

**MULTICULTURAL WAYS OF KNOWING: READING**

***THE KITE RUNNER IN A GRADE 11 CLASS***

by

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*The great teacher makes a few simple points. The powerful teacher leaves one or two fundamental truths. And the memorable teacher makes the point not by telling but by helping the students discover on their own.*

Professor Jacob Neusner

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## Abstract

This qualitative study describes responses of twenty-eight students in a Grade 11 language arts class as they read *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), and responded to activities in the context of a multicultural unit. The study is situated within the conceptual constructs of reader response pedagogy, response to multicultural literature and curriculum planning and implementation of units. The study took place within a four-week period and included multiple data sources. Eight themes emerged from the analysis of data: character analysis; stylistic devices, identifying with self; sociocultural knowledge; sociopolitical awareness; broadening perspectives; role of the teacher and response group process. Students' experiential modes of engagement and response evoked intertextual connections that contributed to an empathized understanding of the lives of the characters embedded in the textual world of *The Kite Runner*, and, in the process, made them aware of their own culture and traditions. Response group discussions played a role in furthering students' comprehension of sociocultural and sociopolitical issues on personal, textual, and global levels. The organization and resources embedded in the multicultural unit were significant tools that provided students with the structure and opportunities for metacognitive growth. The role of the teacher as facilitator was critical in scaffolding students' understanding. Her role as a co-learner along with the students and reflective practitioner illuminated the dialectical relation between the curriculum as plan and curriculum-in-use (Aoki, 2005), and promoted understanding of complex ethnic issues in a multicultural text and enabled students to make self-world connections.



## **CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

Multicultural education has evolved into a multifaceted construct in the past two decades (Banks, 2008; Diaz, 1992; Ghosh, 2002; Nieto, 2005). It encompasses the worldviews, histories and experiences of non-minority and minority students, and acknowledges differences based on gender, physical and mental attributes as well as aptitudes, and seeks to promote understanding of diverse human situations and equity issues (Au, 2006; Banks, 1993; 2008; Benhabib, 2004; Ghosh, 2002). To this end multicultural education involves validating the constructed identities and experiences of all students, bringing necessary changes in the curriculum, and providing a school culture that fosters a learning environment free of discrimination and inequality. The proponents of multicultural education have suggested these changes through the adherence to a multicultural education policy, practicing a multicultural pedagogy, and including multicultural content in the curriculum (Banks, 2008; Cai, 2003; Gollnick & Chinn, 2006; Johnston, 2003; Scott, 2003).

The goals of multicultural education involve creating school cultures that will address differential treatment of students based on race, gender, culture and class, and promote understanding, respect and acceptance of diversity (Banks, 2008; Ghosh, 2002; Nieto et al., 2007; Scott, 2003). A multicultural pedagogy seeks ways to develop critical consciousness and awareness of equity issues and ways to deal with the social construction of differences. It has progressed from the simplicity of celebration of ethnic festivals to the complexity of construction of identities within cultural spaces, and fusion of these spaces to create an ideal multicultural space (Aoki, 2005; Bhrah, 2003; Ghosh, 2002). For the past twenty years multicultural education has been an educational vision and idea outlined in curriculum documents (Banks, 1991; Grant & Sleeter, 1985; Scott, 2001; Nieto, 2002). Despite such

initiatives, the use of literature that represents the diversity of cultures and value systems is not an integral part of the secondary school curriculum, and is an area that can benefit from further research (Cai, 2003; Johnston, 2003).

Critics of multicultural education (Cai, 2002; Johnston, 2003; Rogers & Soter, 1997) have attested that language arts educators need to provide literary experiences that reflect the diverse backgrounds of students in North American schools. Diamond and Moore (1995) define multicultural literature as “meaningful literature in that it speaks to the interests of children of diverse cultures and stimulates imaginative experiences” (p. 13). Furthermore it promotes understanding of diverse groups that have been “historically excluded, misrepresented, and marginalized,” and in the process “affirms and legitimizes a culture and the human race” (Diamond & Moore, 1995, p. 13). A multicultural text creates the space for dialogue and discussion that can bring about cultural and socio-political understanding and envision a shared goal in learning (Johnston, 2004). To this end, critics (Banks, 2008; Cai, 2003; Johnston, 2003; Nieto et al., 2007) have voiced concern about one way of knowing that is based on European literature, and argue the imperative of a co-existence of texts necessary to maintain a balance between and among diverse experiences and multiple ways of knowing.

