EXAMINING INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL SERVICE-LEARNING THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL LENS:

USING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY TO DECOLONIZE THE SELF

By

Elizabeth Christie

Bachelor of Science, Trent University, 2000
Bachelor of Education, Queen’s University, 2002

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education (Critical Studies)
in the Graduate Academic Unit of Education

Supervisor: Linda Eyre, PhD, Faculty of Education
Examinining Board: Ellen Rose, PhD, Faculty of Education (Chair)
Pam Whitty, EdD, Faculty of Education
Teresa Strong-Wilson, PhD, Faculty of Education, McGill University

This thesis is accepted by the Dean of Graduate Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

June, 2015

© Elizabeth Christie, 2015
Abstract

My research explores the relations of power that exist in the application of service-learning programs through international schools within the countries in which they operate. Using critical research and autoethnography, I examine my own experiences as a Community Service Coordinator for an international school in Tianjin, China, in the academic year 2007-2008, in order to illuminate the complexities, tensions, contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the delivery of service-learning programs in international school contexts. By juxtapositioning texts from my personal experiences as Community Service Coordinator in China, with my beloved childhood novel *Little Women* (Alcott, 2008, original 1868) and Mao Tse-tung’s essay “In Memory of Norman Bethune”, I illuminate the presence of colonial power structures still operating today through the delivery of service-learning programs at international schools.

Using critical discourse analysis I identify how the problematic binary of ‘server’ vs. ‘served’ establishes the international school and its students in the position of relative superiority and echoes historical imperial values of philanthropy for the ‘good’ of the other. Furthermore, I make visible the dangers and possibilities in my ability, as Community Service Coordinator, to author the service-learning experiences of students in my classes. Throughout the research, I attempt to make visible how my storied formation has constructed a colonial view of the world, such that once recognized, I can begin to dismantle these structures and thus begin to decolonize my self in order to act more equitably and with more agency in my world, and within my pedagogy.
Dedication

This research is dedicated to my son Duncan,
who has shown me the joy of jumping in mud puddles.
Acknowledgments

I deeply appreciate the guidance and counsel provided by my advisor Dr. Linda Eyre. You have challenged my understanding of the world and accepted only my best writing.

I would also like to acknowledge the wonder-full and encouraging spirit of the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. It astonishes me that not only the professors with whom I studied, but other faculty whose classes I never took, have gone out of their way to come to know me and my research, and to encourage me in my work.

I am also thankful for my friends, colleagues and students with whom I practiced teaching in China and Malaysia. My experiences from 2007-2009 changed who I wanted to be and guided me towards this research.

I would like to thank my friends, colleagues and students at Nackawic High School. Your support and encouragement have pushed me towards a finish line.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband Craig Woodcock, and my son Duncan, who have given me the time and encouragement to engage in this research. I look forward to enjoying more time with both of you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. PRECIPITATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-Learning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin, China</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positioning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. MAPPING THE WATERSHED</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Aims</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storied Formation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcolonialism</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decolonizing the Mind</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcolonialism and Education</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Research on International Schools in General</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Research on Service-Learning</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying Postcolonial Theory to International School</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-Learning Projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. A METHODOLOGY OF MEANDERING RIVERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embracing My Own Current: Critical Research and Autoethnography</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity and Intent</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Question of Memory and Agency</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing Forward My Memories</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing as Inquiry</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A River Courses from Somewhere to Elsewhere</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. POOLS, EDDIES, AND OBSTRUCTIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arriving Requires a Departure</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisiting a Cherished Text</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming Attuned to Counter-Stories</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tianjin Economic Development Area (TEDA) as Contact Zone</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissonance – Marking the Presence of a Counter-Story</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing <em>Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities</em></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities ................................. 90
A Shared Story or Another Counter Story? ................................. 96
“In Memory of Norman Bethune” ............................................. 97
Concluding Thoughts .......................................................... 100

5. ARRIVING AT CONFLUENCE ............................................. 101
   Reading the Memory ...................................................... 103
       The Geography ....................................................... 103
       Offering Service and Assuming Reciprocity ..................... 109
       Assessing the Site ................................................... 113
   Reading the Text Otherwise ............................................. 118
       The Invitation ......................................................... 119
       A Sense of Time ..................................................... 123
   Rereading the Memory Against Little Women ....................... 127
   Rereading the Memory Against “In Memory of
   Norman Bethune” ....................................................... 131
   Concluding Thoughts ................................................... 136

6. SURFACING ........................................................................ 141
   A Critical Look at the Operation of International Schools
   in Developing Countries .................................................. 143
   A Critical Look at Service-Learning Programs
   Delivered by International Schools ................................... 144
   A Critical Look at the Position of Community Service
   Coordinator ................................................................. 146
   Implications for the Delivery of Service-Learning
   Projects at International Schools ..................................... 148
   Implications for the Delivery of Service-Learning
   Projects in New Brunswick, Canada ................................ 152
   Implications for Further Research ..................................... 155
   Diving Back Down ........................................................ 157

7. REFERENCES ...................................................................... 161

CURRICULUM VITAE
2:28 pm, May 19th, 2008, one week after the Wenchuan Earthquake

A full week has passed since the Wenchuan earthquake struck Sichuan province. Even 2000 kilometres away in Tianjin, our light fixtures had swayed under the influence of this 7.9 level earthquake. As the Community Service Coordinator for the international school that employed me, I had organized our relief fundraising with terrible results. Not that the money wasn’t coming. It was. It had simply never occurred to me that there would be cultural differences in how such fundraising should be run. But this is a story for later.

Today, May 19th, 2008, is a National Day of Mourning for China and I am tense in the anticipation of the hour, 2:28 PM, when we will observe three minutes of silence. Earlier today, I had lectured my students to be respectful. This was not a time for sidelong glances, giggles or smirks. Absolute silence was necessary to begin mending the cultural rift which had occurred on our staff. It would be a way to show solidarity, that we were, in fact, on the same page despite the conflicting views on how to manage the school’s response to this disaster.

Since I don’t have class, I find myself in the photocopy room when our principal makes the announcement that the three minutes of silence are beginning. Despite being alone and unobserved, I plan to participate fully. I need a few minutes of silence to clear my head, and figure out how to negotiate the palpable tension on staff. I take a deep
breath and wait for this city of 12 million to pause respectfully, as I know they will
because the government has mandated it. The traffic comes to a halt. The shuffling of
feet in the classrooms ends. It is suddenly silent, overwhelmingly so. But then, on some
cue unknown to me, every motorist with a horn lays upon it and a wall of machine noise,
like a collective wail of despair, shoots straight up into the stratosphere. I am shocked
that this noise is their response; once again I had failed in understanding. I had
assumed, after a year in China, that I would have a better understanding of the culture.
And as the tears start to stream down my face, I feel so many different things at once.
I’d like to say that I feel the pain and confusion that comes when 69,000 people suddenly
disappear off the planet. But honestly, I feel slapped, locked-out, confused, and angry. I
feel as though the blaring horns are for me, a symbol that I remain on the outside,
despite all my good intentions to help out in the community. I want to go home. But
even this isn’t true. Because I know that the home I left in Nackawic, New Brunswick,
will not recognize how I am altered by my year in China; and I know that I will be seeing
my home through a new set of eyes. “Home” will just be yet another tense negotiation.

The three minutes of silence end. I wipe my eyes, brush my hair forward to hide
my red cheeks which always betray me, and rush to the staff washroom. I need to
recompose, and mask my selfish emotion.

After five years of teaching at Nackawic High School, in rural New Brunswick, my
husband Craig and I decided it was time for a change. In order to find work in New
Brunswick, I had accepted a position teaching French Immersion and Core French. With
five years under my belt, I felt competent as a teacher, I had generally good
relationships with my students and administration, and the beginning teacher workload had levelled off. At the same time, I felt pigeonholed. My geography and history skills were fading. I felt that if I did not manage to get social studies on my resume soon, the opportunity would pass, and then what would the point of my undergraduate degree have been?

We decided to take leaves of absence from our permanent positions and teach overseas. Our preference was Latin America, because we felt Spanish would be relatively easy to learn with our grounding in French. But at our last interview at the Queen’s Teachers’ Overseas Recruiting Fair, the principal of an international school in Tianjin, China, made us feel at ease. The school he described, its structure and its values, all seemed to align with our own beliefs about education. There was also something about his manner, and his sense of humour which made it appear we would fit well with this international school. We agreed to a contract for the 2007-2008 academic year. Craig was hired to teach English and I was hired to teach Social Studies. But later, based on my work with the Nackawic Students for Social Justice Club, half of my schedule became devoted to managing the community service requirements of the high school. I was excited because Students for Social Justice at Nackawic gave me the job satisfaction I was not gaining through the teaching of French grammar and Grade 9 Maths. So with the best of intentions, and the idealistic views that framed my thirty-year-old self, I found myself at the luggage carousel in Beijing with my husband and our four suitcases, trying to deny my growing sense of unease. I was trying to subdue that nagging question – Just what have we done? and What are we doing here? While one
might expect these questions to be perfectly natural under the circumstances, by the
time we were deposited at the school’s residence later that evening, I already knew I
would have to censure my first experiences in China for my family, friends, and former
students back in Canada. I did not want to reinforce stereotypes of China, nor terrify my
parent in-laws with the differences between China and Canada. I thought that the first
shock would pass and, as I became accustomed to life in China, that the tension would
dissipate; instead, the tensions would become more palpable and refuse to be ignored.

As exemplified in my story about the minutes of silence, once my contract came
to an end, I was more confused than ever. On one hand, I felt as though my work as
Community Service Coordinator had been authentic and important with some moments
which I would like to call successful, meaningful, and moving. All education is values-
based, whether we intend it or not. I consider service-learning a venue for teaching
about the value of relationships and for being generous and open to the stories of
others. But, as highlighted in my opening story, I found it a challenge to bridge a
relationship between the program, the students, and China. And as someone who likes
to be in control, I found personal injury when I failed to make appropriate connections.

In the spring of 2008, Craig and I were contacted by an international school in
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with whom we had interviewed the previous year at the
Queen’s University Recruitment Fair. The international school offered us positions for
the 2008-2009 academic year in Malaysia, which we accepted. I consider myself
fortunate for the opportunity to have lived a different teaching experience the following
year, for the place which is Malaysia, is entirely different than the place which is China.
Malaysia was officially a British Colony (Malaya), through a form of indirect rule established through the Pangkor Treaty in 1874, in which British residents in Malaysia advised the ruling Sultans. The pressure of “Merdeka” (independence) mounted after the British surrender to the Japanese in 1942 (Tay, 2011, p. 2), with Malaysia and Singapore separating into separate independent states in 1965 (p. 3). Until 1990, the New Economic Policy privileged the majority Malay population over the minority Chinese and Indian populations (p. 3). Although the policy has officially ended, its structural and emotional effects were still very much in evidence when we lived there in 2008-2009. Our recruitment to Malaysia was part of its desire to be a destination for international education. The government of Malaysia website advertises its “quality education,” “competitive course fees,” and “wide range of study options” (My Government: The Government of Malaysia’s Official portal, n.d., Why study in Malaysia? section). As such, at the international school in Malaysia, our classes were composed not only of the multicultural diversity which is Malaysia, but also of students from around the globe. This situation is very different from China, in which the expatriate students did not have local (Chinese) classmates. Both schools, however, positioned me as a White teacher from the West, instructing a class of primarily non-Western students.

Once again, I had a reduced teaching load in order to facilitate the community involvement requirements of the Ontario High School Diploma program which we administered. I also taught World Issues, and was able to pursue service-learning as a co-curricular activity with my students. My experiences in Malaysia were still filled with tensions and contradictions, but through the support of my program director, and the
UNICEF Malaysia representative, I was able to negotiate these tensions and contradictions—sometimes more successfully and sometimes more gracefully. It helped that Malaysian national students attended the international school; it was thus easier to communicate meaningfully with the local community. I felt that my work was more in partnership with local NGOs who sometimes reached out to our program, and sometimes our program reached out to the NGOs. And I have no doubt that the common use of English in Malaysia helped me better communicate and thus relate to my colleagues, students, and to members of the community. Nonetheless, tensions still existed between staff, around the delivery of the curriculum, and between expatriates and the community.

As was the case in China, it seemed difficult for authentic friendships to form between the Malaysian staff and the Canadian staff. Although everyone sat together in the lunchroom and were collegial in conversation, it was not common practice for Malaysian and Canadian staff to comingle after work hours. We were paid more than our Malaysian counterparts, who performed the same duties, on the basis of our Canadian experience. And the Canadian staff had a high turnover rate; the Malaysian staff were used to seeing Canadian teachers come and go. In terms of the tensions with students in my classes, delivering a World Issues curriculum written from a Canadian perspective was problematic. For example, the Canadian textbook for my World Issues course, to exemplify life in developing countries, featured a picture of a Malaysian Bas Mini, a form of public transportation. This picture led to an awkward conversation about why the picture, and the style of transportation was deemed to exemplify a
common characteristic of all countries labeled as ‘developing’. Finally, teaching World Issues in Malaysia had to be done prudently; the year I lived in Kuala Lumpur was filled with civil unrest, the cause for which I could not directly discuss with my students for fear of being charged with sedition. And yet, several of my students very much wanted to discuss it. Wanting to encourage activist thinking while not wanting to lead my students (nor myself) into trouble with the law was a fine line to walk—and, possibly, hypocritical for a teacher who could leave and return to relative safety in Canada.

When I moved back to Fredericton in August 2009, my return, as anticipated, was jarring. I felt full of questions about my experiences in China and Malaysia, but I lacked the language and knowledge to voice them. I just had a visceral sense that something about the experience was “wrong.” This is where and why I began my M.Ed. at the University of New Brunswick. It was near the end of my Introduction to Critical Studies in Education course that a reading in postcolonial theory anchored my emotional internal arguments to rational external ones and provided the language to talk about my experiences as an international school teacher—specifically, as a Community Service Coordinator in China and Malaysia.

Service-Learning

Service-learning generally refers to students performing some kind of volunteer service for either their local community or perhaps a community in another country, such as Habitat for Humanity. Roughly half of service-learning programs involve ‘direct service,’ such as working at a soup kitchen; but they can also include everything from
website development to environmental clean-up. According to Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer (2006), only 1% of service programs attempt what they would call “political advocacy” (p. 21). Generally, all service programs are steeped in the discourses of civic engagement and responsibility (p. 2). Service programs are often a mandatory graduation requirement, as is the case with the Province of Ontario’s requirement that all students complete forty hours of service over their four years of high school (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999, p. 9). Although New Brunswick does not have a mandatory service-learning component, my work as the Staff Coordinator for the Students for Social Justice Club at Nackawic High School was based on similar principles: as active global citizens, students should contribute to bettering the lives of others in their local and global communities. In return, the students would be provided with meaningful and authentic learning experiences which would develop a skill set that would benefit them personally. I realize that the service opportunities occurring locally in New Brunswick are also deserving of analysis, which is why I highlighted the phrase “bettering the lives of others.” However, this thesis will be looking only at my experiences transferring the concept of service-learning to the contexts of an international school operating in the community of Tianjin, China.

Tianjin, China

The international school where I taught opened in 1995 and is owned and operated by the Chinese government. It is a K-12 school with roughly 300 students of mixed nationalities whose parents are expatriates working abroad in the Tianjin

During the 2007-2008 academic year, Chinese students were not supposed to attend
the school. Instead, another international school, located directly across the road,
provided the international school experience for Chinese nationals (Maple Leaf
Educational Systems, n.d.). This is important because it means that the service
opportunities that I was organizing within the local community would be performed
exclusively by the children of expatriates. The Tianjin Economic Development Area
(TEDA) is a suburb of Tianjin, a port city at the mouth of the Hai River and gateway to
the inland capital Beijing. According to a Chinese government-produced news portal,
the special economic zones were created as part of a policy of “opening to the outside
world in a planned way” by being “[w]indows” for foreign investment and trade as well
as “radiator” of economic development inland (China.org, n.d., para. 1). That being
said, Baskar Goswami (2007) points out that the foreign investment is driven by “cheap
land, compliant labour laws and lax or ineffective environmental rules” (Cost of Export-
driven Growth section, para. 3). The economic relationship, as Goswami describes it, is
reminiscent of colonial economic models.

Although China was never officially colonized, the themes of postcolonial
critique, such as challenging dominant narratives and deconstructing Western cultural
discourses, as well as the power of Western economic dominance, can still apply in the
postcolonial theory the concept of neocolonialism which “exploits the cheap labor [sic]
available [...] often at the expense of those countries’ own struggling businesses, cultural
traditions, and ecological well-being” (p. 425). In other words, new economies based on transnational companies and globalized commerce are reproducing colonial economic models. Indeed, the official Tianjin Economic Development Area (TEDA) website advances a mission in which “Investors are emperors and Projects are lifelines” and, “Service is productivity” (Welcome to TEDA – About TEDA, n.d., Development Strategy section, para. 1). And so, in TEDA, China’s new emperors are the foreign investments, and the expatriates (whose children the international school educates) are the foreign elite whose interests must be served. Postcolonial critics are also interested in cultural imperialism or the “takeover of one culture by another” (Tyson, p. 425). As such, where service programs are inherently values-based, to what extent could their implementation in developing countries be a vehicle for cultural imperialism?

Postcolonial theory offers an appropriate lens through which to analyse my experiences as the Community Service Coordinator at an international school in China. What were the complex power dynamics at work in this context? What are the implications of these power dynamics in reference to a high school service-learning program?

**Positioning**

Before framing my research questions more concisely, there are a few more ways in which I must position myself in this research. I am a middle-class, thirty-eight-year-old, White, married, heterosexual woman and mother with a disposition to move. My father was a military engineer, and, as such, the place I called home shifted every two to four years of my childhood, leaving the adult me with a lingering wanderlust and
difficulty putting down roots. That being said, my new entry in the world of
motherhood is redefining my world. I am more concerned about the long term outlook
for our planet and an equitable and peaceful future for its inhabitants, my students,
and, of course, my family.

Although I use postcolonial theory to anchor my research, it is also framed by a
feminist approach. Elizabeth Tisdell’s (2008) attribution of “caring, connection, and
relationship” (p. 331) to a feminist epistemology resonates with my own aims in this
research. I am deeply concerned with how the actions involved in a service-learning
program, including my own actions, can create both caring and beneficial relationships
and connections as well as selfish and harmful relationships and connections. I feel a
feminist approach allows me to be driven by an ethic of love. While bell hooks (2000)
warns that there exists “a callous cynicism that frowns upon any suggestion that love is
as important as work, as crucial to our survival as a nation as the drive to succeed” (p.
xxviii), I myself cannot envision a safe future for our children if we do not realize that we
all profit from better relations while only a few profit from increased capital—or, as
Erich Fromm (2000) points out, “the principle underlying capitalistic society and the
principle of love are incompatible” (as cited in hooks, p. 72). Tisdell (2008) also
attributes the possession of many and shifting identities as key to adopting a feminist
epistemology (p. 333). I acknowledge not only my shifting identities at the present
between woman, mother, wife, teacher, student, friend, and colleague; I must also
acknowledge that, during my years in China and Malaysia, I was also a volunteer, a
traveller, and a voyeur. I can identify with Aime Cesaire’s (2010) description of the
colonial benevolent enterprise as being “spear-headed by the pirate, the opportunist, the adventurer and the merchant (as cited in Nayar, p. 11). Rephrased as questions, I might ask of my time in China and Malaysia: what did I take; what did I take advantage of; what risks did I perceive that I saw the experience as an adventure; and, finally (and perhaps most importantly), just what was I selling?

I feel I must address the question of my use of postcolonial theory as a white woman. Tyson (2006) argues that we should be apprehensive of postcolonial theory being “colonized” or interpreted by yet another Western position of privilege (p. 426). And yet, in “Moving Horizons: Exploring the Role of Stories in Decolonizing the Literacy Education of White Teachers”, Teresa Strong-Wilson (2007) argues that being respectful to not speak for others does not mean that the White person cannot speak at all. She argues that the White researcher can still have “epistemological authority” based on a “historical critique of one’s position” (p. 117). As will be described in more detail in chapters two and three, Strong-Wilson says it is possible to decolonize the White subject in order to create a sense of “agency and change” (p. 118). She deems this particularly important for White teachers because teachers are the ones tasked with the “transmit[ting], critiqu[ing] and interpret[ing]” of knowledge, and as such are “cultural workers” (p. 115). In Joe L. Kincheloe’s Critical Pedagogy Primer (2008) he argues that the critical pedagogue is “dedicated to addressing and embodying these affective, emotional, and lived dimensions of everyday life in a way that connects students to people in groups and as individuals” (p. 11). As such, this research embodies my journey not only to “decolonize the mind” (wa Thiong’o, 1994), but because I do not live the
mind and body as separated, it is a journey to decolonize the self as a necessary step towards a critical practice in general and in a service-learning context specifically. For as Michel Foucault (2000) described his own work, “... I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before” (p. 240).

Research Questions

Teresa Strong-Wilson (2008) argues that there are moments in life which are like stones in our shoe, setting us off-balance. These stones represent the chaffing of our most treasured stories, the ones that formed us and informed our world-view, with counter-stories that challenge us to think and reconsider (p. 2). This metaphor has enabled me to explore my own storied formation in order to begin the work of confronting and resisting the colonial influences on myself and the world. It has also influenced my approach to this research and the formation of my research questions:

- How are relations of power established between international schools and the countries in which they operate? To what extent are these relations of power complex, contradictory and ambiguous?

- How do colonial power structures operate in international school service programs? And, with reference to the international school’s service-learning program in Tianjin, China, what tensions and contradictions existed within the relations of power in that context?

- How am I as a teacher, traveller and, most importantly, the Community Service Coordinator implicated in those structures and practices?
• What are the implications of my research for the delivery of service-learning programs both in the international school and local (New Brunswick, Canada) public school contexts?

Organization

In this chapter I opened with a story describing a dissonant experience from my work as Community Service Coordinator at an international school in China. I described how I arrived in the position of Community Service Coordinator for this international school, and, furthermore, how I arrived at the place in which I could formulate critical questions about my experiences as Community Service Coordinator. I described service-learning, as well as the geographical, historical, and economic contexts of Tianjin, China, in which I delivered the service-learning curriculum that is the basis of this research. I positioned myself with reference to the feminist and postcolonial theories I utilize in this research and then framed my research questions.

In Chapter Two, I examine the concept of storied formation (Strong-Wilson, 2008), the theory of postcolonialism, and the idea of decolonizing the mind (wa Thiong’o, 1994). I provide an overview of research surrounding service-learning, particularly in an international school context and describe where my research fits within the current literature.

In Chapter Three, I give an overview of critical research and autoethnography as my research methodologies. I outline how I excavated my memories in order to provide
material for the research analysis and explain the methods of analysis—specifically, writing as inquiry and critical discourse analysis.

In Chapter Four, I provide and contextualize three stories which serve as the material for my analysis. My reconnection to Louisa May Alcott’s (2008, original 1868) novel Little Women surfaced childhood memories which I captured in journal form. My experience setting up a service site at a seniors home in China is storied and contextualized in a piece I call Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities. Finally, Mao Tse-tung’s (2004) essay In Memory of Norman Bethune is also included and contextualized for the purpose of analysis in the following chapter.

In Chapter Five, I analyze my story Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities revealing asymmetrical balances of power, particularly postcolonial ones. I then juxtapose Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities against my story of re-meeting Little Women (Alcott, 2004) and against Mao’s (2004) essay In Memory of Norman Bethune. In doing so, the relations of power as described in Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities are revealed to be more complex than originally seen in the first analysis. My authority and power is exposed as shifting and, possibly, diminished as other truths are revealed in the fissures between the stories.

In Chapter Six, I return to the four sets of research questions which framed my work. I revisit the opening story in my introduction about the Wenshuan Earthquake. With reference to the truths revealed in my analysis, the Wenshuan Earthquake story reveals implications for the implementation of service-learning projects at international schools and also for my local practice in the province of New Brunswick.
Chapter 2

Mapping the Watershed

The fastest meltwater creek and the largest, most lumbering river only exist because of the individual water droplets that fell in their watersheds. To understand a river, its watershed must be mapped and the sources which make the river possible must be revealed. In this chapter, I map the watershed which enables my research.

Chapter Aims

*What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects?*

(Foucault, 1984, as cited in MacNaughton, 2005, p. 1)

My identities, my politics, my ethics—they all shift, I would like to believe, as needed. I would like to believe they shift around some anchor of an authentic self. But are these shifts a choice based on an ability to read what will best serve the current context, or what will best serve me? Perhaps, rather than shifting, I am bending to powers both known and hidden. Is Foucault asking how we become ethical subjects in reference to accepted norms, or is he asking how we rail against those norms in search of other ethics? In other words, to whose ethics does he refer? I have not read Foucault’s quote in its original context. Can he mean both? I hope so because I do not feel completely without power, nor do I feel completely free. It is comforting to read questions that seem to be at once fractured and bridged; it makes my questions and thoughts feel in community with others’ questions and thoughts. So what are the
means by which I shift or bend my identities, my politics, and my ethics in order to become an ethical subject? This literature review begins by examining the powers to which I have hitherto bent—though, until I began my studies in postcolonialism, not consciously so. Specifically, I examine the concept of storied formation (Strong-Wilson, 2008) and the theory of postcolonialism. I will follow this with a review of the idea of decolonizing the mind (wa Thiong’o, 1994), through which it is my intent to gain more agency and purposefully shift, rather than bend. With my intent thus established, I review how service-learning in an international education context has been researched with, or in the absence of, a decolonizing mindset.

