "Doomed to his relentless cycle, he [Othello] will not vanish from our dreams. And yet I dream of ways of liberating him from that bondage" (p. 86).

I was surprised to discover that the word anxiety has its roots in the Latin *anxius* (past participial stem of *angere*) which means to choke. The culture war debates examined in this study are not short on anxieties, yet are these anxieties choking us in the same way as Othello ended up choking Desdemona? Is there a catharsis at work that can help explain the persistence of culture wars? I concede that there is something contrived in the way that I am posing these questions. Yet for many of us the experience of listening to the morning news or reading the newspaper has become a ritual of bearing witness to a frenzied or an overheating world ceaselessly choking itself. This study will have achieved much if it at least succeeds in provoking a response about ways in which language arts educators can begin engaging themselves and their students with the uncertain, anxious times in which we live.

A productive starting point can be to begin building intellectual bridges with rigorously explored investigations of cultural conflicts by those outside the field of education, and yet who also write about the significance of contemporary culture wars for public education. Two recent books come to mind: the Ghanaian-British philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006) and the Bengali economist Amartya Sen's *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (2006). Appiah (currently teaching at Princeton) and Sen (at Harvard) reflect variations of a self-consciously liberal argument against a "clash of civilizations" approach to cultural differences. For Appiah, hope lies in reviving a robust concept of cosmopolitanism:

So there are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because they are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or society should converge on a single mode of life ... Cosmopolitanism is an adventure and an idealCosmopolitanism isn't hard work; repudiating it isThe world is getting more crowded: in the next half a

century the population of our once foraging species will approach nine billion. Depending on the circumstances, conversations across boundaries can be delightful, or just vexing: what they mainly are, though, is inevitable. (pp. xv–xxi)

For Sen, the way forward lies in accepting that our self-definitions cannot be reduced to singular identities:

The violent events and atrocities of the last few years have ushered in a period of terrible confusion as well as dreadful conflicts. The politics of global confrontation is frequently seen as the corollary of religious and cultural divisions in the worldOur shared humanity gets savagely challenged when the manifold divisions in the world are unified into one allegedly dominant system of classification—in terms of religion, or community, or culture, or nation, or civilizationThe uniquely partitioned world is much more divisive than the universe of plural and diverse categories that shape the world in which we liveThe hope of harmony in the contemporary world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity, and in the appreciation that they cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division. (pp. xii–xiv)

What then, I have been asking, are the implications, resonances, contradictions, and limitations of such re-thinking around cultural conflicts for secondary language arts education? The future is always about our absence and therefore the future of culture wars in education cannot be predicted. Yet acknowledgement is preferable to avoidance, and let me confess that I am an optimist. Thus for the road ahead I take to heart the late Clifford Geertz's (2003) hopeful reminder that unpredictable possibilities come to life when acknowledging unfamiliar voices, rather like the vitality with which *Othello's* otherness and tragedy continues to address us:

It is clear that merely listening to other voices in other rooms saying other things in other accents can be a perilous business, liable to confuse our emotions, derail our judgments, and leave us both rattled and engrossed. But that is what listening to the voices of our own literary tradition, *Macbeth* or Merrill, *Lear* or Faulkner, brings on as well: the sense that there is more to things than first appears and that our reactions are where we start, not where we end. We may indeed end almost anywhere. (p. 36)

Let me end by returning to the term culture. At a rather advanced stage in my research I discovered that Shakespeare never used the term culture; there is not a single reference to the term in his plays and sonnets. I am at a loss for an explanation, especially since the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) refers to citations as a noun from circa 1420

(anonymous), William Caxton (1483), and Sir Thomas More (1510). From the early 17th century onwards it appears to have entered into relatively common usage: see Francis Bacon (1626), Thomas Hobbes (1628), Robert Boyle (1665), and John Dryden (1697). Yet William Shakespeare (1564–1616), the most cited author in the OED, does not once use the term culture. It would be presumptuous to speculate on the reasons for this, though I like to believe that Shakespeare found this term too incoherent to be useful. He certainly was not given to unexamined uses of a word. These observations further underscore the fact that the term culture has a history—a relatively brief and recent history. Cultivating such historical self-consciousness among language arts educators has been one of the key goals of this study. With this self-consciousness comes a larger question about the future of the term culture not only in language arts education but educational contexts in general—a compelling yet murky question for another study. I foresee the term culture attracting the type of critical attention that not too long ago we began investing and continue to invest in class, gender and race.

Postscript

It is difficult to predict how this study will be received in the field. Nonetheless let me spell out broadly the next steps that I want to pursue. Wider dissemination of the work is an immediate priority. By converting the chapters into articles I want to test the reception of my arguments among: a) language arts educators (through journals such as *English Quarterly*, *English Education*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*); b) literacy researchers (*Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Literacy Innovations* and *Literacy Today*); c) multicultural education researchers (*Harvard Educational Review*, *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, and *Education and Culture*); and d) theorists and philosophers of education (*Educational Theory*, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, and *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*).

Presenting papers at relevant conferences and particularly at the annual meetings of NRC (National Reading Conference), CSSE (Canadian Society for the Study of

Education), and AERA (American Educational Research Association) will serve as an invaluable channel for receiving feedback on my research. Presentations to current teachers through in-service professional development programs would be no less valuable. Building on these publications and presentations I will apply for a research grant to design and implement a field study, which will compare and analyze data gathered from observing four different teachers teaching *Othello* in Canadian public secondary schools. The aim of this field study is not only to examine different approaches to teaching *Othello* but to also identify (where possible) key factors shaping different teaching approaches (particularly factors such as teacher backgrounds, student backgrounds, and racial diversity/homogeneity in classrooms). The contextual factor of race will be anticipated by selecting two teachers from schools where non-white students are in the majority and two teachers from schools where the student body is predominately white. By analyzing the ensuing data around frames of analysis developed in this study (i.e., cultural capital, cultural rights, and cultural reproduction), my aim is to also evaluate the applicability of these frames of analysis. Depending on the quality of the data gathered, I intend to explore possibilities of conducting similar field studies with an international scope, comparing approaches to teaching *Othello* within English-speaking contexts outside Canada.

For the past few years I have been teaching courses in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria which briefly cover the multicultural education debate as well as anti-racist pedagogy. I want to now develop a full term undergraduate course (or graduate course seminar) entitled ‘Theories and Practices of Multicultural Education.’ The inclusion of such a course carries the potential of generating significant conversations with other faculty members—especially difficult conversations about the relevance and value of this course. An equally exciting prospect is to develop and teach a course entitled ‘Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare.’ Focusing on four plays (two comedies and two tragedies) as well as selected sonnets, the objectives of the course would be: a) to critically examine the benefits of teaching Shakespeare; b) to explore effective approaches to teaching Shakespeare; and c) to analyze the contemporary significance of Shakespeare’s writings.

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Appendix A: IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace, and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context and graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual languages (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structures, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). (1996, p. 3)