Applebee’s (1993) report on a series of studies carried out by the National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning provides a comprehensive portrait of the selection of books and approaches in the teaching of literature in a number of high schools in the United States. In this survey he found that the top ten titles used for Grades 9-12 in public, Catholic and independent schools were books by Dickens, Fitzgerald, Golding, Lee, Shakespeare, Steinbeck and Twain. He mentioned that Lee happened to be the only female

author in this list and that there were no authors represented by minority groups. Banks (2008) and Johnston (2003) have noted how, in the course of two decades, this list is still composed of the same authors. In Canada, one fifth of the school age children come from visible minority backgrounds (Statistics Canada, 2001), yet this diversity within the student population is not reflected in the diversity of curriculum content in the language arts courses (Diamini & Martinovic, 2007; Henry, 1993; Johnston, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of a Grade 11 readers' engagement with and response to a multicultural text, *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004). The study took place over a four week period, from December, 2007 through January 2008. The aims of this study were to: (1) contribute to the literature on reader response in the area of adolescents' engagement with and response to a multicultural text; (2) examine students' private and social constructions of meaning as they engaged with and responded to a multicultural text; (3) and to problematise critical issues which emerged in the multicultural unit plan as students engaged in various activities.

### **Personal Background for the Study**

I am a landed immigrant from Bangladesh, a country half the size of Saskatchewan geographically but with a population of one hundred and forty million people. Formerly Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan, and was separated by the peninsula of India from West Pakistan, now known as Pakistan. It was a unique geographical situation in which two countries with different language and culture were united as one country based on the religion of Islam. The two countries, East Pakistan and West Pakistan, were governed as one nation from 1947 to 1970. The seat of government was located in West Pakistan. In 1952, it not only denied self-government to East Pakistan, but also declared that the official language

of East Pakistan, Bangla, would be replaced by Urdu, the mother tongue of West Pakistan. This imposition gave rise to conflict and political unrest. Denial of a nation's mother tongue was regarded as tantamount to genocide, and resulted in years of negotiations with West Pakistan on issues of autonomy and safekeeping of culture and language.

Finally in 1970, war broke out, and millions of soldiers were mobilized from West Pakistan through the sea-way. For one year, the general masses in Bangladesh lived in fear and experienced the ravages of civil war, in the form of looting, raping, and killing of the nation's leading writers, orators, renowned professors, playwrights, and artists. Fortunately, this war was not long drawn out. The unfamiliar terrain and the logistics of mobilising soldiers across the sea and air finally took its toll, and by the end of December the war was declared over. Bangladesh gained freedom and recognition as an independent country. Growing up in the then East Pakistan amidst the political turmoil, I witnessed the cold-blooded liquidation of a nation's cultural icons, and from a young age was aware of the connectedness of culture, language, and identity. As East Pakistan, Bangladesh was united with West Pakistan on the grounds of religion, and also bore affinity to India on the grounds of the Bangla language and the Hindu culture. This connectedness with neighbouring nations was reflected in the curriculum of the schools.

In grades five to eight I had to study the history of the Muslim and Hindu rulers of the Indo-Pak subcontinent, Iran, Turkey, the Middle East and South East Asia. In History we studied about invaders from Persia, the Greek Alexander, and finally the British. The literature course, as a result, consisted of Asian, British, and European writers. The literature classes fuelled my imagination and provided awareness about different lands, their people, characters and cultures. Literature of the Indo-Pak subcontinent provided information and

awareness of people belonging to diverse cultural contexts, and having their own set of belief systems. Growing up in a land influenced by a number of different religions and languages, cultural diversity is a lived experience for me. My curricular landscape is embedded with novelists, poets and writers from various cultural contexts. In Grades Eleven and Twelve, literature discussions in my classes were centered on sense of duty, societal expectations, political contexts and spiritual explorations. The curricular landscape for me has not just been one way of knowing, but many.

One of the students in this study mentioned this way of knowing. In *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), the main character Amir talks about reading works of Mark Twain and Victor Hugo, watching western movies, and commenting on how a character looks like John Lennon. Josslyn noted that “it is interesting to see how much they know about us, and how little we know about them.” It was a source of surprise to her how people living in another continent were aware of the literature and arts in another part of the world. Josslyn’s query reminded me of my own intertwined background of languages, religions, and cultures, and how, like Amir, I was aware of European and American writers. Exposure to literature of various origins has contributed to my understanding of cultural diversity and sociopolitical contexts.

At present, I am a secondary English teacher with the Lakehead District School Board. Growing up in a lived curriculum of multiple realities, and as a practising teacher in Canada, I see myself as being situated in a “zone between two curriculum worlds,” the “curriculum-as-plan” and “curriculum-as-lived-experiences” (Aoki, 2005, p.159). “The “curriculum-as-plan” constitutes the formal course content being taught and “curriculum-as-lived-experiences,” for me constitutes the multiple realities represented through the

landscape of literature. From the vantage point of lived experiences, I am interested in students' interpretations and the processes by which they construct an understanding of the socio-cultural context, events and characters in a story. Sumara (2001) notes that "reading a common literary text can create opportunities to interpret personal and collective experience and, rereading that text can generate surprising and purposeful insights" (p. 165). His theoretical constructs have been developed through research with literary texts from a traditional western canon. As a secondary English language arts teacher, I have been teaching a set number of novels that belong to a western canon, and have wondered if multicultural texts can likewise be sites to evoke personal and collective responses from a class.