**Storied Formation**

I was moved to pursue the process of decolonization of the self after reading “Moving Horizons: Exploring the Role of Stories in Decolonizing the Literacy Education of White Teachers” by Teresa Strong-Wilson (2007). This study intended to “move the horizons” of White teachers so that they could better perceive “conscious and unconscious social identities,” particularly that of prejudice (p. 118). Strong-Wilson states that research has shown White teachers to be particularly resistant to acknowledging the “construction of the identity of race to identity formation and of perceiving themselves as White and therefore implicated” (p. 115). Strong-Wilson worked with eighteen teachers of both European and Indigenous backgrounds in four literature circles. They read and re-examined those stories they loved as children, juxtaposed with the reading of counter-stories from Other (First Nations) perspectives.
The circle then reflected on how those stories may have informed the racial identities they apply to themselves and others, thus expanding their horizons (2008, pp. 74-75). While some of Strong-Wilson’s methodological choices will be reviewed more specifically in chapter three, it is important to highlight the importance Strong-Wilson places on the juxtapositioning of what she calls “touchstone” stories—those to which we have in our past attached an emotional connection and which have shaped our standpoint on the world—with counter-stories that challenge these touchstones (p. 124). These counter-stories challenge “dominant or ‘master’ stor[ies]” and may be other novels or “simply stories of everyday life” (p. 123). Counter-stories, she argues, bring us back to when and where our stories formed us, allowing a person the opportunity to question, challenge, and even possibly reject previously held standpoints (p. 124)—a decolonization of the self.

My research approach worked somewhat in reverse. In China (and Malaysia) I had dissonant moments or experiences which I struggled to understand. When I read Strong-Wilson’s work I was able to identify the dissonance as counter-stories, but I still had to ask—to what did they run counter? I then dove back into childhood memories in search of the texts that may have acted as touchstones. I mentally sifted through the texts which I had read, reread and returned to over and over again throughout my childhood: C.S. Lewis’ (1950) novel *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lucy Maud Montgomery’s (1908) novel *Anne of Green Gables*; but then, the memory of my mother’s copy of Louisa May Alcott’s (2008, original 1868) *Little Women* surfaced to consciousness, bringing with it a well of emotion almost too dangerous to name. I
knew, at a cellular level that it would reveal, expose, and chafe. But I waited to re-open the text; I wanted to be sure I had sufficient theory and tools to enable the juxtapositioning and analysis of the text in a way which would go further than mere introspection. Postcolonial theory and the tools of critical discourse analysis are necessary to dismantle those structures which confine, restrict, and harm the world.

Strong-Wilson’s work alerted me to the importance of stories in the formation of our identities and, through counter-stories, in our agency to shift horizons. Edward Said (1994a) also strove to “show [how] the novel generally, and narrative in particular, [had] a sort of regulatory social presence in West European societies” (p. 73). According to Said, the novel as part of bourgeois society and the project of imperialism are inseparable concepts (p. 70). The following section will review postcolonial theory and, in particular, Said’s *Orientalism* (1994b).

**Postcolonialism**

Postcolonial theory examines the complex, varied, and power-imbued conditions of nations and cultures, generally after achieving political independence. It interrogates colonial practices as they have operated historically and how they continue to operate today—though, perhaps, these practices now operate through different means (Nayar, 2010, p. 1). According to Homi K. Bhabha, “postcolonial [study] is a salutary reminder of the persistent ‘neo-colonial’ relations within the “new” world order and the multinational division of labour” (as cited in Subedi & Daza, 2008, p. 2). Postcoloniality materializes through what is deemed Third World labour, attitudes towards immigrants,
and economic policies and military campaigns where resources such as oil are a factor whether explicitly stated or not (Nayar, 2010, p. 3). Postcolonial theorists are not only interested in the present day manifestation of these forms of power but also in the relationship of these forms of power to the colonial past. Frantz Fanon argues the importance of undertaking “a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (as cited in Gandhi, 1998, p. 9); for as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) alerts us in Decolonizing Methodologies, “[i]mperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly” (p. 20). Today’s imperialism has reformed and disguised itself in the language of the globalized market economy.

Recognizing imperialism in current forms requires letting go of the image of powerful nations, distant territories and military control. Today, the project of imperialism has as its engines economics, education, culture, and language; and while imperialism’s most useful tool used to be colonization, today it is capitalism (Haque & Akter, 2013, p. 101). ‘Neocolonialism’, argues Leela Gandhi (1998), “[links] first-world capital to third-world labour markets (p. 174). Indeed, today, the United Nations estimates there are 64,000 transnational companies, more than doubling their numbers since the 1990s (Brown & Lauder, 2009, p. 138). As such, neocolonialism is more “subtle” than the original imperialism of the British, French, and Dutch because “the sovereignty of former colonised nations is recognised” (Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009, p. 110). That is to say, although non-Western states maintain their own sovereign governments, transnational corporations are still able to wield similar imperial power,
imposing and maintaining economic imbalance and promoting Western culture and values, without the necessity of military occupation.

The use of the term *colonization*, however, denotes more than capitalist economic expansion and control; its meaning has broadened. This expansion of meaning is at the heart of much of the criticism of postcolonial theory:

[T]he term has a kind of elasticity that makes it *all* but meaningless, indexing, as it so easily can, all kinds of struggles for *all* kinds of independence against all kinds of domination in and around all parts of the globe. (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p. 6)

Postcolonial theory is also criticized for its prefix, which implies that colonialism has indeed ended and sits in a distinct past. Gandhi (1998) argues that by refusing to hyphenate *postcolonialism*, it is implied that the study will examine all effects beginning from the “onset rather than the end of colonial occupation” (p. 3). Nonetheless, Gayatri Spivak, once considered part of the “Holy Trinity of colonial-discourse analysis” along with Said and Babbha (Tay, 2011, p. 6), no longer wishes to be identified as a postcolonial critic because “colonial discourse studies . . . can sometimes serve the production of current neo-colonial knowledge by placing colonialism/imperialism securely in the past” (Spivak, 1999, p. 1). Spivak (1999) offers her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* as a guide to “progress from colonial discourse studies to transnational cultural studies” (pp. ix-x). Additionally, Aijaz Ahmad has argued that the field privileges its intellectuals to theorize while imperialism and its effects continue to “[condemn others] to labour below the living standards of the colonial period” (as cited
In Gandhi, 1998, p. 56). All the while, by using the language of poststructuralism and postmodernism, postcolonialism is a field whose language is inaccessible to those it ostensibly purports to serve (Crossley & Tikly 2004, p. 148). How and why, then, does postcolonial theory still maintain legitimacy?

In regards to the argument that postcolonialism has lost power due to its overly broad scope, Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1993) argues that to understand how the power of imperialism operates, one must examine the tools that maintain “cultural and hence mental and spiritual subjugation” (p. 42). In other words, the means and the ends of imperialism were and continue to be broad in scope. And with reference to my research, there is no doubt that schooling, particularly the implementation of a Western, English-based curriculum in an international school in a developing country, can be one of the most powerful tools to have effect culturally, mentally and spiritually.

As for the argument that postcolonialism implies an end, Ella Shohat suggests that the field is looking at the “continuities and discontinuities, but its emphasis is on the new modes and forms of the old colonialist practices, not on a ‘beyond’” (as cited in Said, 1994b, p. 348), and I would argue that international schools are one of these new modes. And Said (1994a) argues that the past cannot “be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other” (p. 4). As will be discussed shortly, the philanthropic aims of service-learning in the international school context echo imperialism’s philanthropic aims of civilizing others. Finally, Gandhi (1998) chooses to address Ahmad’s criticism of intellectual inaction, arguing that “the unilateral privileging of experience over theory, or activism over the academy – works to
disqualify or debar the social validity of almost all intellectual activity” (p. 60). Likewise, Paulo Freire’s (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* addresses this criticism through his notion of praxis, which refuses a dichotomy between action and reflection, and, furthermore, he states that “critical reflection is also action” (p. 109).

Since my research uses postcolonial theory to analyze my experiences in China, Said’s (1994b) text *Orientalism* demands attention in this literature review. Said (1994b) describes *Orientalism* as “the corporate institution for dealing with ‘the Orient’—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3). Said states that authors, within the Orientalism framework, by referencing each other’s works, gain their strength and authority by creating relationships between Orientalist texts in concert with one another (p. 20). Their validity relies on intertextual agreement and not on the reality of a “distant and amorphous Orient” (p. 22). “Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors” (p. 23)—in other words, the language of Orientalism becomes currency through referencing.

In short, Said argued that by lumping together Arab, Chinese and Japanese cultures into a single entity (Oriental), it homogenized, simplified and degenerated the value of these distinct cultures (Nayar, 2010, p. 15). This representation manifests itself in an us/them or self/other binary in which the Other takes on the traits of “brutality, under-development, weakness, immorality” (Ramone, 2011, p. 80). The West, by defining itself on the positive side of this equation, could justify military, economic, and
philanthropic intervention (Tyson, 2006, p. 421). These representations are embedded in culture and operate “within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Antonio Gramsci calls consent” (Said, 1994b, p. 7). Orientalism is not without its critics. Gandhi argues that Said creates yet another us/them binary by creating another stereotype: the “racist Westerner” (Gandhi 1998, p. 78). In such phrases as, “Everyone who writes about the Orient […]” (Said, 1994b, p. 20), “[…] the Orientalist makes it his (sic) work to be always converting the Orient […]” (p. 67), and “[…] they are always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, a European equivalent […]” (p. 72), he makes it impossible to imagine a Westerner with agency to challenge the Orientalist system. Nonetheless, Said’s Orientalism encourages new ways of reading canonical texts, with more attention paid to the relationship between the metropolitan centre and peripheral territories. Said (1994b) states “The things to look at are style, figure of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original” (p. 21). As such, Said’s Orientalism, despite some limitations, offers me a tool for critical reflection upon those novels and stories which may have been my touchstones.

Foucault argues the past constructs the reality of the present, and so “to re-meet our history is to have effects and power in the present” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 147). From a postcolonial lens, Gandhi (1998) points out “postcolonialism also holds out the possibility of thinking our way through and, therefore, out of the historical imbalances and cultural inequalities produced by the colonial encounter” (p. 176). Admittedly, as a
White, heterosexual, married, middle-class professional, I am positioned to benefit economically and socially from this historical imbalance; and yet, Freire (1996) asserts that “the oppressor . . . is himself [sic] dehumanized because he [sic] dehumanizes others (p. 29). More bluntly, Aimé Césaire (as cited in Gandhi, 1998) states “colonisation works to decivilise the colonizer, to brutalise him [sic] in the true sense of the word, to degrade him [sic], to awaken him [sic] to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism” (p. 138). As such, it becomes arguable whether anyone can truly benefit from a system which privileges a few over the rest. Freire (1996) goes further to argue that the person who suddenly realizes their privilege commits self-violence by “divesting themselves of and renouncing their myths” (p. 137)—but I disagree. I think to come to this moment, realizing the constructed nature of a world with so much imbalance, injustice, and poverty, realizing my storied formation which has thus far blinded me to my complicity—to come to this moment and do nothing—this would be the ultimate act of self-violence.

Decolonizing the Mind

Struggle. Struggle makes history. Struggle makes us. In struggle is our history, our language and our being. That struggle begins wherever we are; in whatever we do: then we become part of those millions whom Martin Carter once saw sleeping not to dream but dreaming to change the world.

(wa Thiong’o, 1994, p. 108)

It makes sense to begin a discussion of ‘decolonising the mind’ with Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature, 1994. He argues, “[I]f we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today,
then we have to coldly and consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe” (p. 88). wa Thion’o discusses the power of language and the educational system of the coloniser to subjugate culturally, mentally, and spiritually (wa Thion’o, 1993, p. 42), and as an international educator, I need to look at my own involvement in this form of subjugation. I want to be careful not to appropriate wa Thiongo’s call to action, but mercifully, he seems to extend his invitation to any reader to participate in the struggle. Unlike Freire (1996), who fixes each person within a binary of oppressor and oppressed with statements such as “the pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors” (p. 36), wa Thiong’o (1993) argues for a more beautiful world in which all world cultures (including Western cultures) act as flowers in a garden, more beautiful for the diversity, where cross-fertilisation is important because, “they all contain in themselves the seeds of a new tomorrow” (p. 24). To achieve this end, decolonization must be vehicled from multiple positions. Spivak also challenged Freire’s silencing of the oppressor by inviting those who felt thus silenced to:

   develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced . . . [develop a] historical critique of one’s position [and] you will see that you have earned the right to criticize and . . . [to] be heard. (as cited in Strong-Wilson, 2007, p. 117)

And yet, despite my criticism of Freire’s (1996) Pedagogy of the Oppressed, his book resonates deeply with me, particularly the agency he assigns by stating, “Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (p. 69). By confronting
my storied past, Strong-Wilson (2007) not only offers the tools to name the world which constructed my perceptions of the Other (p. 124), but also provides the tools to rename the world and thereby become a “permanent re-creator [of reality]” (Freire, 1996, p. 51).

An important piece of this project is time—time to think. Although we talk about time limitations, time does not limit; time allows thought and action, and thus empowers people. Other factors limit time, and thus disallow thought and action, and disempower people. In 2013, in my Research as Critical Praxis course (ED 6131) through the University of New Brunswick, I read Sherry Rose and Pam Whitty’s (2010) article “‘Where do We Find the Time to Do This?’ Struggling Against the Tyranny of Time.” The article caused me to wonder whether what is sometimes referred to as the tyranny of time is really the tyranny of capitalism and neoliberalism upon time. Capitalism and neoliberalism value efficiency, individual choice, and hypermobility—all of which put pressure on our time (Keith, 2005, p. 8).

Certainly, in my own teaching career, I feel these pressures have been steadily mounting since I began teaching in 2002. Despite the increased workload during the beginning teacher phase of my career, I nonetheless feel I had more time within the school day. My lessons tended to be more meaningful, and I felt I had more time and space within the demands of the educational system to develop meaningful relationships with my students. In my last year of teaching before my maternity leave (2010-2011), on the last day before winter vacation, I asked my Grade 9 students if they would like to see some pictures from China. “Why?” they asked. “Well I thought you’d
like to see where I lived,” I responded, to which they cried, “We didn’t know you lived in China!” This was one of the most embarrassing moments of my teaching career. That autumn, under the pressure to implement a new curriculum, using a new resource, as well as a new method of assessment, recording and reporting and, to top it off, a district mandated, daily lesson structure called “Balanced Math,” I had spent four months with my class and clearly shared little of myself in the process. Perhaps this was why I was having issues with student motivation and success. Forming a relationship with another person involves the sharing of experiences. If I had not found the time to share of myself with my students, then, in turn, I had not given my students the time to share with me about themselves. I simply hadn’t the time to even think about the bigger picture. Time is not my enemy; it works for me, not against me.

When I tell people I am doing my M.Ed, they usually want to know how long it will take me to do it and talk about all the time it is “eating up,” as though the time I devote to this thesis is somehow lost. I find they are surprised to hear how much I value the time my M.Ed has allowed me for the sole purpose of thinking: “We must free ourselves from the sacrilization of the social as the only reality and stop regarding as superfluous something so essential in human life as thought” (Foucault as cited in Gandhi, 1998, p. 60). I agree with Said (1994b) who believes that meaningful thinking requires “time and patient and sceptical inquiry,” which is at odds with “a world demanding instant action and reaction” (p. xxix). My thesis is a gift of time, and I will spend the time thinking with a particular intent—that of decolonizing the self. The specific methodology I will employ is covered in detail in the next chapter; but,
generally, as Spivak suggests, I must “unlearn the privileged systems of Western knowledge that have indirectly served the interests of colonialism and neocolonialism” (as cited in Morton, 2003, p. 9). It will be a personal journey from which “the only way out is . . . to go back (or down) in place and time” (Rose as cited in Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 43) or, as Gandhi (1998) puts it, “the only way out is by thinking, rigorously, about our pasts” (p. 8).

I have now reviewed the intent and theory behind this project of decolonizing the self—not that there will exist some perfectly decolonized self at the end of the process. It is simply a piece of my struggle. It remains important, however, to look at the application of decolonising theory to international education, service-learning and the concept of global citizenship, for it was the dissonance I experienced in my work overseas that led me to my research. Furthermore, if this project—this gift of time to think—does not change my pedagogy, then I will have entirely missed the point. And although this research is very specific to my own experiences, service-learning is common practice at international schools and in Canada. I hope my research illuminates the need to take a critical look at the implementation of service-learning projects, so that the projects involve working together with local communities, rather than perpetuating a colonizing past.

**Postcolonialism and Education**

Having reviewed the theory underlying my research, the rest of the literature review will examine how this theory has (or has markedly not) been applied to
education—specifically, international education and service-learning education. It is important to talk about postcolonial theory in its application to education because as educators we wield an inordinate amount of power—power we can use to challenge or maintain the status quo. Kincheloe (2008) describes education as “shaped by a plethora of often invisible forces, [able to operate] even in the name of democracy and justice to be totalitarian and oppressive” (p. 2). But, as previously discussed, as more techniques, prescribed programs of instruction, and accountability measures are forced upon educators, the time to have these important conversations with our colleagues is being stolen: “the culture of pragmatism dissuades theoretical or philosophical discourses among educators in favour of those focused on immediate, practical strategies” (Gorski, 2008, p. 521).

In my personal experience, other than one-on-one, informal conversations with like-minded colleagues, I find the professional learnings provided to and for teachers in New Brunswick do not typically address systems of power, and social change. Furthermore, those school projects which do address issues of social justice often do so by representing injustice as issues that exist in the countries of Others; certainly, my World Issues curriculum is guilty of having fallen into that trap. For example, Aziz Choudry (2009) argues that while Canadians and NGOs profess commitment to the alleviation of social injustice in Tibet or East Timor, they remain silent on the struggle of the Lubicon Cree within Canada (p. 99). And so, to break the silence would make Canada responsible to the Other within its borders. Indeed, Derrida notes, “the words ‘respond’ and ‘responsibility’ have the same root. Thus, answering to the other is in itself a
recognition of the responsibility you have towards the other” (as cited in Morton, 2003, p. 127).

Before I left for China (and Malaysia), I was relatively ignorant of the Other, locally in New Brunswick and in Canada as a whole. Although I claimed to espouse Think Global, Act Local in my work with Students for Social Justice at Nackawic High School, it usually manifested itself as one-off fundraisers and cheques sent to distant projects. Tensions exist here in Canada, but the dissonance these tensions create are drowned out by Kate McKoy’s (as cited in Solomona et al., 2005), “white noise” (p. 157). Present in literature, poetry, and entertainment, white noise “acts as a sound of comfort that renders only familiar ideologies and beliefs audible to Whites” (p. 157). My time in China and Malaysia was the first time in my life that I noticed the white noise, if only for its absence. Suddenly I began to sense stories that ran counter to my worldview; I sensed them, though I could not at the time make sense of them. Strong-Wilson (2008) argues that a counter-story “provokes an alternate history ... that represents an elided aspect of the teacher’s history, an elision that often bears an intimate and therefore unavoidable relationship to their own lived histories” (p. 6). I entered my Master of Education program with questions—questions which stemmed from the dissonance I encountered in China (and Malaysia). My studies in critical theory enabled me to begin identifying counter-stories.

In my thesis, I take up the counter-stories produced by my experiences working as a Community Service Coordinator in China. When I come up and out of this process, I hope to become a more critical pedagogue —and as I pursue my awakening to the
power of ‘us’ and ‘Other’ in an international context, I am realizing the othering which occurs within Canadian borders. Questions about how to apply my new understandings will weave through my stories. That being said, to contain this research to a feasible piece of work for a Master’s thesis, I limit my context to that of my international teaching experiences in China.

Critical Research on International Schools in General

Philip Brown and Hugh Lauder (2009) write that international schools emerged to meet the needs of professional global workers (expatriates) and growing numbers of middle class elites in developing [sic] countries” (p. 132). Economic globalization has dramatically increased the perceived need for these schools such that their numbers have increased from over 1000 in 1995 to roughly 2,700 in 2009 (p. 132). Although, the schools are certified at the international level (p. 130), it would be erroneous to assert that national governments have no control over practices within the schools. The schools and teachers are still responsible to any national laws. For instance, in China, any maps used in the school must reflect Taiwan and Tibet as part of China. In Malaysia, a Canadian teacher could be arrested for sedition if they spoke ill of the Malay government. Nonetheless, the cultural impact of ninety-five percent of international schools operating in English and their preference for recruiting teachers whose first language is English should not be overlooked. Furthermore, the vast majority of international school students will pursue university, and most of these will go to the United States for their studies (p. 135). As such, I think it is safe to argue that, to some
degree, international schools are purveyors of Western culture and encourage the adoption of Western ideologies by their students.

In addition, since international schools are operating in English, resources such as textbooks and maps tend to be purchased from Western sources. This begs attention, especially in light of Janet Bu-Lughod’s assertion “If history is written by the victor, then it must, almost by definition, ‘deform’ the history of the others” (as cited in Smith 1999, p. 70). Textbooks and maps as cultural artefacts, by reflecting the victor’s view of the world, must certainly create for non-Western students enrolled in these schools, moments of “being made to stand outside himself [sic] to look at himself [sic]” (wa Thiong’o, 1994, p. 17). Recently, Muhammed Shariar Haque and Tahmina Akter (2013) researched how English-medium schools in Bangladesh foster cultural imperialism and attract parents with the economic advantages and prestige of Western education (p. 99). Likewise, international schooling, especially as a vehicle for sending students to study at American universities, seems similar to Said’s (1994a) description of colonies sending students from the East to study in the West: “the imperial hierarchy was imparted to eager students from the East along with information, useful texts, and profitable habits” (p. 263). Considered alongside the argument that today’s imperialism is engined by capitalism, it follows that the promise of emerging on the profitable side of capitalism’s power imbalance is understandably attractive to many families. But in the process, international schools also teach Western values—ones they assume to be universally desirable, living them in their lesson designs, the structure of their school schedule, and commitments within the community.
Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, and Pilot (2009) examined how Western teaching strategies—touted as universally beneficial and often based on Western values—are implemented across cultures. Specifically, they looked at the poor fit of cooperative education with students of Confucian Heritage Cultures—the impact “upon the quality of student learning” (p. 112) and, equally concerning, that the Western value set underlying cooperative education would be perceived as superior, thus allowing “for mental colonialism to continue and neo-colonialism to triumph” (p. 112). Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, and Pilot’s research surfaced memories from many of my interviews at the Queen’s Teacher’s Overseas Recruitment Fair. We were asked how we would help non-Western students adapt to the different teaching styles used in Western education. In other words, how would we help the students bend to Western expectations, rather than bend our teaching styles to meet their needs? Perhaps here lies the opportunity of finding the middle ground—the place where discussion across difference can happen.

And yet the nature of international school recruitment and staffing begs analysis as well. When Craig and I went overseas, there were enough teaching opportunities to afford us a choice. School administrators tried to entice us with the opportunities to travel from each location. As such, although in a very different context, I found the notion of tourist teachers (Schulz, 2007, p. 270) applicable to my research. In her article “Inside the Contract Zone: White Teachers in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands,” Samantha Schulz describes the impact of tourist teachers in South Australia who embody a culture of “high turnover of white staff in remote communities,” and how these teachers “reproduce uneven transcultural relations” (p. 270). The term tourist
teacher could be applied to the international school setting, with its high turnover rate and tendency for White teachers to have classes of mostly non-Western students. In international schools, however, students come from a position of relative economic privilege, and the heterogeneous cultural composition may afford (or hold back) student resistance to Western values. My point is that tourist teachers (and I describe myself as one) may not remain in any place long enough for the white noise to fade. As such, earnest dialogues about teaching that acknowledge cultural differences and issues of false-universalism would need to be started from scratch each year. As Freire (1996) noted of teachers back in 1968, “To these professionals, it seems absurd to consider the necessity of respecting the ‘view of the world’ held by the people. The professionals are the ones with a ‘world view’” (p. 137). I would argue that teachers, in general, risk falling into this trap; and so, for the tourist teacher, transience may put them at even greater risk for such colonial assumptions. And for a concerned administrator, working to disrupt the concept of a universalising world view could be an unending challenge.

In considering the importance of education as the tool of the coloniser in important critical works such as Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), wa Thiong’o’s *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1994), and Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1994a), I am surprised to find a remarkable absence of query in the research as to whether and how international schools continue the colonial project of spreading and normalizing Western culture. Finding critical research on service-learning in general, and service-learning at international schools specifically, was equally challenging.
Critical Research on Service-Learning

*I think that, in the context of a history of dominance of one group over others, there is an incipient racism in the practice of service that cannot be avoided even if the conceptualization of it includes values and ideals we can respect and the virtues of people who practice it are above question.*

(Nadinne Cruz, 1990, “A Challenge to the Notion of Service, p. 323)

In her article “A Challenge to the Notion of Service,” Nadinne Cruz (1990) challenges us to examine the contradictions and tensions that are imbedded in the notion of service. Writing from within the system as a member of the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education, she states, “It is possible to use experience as an integral part of education and simply duplicate the realities we wish to change” (p. 323). I assume that by “realities,” Cruz means systemic power imbalances that are at the root of poverty, racism, violence, and other social injustices embedded within the status quo. This, of course, begs the question: to what extent are service-learning projects actually intent on and committed to changing these realities? In order to answer this question, I will examine the context in which service-learning was established.