I have experienced situations in the classroom where students have had difficulty in understanding a number of multicultural stories. For example the title of the short story "Syamvara" (Davies et al., 2000) is a Sanskrit term that means "the woman has the power to choose her own husband." The princess in this story is a marvellous whistler; and she decides that the man who can beat her in whistling will be selected as her husband. The story takes place in a patriarchal society. The Grade Ten students find it difficult to understand the princess's unique situation of being allowed to choose her own husband. In another short story, "Forbidden Clothes," (Hilker et al., 2004), the main character, Nasreen decides to wear tight jeans and go out with her friends to parties after school hours. She leaves home to escape her father's beatings, but finally decides on her own accord to return home before her sixteenth birthday. The grade eleven students have difficulty comprehending Nasreen's plight in having to succumb to family pressure, and her decision to go back to her culture. The title of the short story expresses the layers of conflict, Nasreen experiences. *Elements of English 11* (Hilker et al., 2004), an anthology, has a section that contains multicultural

stories; to understand such stories requires entering the domains of socio-cultural contexts. These stories are set in diverse socio-cultural settings and require new ways of reading and articulation of theoretical frameworks (Aoki, 2005; Cai, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Johnston, 2003; Sumara, 2002).

### **Rationale for the Study**

Demographic changes in Canada and intense globalization have made multicultural issues a critical part of our education system (Alladin, 1992; Banks, 1993; Lynch, 1987; Nieto, 2002, Ghosh, 2002). A gradual change has taken place in the cultural mosaic of students in Canadian classrooms due to globalization and world migration (Banks, 2004; Brah, 2003, Scott, 2001). The Canadian Multiculturalism Policy of 1971 promotes (a) the advancement of cultural diversity in Canada; (b) participation through the removal of barriers; (c) intercultural understanding; (d) the delivery of needed services; and (e) the acquisition of the two official languages (Scott, 2001). The multicultural policy provides distinction and identity to Canadian society. The Canadian multicultural policy has prompted the following response from the Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education.

Canada, having been a multicultural society since its earliest days, has the advantage of long experience in what seems bound to become a mandatory 21<sup>st</sup> century skill: constructive co-existence among culturally and racially diverse communities. Indeed, the term multiculturalism is a Canadian creation. Canadians are to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the world's best-prepared country, enjoying an important advantage over her friends and competitors. (Cited in Scott, 2001, p. 44)

Multicultural citizenship in Canada is built on ethnic and racial tolerance, acceptance, and fairness, respect and trust based on constitutional policy. Canada is a nation where people of many different races, cultures and religions reside. Its multicultural policy gives rise to complex issues regarding sense of identity among marginal and dominant cultures,

especially since a multicultural policy cannot offer a “magic formula” to solve problems that arise from disparate representations (McGillis, 2000, p. 178). Classrooms now contain large numbers of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Ghosh, 2002; Scott, 2001). Various school boards across Canada have developed programs to support multicultural education for learners of diverse races, colours, nationalities, ethnocultural origins or religions. Although the need for a multicultural perspective in the curriculum has been voiced by critics (Cai, 2003; Duarte, 2000; Mukherjee, 1988; Nieto, 2002), there are many unresolved questions regarding evaluation of books across cultures, a comprehensive selection of a multicultural body of works for young adults, and gaps in the understanding of reader response processes as readers respond to literature based on cross-cultural contexts (Beach, 1997; Johnston, 2003; Nieto 2002).

Multicultural literature has the potential to engage students in unfamiliar cultures and make them aware of values, beliefs and perspectives of others (Cai, 2003; Johnston, 2004). Multicultural literature is an “artefact of cultural production” (Rogers & Soter, 1997, p. 136) and deals with the lives, experiences and situations of characters outside of the dominant culture. It also refers to the construction of complex identities in a multicultural context (Johnston & Mangat, 2004; Knoeller, 2005; Mukherjee, 1988). Freire (2005) contends that any form of literature has the potential to promote a “culture of silence” (p. 46) when diverse voices are not heard; whereas “cultural synthesis” (p. 180) takes into consideration the worldviews of diverse cultures, based on an understanding of these differences. The goals and objectives of multicultural literature mirror the critical pedagogy of Freirean theory (1997), where literacy is a “set of practices that function either to empower or disempower people” (p. 14). Multicultural literature offers the context to explore issues of diversity that



can bring about understanding of sociocultural, gender, and economic differences, and prepare students to meet the demands of a global world for the twenty-first century (Au, 1998; Banks, 2008; Ghosh, 2002; Sims, 1999). Despite such acknowledgement, the secondary English curriculum does not frequently include content, experiences and points of view representing diverse cultural contexts (Diaz, 1992; Johnston, 2003; Nieto, 2002).