According to James Youniss and Heinz Reinders (2010), service-learning as part of the high school experience can be traced back to the Reagan administration in the United States in the 1980s. The Reagan administration (and, subsequently, the George H. W. Bush administration) shifted the delivery of services from the government to individuals as part of the neoconservative and market ideologies which informed their decision making (para. 3). In addition, the prevalent 1980’s discourse of “youth moral deficiency” prompted several U.S. universities to create the Campus Compact in 1985, which encouraged their students to complete service work in order to challenge this
dominant negative construction of youth (para. 3). Finally, the 1980s was also a fiercely competitive time for U.S. college admittance due to the “Echo Baby Boomer” cohort’s high school graduation. Many high schools tried to help their students gain admittance by providing voluntary (and sometimes mandatory) service opportunities to expand their resumes (para 3). Today, roughly 25% of schools in the U.S. have some sort of service-based program (David, 2009, What’s the Reality? Section, para.1), yet there is no single formula for service-learning projects in North America; the requirements, types of service performed, and connection to instruction vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Nonetheless, Youniss and Reinders (2010) found that most youth service fits the following criteria: it is not initiated by the students, it is non-political, and it is performed at a distance from the recipients (para. 4), making it apparent that Cruz (1990) is correct in asserting that changing realities is not really the priority (p. 323).

Service-learning programs are generally discussed in relation to increasing civic engagement. Service-learning has been linked not only to fostering civic responsibility but to increasing student engagement to school work and curriculum (David, 2009, What’s the Research? Section, para. 3). Daniel Conrad and Diane Hedin’s (as cited in Schwarz, 2011) review of community involvement research also linked community service to an increased willingness to volunteer in the future. In a longitudinal review of national data sets, Daniel McFarland and Reuben Thomas (2006) found that youth participation in “politically salient” (p. 420) clubs such as student council effected significant change in political participation. In the conclusion, they state that participation in five to six of these clubs would make the participating student 12-17%
more likely to vote and 5-13% more likely to do community service (p. 420). Jane L. David (2009) summarises the body of research linking service-learning to civic engagement as follows: there is a link between participation and civic participation when the projects are “carefully designed and implemented” (What’s the Research? section, para. 9). Teacher training, in-class debates, coordination with community agencies, and dedicated time are necessary for successful long-term civic engagement (para. 9). That being said, some research has taken a more critical approach to the question of civic engagement, troubling the types of values, and indeed meaning of engaged citizens that the programs intend and intentionally (or unintentionally) create.

In their paper “The Limits of Political Efficacy: Educating Citizens for a Democratic Society,” Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer (2006) compared two types of service projects in terms of their ability to instil in students a sense of civic efficacy. They found that if students experienced success in a service program, then it increased their sense of efficacy and likelihood to become engaged citizens (p. 295). That being said, they warn against creating programs that are ensured success because these programs promote a conservative political ideology that implies if individuals would all help a little, complex social problems could be rectified (p. 290). Indeed, they point out this is already a popular opinion: in 1999, 94% of youth aged 15-24 believed “the most important thing I can do as a citizen is to help others” (p. 294). Although they found that projects which run up against many barriers and constraints can frustrate and challenge the students’ sense of efficacy, they nonetheless argue for some exposure to these realities of seeking systemic change (p. 290). They highlight successful projects
which partner students with “efficacious institutions” (p. 294) and form meaningful relationships between the students and community while still linking the project to the root causes and associated politics (p. 294). My overseas experiences confirm these findings. In China, the projects to which the students became most attached, in that they thought about and discussed the projects outside of devoted instructional time, involved classes of students returning to the same place (for instance a group home) on a regular basis for the entire year. This allowed for the students to build more meaningful relationships with the people and sites than one-off projects such as one where my New Brunswick students dropped off donations at the homeless shelters in Fredericton. These ideas were explored in even further detail by Kahne and Westheimer.

In “Educating the Good Citizen” (2004), Westheimer and Kahne examined ten educational programs aiming to promote democracy. Using a mixed-methods approach, they discerned three different types of citizen conceived across these programs. First, the personally responsible citizen acts responsibly in their community through such activities as road-side clean-ups, giving blood and volunteering. As adults they pay taxes, obey laws and give help when needed (p. 242). The researchers point out that these traits are not only desirable to leaders in democratic governments, but are equally appealing in totalitarian regimes (p. 244). Second, the participatory citizen who works in community organizations (p. 242) is more likely to emerge from a program that teaches how government works as well as the skills to run meetings and organize events. These programs believe that in developing relationships in the community,
students will become more understanding, build trust and want to work for democracy (p. 243). Finally, the justice-oriented citizen is least often the goal of the service program. This citizen critically assesses the structural challenges causing injustice. The program that works towards this kind of citizen is not going to emphasize charity and volunteerism as the end product, and is more likely to teach about social movements and systemic change (p. 242). They conclude that different democratic values are possible through service-learning projects. We must therefore question what kind of citizen we want to develop (p. 246), to which I might add for whom are we developing these citizens? By asking this question, I believe it returns us to the very important question of intent. If I, as a Community Service Coordinator, am unaware of what type of citizen I am developing and accordingly remain unaware of who benefits by the formation of this type of citizenship, then I am limiting my agency and may be unknowingly bending to powers to which I would otherwise object. In my analysis, I want to question the intent of the service-learning program I coordinated. What kind of citizenship was I envisioning? What was I promoting? And, to what extent was I, as program coordinator, author of that vision?

In summary, there is a large body of work surrounding types of service programs and their relationship to civic engagement; most, however, entertain the notion of civic engagement on a superficial level of commitment to politics, voting and volunteerism into adulthood. Kahne and Westheimer’s research stands out because it questions the values and ideologies embedded in the discourse of civic engagement. Indeed, Marilynne Boyle-Baise (2002) in her article “Saying More: Qualitative Research Issues for
Multicultural Service Learning,” explains that most research on service is evaluative and only considers community as a variable for success. She states “issues of culture, difference, and power conspicuously are absent” in the research (p. 321). Fortunately, since 2002 a few researchers have chosen to explore service-learning critically beyond Kahne and Westheimer’s troubling of civic engagement, though not in large numbers.

In more recent research, the key critical issues that seem to emerge in the literature are problematic discourses of service-learning, a continuation of Kahne and Westheimer’s concern for commitment to structural change, the neoliberal approach of direct service, and the popular discourse of global citizenship.

The first problematic discourse of service-learning is one I referred to in the introduction—the belief that service-learning should be an act of reciprocity. Novella Zett Keith (2005) argues that “reciprocity and its related concepts remain rooted in a (market) accumulation process, which presses people into giving and receiving and ultimately creating social networks as a way of having more” (p. 15). In essence, the first issue is a capitalist system which believes that some kind of exchange is necessary, and that an act of service-learning should somehow directly benefit the person performing the service. When you consider that the person performing the service is probably already in a position of relative power compared to the person being “served,” an act of reciprocity implies that, in the end, the situation will remain equal. There will be no effective change to the status quo. This becomes clear in the discourse of “I am so lucky,” which Keith adamantly argues reflects a failure in learning for it “assumes independence and separation: the other has nothing to do with me” (p. 16). So really,
when a student returns from a service-learning project reflecting on how lucky they are, it is a discourse of othering, supported by the very language of ‘server’ and ‘served,’ which allows one party “the ability to walk away from whatever problem is being addressed” (Alcoff as cited in King, 2004, p. 123). Keith (2005) believes this form of othering cannot be dissolved if the service-learning is in the form of ‘direct-service,’ which assists a neoliberal trend of government withdrawing services rather than citizens working for a more equal structural reality (p. 6). Ivan Illich (1968) finds this form of othering particularly hypocritical: “sentimental concern for newly-discovered poverty south of the border combined with total blindness to much worse poverty at home justified such benevolent [international service trip] excursions” (To hell with good intentions, para. 4), the othering being that much worse for the pretention that everything is working fairly in the United States. This returns us again to McKoy’s (2005) white noise (as cited in Solomona et al., p. 157) cancelling out the counter stories present locally here in New Brunswick and in the larger context of Canada. And so, while service-learning ought to provide the opportunity to open conversations across difference, because of the discourses involved, too often the discourses close doors and cement the space between server and served. In my analysis, I specifically look for discourses of reciprocity in my own stories as well as my touchstone text Little Women (Alcott, 2008), in order to highlight the asymmetrical power imbalances the service-learning projects may have been entrenching.

The absence of real structural change is another theme that has emerged in the literature. In a study of international service trips, popular with Habitat for Humanity
and other NGOs, Michael J. Cermak et al. (2011) found that while students returned from such trips with the dissonance necessary to want to make change, they had no idea how to act on that desire (p. 10), which I would argue implies that the organisers of such trips do not make it a priority to talk about the structures which enable the poverty they would like to address. John T. King (2004) argues that reflection is a very important part of the process and should be enabled by journaling, research papers and group discussions (p. 122). However, this would require that further instructional time be devoted to the service-learning program, and in schools already stretched to the limits to cover expansive curriculums and student assessments, this is more easily said than done. But I think this marks a return to Kahne and Westheimer’s (2004) argument that we need to design service-learning with the intent of encouraging justice-oriented citizens. And reflection on projects which were based on the neoliberal direct-service model would not necessarily further this goal. Indeed, in the service-learning projects I ran in China, all instructional time was at the service sites. So although we returned to the same site and built relationships over time, no additional time was afforded to discuss, reflect, or analyse the project we undertook. There was no opportunity to work towards Kahne and Westheimer’s (2004) justice-oriented model of service-learning.

Another aspect of service-learning which needs to be explored is the discourse of global citizenship. Among the aims of international education is the “improvement of students’ mobility and their ability to excel in an increasingly internationalized world” (Dunne & Edwards, 2010, p. 25). So it is assumed that students are prepared for the challenges of globalization by turning them into “global citizens” who can demonstrate
“acceptance, cooperation, and the ability to identify and solve global and international problems” (Brunold-Conesa, 2010, p. 260). Some schools refer to these ideas as “intercultural sensitivity” (Westrick, 2004, p. 277), or “international mindedness” (Tamatea, 2008, p. 550). For instance, the International Baccalaureate is a diploma program offered at 4385 schools in 143 countries (http://www.ibo.org/mission). But international schools offer an elite form of education available only to those who can afford it. It is a product that “[embodies] Western capitalist values” (Cambridge as cited in Dunne & Edwards, 2010, p. 26), including the Western belief that we can indeed have an effect upon the formation of values. And today, it is popular to refer to the students of international education as global citizens, as though they are on equal footing with every other person on Earth.

In his article “Global Citizenship and the Cultural Politics of Benevolence”, David Jefferess (2008) questions the binary created by the term global citizen because it implies in its labelling that not everyone can be a global citizen (p. 27). He argues that it “others” because it gives agency only to the “global citizens” (p. 28). Furthermore, by othering, and keeping the poverty or inequality at a distance, we can ignore its connection to our cheap and convenient consumer choices. He stresses, “Global poverty is not distant; it is a part of everyone’s daily existence” (p. 33). As such, Jefferess argues that the discourse of global citizenship, prevalent not only at international schools but also within Canada and the United States, while encouraging acts of charity, fails to address real poverty. For Keith (2005), poverty is not simply the absence of food, water, and commodities but also the lack of “the capability to mobilize
and use resources in ways that allow people to grow and act as they would wish” (p. 17). I think this point is particularly important because often the recipient is made to receive the service as-is, where and when it is convenient for the server. Keith (2005) and Jefferess’ (2008) articles in particular were welcome critical examinations of service-learning and the lauded goal of global citizenship. Although my research does not address how to take advantage of the opportunities to engage international school students in Kahne and Westheimer’s (2004) *justice-oriented citizen* model of service-learning, action-research on this topic is needed. One aspect of my own work as Community Service Coordinator that I do examine closely was the search for services sites, and the negotiation as to what that service might entail. To what extent did I address or ignore Keith’s (2005) call to serve the needs of mobility, growth, and choice?

**Applying Postcolonial Theory to International School Service-Learning Projects**

In summary, while I was able to find critical research on the subject of international schools and their regular in-class curriculum, as well as critical research into service-learning in general, I was unable to find research on the specific context of service-learning as performed by international schools in developing countries. My research helps to fill this gap by examining the tensions that I experienced in the act of visiting a potential service-learning site for an international school in China.

Examining how my experiences coordinating a service-learning program at an international school in China reflects the continued existence of systemic colonial power imbalances, I show how imperialism currently operates through the proliferation of the
Western economic, cultural and linguistic ideology at the heart of the curriculum.

Furthermore, this Western, English-language curriculum is delivered to an economically privileged and mobile population of a globalized labour force. I show the complexities, contradictions, limits and possibilities embedded in such a service-learning program so that the assumptions and intents which support the system be challenged on an individual and systemic basis.

While Kahne and Westheimer, Keith, and Jefferess are all wary of the possibility for service-learning and global citizenship to be hijacked by neoliberalism, they all see in them the opportunity to create space for change. As will be explored in the methodology, this research is based on the beauty that, as human beings, we can change—we can even change for the better. And if a person can change, then a human-made structure can be changed, and it is possible that realities can change. It is therefore possible to change realities. But, none of this can happen in the absence of critical reflection, and that begins with me.
A great river, after all, is more than a personality in its own right. It is a vital link with a people’s past, and also it is a mystery. The eternal river is always a new river yet forever the same; just as men [sic] are new in each generation but forever the same, and always must re-learn what the others learned before them.

(Hugh MacLennan, The Rivers of Canada, 1961, p.33)

I am a geographer; hence, I love rivers. Or is it rather that my storied formation includes a mythology of rivers which directed me towards a study of geography? The more I think on it, the more I realize that my first knowledge of rivers was in reference to their social construction. I loved M. Claude, my elementary social studies teacher at École La Verendrye, in Chilliwack, BC. Even now as I think of him, I know I still love him. I do not remember him needing to manage our class. We, or perhaps just I, hung on his every word. He was a bard who would enter and leave our classroom space recounting the epic adventures of *les voyageurs* and *les coureurs des bois*. He painted a history of Canada vehicled and economied by birch bark canoes, intrepid European adventurers—French adventurers—opening to the West a land that was simultaneously resource-rich and inhospitable. Although at home I had begun to question whether all my parents taught me was true, I would never have questioned M. Claude. He returned from a trip to China with a doll for me. I think he may have brought dolls for all the girls; but in my story, *over there*, in that faraway land, my favourite teacher was thinking of me.

In 2001, my partner (now husband) and I crisscrossed Canada in our station wagon, sleeping in a little pitch tent. On our to-do list were many symbols of these epic moments in *Canadian History*, such as our trip to Dawson City—would we still feel the
reverberations across time from *la ruée vers l’or*? And from province to province, it seemed there was always a *great river* calling to me. I wanted to take in the Peace River, try my voice in the Qu’appelle Valley, marvel at the Fraser, wind down the Saint John, and hopefully admire the banks of the *Great Mackenzie*, although this last never materialized. This fluvial bucket list existed long before I chose geography as my major at Trent University. In 2001, I might have said it was just part of my Canadian soul; but today, while I still love these rivers, I recognize their mythological underpinnings and, interestingly, the debatable nature of their greatness.

According to Hugh MacLennan (1961), a so-called great river of Canada achieves its greatness by virtue of the extent of the area of its drainage basin and the sheer volume of water it carries (p. 3). As the patriarchal saying goes, “the bigger the better” or should we perhaps consider some other factors when assigning value? Until I studied physical geography I believed that the strongest rivers with the strongest currents were those that cut a path wide and straight, like a highway to the ocean. In our popular imagination of greatness and power, their ends are achieved in the most direct and efficient manner. As I write this now, for the first time I recognize how White is the notion that directness and efficiency are positive attributes. Applied to rivers, a great and powerful river would simply drive across the landscape to sea, cutting its path as *the crow flies*. (Have you ever seen a crow fly unrelentingly straight?) But the truth is otherwise. A river’s current, the thalweg, meanders across the river bed, cutting downwards into the bed and creating the deepest part of the channel. And where the thalweg meets one shore and turns back towards the other, at that moment of contact,
it cuts back the bank. The more powerful the current, the more deeply it carves the channel bed and erodes the river’s edge. The straight river has lost its power; its thalweg can barely erode, and, though its current meanders, the river does not.

The river that meanders, then, holds the current with power. The thalweg constantly cuts downwards and outwards. The banks are constantly shifting and the river’s shape is dynamic in its undulation. When, finally, the river’s meander erodes so far back as to cut off its own bend entirely, rejoining the main channel, an oxbow lake is left in its wake. This lake, now without a source, is the opposite of dead. As a wetland it is not so much stagnant, but fecund and purifying. The smaller, meandering channel has the power to cut back its banks, to stimulate life and to heal the environment.

The great rivers of Canada are fed by these meandering channels, but their identities are lost under umbrella titles such as the Saint Lawrence River Basin. I still stand in awe at the banks of the Saint Lawrence, but I better appreciate that it is where the smaller channels connect and feed into this seaway that the bank is more interesting, that life is more apparent. It is at the entrance of the Saguenay into the St. Lawrence, at Tadoussac, where one can enjoy the belugas on a ferry crossing to Rivière-du-Loup. That the smaller channels are all connected should not diminish their importance but elevate them. The health of the entire system is connected.

I still love rivers, and I am not sure to what extent I can displace that sense of greatness I connect to the Ottawa River, whose current direction of flow was initiated by plate tectonics and not its thalweg. But I want my life to have more agency than that. I want to continuously cut back the banks of that terra firma that limits being. I
don’t want to fear erosion and cement the shores; rather, I want to appreciate the beauty of erosion as exemplified in New Brunswick’s Hopewell Rocks. I want to embrace my thalweg, my agency. I feel treacherous in challenging MacLennan; but to me, forever the same is no longer an attractive proposition.

Laurel Richardson (1997) explains that “writing against the current tied [her] to the mainstream always aware of its speed, eddies, whirlpools, displacing the power and centricity of [her] own current” (p. 174). For my thesis, I am seeking a methodology of meandering rivers, wherein I harness my own current and erode my own banks. And, where I am not living in isolation but in a world full of people, I hope that these changes are fecund and help us to move towards that future with “relations more generous than those I live among, fertile relations in which people thrive” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 971).

In this chapter, I lay out a plan for my thesis research—to embrace my own current. I begin by addressing my methodological choices of critical research and autoethnography. This is followed by an exploration of the connections between identity and intent, memory, and agency. I review how I excavated my memories for this research and the artefacts at my disposal from my time in China. Finally, I review my methods of analysis: writing as inquiry and critical discourse analysis which give my autoethnography the necessary weight of theory. I conclude by reviewing how this research reflects a methodology of meandering rivers by embracing my own current and cutting back my banks.
Embracing My Own Current: Critical Research and Autoethnography

As an educator, a politician, and a man who constantly rethinks his educational praxis, I remain profoundly hopeful. I reject immobilization, apathy, and silence. ...I am not merely hopeful out of capriciousness, but because hope is an imperative of human nature. It is not possible to live in plenitude without hope. Conserve the hope.

(Paulo Freire as cited in Day, De Peuter & Cote 2007, p. 246)

Paulo Freire’s words support my belief in my own capacity to change, decolonize my self, and thereby improve my own praxis. Hence, my research is embedded in the assumption that our world likewise has the capacity to change, and that a more peaceful and more equitable future awaits us all and, in particular, my son. Because my interests lie in identity formation, power structures, and reflexivity, critical inquiry and autoethnography currently appear to be the most appropriate, complimentary methodological choices for my thesis. I begin with an overview of critical inquiry.

Critical research, at its most basic, is “a critique of the current ideology, seeking to expose dominating or oppressive relationships in society” (Willis, 2007, p. 81). Critical research does not fix knowledge to reality but assumes that knowledge occurs where identity, social practices, institutions, and power structures meet (Carspecken, 2008, p. 170). In relation to my research, there are many relations of power that begged my critical attention. I begin with a critical exploration of my role as Community Service Coordinator, guided by the question – Whose interests are being served?

Furthermore, critical research is interested in the tensions within the self (Carspecken, 2008, p. 172). I pursue the question of how I was implicated in the colonial
power structures by examining my own self-narratives for the extent to which these stories actually reflect the social practices, institutions, and power structures which have hewn my own identity. Deborah P. Britzman (2000) argues “that by assuming people to be effects of language, knowledge, power, and history, rather than their essential authors, a more provisional, historical, and ethical understanding of agency is possible (p. 36). The goal of critical research through immanent critique is to reveal the contradictions at work in a particular context (in my case, the implementation of a service program in China), but also to reveal their possibilities as part of the necessary praxis for democracy (Schwandt, 2007, p. 55). What I try to avoid in my research is the urge to judge other Community Service Coordinators’ motives to be better or worse than my own. Autoethnography helps in this regard, because the focus of the analysis is my self—in relation to the factors (social formations and historical processes) that formed my identity and allowed me to assume the role of Community Service Coordinator in international schools in China and Malaysia. But the goal extends beyond self-exposure, for autoethnography “can shape critical awareness, disturb the status quo and probe questions of identity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 418).

As a methodology, autoethnography aims to combine ethnography, which looks outwards at culture, and autobiography, which looks inwards at the self, within an analysis that keeps both parts “simultaneously in view” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 16). Autoethnography in its most current form, arose from ethnography’s “Crisis of Representation” in the 1980s (Ellis, 2008, p. 45). Observing others could be seen as harmful in terms of “power, praxis, and the writing process” (p. 48). Stacy Holman-
Jones (2005) sees it as a “Triple Crisis” of representation, legitimation, and praxis. How much can we know of others? How can we truthfully represent the “condition of our lives”? How can we use our work to incite change? (p. 766). By using myself as a research subject, rather than probing into the intent and actions of other Community Service Coordinators, I can avoid the trap of judging others’ motives and intentions against my own. More importantly, we each play a part in the maintenance of the status quo; in order to harness our own currents we must be able to identify the compositions of our own banks if we hope to see them erode.

Autoethnography involves the researcher “zooming back and forth” between the “vulnerable self” and “social and cultural aspects of their personal experience” (Ellis, 2008, p. 48). Catherine Russell labeled it an “oxymoronic method” (as cited in Jewett, 2008, p. 48) since the method uses the auto (self/personal) to better understand the ethno (other/cultural); but whereas Russell implies a binary by using the term oxymoron, Carolyn Ellis states that the line between these binaries will and should become “blurred, sometimes beyond recognition” (p. 48). Nonetheless, maintaining a balance between the auto and ethno is key, for, as Heewon Chang (2008) points out, without an analytic aim of cultural understanding (ethno), we are left with just autobiography (p. 125). The autoethnographer needs to connect personal stories to broader social issues.

Autoethnography demands critical reflection on the part of the author, and, if done well, it asks the same of the reader. Narrative is an important component of autoethnography because of its ability to engage the reader in a dialogue. This requires
“making a text present. Demanding attention and participation. Implicating all involved” (Holman-Jones, 2005, p. 765). Ellis (2004) states I should aim to write so that readers “can keep in their minds and feel in their bodies the complexities of concrete moments of lived experience” (p. 30). As such, she emphasizes that the writing must be of “high literary and artistic quality” (p. 30). Also, Corinne Squire (2004) points out that, since the author is not a “unitary self,” the stories we tell should reflect our “many selves, each situated in particular contexts and working strategically to resist those contexts” (p. 116). For Tami Spry (2011), the narratives of autoethnography are a form of “agency, rendition, and dialogue” (p. 497). In the combination of critical inquiry through autoethnography, I am making a political choice. When I speak of my capacity to change, I mean that I want to once again believe I have agency, a conviction that has been shaken by my time in China and Malaysia. But I do not want to revert to that person I was. I believe I have the capacity to change, and our world has the capacity to change; I hope that through critical inquiry and autoethnography, my research can afford me that agency.

Now that I have addressed my methodological choices for my research, I will describe the important connections that exist between my identities, my intentions, my memory, and my agency.
Identity and Intent

I returned from China and Malaysia with questions that I lacked the language to voice, and, even though my research focus is still applied to my time in China, my intent has changed. I applied to the M.Ed. program with dis/comforting questions about service programs in international schools operating in developing countries, but I was not focusing that dis/comfort or those questions on my own identity. Although I was deeply moved when I fell upon the work of Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson (2007) of McGill University, who gave me the language of self-decolonization to frame my research, it would not have resonated so strongly had I not recently embraced my journey into motherhood. The love I now share with my son Duncan, while joyous (for he is helping me to rediscover the beauty in the everyday, such as jumping in puddles), has also permanently seated me with mild-to-occasionally-overwhelming terror regarding the future. Any emotion (positive or negative) I previously felt towards an uncertain future due to politics, environment, economics, or social revolution is overshadowed by my pressing need to secure the long-term safety and well-being of my son. To clarify, I do not mean that I want to secure his inborn privilege as a Canadian White male born into the middle class; rather, in re-reading my experiences in China and Malaysia, the status quo appears less and less sustainable. I feel that we need to urgently address the social inequalities and the unsustainability of our resource consumption and our reckless faith in Free Market economics if we want to maintain any hope in a safe future for children, especially, selfishly, for my own child. Every day, Duncan teaches me something new, further indebting me to his future. This research, though specifically based on the
academic year (2007-2008) spent in China, is really a story of how I came to be that person in China, how that experience changed me, how my current identity is causing me to re-meet those experiences and the hope and pressing need I have for this research to make the world a better one. In order to make this happen, Strong-Wilson (2008) argues for “bringing forward” my “storied histories” juxtaposed with counter-stories (p. 6), my counter-stories being those experiences in China which challenged assumptions I took for granted as truths.

The Question of Memory and Agency

*I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.*

(Lacan as cited in Gandhi, 1998, p.9)

To conduct this research, I have worked through a process of retrieving memories from my time in China (and Malaysia), as well as those from childhood, a process Strong-Wilson (2008) refers to as “excavation” (p. 11). Some might argue that without journals documenting those events I hope to bring forward, the truth of the history is questionable; however, even if these journals existed, they would still be but representations of these events, and, as Strong-Wilson points out, “[the] traps of representation cannot be evaded by even the most watchful of intents” (p. 16). For memory is not simply hitting the record button but “an intricate and ever shifting net of firing neurons . . . the twistings and turnings of which rearrange themselves completely each time something is recalled” (Grant in Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 3). Our memories brought forward are social constructions reflecting simultaneously the discursive power
of the past when the event took place and the present through which we are re-experiencing the event. For Amy L. Cole (2011), “Memory is both a material piece of knowledge and an active process by which the knowledge itself is constructed” (p. 225). Strong-Wilson (2008) argues that a construction which can be excavated can be moved. Memory work, she argues, gives the White teacher the agency of movement (p. 3).

In addition to the constructed nature of memory, we must also take into account its complexity: “it doesn’t work in a linear way, nor does life . . . In real life, we don’t always know when we know something (Ellis, 2004, p. 118). For instance, I lived in China and Malaysia prior to entering Critical Studies. This is important because at the time I was there, I had no language available to me to see the postcolonial power structures that existed: “What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). As I have been introduced to critical studies, particularly postcolonial and critical White theory, I have been applying the theory against my memory and have undoubtedly, in the process, remade that memory. It feels as though, in the revisiting of events, I can now see that which I was unable to see at the time. Virginia Woolf (2008) writes that “memory supplies what I [have] forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen” (as cited in Strong-Wilson, p. 23). The act of forgetting produces counter-memories themed in the difference and otherness (Foucault, as cited in Strong-Wilson, 2008, pp. 79-80). It is important to retrieve the memories as well as the counter-memories in order to “confront the constraining framework of one’s past” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 260). Therefore, although I intend to tell verifiable stories of my
experiences, it is the meaning of the events which is of the greatest importance (Ellis, 2004, p. 116), and the meaning I can make is always partial and situated (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963). Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira (2009) point out that our identities are themselves “forever mutant and relational, adapting to the contextual pressures of making oneself feel worthwhile” (p. 20). I previously stated that I now story my memories as a mother; during my time in China and Malaysia, I storied my experiences through my privileged positions, which include not only being White but also being a teacher—a sanctioned professional of the middle class. In China and Malaysia, this economic and class privilege is only further magnified. I was also storying my experience through my privilege of comfort in a heterosexual marriage. And, finally, being a woman, my gender was tied up in my work as Community Service Coordinator and as teacher, and undoubtedly had me storying my time in China and Malaysia differently than my husband. Or, as Britzman (2000) states, “my own telling is partial and governed by the discourses of my time and place” (p. 32). It is in the contradictions and spaces between the meanings I make, through my various identities, that I find the opportunity to “interrupt the negative effects of what passes for common sense” (Brodkey, as cited in Kamler, 2001, p. 4). And so, with full admission of the complex and shifting nature of memory, I will describe its excavation for this research.

**Bringing Forward My Memories**

According to Barbara Kamler (2001), autoethnographies collect data through “interviews with the self” (p. 4). I had at my disposal a number of artifacts from my time
in China whose presence helped me retrieve memories. I could juxtapose these artifacts against how I was re-meeting and retelling the stories which surfaced for analysis. For instance, I kept an online, public travel blog from 2007 to 2009 which covered aspects of daily life in an/other country as well as the adventures of my travels when not at work. The blog, besides now providing a text to be analyzed, helped me construct a sequential framework for memories that resurfaced, a process which Chang (2008) calls chronicling. As previously stated, memory is not necessarily linear; nonetheless, chronicling provided a referent for how I changed during my time in China and have changed since that time (p. 72). The blog was also revealing for the stories I do not tell. As I lived in China, I became increasingly aware that the stories I wrote could be used to show how backwards, (rather than different) life could be in China (and Malaysia). I was also aware that the friends I made in China (and Malaysia) might read what I wrote about their countries. It should also be pointed out that, while living in both China (and Malaysia), I was very conscious to not get into politics in my communications via blog, email, or telephone. I recall how one email I received from a relative in Canada asking for my opinion on the Tibet uprisings put me in some danger. Although I do not specifically address these political omissions in my analysis, whenever I engage in remembering my time in China, that tension of political omission remains visceral. School documents, such as mission statements and curricula that informed the nature of my work as teacher and Community Service Coordinator were also reviewed for analysis. To supplement these policy frameworks, I looked back over lesson plans, student work, and photographs to shade in the activities of my teaching. Finally, I also
referenced those relationships with people I knew in China who are still present in my life. First and foremost is my husband, Craig, but I do also remain in contact with principals, expatriate and Chinese friends and colleagues, and a few students from both schools.

Strong-Wilson (2007) argues that we are constructed by stories which limit and extend the horizons within our view (p. 118). These horizons are moveable, she argues, if we revisit those touchstone stories to which we deeply attached as children, and read them against counter-stories (p. 124). As such, I reread a book that I adored as a child, *Little Women* (Alcott, 2008), and allowed it to chafe against my experiences in China. Specifically, how did this text direct my identity formation and worldviews? I journaled while I reread the text, noting any passages that caused a raw emotional reaction and any thoughts and connections that might bridge these emotions to my experiences in China. Strong-Wilson (2007) argues that by the juxtapositioning of touchstone stories against counter stories, “teachers could produce a story of confrontation” (p. 116) which could “[provoke] a different story that can open and shift their horizon” (p. 119).

Strong-Wilson is not the first, nor alone in her use of juxtapositioning.

In a discussion of nomadic inquiry, Glenda MacNaughton (2005) recommends placing “other texts in the middle of your own text and see what they ‘do’ to each other that surprises you” (p. 133). Said (1994b) speaks of letting the juxtaposed experiences “play off each other” such that those “views and experiences that are ideologically and culturally closed to each other and that attempt to distance or suppress other views and experiences” are revealed (p. 21). In this research, all the texts are personal and stem
from my storied formation. Juxtapositioning of one’s stories, then, can exemplify the complex nature of identity. It is not that the stories add up to describe a whole and complete picture of a being; rather, it is like putting together a puzzle in which the pieces sometimes overlap and sometimes leave gaps. And, due to the shifting nature of identity in time and over time, it exemplifies Freire’s (1996) point that:

people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p. 64)

Judith Butler argues that agency comes from recognizing how our identity is constituted “by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox is the condition of its possibility” (as cited in Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 177). As such, my being in the world is not fixed, existing within a reality that is likewise unfixed. It is in those surprising overlaps and gaps, those inconsistencies of images and story that are illuminated through juxtapositioning of text, that the analysis provided the deepest insight.

Now that I have addressed my methodological choices and the means by which I collected and drew material for my research, I will address my tools of analysis: writing as inquiry and critical discourse analysis.
Writing as Inquiry

*I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn’t know before I wrote it.*

(Laurel Richardson, as cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 170)

Many times I have drafted an outline for a paper, begun writing the paper, and somehow ended up at a conclusion altogether different than the one suggested in my initial thesis. These papers, which were intellectually more like taking a Sunday drive than driving on an expressway, have also tended to be some of my best writing. And, although I personally liked where I ended up, it was not where I had set out to go. I would edit out evidence of having abandoned my plan, and rewrite the introduction so as to hide my meandering spirit. As such, I find Richardson (1990, 1997, 2005) and St. Pierre’s (2000, 2005) espousal of writing as inquiry to be both exciting and relieving. I can write more honestly about my process, and thereby leave more of myself on the paper.

Writing as inquiry is a way of thinking: “I closed my eyes, felt a story coming to me, and wrote” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 203). By letting yourself go, abandoning yourself to your current rather than writing against it (Richardson, 1997, p. 174), and “honoring the embodiedness and spatiality of one’s labours” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 965), you can discover ideas that do not necessarily stem from a linear-rational argument formation: “I doubt I could have thought such a thought, by thinking alone” (p. 970). Bronwyn Davies (2000) writes that we are “a subject of power . . . where ‘of’ connotes both belonging to and wielding” (p. 14). Since my goal was to reveal how I am
a subject—and perpetrator—of colonial discourses, finding a space where I could simply write with the language available to me and map the world with the tools available to me uncovered the possibilities and limitations of that language and those tools. Richardson (1997) reminds us that the text we create both “reinscribes and challenges” dominant discourses (p. 47). To know which discourses live inside me, I had to let them out; and they sometimes took me somewhere completely unintended, on a “line of flight” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 971).

Writing as inquiry can be “dangerous and poignant” because it is so “up close and personal” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 966). Autoethnography is a way to challenge the right of the researcher to represent the Other; by choosing to represent the self, there are still ethical questions with which the writer must struggle. We do not live in isolation, as Chang (2008) points out: “Your story is not in a vacuum. You don’t own it, because you tell it” (p. 68). Indeed, our story without anyone else, would fail to take into account the ethno, or cultural, in autoethnography (p. 54). Richardson (1997) emphasizes that writing is “an intentional activity and, as such, a site of moral responsibility” (p. 58)—“No textual staging is ever innocent” (Richardson, 1990, p. 12). This means that I needed to pay close attention to the stories I chose to tell. I did/do not want to hurt anybody in this research. Indeed, there is no “bad guy” in this story, but rather a story of how we are all part, willingly or not, of a world which continues to privilege some over others: “If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox is the condition of its possibility” (Butler as cited in Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 177). So if my
research is a pursuit of my own agency, I must be careful not to deny that same agency to anyone involved in my stories.

As meanings emerged within the text I wrote, it was important to situate those meanings in "other parts of one’s life", in order to remind ourselves that our work is "grounded, contextual and rhyzomatic" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 965). In terms of my own research, this meant situating my experiences within postcolonial theory, particularly, showing connections between the events which reveal underlying power structures which I could not (or was unwilling to) see.

There are no specific rules for writing as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 972), but this does not mean there are not standards against which to be judged. Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre evaluate writing in terms of the substance of its contribution, its aesthetic merit, reflexivity, emotional and intellectual impact, its ability to generate new questions, and its ability to make the reader act (p. 964). In order to achieve such a text, after exploring lines of flight, one must go back and “...think write ... write and read... and write and reread...” (P. Whitty, personal communication, April 8th, 2013). Kamler (2001) offers some questions to ask in the reading (and rereading) to help us connect to the theory:

- What is powerful in the writing?
- What is omitted? Who/what is absent and/or hinted at or overgeneralized?
- What clichés are used to gloss over experience, facts, feelings?
- What doesn’t fit? What contradictions, if any, emerge?
- What aspects/issues [...] are constructed/concealed?
• What common issues, experiences, storylines do the texts have in common?

(p. 62)

It is at this point that critical discourse analysis will complement writing as inquiry.

Critical Discourse Analysis

I have mentioned several times already, that I wanted to explore my dis/comfort in China but I want to emphasize that I loved my time there, despite a steady unease. I learned to live and even to become comfortable with practices different than the ones I was accustomed to in Canada. I remember pausing in wonder, months after I had arrived in Tianjin, China, at how I had stopped being aware of the fact that I could not read most of the signage. I also remember how comforting it was to taxi to the next town to eat at Pizza Hut—a restaurant I avoid in Canada. As much as I intended to use strong feelings of discomfort to identify those experiences which needed to be troubled for their relationship to colonialism, it would be disingenuous to pretend I was not only comfortable but enjoying my time in these places as well. From the very beginning of this research, my use of the discourse of comfort and discomfort begs analysis.

In order to understand critical discourse analysis, it is important to recognize that the texts by which we communicate include much beyond the written and spoken word. Thomas A. Schwandt (2007) refers to discourse as practices which include “ideas, ideologies, attitudes, courses of action, [and] terms of reference” (p. 73), and Sara Mills (2004) describes discourses as including “all utterances or texts which have meaning and which have some effects in the real world” (p. 6). As such, the manner in which I lay out
my classroom is a text which presents how I intend to manage my authority with my students; however, the layout choices available to me are limited by the public school system and its design of classrooms. This demonstrates that I am at once constrained by discourse but have agency within it. As such, Michael Arribas-Ayllon and Valerie Walkerdine (2008) add that discourses are not so much objects “but the rules and procedures that make objects thinkable and governable” (p. 105).

To engage in Foucauldian discourse analysis is to question a text, with the assumption that no text is neutral or innocent. Stuart Hall (2001) states that “Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language . . . [and] our conduct” (p. 72). To put it another way, all communication is a dialogue about how the world works, how we operate in the world, and, if we have any agency, how we want the world to be.

Using Mills (2004) review of Foucault’s discursive structures, I have outlined three basic questions that guided my analysis:

- How does the text narrow the scope of meaning to include and/or exclude what is possible to be considered real?
- How do subjects establish their authority within the text?
- How does context that precedes and follows a text illuminate and restrict possible meanings? (adapted from Mills, 2004, pp. 46-47)

More specifically, Hall (2001) suggests we identify rules that govern “the sayable and thinkable” (p. 73).
The problem is that most discourses are disguised as natural. As such, their power lies in their invisibility. Magda Lewis talks about “[the] common and unremarkable/unremarked in everyday details of our everyday lives that we have learned to live—learned to live so well, in fact, that their political intent is no longer obvious to us” (as cited in Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 19). I remember that as I adjusted to life in these countries, it became harder to write home about aspects of daily life that I thought my friends and family would find interesting for two reasons. As I learned to live within the framework of these cultures, the details of everyday life faded to unremarkability. It was the arrival of a new expatriate, with a fresh set of eyes, who might have reminded me that in Canada you don’t prepay your electrical service. I think it speaks to the power of discourse that I so quickly adapted to and became comfortable within a new set of rules governed by the expectations of expatriates, international schools, and the local communities in which I lived.

Furthermore, as I developed friendships within the Chinese community, I grew aware of how my online, public travel blog could have the power to hurt. Mills (2004) talks about the power of social context to frame and contribute to discourses as well as to be changed and modified by discourse (p. 10). As my social context changed to include friends in the Chinese community, I wrote more carefully about my experiences in China, for fear of offending my Chinese friends. At this point, I was being constrained by multiple discourses, which is not in and of itself a bad thing; it just reflects that at any point in time, an individual is reacting and reflecting multiple and sometimes contradictory discourses.
In my research, I searched specifically for discourses that reflected colonialism. Davies (2000) argues,

[by making the constitutive force of discourse visible and thus revisable, power shifts dramatically [...] [the subject] can begin to imagine how to reposition themselves, realign themselves and use the power of discourse they have to disrupt those of its effects they wish to resist. (p. 180)

I aimed to make visible the discourses operating in texts from many different points in my life. Said (1994a) reminds us that “Texts are not finished objects;” they should be revisited with displacement of time and place (p. 259). Using touchstone stories such as *Little Women*, childhood memories, and my travel blog, as well as the stories that I write from my current vantage point, I had the advantage of seeing the influence of discourse over time, as well as how discourses that I took up have changed over time.

My analysis also troubles how the discourse of dis/comfort in China reveals the tensions and contradictions causing that unease. Richardson (1997) explains that she “wanted to write through the ‘personal’ binaries (me/them, good/bad, for/against) that were my walls, invisible to me then, bracing and constraining” (p. 174). I wanted to write through my binary of dis/comfort. I must admit that I enjoyed the magnified privilege of living as a middle-class, White, married, heterosexual woman in China while simultaneously finding the additional power I carried there to be disturbing to my “false understandings” (Willis, 2007, pp. 81-82). Jacques Lacan stated “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think” (as cited in Gandhi, 1998, p. 9). My stories of
discomfort in China represent the rooting of counter-memories to challenge these silent places inside myself, where I had not thought.

Another discourse that I highlight in my analysis is that of authority. Weninger (2008) points out “beliefs and norms are largely disseminated and reproduced through public means of communication, all of which are controlled by the élite” (p. 146). I would argue that I was in a particular position of privilege in these places, to disseminate my views not only through publishing an online public travel blog, but also through my pedagogy. How was my authority to advise and set-up a service program in China established? What expertise did I cite? (Eyre, 2011).

It was particularly important to analyze the discourses that I took up through all of my artefacts, using questions such as suggested by MacNaughton (2005) for mapping meanings:

- What binaries does this text rely on for meaning? Who are the silenced others in this text?
- How does this specific text create assumptions about what is normal or desirable?
- How does each term in the binary depend on the other for its definition?
- Who benefits in this text from how the word or idea is used and its binaries constructed?
- How is the norm exceptional? (p. 94)

Again, teasing out the binary between comfort and discomfort was an important part of the process because we are often unwilling to name the factors that are truly
contributing to these sensations, nor are we willing to admit that we are regularly in a state of simultaneously feeling comfort and discomfort.

To make my critical discourse analysis specific to postcolonialism, I was guided by questions drawn from Edward Said’s texts—*Orientalism* (1994b) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994a):

- What are “deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally representing or speaking on its behalf?” (1994b, p. 20)
- How does the text reflect an “imperial dynamic and above all its separating, essentializing, dominating, and reactive tendencies”? (1994a, p. 37).

These questions were most applicable to my own writings, and gave insight into the degree to which I had incorporated Orientalist discourses by my storied formation.

Furthermore, Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2008) ask that we consider the subject in terms of its “position” rather than as a “thing” (p. 94). As such I also asked:

- How do I position myself within the text? and, How does that positioning reflect postcolonial power structures?

Additionally, Hall (2001) suggests we look at “the practices within institutions for dealing with the subjects” (p. 73) from which I have adapted the question:

- How do international schools, in particular through community service programs, position themselves and their staff within the communities in which they operate?
Critical discourse analysis is a tool “to look again at what has been and to see it in new ways” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 147), in order to live differently in my life at the present. Davies (2000) believes that by:

- making the constitutive force of discourse visible and thus revisable . . .
- [subjects] can begin to imagine how to reposition themselves, realign themselves and use the power of discourse they have to disrupt those of its effects they wish to resist” (p. 180).

As such, if writing as inquiry is embracing the current of my river, critical discourse analysis gives that current the power to shift the banks. The methods complement each other.

**A River Courses from Somewhere to Elsewhere**

Autoethnography is described, defended, and presented in so many different ways by so many different researchers, and yet they all seem to share the same concern: that there is danger “in getting lost . . . losing sight of what we’re telling or why we’re trying to map these locations” (Kamler, 2001, p. 1). Friedwald provides guidance here by stating that “[autoethnography] is the kind of art that takes you deeper inside yourself and ultimately out again” (as cited in Holman-Jones, 2005, p. 765). In other words, you need a plan to re-emerge. This is not to say there is some final destination. In the case of my research, there is no state of perfect decolonization in which I can exist. But where I left for China having no understanding of how I was implicated in colonial discourses that maintain a constructed global power structure which privileges
and harms, the discourse being invisible to me, I had no agency to effect change. This is ironic, because as a Community Service Coordinator, I felt that I was there for vague reasons of social justice and global citizenship and that my work could change the world. I felt full of agency, but now I question—whose agency I was filled with? Whose ends were met by the service programs? This is not to say that there is no room for possibility within the concept of service education. But, if the discourses governing the programs are not made visible, then they cannot be evaluated and shifted as needed. I have “a desire to move elsewhere from somewhere” (Kamler, 2001, p. 1). My research cannot fix the world, nor, for that matter, can it fix me; but I hope it can “document my becoming” a subject with agency, rather than an object through which the status quo is maintained (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 966).

Furthermore, this research is a gift of time to myself: “When we have more time to think and talk about what we are thinking and experiencing, we become more wise and courageous actors in the world” (Wheatley in Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 78). Rather than react, I want to act more purposefully, strategically, and effectively. There are limits to my time and to my energy, and I tend to resent any commitment that steals me from my son. I am torn between the desire to romp, play, and love with my son and the desire to work for a future in which he can grow and love in more safe and peaceful world. It is about ensuring my river has agency. It is about creating the oxbow lakes for him to enjoy. It is about Freire’s (2007) “life in plenitude” (as cited in Day, DePeuter & Coté, p. 246). It is about finding hope in the space between comfort and discomfort. This research, this project to decolonize the self, is about conserving the hope.
Chapter 4: Pools, Eddies, and Obstructions

We are of our stories. It is selfish to think that our negotiations with the world are our own. Our stories are the negotiation of our culture and collective history with the world. We sift through our perceptions with a sieve created by the stories that built us—a sieve that collects and keeps that which fits with the world view provided us, and disregards everything else that falls through the inevitable gaps. But sometimes, under the right set of circumstances, a story gets lodged in the grate of the sieve, stuck in liminality between conscious perception and dismissal.

In Bringing Memory Forward, Teresa Strong-Wilson (2008) refers to teachers as “storied intellectuals” in that their imagination was born out of the stories they read and were told as children, and that these touchstone stories “enter into and subtly influence consciousness and our ways of perceiving, thinking about, and acting in the world, particularly in relation to an “Other” (p. 5). In relation to Foucauldian analysis, then, it might be argued that our storied formation informs our subject positions because the stories teach us our “location...within a structure of rights and duties” (Davies & Harrè, as cited in Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 102), and, as teachers, it is important to note the firm footing of our positions in authority. Indeed, teachers daily author a script of discourses which teach students so much more than the rules of math or the dates and figures of certain historical events. Strong-Wilson (2008) is adamant that teachers cannot dismiss their power nor their privilege (p. 72) and further argues that to be a “compleat” teacher is to be open to the challenge presented by competing ‘other’ stories. Strong-Wilson uses the metaphor of walking with stones in your shoe; if the
first stone is our own stories and beliefs, the ‘other’ stories are those that we come in contact with that “chafe” and erode the original stone (p. 2), forcing an examination of our own stories and beliefs. This is important, because it is from here that the individual teacher can achieve agency, since, Kamler (2001) adds, “that subjectivities are discursively constructed and can therefore be reconstructed seems to me a productive ground for rethinking a pedagogy of the personal that promotes agency” (p. 48). In other words, if we allow ourselves the time and space to confront the contact sites between our touchstone stories and ‘other’ stories we can concertedly install new lenses for perceiving, thinking about, and acting in the world.

I call this chapter “Pools, Eddies and Obstructions” because they are part of the river current. As the thalweg erodes a bank, on the opposite side of the river is a calm, relatively undisturbed collection of water called a pool. In this chapter, I story memories from childhood that surround revisiting Louisa May Alcott’s (2008) novel Little Women, a personal favourite, and therefore a touchstone novel. I had to dive back into this pool to surface memories that I recorded in the journals I wrote as I reread Little Women for this research. Next I looked for the eddies. Although the thalweg carries the power of the river, which can reshape the land, sometimes there are obstructions against which the river must work. A boulder, a fallen tree, a change in geology, any of these can obstruct the current and leave eddies in their wake—swirling and churning water that keeps sediment afloat and unsettled. But, ultimately, what the eddies reveal is the location of the obstruction. As such, I story a particularly unsettling memory, a dissonant experience from my work as Community Service Coordinator at an
international school in China. I name this story *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities*. This is a story that has been churning since I left China, and I set it in writing in order to locate through Critical Discourse Analysis the obstructions that keep the memory suspended and so easily resurfaced. Finally, I preface and include Mao Tsetung’s (2004) essay “In Memory of Norman Bethune”. It is my hope that in the juxtaposition of this essay with my story that countercurrents might be revealed. And so, the following pools, obstructions and eddies are the basis for the analysis chapter which follows.

Arriving Requires a Departure

As explained in Chapter 3, my primary goal in this research is to decolonize my self. To move is to imply one might arrive somewhere; but it also implies one has left somewhere. So I feel that the memory work of this chapter must begin in childhood, in order to site a location from which I have traveled. As such, Foucault’s request for us to shift our question of identity from “‘What is this self?’ to ‘Departing from what ground shall I find my identity?’” (as cited in Rabinow, 1997, p. XXVI), resonated with my research. Teresa Strong-Wilson (2008) asks us to purposefully shift our “historicized and contextualized construction” (p. 3) in order to “reclaim [ourselves]” (p. 13). The ‘ground’ of which Foucault speaks could be the same storied construction Strong-Wilson encourages us to excavate. As such, I returned to a beloved novel of my childhood: *Little Women* (Alcott, 2008, originally published 1868). Reading this text again—for the first time in at least two decades—was at once strangely satisfying and discomfiting. I
could hear in this text the sentiments which propelled me across continents to take a job as a Community Service Coordinator in a country of whose language, history, culture I was completely ignorant. My revisiting of Little Women proved particularly poignant and illuminating when read against Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities. The following is adapted from my journal entries from the fall of 2013, as I reread Little Women (Alcott, 2008) for the first time in years.

Revisiting a Cherished Text

There is something disarming in returning to a beloved text twenty-five years later. Cracking open a newly purchased copy of Little Women, I felt a shiver of delight. But what do I remember of this text at this moment—book open, but still unread? I know I fell in love with the book while my father was posted at CFB Chilliwack. We were posted there for four years, a luxuriously lengthy stay by Canadian Forces standards. Somehow, my parents had been able to enrol me in the French-language base school, despite my being Anglophone. I learned the French language along with French Canadian history, culture, and songs. My father tells me that when I dreamt, I rambled in French. But I was not French; I understood that this was not my history and culture—it was not my home. For that matter, moving every two to four years, I have, to this very day, a very tenuous understanding of the idea of home. I was privileged in that both my parents were university educated and everyone in my family, including my two older brothers, read ravenously. At our house, I read whatever had been recently put down by my brothers. But at some point, my mother offered me her childhood copy of
Little Women, which I doubt my brothers have ever read, even today. And I read it — many times. But my memory of the text is more contextual.

Mostly, I can feel my arms gently lifting while pulling to open the wooden framed glass door of the bookcase. The door always wanted to catch, and the contents of the shelves (books and figurines) could rattle and alert my family to my intrusion. I should always ask before entering this space, but it was a gamble whether or not I would receive permission or be denied. I remember the excitement of the risk played against the need for slowness, and that long moment when, door ajar, I could deeply inhale and consume the smell of wood and musty books. With the same lift and now push, I would carefully reseal the treasure chest and escape to my room, reading as long as I could before I was ordered lights out. I remember submerging myself into the text, all the while praying that I would not be forced out of my room, away from my treasure for chores or family time. I loved/love solitude.

Little Women is considered a classic American novel written by Louisa May Alcott in 1868. It tells the story of the transition from girlhood to womanhood through four sisters, Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy. The author and the book have been the object of decades of critical study, most of which tries to unravel whether the text is a sentimental and constraining guidebook for the proper behavior/submission of women or a feminist and subversive text that rails against the ideal of the married/domesticated woman (Murphy, 1990, pp. 563-564). But at the moment before I plunge back into a text I haven’t read in twenty-five years, I do not remember enough of the plot to have an opinion on the matter.
What I do remember is that the book moved me to tears. I remember each of the sisters as follows: Jo was bold and fun; Meg got married; Amy was a brat; and Beth gives everything, does everything right, and then dies. I remember their neighbour Laurie, with whom I fell in love. I remember wanting to be Jo and wanting likewise to rebel against the norms. I was not brave enough to cut my own waist-length hair. Like her, I often bungled things up, but I would have chosen to marry Laurie. I wanted to be Jo, but I was nothing like her. I also remember that I did not like Beth. I felt she was weak, and I hated that she died—and I hated that I felt bad when she died. I despised sharing my name with her. I remember little of the plot.

So now, twenty-five years later, I read again. My first shock is the cumbersomeness of the language. It does not flow as a page turner in the same way that I remember. I am surprised at the heavy-handed morality of the text. That The Pilgrim’s Progress should sew the plot together but have no place in my memory seems odd. That being said, the biggest shock to my system was Old Hannah, a live-in maid-servant of whom I have absolutely no memory. Old Hannah begs analysis, but my point at this moment was that my shock at discovering Old Hannah on the margins of the text led me to ask friends and colleagues: “Do you remember Old Hannah?” And it was only then that I realized, friends and colleagues of my generation, as a rule, had not read Little Women. For some reason, I have many friends who are of my parents’ generation, and it was these friends who could speak to the text. Some claimed to remember her—but many, like me, had no conscious memory of her. “Mind you, it has been a long time since I read it!” one friend exclaimed. And yet, they, like me, could name each of the
four sisters and Laurie. My point here, however, is that I did not only lose the memory of Old Hannah, but I also lost the memory of reading different texts than those my peers were reading, and not just because of the language barrier; it would appear my generational peers in the Anglophone schools were not, as a rule, reading *Little Women*.

I came to *Little Women* when my mother lent me, from that bookcase, her own childhood copy. I devoured it. And while it is true that I loved books in general, I recognize in this text a book which connected me to my mother. My mother never seemed like other mothers to me. She was always, and in my mind continues to be, of an older time and she insisted I know the rules of etiquette. But as I resisted those rules, connecting to Jo who had resisted them in her own time, I felt my mother took offence. I feel she took my resistance—and probably society-as-a-whole’s rejection of outdated rules of etiquette—as a personal rejection. So I kept reading through her library (*Anne of Green Gables, Peter and Wendy*), trying to bridge myself to her in other ways, eventually reading her more current selections of mysteries and caveman sagas. I couldn’t understand that my mother’s struggles with mental health broke down our lines of communication; rather, I believed that my inability to find a way to communicate with my mother was the cause of her struggles. In *Little Women*, I learned that a girl’s safest and wisest counsel came from her mother. I had close friendships, but I also limited those friendships for fear they would learn I had failed my mother. Through high school and university I often struggled to connect to my age peers, in part because we were raised on different books—in the world of etiquette in
which I was raised, and which the texts I read reinforced, dark family secrets needed to stay hidden and protected—appearance was everything.

I should be clear, however, that my ongoing interest in social justice might mark me to my generation, myself a middle-class, white teenager of the 90s, the decade marked by youth political action, grunge, boycotts, recycling, and the Clayoquot Sound protest. But truthfully, I always felt a little outside of this; I wanted to do good, but not so rebelliously. At that time, I did not want to distance myself any further from my mother.

Rereading these texts brings to the surface frustrations, anxieties, and a sense of exile that I felt within my childhood. I am reminded of desires—a desire to prove myself, a desire to do enough good to win approval, a desire to show tangible evidence of caring to others—all of which were bound up in a very misplaced desire to heal my mother. But in the end, failing to achieve this end, I settled on a more selfish desire to be far away from lonely places. This is the ground from which I departed.

**Becoming Attuned to Counter-Stories**

While living in China I felt constant stress from the difficulty of communicating with local people, the difficulty of adapting to new rules of behaviour and recurring bouts of bronchitis from the air pollution. I am nonetheless thankful for the opportunity to have experienced even a small piece of China. China changed me, and through this research continues to change me, because it provided the context of Mary Louise Pratt’s (2008) *contact zone* (p. 8), that allowed the counter stories around me to become
visible. Before I story the dissonant experience that serves as the basis of my analysis, I will first contextualize the story by giving an overview of the concept of the contact zone and this will, in turn, frame and explain how these counter stories emerged as *dissonant experiences*. Finally, I will explain how the story of a service-education site visit to a seniors home on the outskirts of Tianjin came to be the experience I trouble in this research and how I set it down in a short story I name *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities*.

**The Tianjin Economic Development Area (TEDA) as contact zone.**

As I explained in Chapter one, in 2007-2008, I took leave of my teaching position at Nackawic High School to teach and work as the Community Service Coordinator at an international school in Tianjin, China. The school was in TEDA (Tianjin Economic Development Area), a suburb and port of Tianjin. It was an industrial hub for transnational corporations who imported workers from throughout the world. The international school was opened to provide a private, Western education to the children of those expatriates. But TEDA (the suburb) was not just populated with expatriates; we were the minority of the physical population, and I was required to learn Mandarin and cultural customs quickly in order to live in (and feel part of) this place.

In *Imperial Eyes* (2008), Mary Louise Pratt uses the term *contact zone* to describe those “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today”
I see my year in TEDA as a year lived in the contact zone. First of all, expatriates in TEDA certainly held financial power; while many expatriates were paid far more than was I, as a teacher at an international school, my pay in relation to the cost of living nonetheless made me wealthy in this location. There were enough Western expatriates in TEDA to support two Western food stores (which fulfilled a role not unlike that of a Chinese grocery in Canada), and the TESCO in town had an aisle devoted to Western expatriate desires. There were restaurants and pubs, such as the White House and James Joyce, whose menus and servers catered to us in every White, Anglophone, and Western sense, and the Starbucks franchise, located in the high-end Friendship Department Store, allowed me and my friends to escape back to North America whenever we liked.

That being said, though I know it to be possible, it was very difficult to avoid the Chinese community altogether. The taxi drivers did not speak nor show any interest in learning English. Indeed, some of the more regular drivers taught us to speak Mandarin and/or corrected my pronunciation. Few local restaurants translated or added pictures to their menus, and those that did usually added a price increase for the effort. But it was not just a requirement to learn the language; to reward our loyal patronage, some restaurants would send us complimentary dishes or additions to our dishes, some of which we had studiously tried to avoid. “Wo bu xi-huan yu tou tang” – I don’t like fish head soup – is a phrase I memorized early upon arrival without ever having tried the dish, and yet fish head soup became a favourite dish by the time I left. I developed
tastes for foods in China because, in order to be polite, I ate that which I would have avoided over and over again, until suddenly I found myself craving these very foods.

That which is China pervaded my every sense. I can still hear the waltzes amplified in the park outside our kitchen window by members of the local Chinese community who gathered in the square and danced ballroom steps into the evening. Shutting the windows was not enough to bar the sound from entering, and even if you could, bringing all your Western wants into your apartment oasis was a challenge in and of itself; if you wanted a fork (our local TESCO carried them only sporadically), it required a day trip to Beijing’s IKEA outlet. In TEDA, expatriates from around the world were in daily contact with the Chinese community, and no doubt that contact zone was full of friction and tension, sometimes revealing the nature of the ways in which we understood each other.

Craig and I were asked to volunteer as English teachers for the doctors and nurses at a hospital in TEDA. On one occasion, we held class at our apartment and made pancakes with maple syrup, offering up only forks and knives for the meal because we had a hard time imagining eating pancakes with chopsticks. As our friends/students struggled to wield the tools, one friend asked, “Why is it that in Canada you start your children with forks and knives? Would it not be easier to start them with chopsticks, since it is so much easier, and then switch to forks and knives when they have more manual dexterity?” While I know that Mary Louise Pratt introduces the notion of the contact zone to trouble far more nefarious forms of contact than the one I just described, I still think this question speaks to the cultural grappling that is the key
element of the contact zone. I often share this utensil story to exemplify what I mean by “worldview” to my own students here in Canada. Raised on forks and knives, my students have often asked me why the Chinese have not abandoned the chopsticks in favour of Western utensils. But the Canadian framing of the question also highlights the asymmetry of the question and thus power relations. Students/friends in China asked us a question of sequencing, not overtly questioning our choice to use fork and knife. Inherent in the Canadian question is the view that our utensils are better and reflects somehow poorly on the Chinese that they, though presented with the choice, have not abandoned “theirs” in favour of “ours.” I would say that my year in China was eye-opening, except that it speaks to far too superficial a means of perception. In the contact zone, I became aware of reverberations which I sensed internally, not unlike experiencing the movement of an elevator. I sensed the energy, the motion, and, particularly, the moment when mechanics and gravity wrestle before your box comes to rest in its new position. I call these moments dissonant, because I experience mismatched sounds not only audibly, but also as a whole, tangible body.

**Dissonance – Marking the Presence of a Counter-Story**

When I have tried to explain my research intentions in this thesis, to uncover the power relations embedded in these moments of dissonance while I lived in China, I am often asked if it cannot simply be put down to “culture shock”. Emotionally, I can feel a concrete difference between those moments I would classify as culture shock and those moments I call dissonant and in need of troubling. Let me give you some examples.
About two months into my stay in TEDA, without it ever having been an issue before, the armed security guard at the bottom of the escalator to the TESCO grocery store indicated that I was not allowed to bring my small purse into the store. This had not been the case before, and was rarely the case thereafter, and even if I had had the language to make my point, it would not have mattered. It was the rule of the day and I had not yet learned to accept that rules worked differently in this place. The only choice I had left was to go home without groceries and, if I wanted, return later with cash in my pocket. I stood there at the bottom of the escalator, watching everyone else (who had apparently got the message to avoid purses that day) board the escalator. Suddenly I felt so overwhelmed and frustrated at my lack of cultural literacy that I just stood there crying in a public place. I remember that moment vividly, and it is rich in emotion, but it does not ring as truly dissonant. The moment did not cause me to question my self, nor my intentions.

My dissonant moments are ones that leave me feeling troubled and off-balance, like being on a rocking ship and not being able to track the horizon. I lose sense of the ground that is supposed to be supporting me. For instance, I recall bringing my co-worker’s mother to a group home for children with an array of physical needs and cognitive function with the Grade 10 students in December of 2007. We played games indoors, and then my students and the children took turns performing songs and feats of agility for each other while we sat in a circle together. When we left, driving away on the bus, I noticed my co-worker’s mother was crying silently, and I said nothing to her about it. It concerned me that I did not feel as she did and I worried that I could no
longer see what was before me with her eyes—it had seemed a pleasant enough morning to me up until that point. I just knew that I did not want to discuss it with her.

In Foucauldian analysis, the subject position is troubled in light of its context; that is, your “vantage point” can affect not only what you see, but how you see the world, feel the world, and thus act within it (Willig, 2001, p. 111). But what if the context of your life changes so much that you are dislodged from your vantage point? I have never been so nimble as to smoothly find new footing; I stumble. In that disorienting moment, without a clear line of sight, I lost track of my horizon—I felt uncomfortable and confused, and the usual white noise of daily life was dissonant. I was questioning my self. In experiences of culture shock, I still knew where I stood; I was just frustrated that the new culture did not see it as I did. At best, I was surprised to learn there are other ways of seeing the world. In dissonant experiences, I no longer knew the ground on which I stood. I truly do not believe I could have been led to this place of questioning had I not lived in the contact zone.

The dissonant moments were only occasional interruptions to my stay in China. I am a curious person, so I found living in the contact zone to be fun even though I found it stressful to negotiate my illiteracy within both the Mandarin language and the Han Chinese culture. And, as an individual, I had no conscious, nefarious goals like the proliferation of Western cultural influence. In Orientalism (1994b), Said differentiates the possible intentions of those seeking to have knowledge of other peoples and cultures: “There is after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to
dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion” (p. xix). I went to China for the opportunity to see the world, not to pursue some overt objective of further globalization; but, as a Westerner I cannot ignore Said’s argument “...that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient, almost since the time of Homer” (p. 11). Furthermore, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994a), Said explains, “there is just no way that the past can be quarantined from the present” (p. 4). In other words, while as an individual, my presence in this contact zone—TEDA—could be disregarded as inconsequential, my cultural affiliations to a colonizing past were creating, at times, a disharmonious clash of stories in the present. Most certainly, experiences must have passed in which I was simply not awake to the dissonance, and so I must work within what I have been given. It is my aim, in this analysis, to take one memory, a particularly dissonant memory, and write/re-read this memory as a counter-story to my own cherished *touchstone* stories.

**Writing Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities**

One of the stories I often relate about my time in China is about visiting a seniors home in the spring of 2008 to see if it would serve as a service-learning site for our school. In this story, I am a white, Canadian, female teacher who has been living in China for roughly eight months. I pay for oral Mandarin lessons each week, but I cannot master the tones. Half of my schedule is devoted to teaching social studies, and the other half is dedicated to acting as the Community Service Coordinator for the
international school. One of my first tasks as Community Service Coordinator was to visit a number of potential service sites throughout the city in order to select two sites for regular visits from our Grade 9 and 10 students. I committed the Grade 9 students to organize play-based activities biweekly for the children’s ward at a local hospital and the Grade 10 students to design and implement activities and outings biweekly for a group home for children with a range of physical needs and cognitive function. My visit to the seniors home occurred eight months later. *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* describes my first visit to the seniors home on the outskirts of Tianjin.

I enjoy telling this story because there is a funny trajectory to the tale in which I am asked to speak upon the topic of the Canadian surgeon Norman Bethune, of whom I was basically ignorant. According to Library and Archives Canada (2008), Bethune was “a gifted surgeon, an inventor, a political activist and an early proponent of a universal health care system” (Dr. Norman Bethune section, para. 1). Most importantly to my story, Norman Bethune was a communist sympathizer who, in 1938, “adopted the cause and the [Chinese] people as his own” (A New Cause to Remember section, para. 2). He mobilized a medical unit and cared for the wounded Chinese in the enfloding Sino-Japanese War. Bethune died in 1939 of blood poisoning, after cutting his finger during surgery. A month later, in December of 1939, Mao Tse-tung wrote the essay *In Memory of Norman Bethune*, in which he valorized Bethune’s work in China (A New Cause to Remember section, para. 3). It was made known to me while in China that this essay remains required reading in the public school system until this day. The shared nature of this history does not align to a shared sense of importance. But there is also
something in this particular memory which has always been dissonant; I think I return to the story because there is something in it I have always wanted to understand better. I believe that in this memory is embedded a counter-story, stuck in liminality, begging to be dislodged.

Although I did keep a blog during my time in China in which I discussed aspects of my role as Community Service Coordinator, Norman Bethune and the seniors home remain conspicuously absent. As discussed in the methodology, I make no claim that the memory as it sits in my consciousness today (or at any point in time) is an objective and immovable truth. The context of each event of remembering is woven through the new writing and experiencing of the memory (Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 3-4). As such, in order to complete an analysis, I needed to benchmark this memory into story as a starting point; and so, I wrote *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* in November 2013. It might be argued that I should have chosen a story I had set in writing in ‘real time’ while living in China, for a more accurate and true representation of the experience. However, even if it had been written at the time, Said (1994a) argues that the memory could still not have been written in an objective form “subject neither to history nor to a social setting” (p. 32). The truth of the story is bound up in my continued telling of the story: “An experience is always a fiction: it’s something that one fabricates oneself, that doesn’t exist before and will exist afterwards” (Foucault, 2000, p. 243). Every time I tell the story I am forwarding knowledge, and writing subject positions for the Community Service Coordinator at an international school, for travel adventurer, for cultural interpreter, and for voyeur. Written or spoken, a story is a text,
and as Said (1994a) states, “Texts are not finished objects. They are ... notations and cultural practices. And texts create not only their own precedents and cultural practices ... but their successors” (p. 259). But I need a starting point for this analysis, so I finally sat down and set my experience at the seniors home in writing. I wrote my remembering as I would tell it to an interested friend or colleague, but with the prose of written language. I do not share this story with my students in Canada. I did my best to ensure that the story captured the range of emotion I experience while falling back into the memory, but particularly the awkwardness and tension I felt at this seniors home. Despite freezing the moment for this research, the story *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* remains unfinished because I am not done with telling it.

**Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities**

*In the spring of 2008, roughly eight months into my year in China, the Teda Volunteers Association let me know of a possible new service project. On the outskirts of the development zone, a couple had purchased an older motel and opened it as a seniors home. In return for the meager pension they received, the seniors received a shared room, two meals a day, safety and companionship. My understanding was that the couple running the motel was not going to make profits from this enterprise. It was for seniors who had nowhere else to go.*

*My contact at the Volunteers Association set herself to “rallying the troops”. She quickly acquired a washing machine and microwave for the home and organized food drives to stock the shelves. She sent me to visit with the owners to see if the school could*
be of help, and I brought along our staff Chinese liaison whose job it was to help the expatriate staff negotiate their needs—whether with the Chinese government for passports or customs, or getting a new cellphone. I had made a few of these visits to assess potential service sites at the outset of the school year. At that time, China was still so new and so overwhelming that my recollections of those visits are mostly a blur. But I can say that those visits did not stand out as being any more or less dissonant than any daily experience at the time. This visit was different—while I had found my ‘sea legs’ in China, so to speak, I still had the uneasy sense of falling, of being off-balance. And these feelings persist as I allow these events to resurface.

The seniors home was a good distance from the school; it would easily be a twenty- to thirty-minute bus ride. Although the international school was proud of its service commitment, it was always in compromise and negotiation with instructional time. Aside from the physical distance, the home felt rather isolated. It was out of the city proper, I remember going through something more like a village and down a country road. I wondered who the motel would have ever serviced in this location. Spring had only barely arrived, so the landscape was still bleak, and the cement block which was the motel seemed so out of place in this field of dead grasses. We entered the lobby, where four or five seniors sat in chairs, smoking cigarettes. There was a table in the corner with a display of some of the food the Volunteers Association had rounded up and a large framed picture of my contact at the Volunteers Association alongside, presumably, the owners of the seniors home dressed in their best clothes and holding a banner with Chinese characters.
A woman came out and greeted me formally, inviting us into an office where a table too large for the small room was decked out with a bowl of oranges, a bowl of nuts, and a pot of tea. A Chinese man was waiting in the room. The four of us took our seats.

Introductions were made awkwardly; I never mastered the art of when to bow my head nor how to make respectful eye contact. We sat at the table. The oranges were pushed toward me and my liaison encouraged me to eat. I cannot deny I was uncomfortable. I knew they desperately needed donations, and these treats on the table were expensive. Why was I being fed them? And yet I had also been in China long enough to know the importance of ‘face’. They were not begging; we were searching for something more along the lines of a business arrangement. The show of food was a demand of respect, and I had to eat the food. I ate oranges, I ate nuts, and I drank the tea, complimenting the quality of the food, all the while wanting to get on with business but knowing it would not be up to me to decide when the right time was to start that conversation. I drank my tea slowly, knowing they would continue to refill it, so long as I emptied it, but never sure as to how much I needed to drink in order to pay compliment to the host. By this point, I had realized that things moved at their own pace in China; it was about knowing the right time for things. And, although I knew this sense of time was important, I was never able to feel it myself; I always waited to be told. In this case, I awaited the conversation that took place every time I visited a new service site:

“So you are Canadian?” Of course, my contact at the Volunteer’s Association would have shared this information in advance of my visit.
“Yes, wo shi Jianada ren” (I am Canadian), I would answer.

“Your Chinese is very good!” they would exclaim.

“No, my Chinese is very bad” I would retort in Chinese.

My tones would have been entirely wrong. My Chinese was terrible, but even this conversation was an important part of the ritual. Had my Chinese been as excellent as they were claiming, I would not have needed my liaison.

“Bai Qiu’en was a very good man.”

The first time Bai Qiu’en was raised in conversation I had no idea to whom they were referring. But I had been in China for three quarters of a year, and I now knew they were referring to Norman Bethune, a Canadian doctor, and a communist sympathizer, who had come to China to help during the Second Sino-Japanese war and had died of blood poisoning during his mission.

“A Canadian doctor;” I say, “he helped the Chinese. A good man.”

But frankly, I knew little of Norman Bethune; I had read just enough to have an idea of him and had not bothered to research the man any further. Mao Tse-tung had written an essay entitled “In Memory of Norman Bethune”, which even today is a mandatory component of the Chinese public education system. This was another piece of the formality I had to move through before we could get to ‘the point,’ which, to my mind, was the feasibility of developing a working relationship between our school and their home.
“A very good man.” I would have responded, having little more to add. It was very quiet then, and I felt very awkward, and the time seemed to stretch on forever before they suggested a tour.

The place was Spartan and clean. Shelter and some food were provided—and, I suppose, the company of fellow seniors—but the place felt a little cold to me. That being said, I have no idea if anything unsightly had been whisked away in advance of my visit. I was shown into the various bedrooms, and I was conscious of invading the very little personal space these seniors held. I thought of begging off seeing the rooms in order to protect their privacy, but I was more afraid of offending. I inspected, and tried to note what might be missing—what piece of the puzzle we might hope to provide. I had already decided that if the site suited, I wanted it to be reserved for the less-frequent visits of the elementary and middle school classes. My high school classes were already committed regularly to other sites. I would need this site to suit my needs as well.

At the end of the tour everyone looked at me expectantly. Was this finally the time to make suggestions? I noted that the old restaurant/dining room was still set up with tables. There was a lot of open space, and the chairs could be arranged to watch a performance.

“The children at the school are all in choir,” I started, “perhaps sometimes they could come and perform for your residents.” I waited for the translation and nods of understanding. “That would be nice,” I read into their expressions, “but you are going to do more than that, right?” In reality, they just nodded and I went on to fill the silence.
“I think we could probably collect soap and shampoo for your home,” I suggested, thinking of how much the parents of our students travelled. They seemed excited at this idea. It would likely free up more of their budget for other needs.

“We may be able to do more, but I have to return to the school and discuss with my principal and the teachers.” Nods of understanding.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you. A picture—we must take a picture.”

And so I posed with the owners, in the front lobby, and wondered if my photo would be framed and displayed next to the picture of my contact at the Volunteers Association. I hoped not, but I also knew the show of support by a white expatriate was currency for them.

The grade 3 and 4 classes made a handful of visits to the home. They performed for the seniors. They brought games such as checkers and attempted to play with the seniors. They left the games at the home—something to do.

The “Soaps for Seniors” program was quite the hit. Many of the parents had been stockpiling hotel supplies, and were happy to have a reason to move them. In the Spring “Beyond our Walls” field trips, in which our students went out on week long excursions, the students were very excited to empty their hotel bathrooms nightly, filling small suitcases with soaps and shampoos.

I don’t know if the relationship was maintained the following year.
A Shared Story or Another Counter Story?

As previously mentioned, *In Memory of Norman Bethune* is an essay written by Mao Tse-tung (1939) on the communist virtues of this Canadian figure who died while providing service to the Chinese War of Resistance against Japan. Said (1994a) argues that “nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (p. xiii). In other words, Mao Tse-tung’s essay is a piece of China’s narration of its history and of its culture. And in that narration, Mao Tse-tung is part of China’s own regime of truth as one “who [is] charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault as cited in Hall, 2001, p. 77). Furthermore, Said (1994a) encourages the juxtaposition of texts precisely because imperialism implies “interdependent histories [and] overlapping domains . . . requiring intellectual and political choices” (p. 259). Here in the story of Norman Bethune is a person who overlaps both Canadian and Chinese history and has been historically valorized in both countries. As such, I am including Mao Tse-tung’s essay because it is essential to the analysis.
In Memory of Norman Bethune

by Mao Tse-tung

December 21, 1939

Comrade Norman Bethune, a member of the Communist Party of Canada, was around fifty when he was sent by the Communist Parties of Canada and the United States to China; he made light of travelling thousands of miles to help us in our War of Resistance against Japan. He arrived in Yenan in the spring of last year, went to work in the Wutai Mountains, and to our great sorrow died a martyr at his post. What kind of spirit is this that makes a foreigner selflessly adopt the cause of the Chinese people’s liberation as his own? It is the spirit of internationalism, the spirit of communism, from which every Chinese Communist must learn. Leninism teaches that the world revolution can only succeed if the proletariat of the capitalist countries supports the struggle for liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples and if the proletariat of the colonies and semi-colonies supports that of the proletariat of the capitalist countries. Comrade Bethune put this Leninist line into practice. We Chinese Communists must also follow this line in our practice. We must unite with the proletariat of all the capitalist countries, with the proletariat of Japan, Britain, the United States, Germany, Italy and all other capitalist countries, for this is the only way to overthrow imperialism, to liberate our nation and people and to liberate the other nations and peoples of the world. This is our internationalism, the internationalism with which we oppose both narrow nationalism and narrow patriotism.
Comrade Bethune’s spirit, his utter devotion to others without any thought of self, was shown in his great sense of responsibility in his work and his great warm-heartedness towards all comrades and the people. Every Communist must learn from him. There are not a few people who are irresponsible in their work, preferring the light and shirking the heavy, passing the burdensome tasks on to others and choosing the easy ones for themselves. At every turn they think of themselves before others. When they make some small contribution, they swell with pride and brag about it for fear that others will not know. They feel no warmth towards comrades and the people but are cold, indifferent and apathetic. In truth such people are not Communists, or at least cannot be counted as devoted Communists. No one who returned from the front failed to express admiration for Bethune whenever his name was mentioned, and none remained unmoved by his spirit. In the Shansi-Chahar-Hopei border area, no soldier or civilian was unmoved who had been treated by Dr. Bethune or had seen how he worked. Every Communist must learn this true communist spirit from Comrade Bethune.

Comrade Bethune was a doctor, the art of healing was his profession and he was constantly perfecting his skill, which stood very high in the Eighth Route Army’s medical service. His example is an excellent lesson for those people who wish to change their work the moment they see something different and for those who despise technical work as of no consequence or as promising no future.

Comrade Bethune and I met only once. Afterwards he wrote me many letters. But I was busy, and I wrote him only one letter and do not even know if he ever received it. I am deeply grieved over his death. Now we are all commemorating him, which
shows how profoundly his spirit inspires everyone. We must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness from him. With this spirit everyone can be very useful to the people. A man’s ability may be great or small, but if he has this spirit, he is already noble-minded and pure, a man of moral integrity and above vulgar interests, a man who is of value to the people. (Mao, 2004)
Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have contextualized and presented personal memory that emerged from rereading Little Women, a story of dissonance from my work as Community Service Coordinator in China named Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities, and Mao Tse-tung’s essay “In Memory of Norman Bethune.” Although the three pieces of writing do not fit perfectly together, they have nonetheless converged at this juncture in my life and demand to be read in concert. And as Madeleine Grumet (2008) states, “There in the interstices, the spaces where the pieces don’t quite meet, is where the light comes through” (as cited in Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 63). In Chapter 5, I will analyse each story, using postcolonial theory and critical discourse analysis, to reveal not only what emerges from each discrete text, but more importantly, how in the juxtapositioning of these three texts we arrive at a confluence which illuminates the complexities, the contradictions and ambiguities operating not only in this particular service site visit, but in the operation of a service-learning program, in an international school in China.
Chapter 5

Arriving at Confluence

What kind of spirit is this that makes a foreigner selflessly adopt the cause of the Chinese People’s liberation as his own? It is the spirit of internationalism, the spirit of communism, from which every Chinese Communist must learn. Leninism teaches that the world revolution can only succeed if the proletariat of the capitalist countries supports the struggle for liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples and if the proletariat of the colonies and semi-colonies supports that of the proletariat of the capitalist countries. Comrade Bethune put this Leninist line into practice.

(Mao Tse-tung, *In Memory of Norman Bethune*, para. 1)

I think there were not in all the city four merrier people than the hungry little girls who gave away their breakfasts and contented themselves with bread and milk of Christmas morning.

‘That’s loving our neighbor better than ourselves, and I like it,’ said Meg, as they set out their presents, while their mother was upstairs collecting clothes for the Hummels.

(Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 24)

I had already decided that if the site suited, I wanted it to be reserved for the less-frequent visits of the elementary and middle school classes. My high school classes were already committed regularly to other sites. I would need this site to suit my needs as well.

(Elizabeth Christie, *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities*)
Ultimately a river is the confluence of the rivulets, streams and channels which comprise its tributaries. Each tributary carries a sediment load that reflects the composition of the ground over which it flowed and of which it eroded. In the confluence of these many tributaries, the composition of the sediment load is altered, blended, carried, and deposited elsewhere. In this chapter, I analyse each story as a discrete tributary, using postcolonial theory and critical discourse analysis. I then juxtapose the stories in order to arrive at confluence. My purpose is to re-locate the story *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* and my self to somewhere else. I begin by revisiting my initial version of *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* in order to determine how the story reflects an asymmetrical power distribution. Next, I examine how the memory can be recontextualized, and thus rewritten, by juxtaposing it first against *Little Women* and then against Chairman Mao Tse-tung’s essay, *In Memory of Norman Bethune*.

Specifically, I address the following questions:

- What power structures does *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* imply are still operating today in the context of international school service programs and the communities in which they operate?
- What counter-story/ies might be read in the dissonance that surfaces in these memories?
- How did storied formation inform expectations of this service site visitation?
Reading the Memory

In the previous chapter, I explored my own storied formation by rereading *Little Women*, and it informed (at least partially) as to the wants and needs of the person who entered the seniors home. I now intend to read myself against the text produced as *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities*. In the following sections, I aim to trouble how my description of the landscape and my tasks and goals in this site visit reflected an asymmetrical balance of power between myself and the couple who ran the seniors home.

The Geography

Growing up, my family was continually relocated whenever or even before familiarity could set in. As a survival skill, I learned to be conscious of my surroundings. I am quick to note what is new and different in a landscape, and I am constantly searching for clues about how to negotiate with new people and with new rules. A new place could land me in an entirely new position. Will it be better? The same? Worse? Who will I be in this new place? As Diversi and Moreira (2009) point out, “identities are not inside individuals but in the space between interacting individuals” (p. 20), and thus the geology, relief, lighting, acoustics, and aesthetics of a place will contextualize, constrain, and open my relationships. David A. Greenwood (2009) states, “[places] are pedagogical both because their contexts shape our experiences of learning and becoming, and because our experiences of learning in turn contribute to place-making, place changing, and place-leaving” (p. 1). In other words, a place contextualizes me,
but, simultaneously, by the very nature of existing between interacting individuals, I am contextualizing and writing meaning on the place. There is thus an inherent power negotiation occurring not only between individuals, but also between self and place; and this negotiation is evident in my description of the seniors home:

The seniors home was a good distance from the school; it would easily be a twenty- to thirty-minute bus ride. Although the international school was proud of its service commitment, it was always in compromise and negotiation with instructional time. Aside from the physical distance, the home felt rather isolated. It was out of the city proper, I remember going through something more like a village and down a country road. I wondered who the motel would have ever serviced in this location. Spring had only barely arrived, so the landscape was still bleak, and the cement block which was the motel seemed so out of place in this field of dead grasses. We entered the lobby, where four or five seniors sat in chairs, smoking cigarettes. There was a table in the corner with a display of some of the food the Volunteers Association had rounded up and a large framed picture of my contact at the Volunteers Association alongside, presumably, the owners of the seniors home dressed in their best clothes and holding a banner with Chinese characters. (excerpt from Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities)

In the above excerpt from my story Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities, I describe my first journey to the seniors home in reference to its location outside of the city, I use the term bleak and imbue the site with morbidity by surrounding it with dead
grasses. My urge to help is clearly not ignited, for my story is cold. It is neither a story of engagement nor adventure, but rather a story of purposeful distance that I set between myself and this place.

I cannot say now why I did this. Perhaps eight months into the role of Community Service Coordinator the charm of the position had worn off. Instead of spending my time preparing the service-learning programs by reflecting, analyzing and working toward creating more meaningful service projects with my students and colleagues, I found my preparation time mostly spent in negotiation. I had to negotiate with those colleagues who valued the experiences of service-learning less than traditional in-class instruction and, at the same time, negotiate with those colleagues who suddenly wanted to jump into pre-existing programs without realizing the work that this created—not only for myself as the Community Service Coordinator, but also for the service site. I had dived into the position of Community Service Coordinator with the naïve belief that the service-learning project was inherently good, and I was surprised and now exhausted from these endless political negotiations. I did not enjoy the amount of contact, nor the perpetual conflict it forced me to experience. Perhaps I had realized on some level that I find peace in solitude and am comfortable in a state of exile. But, contrary to the common sense that a teacher must be somebody who loves being amongst people, Strong-Wilson (2008) makes evident that a teacher’s attempt to exit civilization is a well-trodden path. “[I]t is essentially the same landscape as that traveled by other itinerant teachers and other nomads: the difficult terrains, the
arduous journey simply in getting there, the ‘there’ as wilderness, isolation, the antithesis to civilization” (p. 23).

Do we turn to the teaching profession because a classroom offers us a home? Or is there safety in knowing any attachments we develop to our students have automatic expiration dates? The students move on to other classrooms and leave us behind, not of their choice nor ours. For me, one of the most uncomfortable practices of teaching is entering a new class of students and negotiating those ‘first day of class’ tensions. I do not find that my text in *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* reveals this nervousness and excitement I always felt/feel when entering any new situation. I write the story as though these service site visitations were old hat, “for I had found my ‘sea legs,’” but I am always shy and distressed in any new encounter. And yet I have entered a profession in which I am continually re-immersed in this discomfort, possibly because I still search for (and perhaps this re/search grows out of the hope of finding) a better world—one in which I won’t search out solitude. That said, the narration of *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* is threaded with pragmatism and not idealism. I clearly did not anticipate finding any new world at this site nor any meaningful way to contribute, because from the outset I describe the place as “problematic.” Not yet arrived at the seniors home, I am already negotiating myself out of meaningful commitment, widening the space between myself and the home through what might be construed as a hostile description that others the landscape from my self.

Zooming back, in order to gain a larger perspective, my negotiation with the geography of the site can take on new meaning when read through a postcolonial lens:
Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings. (Said, 1994a, p. 7)

Perhaps, on the edge of my consciousness, I was beginning to realize that service-learning can be construed as a vehicle of power for the centre. Said (1994a) states, “We are, so to speak, of the connections, not outside and beyond them” (p. 55). But what forces, and what connections were here at play? In Keith’s 2005 article “Community Service Learning in the Face of Globalization: Rethinking Theory and Practice,” she discusses the importance of ‘situatedness’ and how, in service-learning “participants are entering the field as subjects with histories, experiences, relationships, social positions, and that situatedness creates the window through which people look at the world and interact with others” (p. 18). In this case, how might my writings reflect a colonial/imperial attitude towards this site?

First and foremost, I recognize how I identify this site to be physically on the margins of the city. In my travel blog, I described Chinese cities as bustling and teeming with life and optimism of a better economic future, as exemplified in the excerpt below about my first visit to Shopping Street in Tianjin, China:

_In the afternoon we checked out Shopping Street. It’s huge and loud. It’s a lot of chain stores (none that I knew except Starbucks). Most of these stores don’t barter. We sort of wandered, a little bewildered by the crowds and noise. There were women in wedding dresses enticing people into a photography shop, tons of_
people handing out flyers and department stores 8 stories high. Again, we didn't buy anything. We did however discover that a restaurant in TEDA, whose name we absolutely adore (California Beef Noodle King USA Mr. Lee), is actually a very popular chain. There were several on Shopping Street. (Excerpt from Further Adventures in Tianjin, Travel Blog post, August 26th, 2007)

Writing for friends and family back home, I can read how I am trying to show that I can “get what I need here” because China offers the same market economy—if not better and bigger—as back home in Canada. I still write China as ‘other,’ marking myself as ‘wandering’ in the ‘wildness’ necessary to be bewildered. But I am also making the point that there is money, exchange, shopping, energy, excitement, and a desire to adopt Western identity (Starbucks, California), so no need to worry. I visited service sites within the city—Shine Home and the Cardiovascular Hospital were within the city and both made their way into my travel blogs. But for me, the Norman Bethune conversation makes a story when it is situated outside the city.

By choosing to identify my ‘Norman Bethune’ experience at this site (rather than a city site) I identify to the centre, to my audience, to the West, that there is another China which is bleak and friable. In Imperial Eyes (2008), Mary Louise Pratt argues that travel writers were not unlike “advance scouts for capitalist ‘improvement,’” identifying to the West land and resources which, if marked as unused, could be justifiably claimed under the guise of improvement (p. 60). In a modern day context, we speak of improvement as development. The Beijing Olympics of 2008 showed the world a modern and urbanized China: self-capable, economically strong, and challenging the
designation as a developing country. But *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* describes not cities, but a village; not modern transportation infrastructure, but country roads; and not an economically successful population, but rather an absence of people. I mark for the West a land in want of our help—and development, as though Canada in its developed state lacks villages, lacks country roads, and does not suffer a discrepancy between the wealth of its cities and the economic difficulties of its rural areas. Furthermore, I establish a backwardness of thought, particularly of market knowledge by sharing my wonder at “who the motel would have ever serviced in this location.” Sara Mills (2004) points out that travelers frequently describe the people of a place in reference to the absence (p. 102). As such, my question does not only patronize the market sensibilities of the original owners of the motel but also makes very clear the absence of people to use the motel at all. Finally, I establish my dominant position of power by explaining that any service site would need to fit my need—or, rather, the school’s need—to maintain instructional time. But, at the same time, am I truly establishing individual power or the power of the institution of an international school? I am, after all, the school’s replaceable tool for observing, assessing, and administering service sites.

**Offering Service and Assuming Reciprocity**

To begin, it warrants reflection that the purpose of the site visit was to assess whether we would offer service and, if so, what type of service. The nature of service-education as it is most often practiced reflects that an international school is the
product of market economy and globalization. The international school at which I taught exists because transnational corporations operating factories in the Tianjin Economic Development Area bring managers from outside the country to live in this place and desire a place for their children to be educated in other than Chinese public schools. An educational setting constructed to service the needs of a globalized market economy will necessarily construct its educational practices in these terms—and in the case of the service-learning component of this education, it gets framed in reciprocity.

Consider the following excerpt from Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities:

\[
I \text{ had already decided that if the site suited, I wanted it to be reserved for the less-frequent visits of the elementary and middle school classes. My high school classes were already committed regularly to other sites. I would need this site to suit my needs as well. (Excerpt from Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities)}
\]

It is clear from this passage that I have specific wants that I hope to fulfill in this site, and, in so doing, I refer to the site as an object that can be possessed—or, at least, ‘reserved’ for the use of the school’s classes—rather than referring to the seniors home as a place with people and community that I hoped to connect to classes which are also places with people and community. Framed otherwise, my practice reflects what Keith (2005) describes as “[choosing] and [consuming] community” (p. 11). Additionally, my practice plays in stark contrast to Peter McLaren and Nathalia Jaramillo’s (2007) ideal of creating “power-to” relationships, in which service education should be aiming for “the collective construction of a ‘we’ and the practice of the mutual recognition of dignity”
Indeed, bell hooks (2000) argues that movements for social change can include “the process of making community wherever we are” (p. 143). But as I have constructed service-learning in this passage, service-learning is not about building community; it is the exchange between two discrete objects. Even if we try to reframe the exchange by using words such as ‘learning’ to describe the product being moved, service-learning nonetheless implies that the student will derive the benefit of ‘learning’ from the process. This initially seems desirable and harmless, but as Novella Zett Keith (2005) points out, “reciprocity and its related concepts remain rooted in a (market) accumulation process, which presses people into giving and receiving and ultimately creating social networks as a way of having more” (p. 15). Pratt (2008) furthers that “reciprocity has always been capitalism’s ideology of itself” (p. 82). She challenges the capitalist image of ‘flow’ of resources, because it implies a horizontal surface on which, eventually, everything is evenly dispersed (p. 241); instead, she describes a vertical movement in which money is ‘sent’, “defying gravity” and “[pumping] wealth upward into fewer and fewer hands” (p. 242). In other words, no amount of unreciprocated service is likely to undermine this flow. Furthermore, when framed in reciprocity—as it generally is—if the server obtains any benefit, then any value the served derives at best preserves the disparity between the two and, at worst, widens it further.

Part of the reciprocal benefit of service education to an international school lies in the marketability of assuming noblesse oblige, which the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines as “the idea that people who have high social rank or wealth should be helpful and generous to people of lower rank or to people who are poor” (“Noblesse Oblige,”
Placing the school’s student body in the position of server affiliates those families who use the institution with a privileged social rank which may be more desired than true. While perhaps it would be kinder to frame an interest in having your child’s school perform service-education as caring and philanthropy, Said (1994a) challenges us on that very notion as well. He describes the imperial project as having always been consented to on the basis of “cultural formations such as philanthropy, religion, science and art” (p. 12). In other words, colonial disparities can be justified because we, the colonizers, are seen to be doing good in this place. The school’s relationship to this formation of consent is very important because, as Foucault (2000) describes it, the institution “fastens [students] to an apparatus of knowledge transmission” (p. 78). So the learning that occurs is, in part, that the students are learning their position in these service visits in relation to the other. In this case, the other is marked as being in the local community and needing help, whereas the student is from away. On service visits, students are placed in a position to “view a version of reality” that they are in the economically dominant position to give which is simultaneously “a moral location”—which is as the carrier of noblesse oblige (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 102). As such, the enactment of noblesse oblige can reflect a way for the school and its clients to not only locate themselves in a position of cultural and economic dominance but also (in the same wave of the hand) justify that positioning as necessary and kind.

To be fair, however, the international school at which I taught did not need to market itself too strongly. There were not a lot of choices for expatriate families in this particular suburb. I can also attest from my personal experience that the school
administration and long-term staff had a vision of education which to this day meets better my values than the New Brunswick system in which I currently teach:

At XXXXXXX International School, we believe that education alone enables the individual to manifest his or her innate treasures, and enables mankind to benefit there from. Each child is acknowledged to be fundamentally a social being capable of harmonious interaction with others. We embrace the concepts that all people are worthy and deserving of respect, regardless of native origin, socio-economic status, or ethnicity, and that students achieve a sense of self-worth and fulfillment by becoming interconnected, capable, and contributing members of society (Mission & Philosophy).

I can still read into this philosophy a market-based discourse of being ‘contributing members of society,’ begging questions such as ‘Whose society?’ ‘What is meant by contribution?’ and, problematically, ‘How does this assume a universal world view?’ Even so, I appreciate its lack of overt reference to employability and economic success. That being said, I was nonetheless a tool that the school could send out to assess and negotiate a new possible service site—if it could work within our criteria and limitations. But while this framing of the visit sounds aboveboard and harmless, if read through postcolonial theory, it could more problematically reflect a strategy of surveillance.

Assessing the site

In the last section, I reflected on how the very nature of the act of assessing a service site reveals the market-based discourse of reciprocity in service-learning and the
problematic colonial positioning of *noblesse oblige*. In this section, I want to focus more narrowly on my assessing gaze in the story *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities*, and trouble that against the concept of surveillance and postcolonialism. In the following excerpt, as much as I try to diminish my authority by referring to my awkwardness and fear, I nonetheless assume a position of somebody with the right and the knowledge to help better the situation of a seniors home:

> It was very quiet then, and I felt very awkward, and the time seemed to stretch on forever before they suggested a tour.

> The place was Spartan and clean. Shelter and some food were provided—and, I suppose, the company of fellow seniors—but the place felt a little cold to me. That being said, I have no idea if anything unsightly had been whisked away in advance of my visit. I was shown into the various bedrooms, and I was conscious of invading the very little personal space these seniors held. I thought of begging off seeing the rooms in order to protect their privacy, but I was more afraid of offending. I inspected, and tried to note what might be missing—what piece of the puzzle we might hope to provide. . . .

> At the end of the tour everyone looked at me expectantly. Was this finally the time to make suggestions? (Excerpt from *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities*).

I have already mentioned that this site visit was unique because most of the site visits were performed at the outset of the school year, but this one occurred as a stand-alone event eight months later. I accepted the invitation to visit the seniors home in the
spring first because my contact at the Teda Volunteers Association was a very hard
woman to say no to—and also because the upper elementary teachers were becoming
interested in having their own service projects. I think it is important to note that when
I went to the seniors home, I had already signed a contract to teach the following year in
Malaysia. I knew I was leaving the international school, and I did not know who would
replace me as Community Service Coordinator. Any commitments I made had a quickly
approaching expiration date. What is important here is that I (and the school) assumed
the authority to observe the home before committing to service—what would be a
relatively light and short-lived commitment, at that. This is not unlike Foucault’s (2000)
description of the eighteenth century Quakers who,

> [a]t the same time as they offered assistance though, they accorded themselves
> the possibility and right to observe the conditions in which the assistance was
given: observing whether the individual who wasn’t working was actually ill,
> whether his poverty and his misery were not due to debauchery, drunkenness,
> the vices. (p. 60)

The school and I were assuming the moral position to judge whether this home
deserved our help.

> It strikes me that during my tour and observation of the seniors home, I am
assessing their needs without simply asking the obvious question: “What do you need?”
And my colonial gaze is evident by referring to the space as ‘Spartan’ (a Western
historical reference). But what most stands out to me is how little I appraise the worth
of the place—the safety, community, and care provided—instead seeking out its
imperfections. I write, “I inspected and tried to note what might be missing—what piece of the puzzle we might hope to provide.” As such, I am looking for needs rather than for accomplishments, a deficit theory approach, which, according to Smith (1999), is a “remnant of colonial and imperial history” (p. 518)—and which, Paul Gorski (2008) argues, “holds that inequality is the result, not of systemic inequities in access to power, but intellectual and ethical deficiencies in particular groups of people” (p. 518). So to further the problem that I was assuming moral authority by judging deservedness, according to Smith and Gorski, there is no possibility that the judgment could be free of the notion that if they were more like us then they would not need our help in the first place. And my so-called superior vantage point, or moral high ground for judging these needs gives me, perhaps “strategic advantage, [but] does not necessarily provide understanding” (Rabinow, 199, p. xviii). By thus positioning myself as the assessor, I am reinforcing a “privileging process that is normative in both elitist and meritocratic social systems” (Keith, 2005, p. 15).

Furthermore, I am exerting power by virtue of the very position of determining whether, and what suggestions/offers of service I will make to this place (Hall, 2001, p. 76). Tomlinson (1991) asserts “The economic dominance of the West is therefore tied in . . . with the need to assert its discovery of ‘the way of life appropriate to all human societies’” (p. 154). Near the end of Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities, my tone is that of relief to have finally arrived at “the time to make suggestions”. Finally, I could assume the authoritative expertise (my Whiteness and Western affiliation) that I brought to the seniors home with which to make a needs assessment, assuming their
needs involved becoming more like us. Hall (2001) states, “[D]iscourses, then, construct
subject-positions, from which alone they make sense” (p. 80). If the text is the
assessment of the service site, then the relief I found was in assuming the subject-
position of assessor, because, whether or not I was qualified, it was the only position I
could occupy in this place that made any sense to me. I wish I could make more
altruistic claims, but Said (1994a) is adamant:

> there is no vantage outside the actuality of relationships among cultures, among
unequal imperial and non-imperial powers, among us and others; no one has the
epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting the
world free from the encumbering interests and engagements of the ongoing
relationships themselves. (p. 55)

I do not exist in separation of the past, of my culture, of my privilege. Many believe that
the era of imperialism, strictly speaking, has not passed; rather, Haque and Tahmina
Akter (2013) argue it has “transcended from explicit military might to economic,
educational, cultural and linguistic dimensions” (p. 101). I feel I was painted into a
corner as a cultural and educational operator within a special transnational economic
zone.

The very acts of arriving, assessing and offering are problematic in that they
reinforce a colonial structure. My narrative, always positioning itself as being from
outside of the home (and outside of China and its culture, furthermore) authors a
representation of this place without consent or input:
The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and fate de mieux, for the poor Orient. (Said 1994b, p. 21)

The only way I can see to muddle through this problematic representation that I wrote is to re-meet this story and look for other pathways through it.

**Reading the Text Otherwise**

Thus far in the chapter, I have done my best to unravel the story *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* as a version of the event of this site visit to see how, in its disentanglement, it might expose asymmetrical power structures, particularly those colonial in form. I have done so by examining what I have set down in the text of the story. But Hall (2001) points out,

> Just as discourse ‘rules in’ certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk or write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it ‘rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it. (p. 72)

In other words, by setting down the story as a written text, a sidebar story is written as omission to the story; and that unwritten text is not void of knowledge but a discourse that also demands re-reading. Indeed, the discourse I have slighted can also be powerful because it creates cracks and fissures in the telling of the story that, with some help, might allow the more dominant discourses to crumble: “Discourse transmits and
produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault as cited in Mills, 2004, p. 40). If the previous analysis made me an object with little agency due to the powerful and historicized networks of power operating in international schools, in service-education projects, and in my self, then I look to Butler to advise me on how to reclaim my self in this discourse:

If my doing is dependent on what is done to me or rather, the ways in which I am done by norms, then the possibility of my persistence as an “I’ depends upon my being able to do something with what is done to me. (as cited in Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 3)

Specifically, I can do the analysis otherwise, reading and analyzing that which is not written. The ensuing analysis will examine how the action of invitation and the way of being within time can represent alternate, powerful, ‘other’ discourses.

The Invitation

As I read this story I know that I have omitted some very important observations. This seniors home is brilliantly conceived, pieced together out of love and community by a couple with little to gain in the process. To reimagine an empty hotel as a seniors home for those with nowhere else to go is awe-inspiring—the kind of work I can only wish I was capable of sacrificing my own privilege for. Nothing I can offer this place can match what this couple has provided for these seniors. I write myself in this position of power, to give service or deny it, but I arrive at this place by invitation only:
A woman came out and greeted me formally, inviting us into an office where a table too large for the small room was decked out with a bowl of oranges, a bowl of nuts, and a pot of tea. A Chinese man was waiting in the room. The four of us took our seats.

Introductions were made awkwardly; I never mastered the art of when to bow my head nor how to make respectful eye contact. We sat at the table. The oranges were pushed toward me and my liaison encouraged me to eat. I cannot deny I was uncomfortable. I knew they desperately needed donations, and these treats on the table were expensive (Excerpt from Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities).

In service education, the students, the coordinator and the school are positioned as service providers. In a restaurant, the server provides the food, and is often considered the host or hostess. As such, this passage marks an inherent contradiction in the simple server-served relationship which is supposedly established. I am at the seniors home to offer service, but I am not the host, and food is being provided to me. While my story structure sets up my authority at the outset (in the geographic description of the home) and at the end of the story (when I take credit for making suggestions for service I claim were successful), embedded in the middle of the text, providing the tension of the story, are a number of contradictions to my so-called authority. I write as though I am a tool being wielded by my school to observe, discern, and make recommendations as to whether this site can meet our needs. And yet there is no doubt that I also offer utility
to the Teda Volunteers Association and the home, and that is why they have chosen to invite me. Foucault writes,

[people] are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing or exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are like vehicles of power, not its points of application. (as cited in Gandhi, 1998, p. 14)

At this site visitation, I am a vehicle or tool, not only for my school, but also for the seniors home.

The unnamed couple running the seniors home had already done the bulk of the work. The seniors home was already operating; I saw evidence of clean shelter, some food, and community. In a situation of complete need, the home could not have offered tea and oranges at all. *Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities* makes meaning of my presence at the seniors home. While I am open in the narrative that I do not intend to make a large commitment to this place, I nonetheless assume some authority over this place and take credit for its operation by offering suggestions and actions for its improvement. As McLaren and Jaramillo (2007) chillingly point out, “those who exercise power-over separate the done from the doing of others and declare it to be theirs” (p. 40), and certainly there is an appropriative tone to my story. I end the story speaking of the success of the ‘Soaps for Seniors’ project only in terms of the international school, and the degree of student and parent buy-in:

“I think we could probably collect soap and shampoo for your home,” I suggested, thinking of how much the parents of our students travelled. *They*
seemed excited at this idea. It would likely free up more of their budget for other needs. . . .

The “Soaps for Seniors” program was quite the hit. Many of the parents had been stockpiling hotel supplies, and were happy to have a reason to move them. In the Spring “Beyond our Walls” field trips, in which our students went out on week long excursions, the students were very excited to empty their hotel bathrooms nightly, filling small suitcases with soaps and shampoos. (Excerpts from Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities)

There is no follow-up as to whether the program or the home’s alliance with our school proved of benefit to either party. Furthermore, McLaren and Jaramillo (2007) charge that a relationship in which power is being establish ‘over’ “[flattens] out relations between people to relations between things” (p. 41). Indeed, my narrative usually refers to the arrangements and communications as being “a working relationship between our school and their home,” or “The grade 3 and 4 classes did make a handful of visits to the home” which is just as problematic. Ultimately, at the end of the story, when making offers of possible services, I assume that the offer of having the school choir come to perform was deemed of less value and then proffer up the ‘Soaps for Seniors’ program, which is a more tangible, product-based relationship between the school and home. I have no idea—to this very day—whether one was valued more or less than the other, or whether either was valued at all.

So if I revisit this story as one where the Chinese couple has done the valuable work to set up this safe place for seniors, then the invitation should feature far more
prominently in the narrative. I am there at their choosing. They see, in me, some channel to gain further whatever it is they needed. They are not without power, and, should I choose to leave without offering assistance, their position is not changed. I do not exercise a power that can make things worse in this specific place. According to Butler (2011), identity does not rest in a title (such as Community Service Coordinator), nor anything else I could possess; it is instead “something that one ‘does’, or ‘performs’ and recreates through concrete exchanges, discourses and interactions between human beings” (as cited in Van Dijk, 2011, p.266). What happens, then, to my identity when the action of the story changes from my active journeying, assessing, and suggesting to the action of inviting, directing conversation, and offering of tea and oranges—done by others onto me? I am invited into the room for tea and oranges, and, indeed, in this moment, the description of my position in a more passive tense demonstrates that I did not hold nearly the power I tried to assume. But it is not just the tangible action of inviting and hosting undertaken by the other in this text which rewrites and subverts colonial norms; I have a distinct inability written through the middle of the text, exemplified through my understanding of time.

A Sense of Time

In Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities, I speak to another view of time I experienced while in China:

I ate oranges, I ate nuts, and I drank the tea, complimenting the quality of the food, all the while wanting to get on with business but knowing it would not be
up to me to decide when the right time was to start that conversation. I drank my tea slowly, knowing they would continue to refill it, so long as I emptied it, but never sure as to how much I needed to drink in order to pay compliment to the host. By this point, I had realized that things moved at their own pace in China; it was about knowing the right time for things. And, although I knew this sense of time was important, I was never able to feel it myself; I always waited to be told. (Excerpt from Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities)

Before my time in China, it had never occurred to me that there might be other ways to live time. Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, and Pilot (2009) explain the differences between two major cultural ways of experiencing time: monochromic and polychromic time. Confucian Heritage Cultures experience polychromic time in a way that “[tends] to emphasize the experiential rhythms of time with priority given to relationships rather than ‘artificial’ clock time. . . . Time is limitless and unquantifiable; there is always more time” (p. 121); and, in the story, I talk about “knowing the right time for things” in a way that “I was never able to feel . . . myself.” For I, on the other hand, was raised to talk about time with a market discourse. Time can be spent or saved, gained or lost, and, somehow or other, one can arrive ahead of time or behind time. In the story, I long for the time “to ‘get on with business.’” In my understanding of the world, regardless of interruptions or divergences, time marches on, never veering, in a forward direction. The problem with the sense of time that formed my view of the world is that “the teleological promise of linear time—that is to say, its belief in the benign purposiveness of history and nature—carries with it the double charge of Progress and Perfectibility”
(Gandhi, 1998, p. 174). If I connect my linear preference for time to an imperialist value of progress, I must refuse the possibility that my awkwardness and tension in this meeting can be a simple lack of cultural currency on my behalf. Indeed, it is impossible, because every day in China I negotiated my lack of cultural currency with frustration (perhaps) but not the dissonance evidenced in the story.

I remember visiting the Great Wall of China with students/friends from the English class we taught at a local hospital. The plan was to visit the wall, have lunch and return. Heading back to TEDA, our friends decided we should visit a nearby headpond to do some boating. Upon our return to TEDA, we were treated to a lengthy and ceremonious restaurant meal to celebrate the day, and afterwards succumbed to the suggestion of KTV (Karaoke). At every added activity, my husband and I were calculating the cost of that time and weighing it against the possibility of offending our friends for bowing out early. We fell into bed that night exhausted and, frankly, stressed, because we had planned for a half-day trip, and now our lesson preparation and marking was behind schedule. But this still does not feel dissonant to me. This Great Wall of China visit reflects a cultural difference in how to experience time, and any inconvenience we met was certainly countered by the fond memories we have of our friends on that day and the awe we felt experiencing this historic site.

So while the Great Wall of China visit and the seniors home visit both feature a run-in of sorts between different ways of experiencing time, the former is a pleasant memory whereas the latter continues to disturb. If my sense of fulfilling the duty of time is to progress and improve then the dissonance that occurred in this moment may
have been my reaction to not being able to set my own agenda, or easily get to a point. In this story, while “I knew this sense of time was important, I was never able to feel it myself. I always waited to be told.” Certainly, the description of the passage of time as spent “waiting”—rather than “enjoying tea and oranges” or “getting to know my hosts”—reflects an idea of wasting time that could be spent in progress. Furthermore, Mills (2004) states it is important to look for “the labor which people perform to exclude certain forms of knowledge from consideration as true” (p. 16). The waiting was laborious. How the story would have changed had I asked the simple question – “What can the school do to assist?” I would have passed to them the authority to speak upon their situation, but instead, by laboriously waiting, I keep the authority seated in me.

But this same narrative can also be read otherwise. Carla Willig (2001) explains that Foucauldian discourse analysis assumes of any text that “multiple readings are always possible” (p. 121). As such, despite my attempt to establish myself as the person with the power to make decisions, I belie myself in this moment. Arribas-Ayller and Walkerdine (2008) explain that power “is not the possession of individuals, but operates through individuals by acting upon their actions” (p. 94). If you consider that the bulk of the Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities, is spent waiting, then I am now repainted effectively inactive. I am not only a tool at the service of the seniors home (as established in the previous section), but, at least in this meeting, I am unable to steer us through this course of time. In the middle of my story, I take little action; as such, I have not nearly the power with which I described myself nor nearly the power which I
expected to have. In the next section, I will examine more deeply the basis of my expectations.

**Rereading the Memory against *Little Women***

I did have expectations. I had expectations about how it should feel to come with the offer of aid, I had expectations of how I should thus be greeted, and I had expectations placed upon me by my school to make only ‘appropriate’ commitments to this home. Teresa Strong-Wilson (2008) argues that a white teacher is a construction bound up in the history and context of stories and lived experiences (p.3). Strong-Wilson suggests that a person can extend her or his horizon (which I interpret as seeing a more whole picture of the world) if we set in counterpoint our touchstone stories with counter stories, of which for me the seniors home visit is one. It is when texts are read side by side that we can be “[provided] new significance to those forgotten details confined to the shadows” (p. 6). In this section, I reread the experience of *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* against one of my own touchstone stories, *Little Women*, to see what might emerge in their juxtaposition. Notably, I see now how the text of *Little Women* was formative in my expectations at the seniors home visit.

In *Little Women* we learn the importance of duty to others before self through the March family’s (Jo, Meg, Amy and Beth’s) relationship with the Hummel family, an impoverished local German family headed by a widowed mother. With each act of ‘sacrifice’ on the part of the March family, love and gifts are bestowed in return upon them by their wealthy and watchful neighbor, Mr. Laurence. When they send their
Christmas breakfast to the Hummels, they received, that evening, “Ice-cream—actually two dishes of it, pink and white—and cake and fruit and distracting French bonbons, and, in the middle of the table, four great bouquets of hothouse flowers” (Alcott, 2008, p. 32). Furthermore, when Beth becomes deathly ill tending to the sick Hummel children, Mr. Laurence arranges for the return of Marmee (the mother in the March family) to her daughters from the war front, where she was tending to their ailing father (p. 291). In contrast, the Hummels, who lose a baby to this sickness (scarlet fever), are never reported in the text to receive of Mr. Laurence’s generosity. So, despite Meg’s declaration that the internal motivation of ‘feeling good’ from “loving our neighbor better than ourselves” (p. 24), this text implies omnipotence and karma. Putting yourself in the service of others would appear among many things to be a strategy to endear oneself to those who have the power to bestow great gifts, including love.

So, then, what can be read into my intentions and expectations that day, at the seniors home? I would like to argue that I was there as a champion of social justice, wanting to make a statement about a system that marginalizes seniors, in particular those with no children to take care of them (a still-problematic urge, considering the elderly in Canada face their own issues). But clearly, where the Volunteer Association had approached me to assume this seniors home as a service site, I was following the path set before me. I was there to fulfill a duty—not as a member of the community concerned for its people, but rather as the representative for an institution that educated the children of expatriate business workers in China. I was there to offer assistance if it fell within the constraints of instructional requirements. In other words, I
was not of the community, and I was not trying to build community; I was ever on the 
outside looking in. My visit to this seniors home felt unbalanced, perhaps because it 
seemed wrong to be greeted by a host who generously provided tea and oranges, as is 
indicated when I write, “I cannot deny I was uncomfortable. I knew they desperately 
needed donations, and these treats on the table were expensive. Why was I being fed 
them?” (excerpt from *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities*) Those who are to 
receive the service do not bear the gifts! After all, this was not the scene of the March 
family bringing their Christmas breakfast to the Hummels: “‘Das ist gut!’ ‘Die 
Engelkinder!’ cried the poor things, as they ate, and warmed their purple hands at the 
comfortable blaze” (p. 23). This text paints the served as giving only grateful praise, for 
they have nothing else to give. *Little Women* taught me that charity was a relationship 
of power over, between giver and recipient. But despite my narrative positional 
superiority in *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities*, I make evident in the text 
that I was being treated with respect—the respect that exists between equals, which I 
acknowledge when I write,

\[
I had been in China long enough to know the importance of ‘face’. They were not 

begging, we were searching for something more along the lines of a business 

arrangement. The show of food was a demand of respect, and I had to eat the 

food. (excerpt from *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities*).
\]

Indeed, this text makes clear that the couple at the seniors home was wielding power 
over me, in that they could make me do anything. There is a tension to this paragraph 
because there are demands. The Hummel family passively received the offered service,
making no suggestion as to how the *giving* should take place, while, on the other hand, the couple at the seniors home were looking for an *arrangement* which implies dialogue will occur as to how the *exchange* will take place. And if we read that against Smith’s (1999) objection to researchers entering and leaving communities “showing ‘as a collective’ little responsibility for the overall impact of their activities” (p. 71), the assertion of the right to dialogue and reach agreement about the ‘how’ of our being in the seniors home begins to appear as activist.

In *Little Women*, the Hummel family exist on the margins of the text; they have no first names, no personality, and no independent thoughts or actions. They exist only in relation to the March family as the receivers of their service/charity. Juxtaposing the binary of server-served as represented in *Little Women* between the March family and the Hummels, and as represented in *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* between myself as an operator for the international school and the couple who ran the seniors home, the dissonance begins to make more sense. Let me be clear that I did not enter the seniors home with some idea that I would find people begging, groveling, and praising and find pleasure in the discrepancy of our situations. Eugene T. Gendlin (1964) argues that we do not experience on such an explicit level; rather, I experience the present and my memories as implicit, felt experiences informed by my knowledge, my language, and my memories:

> Rarely, if at all, do I think in words what I now observe. Nor do I think each of the past experiences which function in this observing. Rarely do I think in explicit
words what I will say. All these meanings function implicitly as my present, concretely felt experiences. (p. 113)

All of which is to say that the value of the exercise of returning to our touchstone stories in counterpoint with counter-stories is that we can begin to see the root of our implicit, felt reactions to experience. As I reflect on the implicit and try to make it verbally explicit, depending on context (and thus the presence of counter stories), I carry forward the memory (Gendlin, 1964, p. 114) which has as effect “not merely a shifting of interpretation. There is referent movement—that is to say that which is being symbolized is changing” (p. 147). This memory theory is from Gendlin’s chapter entitled “A Theory of Personality Change,” which implies the possibility of changing my self. Indeed, this fits beautifully with Foucault’s proposition that philosophy might be “a means of reflecting not so much on what is true or false but on our relation to truth[.] How, given that relation to truth, should we act?” (as cited in Rabinow, 1994, p. xx). In other words, revisiting Little Women against the seniors home visit has led me to see how it informed my truth of charity and service, and, as this truth is made more explicit, I can choose to explore other truths. In the next and final section of this analysis, I will examine how my position as a Canadian Community Service Coordinator was being otherwise constructed in Mao Tse-tung’s essay In Memory of Norman Bethune.

**Rereading the Memory Against “In Memory of Norman Bethune”**

The critical reading of a text through a postcolonial lens, argues Said (1994a), means not only reading what is at the centre of the text, but reading that centre against
what is on the peripheries of the text. More poetically, Said recommends we pay heed to T.S. Eliot’s “other echoes [that] inhabit the garden” (p. 336). The text of the seniors home visit—both the written text I created as Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities, and even the text which is simply the experience itself—is haunted by a ghost. Besides the four of us at the table (myself, the school liaison and the couple from the seniors home), the echo of Norman Bethune was also present in this place:

“So you are Canadian?” Of course, my contact at the Volunteer’s Association would have shared this information in advance of my visit.

“Yes, wo shi Jianada ren” (I am Canadian), I would answer.

“Your Chinese is very good!” they would exclaim.

“No, my Chinese is very bad” I would retort in Chinese. My tones would have been entirely wrong. My Chinese was terrible, but even this conversation was an important part of ‘the ritual.’ Had my Chinese been as excellent as they were claiming, I would not have needed my liaison.

“Bai Qiu’en was a very good man.”

The first time Bai Qiu’en was raised in conversation I had no idea to whom they were referring. But I had been in China for three quarters of a year, and I now knew they were referring to Norman Bethune, a Canadian doctor, and a communist sympathizer, who had come to China to help during the Second Sino-Japanese war and had died of blood poisoning during his mission.

“A Canadian doctor;” I say, “he helped the Chinese. A good man.”
But frankly, I knew little of Norman Bethune; I had read just enough to have an idea of whom they were speaking and had not bothered to research the man any further. Mao Tse-tung had written an essay entitled In Memory of Norman Bethune, which even today is a mandatory component of the Chinese public education system. This was another piece of the formality I had to move through before we could get to ‘the point,’ which, to my mind, was the feasibility of developing a working relationship between our school and their home.

“A very good man,” I would have responded, having little more to add.

(Excerpt from Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities)

I have left this piece of the analysis for the end of the chapter because I think it reveals the most glaring contradiction of Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities. In the text, I talk about wanting “a working relationship between our school and their home,” which I have already revealed to be a problematic construction of a relationship between things and not people, pushing away the possibility of community. But even more problematic, I believe, is how I maintained distance between my self and any service site, any community I visited. If I truly wanted to be in communion with the seniors home, there is a piece of the puzzle that is misfit and reveals the text’s glaring contradiction. Why, if every time I visited a service site I was invited to converse on Norman Bethune, did I not seek out Mao’s essay to better understand the invitation? What might it have revealed?

More to the point, with the official sanction of truth as provided by Mao Tse-tung’s essay, the text of Norman Bethune might have constructed expectations at this
seniors home in much the same way that the text of *Little Women* was operating to construct expectations in my self. That is, it was creating (in those familiar with the text) an implicit understanding of what was occurring in this event (this service site visit) which may have been at odds with my own implicit understandings. What I am suggesting is that, while I had expectations of what it should feel like to set up a service site, the couple at the seniors home may have had expectations of my intent, perhaps based on Mao Tse-tung’s essay. I am further suggesting that my choice to not seek out this essay while in China reflects a problematic positioning of my self that disallowed any possibility of real dialogue or community with the couple running the seniors home.

Reading *In Memory of Norman Bethune* now, I see it is a relatively short piece that mostly valorizes the communist struggle and outlines some of the traits that mark authentic intention in service to others. Mao (2004) writes,

> Leninism teaches that the world revolution can only succeed if the proletariat of the capitalist countries supports the struggle for liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples and if the proletariat of the colonies and semi-colonies supports that of the proletariat of the capitalist countries. (para. 1)

If the raising of Norman Bethune was an attempt to connect my person to Mao Tse-tung’s valuation of Norman Bethune, were the nameless couple from the seniors home assuming a similar intent on my part? If that is the case, were they viewing our meeting not as a relationship of power-over but as a relationship between comrades?

Furthermore, Mao Tse-tung goes on to describe how to recognize a falsehood in charity:

> “At every turn they think of themselves before others. When they make some small
contribution, they swell with pride and brag about it for fear that others will not know” (para. 2). Ironically, communicating the success in service projects is an important part of an international school’s service program because it makes possible its further valuation on staff and with the parents. It helps justify the school’s very presence in the community. I have no intention of defending Mao Tse-tung as a historical figure; nor would I align myself with him. The point here is that if the couple from the seniors home did believe my intentions matched those with which Mao Tse-tung painted Norman Bethune, then there was certainly a disharmonious clash of intentions occurring, of which I was perhaps ignorant—but, more concernedly, of which I chose to be ignorant, by dismissing the essay altogether.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1994a) speaks to the importance of narrative because it can be wielded by the colonizer as power-over, but also by the colonized as an “[assertion] of their own identity and the existence of their own history” (p. xii). By choosing not to read *In Memory of Norman Bethune* while I was in China, was I “[blocking] other narratives from forming and emerging” (p. xiii)? If so, was I risking my own humanity, for as Freire (1996) warns in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “...no one can be authentically human while he [sic] prevents others from being so” (p. 66). In *Tea, Norman Bethune, and Other Formalities*, from the overtness of my not naming the couple who run the seniors home, to the choice to not meaningfully communicate by not reading Mao Tse-tung’s essay, I have omitted their narrative. It is not a simple question of cultural misunderstanding. The couple made me an offer to communicate, and, had this been the first offer of Norman Bethune, I might be able to weaken the
importance of my choice; but, by avoiding the text I was skirting an opportunity to more authentically communicate. Revisiting this memory, I now acknowledge that offering the topic of Norman Bethune displays the power (on the part of the couple operating the seniors home) to give, the power to summon history to their ends, and the power to size me up, in terms of my knowledge and right to be performing in the capacity of Community Service Coordinator. And to this day, I do not know what (if anything) was said afterwards of my presence—or the international school’s presence—in the seniors home. Did I, or the school, feature in their narration? Did we ever appear even on the periphery, or were we omitted in their story? There are roughly 1.3 billion people in China. Just as my telling of the story in Canada is unlikely to make its way back to this home on the outskirts of Tianjin, likewise, the seniors home also holds a significant audience, and just because I am not privy to the stories they now narrate, it is not that my story or theirs was insignificant, or without power. It should not be a marker of power that it manages (or fails) to infiltrate a Western audience.

Concluding Thoughts

Sometimes, a memory from China will suddenly surface, one that I had not paused to consider in years. It surfaces, I re-experience it, and it subsides back to the edge of memory. The warmth of stuffed buns (bao) in my hands on a cold morning, the incessant honking on any given taxi ride, the flame igniting in the box over our sink that heated our kitchen and bathroom water. These memories do not surface unless they are triggered or consciously pulled. The seniors home visit has always been different.
The discomfort of this experience, its dissonance, has rested somewhere much closer to consciousness, resurfacing often, retold often, re-experienced time and time again. I cannot (and, frankly, do not) wish to go back in time and relive this moment. Had I researched Norman Bethune and Mao’s essay, I might have had a smoother conversation. The experience could have been more comfortable and less dissonant. I do not bemoan the dis/comfort that has led me to this place—a place where I am revisiting my storied formation. Strong-Wilson (2008) writes that the “chafing” of our touchstone stories against counter-stories challenges us to change and to self-critique (p. 2). In other words, I might have read Mao Tse-tung’s essay, had a less discomfounding conversation at the seniors home, and left China without the questions that have led me to this point. Instead, I am choosing to embrace the dissonance as representing a more complex understanding of the world.

Ironically, while we talk of the world as shrinking, as when we refer to the “global village,” my own experiences in China have made me see the world as much, much bigger. This chapter represents how one can journey through a memory many times, remeet it, and, eventually, rewrite that memory. Going back to Foucault’s question: “Departing from what ground shall I find my identity?” (Foucault as cited in Rabinow, 1997, p. XXVI), the geographer in me recognizes that ground is always shifting. My agency is possible only if in concert with the ground moving beneath my feet, I consciously choose the direction in which I will next step.

In the previous chapter “Pools, Eddies and Obstructions” I wrote through my storied formation, identifying my ground when I left for China. In this case, I remet the
experience of reading *Little Women*, and learned how that experience was bound not only to my desire to make tangible something like love, but also propelled me away to distant places. I gained a sense of who I was when I agreed to take the position of Community Service Coordinator in Tianjin, China. Next, I felt I needed to benchmark, as a static moment, that uncomfortable visit to the seniors home, in order to have something to analyze, in order to search through its composition. The dissonance, I believe, is not unlike sensing a weak earthquake, one that barely causes hung pictures to tilt. We are jolted to a sensory place that allows us to know only that something has changed and, possibly, that there are powerful forces at work in the world, beyond our immediate control. And yet nothing in our immediate environment can make explicit what it is that has changed. My writing of *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* represents the first visit to this experience as part of this analysis.

I then revisited *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* three times, meandering through its meanings, looking first at how the text of the story reflected asymmetrical balances of power, particularly postcolonial ones; then reading the text otherwise for what was omitted; and, finally, by juxtaposing the text of the story against *Little Women* and Mao Tse-tung’s essay *In Memory of Norman Bethune*, to see what would fall from between their mismatched seams.

First, I uncovered the power imbalance reflected in the narrative, and tied it to postcolonial and critical theory. The positional superiority I assumed as Community Service Coordinator to observe, assess, and advise rested on no real expertise and certainly not on the local and historicized needs of the community in which we
operated. The very construction of service-learning in the context of an international school in a developing country presented itself as problematic in the discourse of reciprocity and the binary of server-served. I troubled how my very action of observing and assessing reflected Foucault’s notion of surveillance. Reading the text otherwise, particularly for omission, I found the power of the couple who ran the seniors home to have been neglected in my narration. Their power to invite and to steer the meeting through time shifts my position from an authoritative figure to a tool of use to both my school and the seniors home. Finally, in juxtaposing my touchstone story Little Women against the experience, I became aware that my implicit expectations of charity and service were at odds with the manner in which the service site visit was conducted. In particular, I was treated as an equal. Finally, I read In Memory of Norman Bethune these many years later and considered what it might mean if the couple who ran the seniors home assumed a parallel of intent between myself and Bethune as Mao described him. I put forward the possibility that the dissonance was a clash of intent and expectations. Throughout, I rewrite the experience to show how my story’s display of power was only one reading.

My analysis is a re-meeting of my experience at the seniors home, in which the power relationship is written otherwise. My relative lack of power in the situation is acknowledged, and the agency of the couple who conceived a home for marginalized seniors is acknowledged. Foucault (2000) writes, “That [it] is the difficult relationship with truth, the way in which the latter is bound up with an experience that is not bound to it” (p. 243). I think that this analysis has demonstrated that more truths were bound
to the experience. It has made the experience far more complex—and, in doing so, has weakened the power of my initial authoritative discourse. The story is still deeply uncomfortable, but viewing the story through other prisms, I feel I have achieved a more complex, and more forgiving narrative. Gandhi (1998) writes “[i]n its reflective modality, thus, postcolonialism also holds out the possibility of thinking our way through, and therefore, out of the historical imbalances and cultural inequalities produced by the colonial encounter” (p. 33). Indeed, to claim that through my position and privilege it is impossible for the seniors home to have power in experience would be a means of maintaining my position and privilege. Foucault (2004) writes, “[W]hat I have said is not ‘what I think’ but often what I wonder whether it couldn’t be thought” (as cited in Mills, 2004, p. 14). When I was in China, I had no experience in critical theory or postcolonial theory. These discourses were not available to me to influence what I could think or do. I want to think the experience otherwise. I am trying to free myself of the constraints of colonial thinking storied in my privileged childhood in order to act otherwise in the world.
Chapter 6: Surfacing

Following the course of a meandering river, you will end up downstream, moved from your initial position, but, through the twists and turns of the journey, the river may direct you to another place unanticipated. There is no end to my journey of decolonizing the self, I could stay immersed in this meandering current indefinitely. But in order to view and assess the relocation my current has made possible, I must surface and take note of new surroundings. This chapter represents coming up for air and taking pause to observe, absorb and reflect on my journey to date.

The goal of this research, was to decolonize my self. Through critical reflection I illustrated how, as the Community Service Coordinator at an international school in Tianjin, China, I was constructed by (and continued to construct) colonial discourses. By storying a memory of a visit to assess the needs of a seniors home, I discovered a text which located the international school, its students and parents, and my self in a position of superiority and which attempted to marginalize the seniors home, its clients and the unnamed couple who ran the place. But by juxtaposing the stories of my experiences in China with *Little Women*, a touchstone story from my childhood, I discovered contradictions in the visit that demonstrated the multiple power relations at work and how my authority was not nearly as powerful as I had constructed it. Finally, by juxtaposing the text of the visit against Mao Tse-tung’s (2004) essay “In Memory of Norman Bethune,” I was able to show how the event of the visit, while dissonant, meaningful, and powerful to my self, was only one vantage point, and how, after reframing through a different context, my own story’s consequence is debatable. This is
an important piece of the process of decolonizing the self. Had the analysis focused entirely on my own power, and how my discourses reflected harmful colonial practices, it would still have left my White, Western self as the centre of the story and the seniors home and all its residents on the periphery. It would attach agency only to my self and the international school. Using juxtapositioning to shift the focus of power illuminated the possibility that the centre is elsewhere, and the West is peripheral. Though it may seem contradictory, in acknowledging my lack of agency, I gained agency in the process.

Returning to Butler (2009),

“If my doing is dependent on what is done to me or rather, the ways in which I am done by norms, then the possibility of my persistence as an ‘I’ depends upon my being able to do something with what is done to me. (as cited in Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 177)

In other words, my analysis is a continual rewriting of the story so that I become more aware of the operation of discourses, particularly postcolonial discourses, such that I might have more agency within them. I desire a more equitable world for my self, for my students, and for my son, Duncan. By beginning the process of decolonizing my self through this research, I can at least make it more difficult for postcolonial power imbalances to operate through me.

In this final chapter, I begin by revisiting the four sets of questions which framed my research. I urge further research into the context of service-learning programs at international schools and make some suggestions for questions that could frame that
research. Finally, I revisit the story of the Wenshuan Earthquake that prefaced my introduction to see if I can read it otherwise from my new vantage point downriver.

A Critical Look at the Operation of International Schools in Developing Countries

The set of questions with the broadest scope asked: How are relations of power established between international schools and the countries in which they operate? And, to what extent are these relations of power complex, contradictory and ambiguous? I have shown how the current spread and proliferation of international schools in developing countries echoes an imperialist past and reflects the new engines of neocolonialism as defined by Haque and Akter (2013): economics, education, culture and language (p. 101). International schools tend to be established in places with high numbers of professional global workers who can afford private school tuition. Places like the Tianjin Economic Development Area (TEDA) try to attract foreign investment with cheap land and labour which increase the profit margins of transnational companies. In these places, the professional global workers become an elite privileged class who bring with them not only their families, but their cultures, languages, and material desires. As such, places like TEDA become “contact zones” as described by Pratt (2008) in which “disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (p. 7). In addition to the professional global workers who arrive to work and manage the foreign owned factories, the international schools that establish themselves to serve the needs of this elite class also import teachers, usually from Western countries, to teach a Western
English-based curriculum to the children of the professional global workers. These imported teachers have a high turnover rate, and can be considered similar to Schulz’s (2007) tourist teachers in remote South Australian communities. In my experience, few have the intention of establishing roots within the local community and few question the hegemonic principles embedded in the Western curriculum they deliver. Moreover, international schools operate in neocolonial contexts because they tend to be established in places that rely on the economics of foreign investment, the curriculum of international schools is Western and English-based, and the clientele and teaching staff of international schools bring with them culture, language and material desires from outside the local community. And if international schools risk functioning as neocolonial projects, how does the delivery of service-learning projects in the local communities further reinforce these imperialist power imbalances?

**A Critical Look at Service-Learning Programs Delivered by International Schools**

My second set of research question focussed more directly on the delivery of service-learning programs at international schools, asking: How do colonial power structures operate in international school service programs? And, with reference to the international school’s service-learning program in Tianjin, China, what tensions and contradictions existed within the relations of power in that context? To begin, all service-learning programs run the risk of reinforcing neoliberal beliefs that individuals are responsible for their poverty and/or privilege. Direct service projects do not necessarily engage students in a democratic dialogue about systemic power imbalances
and how to address them. Kahne and Westheimer (2004) found very few programs in
the United States that attempted to instil a sense of justice-oriented citizenship.
Similarly, the projects I directed at the international school in Tianjin, China were in the
form of direct service with no instructional time provided for critical reflection,
discussion, or action. These direct-service models of service-learning are problematic
because they risk fastening students to a position of superiority in the server-served
binary that is constructed.

This becomes even more problematic when implemented in the context of an
international school operating in a developing country—first, because the clientele of
the school operates from a position of economic privilege within the community, and,
second, because echoes of a colonial past often haunt these places. As Jefferess (2008)
points out, service-learning is often conducted under the auspices of forging students
into becoming global citizens; however, he asserts that the title of global citizen only
gives agency to the student and implies an inability of the ‘served’ to be able to change
their own positions (p. 28). Furthermore, the position of server can easily be taken up
as a moral position based on the imperial project’s noblesse oblige, and the greater
detrimental effects of the globalized scope of entrenched poverty can be veiled behind
ideas of philanthropy and the idea that perhaps the community is better off for the
presence of the transnational corporations that provide the clientele for the schools.
This reflects Said’s (1994a) description of the imperialist project finding its consent in
“cultural formations such as philanthropy, religion, science and art” (p. 12). Therefore,
service-learning projects risk reinforcing colonial power structures for several reasons:
first, by virtue of the school clientele who are in a position of relative privilege and not from the local community, a power imbalance is established before service-learning has even begun. Second, as Keith (2005) described, the server-served binary that is created whenever projects are set-up in a direct-service model fastens both parties to the power imbalance, and through the concept of reciprocity establishes a system which maintains relative positions (p. 15). Finally, as Tyson (2006) pointed out, imperialism carries with it a history of philanthropy which in the past has been used to justify the economic, military and cultural presence of imperialist powers (p. 421). Although today’s imperialism looks very different on the surface, service-learning projects at international schools run the risk of justifying foreign economic control in developing countries using similar rationalisations. So, if the service-projects at international schools place the students in relative positional superiority to the community members which they ostensibly serve, in what position did that place me, as the Community Service Coordinator for these same projects?

A Critical Look at the Position of Community Service Coordinator

My third set of research question concentrated its focus on the position I held as Community Service Coordinator and asked: How am I, as a teacher, traveller, and, most importantly, the Community Service Coordinator, implicated in those structures and practices? In all three roles, I have the power to maintain or challenge the colonial power structures operating in the delivery of a service-learning program at an international school through the power of stories.
As a teacher and as the Community Service Coordinator, although the scope of what and how I can offer is limited by school structures and curriculum, I am nonetheless in the privileged position of authoring experiences. How I design my lessons, how I communicate and partner with service sites (or fail to do so), how I create the space for my students to critically reflect (or not) on service-learning experiences—all of these decisions affect the plot and the themes my students experience in the classroom lessons and in service-learning projects. Service-learning, in particular, involves bringing the students into the community, and I have the power to outline in advance how I want them to read the community and their role within—or outside of—that community. In other words, as a teacher and as the Community Service Coordinator, I have the power to plan out an experience which could lead students to critical revelations about how power structures operate, why poverty persists, and how the students can assume activist roles in changing those structures. Admittedly, it can be disheartening when the structures within the school and curriculum limit the capabilities of teachers to author the experiences. Time for critical discussion, reflection, questioning, and action must be provided above and beyond the time allotted for performing service-learning acts at service sites. I acknowledge, however, that I am only now coming to these realizations through my research. If I want administrators and curriculum designers to make room for these critical components within a service-learning program, I must engage these colleagues in discussion so that they can understand the importance of offering these spaces for critical pedagogy.
Furthermore, in order to work as a critical pedagogue, I must be literate in those power structures and continue to work to dismantle my own blinders.

I must also be aware of how I, as a traveller, carry stories between places. Having come to realize the power of stories of my own identity formation through rereading *Little Women*, I must pay more attention to not only what stories I tell, but also what I emphasize and omit within these stories. How can I tell my stories with the goal of dismantling, rather than reinforcing power structures? Furthermore, when I travel, how can I seek out experiences which will further challenge my own storied formation, and further loosen imperialism’s grip on how I read the world?

**Implications for the Delivery of Service-Learning Projects at International Schools**

The final question that framed my research addressed how I would move forward and apply my findings: What are the implications of my research for the delivery of service-learning programs both in the international school and local (New Brunswick, Canada) contexts? This section will review implications for international school programs.

While my research made visible that international schools operating in developing countries can represent one facet of the neocolonial project, the research also illuminates how service-learning programs offer possibilities and opportunities for these international schools to operate otherwise in these locations. However, in order to operate differently, some of the problematic language of service-learning could be recognized and recomposed to address a more equitable vision, for as Keith (2005)
points out, service-learning implies a problematic binary of server-served. Is it possible to re-envision service-learning as what I would call in-community learning? To make more horizontal the relationship between the students and community, such that school and community are acknowledging they are fastened together? What could such a curriculum look like? Are there international schools already practicing such a model?

First and foremost, the school needs to maintain long-term relationships with organizations and structures in the community. Only in the context of a long-term relationship can a degree of understanding and trust be built between the school and community organization. The staff at international schools need to familiarize themselves with the history of the places in which they work, with particular focus on how the place may have been impacted by imperialism. Additionally, the schools need to foster relationships with their local staff and include the local staff in the planning of such in-community projects. It is crucial that local staff feel safe enough to express how the local community might view and react to the project under discussion without fear of being patronized or dismissed. Trust is integral to the relationship in order to ensure meaningful communication and, thus, meaningful projects in-community. Keith (2005) envisions projects which “promot[e] capacities for self-development and for self-determination” (p. 17). In other words, the community must feel comfortable and safe enough to express what they need to increase mobility, growth, and choice; and the school needs to respond in terms of what they can and cannot provide, rather than what they will or will not provide. I return again to Derrida, who argues we must respond because we are responsible (as cited in Morton, 2003, p. 127).
Student learning *in-community* could look very different than a direct-service model. Learning would take place by forming relationships individual to individual. Opportunities for students and community members to talk across difference could occur in many forms, from assisting with the creation of a website or running workshops on how to use any number of Information Technologies. But what would move *in-community* learning to a co-curricular model, is the provision of instructional time for critical reflection and discussion in the classroom would link students to community members and facilitate communication between the groups. *In-community* learning would focus on relationships and communication, over the typical market-accumulation model of service-learning which requires labour or product to be given, without the students ever necessarily communicating with (nor even meeting) the recipients.

I acknowledge that this style of *in-community* learning may be harder to market in terms of the school’s reputation. Its timelines are indefinite, its ends are less tangible, and thus these projects are harder to capture in a snapshot or tagline for a school brochure or website. I also realize that it feels good to set a definite goal and complete that goal, which is much easier to do via a fundraiser or clean-up. But the common, one-off fundraising or clean-up project, typical of the direct-service model, should only occur within an existing framework of a long-term meaningful relationship so that the project is contextualized and meaningful to the students—and, at the same time, organized in conjunction with the community organization to ensure that the efforts are at least a partial contribution to their needs: for instance, a community organization might want a particular appliance, tool, or vehicle which would enable
them to be more independent. It is the difference between running a food-drive and fundraising for a community garden. The former requires a periodic commitment, because the drive does not change the self-sufficiency of the organization. The latter enables greater independence for the organization. So it is possible to have both the long-term relationship, the *in-community* learning and the tangible satisfaction that comes with meeting a specified goal.

International schools could also provide a unique opportunity for conversations “across difference” (Keith, 2005, p. 17). International school classrooms are culturally and linguistically heterogeneous. In order for students at international schools to navigate their school day, they are having conversations *across difference* within the classrooms, in the hallways, in their extra-curricular activities and outside of school in the local community. Some of the students are life-long nomads, except that they do not move from one place to another in community, only within the most immediate family unit. In other words, by necessity, they have experience communicating amidst difference. International school students are uniquely positioned to understand there are multiple ways in which people experience and view the world, and an intentional curriculum to teach communication *across difference* lays within the possibilities and opportunities of international school education.

That being said, it will also be important to remember that the international schools usually charge a high tuition and are unlikely to have economically underprivileged students. This is a difference which needs to be addressed directly in the curriculum before *in-community* learning can take place. A critical look at how
systems create poverty, and cracks in the capitalist notion of meritocracy will need to be addressed specifically. Within the classroom and across disciplines, curriculum must address colonialism, globalization, poverty, capitalism, gender and sexuality inequality, as well as anti-racism, class violence, human rights, and social justice. In essence, the language to discuss the many barriers to equality must be taught, such that students can take this knowledge and apply it to their in-community experiences. The delivery of such a curriculum, partnered with *in-community* learning, might foster relationships between the students and community members which would make the students feel the will to respond in ways that create capacity for mobility, growth, and choice.

In other words, because international schools cannot exist in isolation and without impact on the local community, building partnerships with the community is essential. My own range of experience with service-learning is admittedly limited, but I am convinced the program can be conceived to do less harm with the goal of working toward removing barriers of inequity.

**Implications for the Delivery of Service-Learning Projects in New Brunswick, Canada**

In the summer of 2009, I returned from China and Malaysia to my permanent teaching position at Nackawic High School. As I work on this research, it is impossible not to connect my findings with my local experiences. Currently, there is no provincially mandated service-learning program in New Brunswick’s high school system. Nonetheless, the discourses of service-learning and reciprocity are present through particular programs, as well as through the multitude of charitable projects schools
undertake as extra-curricular projects. Although on the surface it might appear easier to deliver a service-learning program from a school whose students are in fact members of the community, there are nonetheless a number of ways these projects can also illuminate asymmetrical distributions of power.

To begin, many direct-service projects are in the form of fundraisers for international causes. When working with students to select these projects, discussions should take place as to whether the project enables self-determination, or is a band-aid solution that maintains the recipients’ dependence on foreign donations. Furthermore, it is important to promote the project in a way that allows students to see the interdependency of all parties—so that the recipients are treated with dignity and respect, rather than pity. Additionally, it is crucial that the program be organized so as to not minimalize the challenges that some of the students within the school are experiencing.

On this note, although many of the direct-service projects have local causes they tend to address the problems previously outlined. First, schools need to strive for projects which stress the importance of self-determination. Could students, in the form of co-curricular projects, envision, design, and implement projects in partnership with community? As already highlighted, the satisfaction of tangible goals can be attained through fundraising and working for a community garden as easily as they can via a food drive. The difference is in the permanence of the solution. Second, careful attention must be given to how the project defines the other, especially when the other, or recipient of the service-project, may very well be a student within the walls of the
school. Returning again to the food drive, many students may be accessing this service. The manner in which the need is communicated and the project is delivered has the ability to either patronize and belittle or to explain and illuminate the deficiencies of the system that creates the needs in the first place.

Finally, above all else, schools need to be wary of the discourse of “luck”. A student who feels fortunate for their privilege is not identifying themselves as interdependent with all members of the community. A teacher or student who takes up a discourse of luck is not envisioning how the privilege of their position is at the cost of another. The student who identifies themselves as lucky may be likely to donate to a food drive, but may be less likely to become an activist fighting for systemic changes that would end the inequities altogether. In order to change the discourse of luck, school must pay attention to how the service project is promoted within the school, and in the curriculum. A critical examination of how systems of power separate and marginalize on the basis of labour, race, gender, sexuality as well as other social constructs must be addressed directly.

I envision in-community learning as equally beneficial in the local context. The same projects I outlined previously (assisting in web development and communication) could be powerful bridges across the differences of age, race, gender, sexuality, income, and experience. Likewise, individual schools forming long-term partnerships with community organizations holds out the best possibilities for creating and sustaining justice-oriented projects.
Implications for Further Research

As I described in the literature review, there is a remarkable absence of query into the relationships that exist between international schools and the communities in which they operate. According to Philip Brown and Hugh Lauder (2009), there were over 2,700 international schools operating in 2009, more than double the number that existed in 1995 (p. 132). The effects of the proliferation of these schools needs to be examined. How are communities changed by the introduction of an international school? To what extent do international schools work collaboratively with the community or with the transnational corporations whose clientele they serve? And, since colonization did not occur homogeneously throughout the world, is there any connection to the local history and the relationship between the international school and the community?

Additionally, further research is needed into the delivery of Western models of education to international school clientele who may not be Western themselves. Further research needs to build on the work of Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, and Pilot (2009), who looked at problematic use of cooperative education with students of Confucian Heritage Culture, as well as the work of Haque and Akter (2013), who looked at how English-medium schools can foster cultural imperialism. Further research should include critical discourse analysis of school policies and the curriculum documents in light of the communities they serve. Additionally, the process for recruiting and inducting new teachers into international schools needs careful review and analysis. I think it would also be enlightening to conduct perception surveys and interviews with
international school students and staff to gauge whether they perceive international schools as trying to enable communication across difference or reinforce a Western-centred view of the world.

While I did find some critical research surrounding service-learning, I found no specific research in regards to the delivery of service-learning programs at international schools specifically. It is imperative that further research be conducted, so that these service-learning programs can operate in partnership with the community rather than as neocolonial projects. I suggest a review of any curriculum documents or messages of purpose attached to the delivery of service-education at international school programs. Furthermore, a survey of service-learning programs at international schools is needed. It would be interesting to compare the distribution of service-learning programs (with reference to Kahne and Westheimer [2004]) as being personally responsible / direct-service, participatory service, or justice-oriented service. Furthermore, a comparison of this distribution of models between international schools and local Canadian schools might illuminate if certain conditions of an international school further enable or limit the ability of these schools to push for justice-oriented citizenship. It could also be interesting to look at the delivery of one service-learning program through narrative inquiry with all participants: students, teachers, community members, and parents. The juxtapositioning of these narrative texts could reveal important discourses, omissions, and contradictions, all of which could help shift the delivery of service-learning programs to more democratic ends.
Diving Back Down

My husband Craig and I were taking our weekly Mandarin lesson when we learned of the Wenshuan Earthquake. Our Mandarin teacher and friend was from Sichuan Province. She immediately tried calling her parents on her cellphone but could not get through. I held her hand, and we went to see the school principal together to break the news. The earthquake was bad, and our own staff were directly impacted, despite it being so far away. I don’t remember if I was asked to organize fundraising or if I just took it upon myself. But out of my care for my friend/teacher, I barreled forward, doing what I thought was best.

At thirty years old, I thought I had trained myself out of emotional knee-jerk reactions. Stop – think – plan. Not necessarily bad, except I had forgotten a key component: communicate – consult. I did not think to ask the obvious question: what would an appropriate response to such an event even look like in China? I moved forward with good intent. We would collect funds in a multitude of ways, and make a single larger donation in a week or two. To my mind, the needs would not quickly dissipate, so I felt that more money later was better than less money quickly. I outlined the plan to staff.

There is much I do not know about this story. When I arrived at the international school, there was tension already existing between the Chinese staff and the expatriate staff. Wanting friendships within both circles and being a person who does not enjoy conflict, I tried to live in the middle, avoiding and exiting when the politics of the situation would arise. Of course, this was never sustainable, and I found myself fully
embroiled in the politics when the Chinese staff erupted in hurt and rage that the school did not make a show of a donation to the relief effort immediately after the earthquake. I felt responsible. Chinese colleagues demonstrated in the school courtyard, sent a petition to the Chinese government and negotiated a meeting between the Chinese staff and a Chinese government official. But my principal said their concerns were not about anything I did. And when I spoke to my Chinese colleagues to explain that the fundraising plan had been my decision, and their anger was thus my fault, they implored it was not, cried and hugged me. And I felt guilty, embarrassed and ashamed.

I wrote the Wenshuan Earthquake story for my research proposal and it was months later that I settled upon and wrote *Tea, Norman Bethune and Other Formalities* as the primary piece for analysis. And so I am coming back to the Wenshuan Earthquake story a year and a half after I wrote it, after having been through the process of rereading and rewriting the memory of my visit to the seniors home. Returning to this memory now, I feel I can finally hear what my Chinese friends and colleagues were saying.

In *All About Love*, bell hooks (2000) writes, “the way we learn to practice compassion, daily [affirms] our connection to a world community.” While my fundraising plan expressed compassion, it was the assumptions on which I formulated the plan that were so problematic. My primary objective was to raise the most money, and, while the Wenshuan Earthquake created very real losses with monetary costs, no doubt, to the individual who had just lost a child, a parent or a friend, my capitalist perception that the most pressing need was to refill the debt of infrastructure and
productivity was not only cold, but cruel. The immediate gesture of giving even a small amount, would have been a gesture of love. My plan reflected that I still identified my position as outside of this community. Without a doubt, had a personal tragedy befall one of my Chinese colleagues within the school, I would have made an immediate and personal gesture of compassion. And yet in this instance, despite my connection to the tragedy through my friend and Mandarin teacher, I clearly located myself as outside of these circumstances and this community and failed to understand how we are all interconnected. As a result, the fundraising I organized was philanthropic and not communional in nature, setting up once again the server-served binary and maintaining the international school’s us and other distinction. The project was jarring because it was yet another representation of the international school as a neocolonial project in and of itself. I assumed the Western values of capitalism, material desires, and efficiency were the correct choices; had I realized the project could have been organized differently in China, I would have judged that to be a limitation of the culture.

To this day, I am still frightened and humbled by the wail of sirens during the moment of silence. Thousands of people were connecting in emotion at a scale I have never experienced in Canada. Nobody had locked me out; rather, I was unaware of my available choice to join in. Peck (2000) asserts “The desire to love is not itself love. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will – namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love” (as cited in hooks, 2000, p. 172).
I could pull apart this story using postcolonial criticism yet again. I could look for how my discourse reveals my storied formations of charity and gendered desire to please everyone and avoid conflict. It is now available to be read, because of the process of this research. But as I surface and take in my surroundings from this new vantage point, my current is pulling me back down and in a new direction. The students who ought to be in my classroom are revealing themselves as counter-stories. The empty desks of my classroom are creating dissonance which is drowning out other thoughts, dissonance which is demanding I finish this research and refocus locally.

My desks are empty - both literally and figuratively. Poverty, addictions, abuse, violence, fear, and depression are preventing some of the students from coming to school at all. Other students facing these challenges are coming to school, but the desks are still empty, because the students are in no place to learn mandated curriculum. The system reduces these young adults to numbers, statistics, and quotas. These students do not make my job easy. But I am trying to hear their stories, I am willing myself to love. I sense new questions emerging, though they are not yet defined.

My research these past years has been with the will to change myself, since it is the only part of the world in which I can ensure I have an effect. It has been an act of will to love, to forgive, and to love myself, so that I can have the confidence to love and live in plenitude. I am closer, though not yet arrived. My journey continues.
References


Illich, I. (1968). To hell with good intentions. An address by Monsignor Ivan Illich to the Conference on Inter-American Student Projects (CIASP) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, on April 20, 1968.


MacLennan, H. (1961). *The rivers of Canada: the Mackenzie, the St. Lawrence, the Ottawa, the Red, the Saskatchewan, the Fraser, the St. John*. New York, NY: Scribner.


Candidate's full name:

Elizabeth Kathleen Christie

Universities attended:

University of New Brunswick, M.Ed. candidate, 2011-2015
Queen’s University, B.Ed., 2002
Trent University, B.Sc. (Honours), 2000

Awards:

Canadian Association of Geographer’s Undergraduate Award, 2000