There is a predominance of canonized texts in Canadian secondary English language arts programs. Johnston (2003) attributes this predominance to a number of factors: (a) teachers are comfortable in teaching “predominantly British or American literary texts that they feel are tried and tested in the classroom” (p. 24); (b) they are unfamiliar with Canadian literature; and (c) the lack of school resources coupled with preparation time prevent them from teaching a wide literary selection. Johnston (2003) correlates text selection and the goals for the reading of literature in high schools. These goals are concentrated on literary analyses of texts that will prepare students for provincial examinations. Although teachers are not using multicultural texts, they are aware of the growing diversity of students in the classrooms (Cai, 2002; Johnston, 2003). Multicultural policies and antiracist philosophies have contributed to a growing awareness about changes that need to be made to serve the needs of an increased diversity of students in the classrooms (Banks, 1998, 2007; Johnston, 2003; Scott, 2001). English teachers maybe aware of such complex issues of culture and ethnicity, but find the multicultural policies to be of little help when it comes “to comprehend what it means to initiate new reading practices in their schools” (Johnston, 2003, p. 24).

Multicultural education has the potential to be “counter-hegemonic”; however, a “sensitive multicultural pedagogy” (Banks, 1998, p. 50) is needed to establish a foundation of trust between the dominant and minority cultures in the classroom. Situational boundaries

play an important role in the understanding of sociocultural contexts (Aoki, 2004; Bhaba, 1994; Cole, 1996). Aoki (2005) draws attention to situational differences from province to province where the “curricular landscape” includes the “lived space where teachers and students dwell in face-to-face situations” (p. 98). Aoki notes that the multicultural landscape in its pluralistic essence is always in flux and offers a “landscape of multiple possibilities” (p. 94). Hence introducing multicultural texts into the classroom is a formidable and challenging process (Dias, 1994; Johnston, 2003; Nieto, 2002).

The nature of discourse, instruction and interpretation of multicultural texts is fraught with challenges (Bennett, 1996; Johnston, 2003; Mukherjee, 1988). The traditional interpretive norms based on universal themes like patterns, quests, character growth, and conflicts fail to take into account the contextual realities depicted in multicultural texts (Mukherjee, 1998, 1988). The specifics of a multicultural text are neglected when context, sociopolitical conflicts and the way social environments affect the lives of characters get overlooked. Multicultural texts are polemical by nature, the essence of which becomes clear when the social contexts are taken into account. Western critics fail to consider the nuances of “folk and scriptural wisdom, collectively revered cultural attitudes,” and, instead, concentrate on “the characters and events and universalize them” (Mukherjee, 1988, p. 18). Novels from the developing part of the world get analysed based on “image patterns, mythic archetypes, allusions, intertextuality, east-west conflict and, ultimately, universality” (Mukherjee, 1988, p. ii).

Mukerjee (1988) draws examples from a number of multicultural texts where contextual significance gets overlooked through a universal mode of interpretation. *Pather Panchali* (Bandyopadhyay, 1929) is a novel about a boy named Opu growing up in a village in

Nishindhipur. A host of village characters are memorably etched along with Opu. The title of the novel translates to a cluster of road tales, based on the sorrows and joys of the people in the village. The village culture and the way of life in rural India are an integral part of this novel. Unable to make ends meet Opu's family leaves for the city after his sister's death. It is a sad tale that relates to the lives of people living in the village. The English interpretation highlights Opu, and his emotions and attachment to the village of his childhood, when in actuality the writer wanted the readers to experience how the happiness and welfare of the village folk are intertwined with the land and traditions, and the loss of a way of life experienced by these people living in the village. Mukherjee (1988) notes how the interpretive mode followed the universal criteria of western literary criticism based on "mythic archetypes" and "universality," and fails to take into consideration the "indigenous reality" of the novelist in his or her cultural context:

These structures have to be different because the Indian or African experience of selfhood is different. For example, while western literature and philosophy have emphasized the primacy of the individual, the Indian literature and tradition have laid emphasis on the primacy of the family and the community. In the Indian context, the well-being of the individual is often tied to the well-being of the larger group to which he or she belongs. (p. 17)

The specifics of the above text are universalized under the "conventions of a main plot and central characters," but fail to take into account the loss of a "recognisable social community" (Mukherjee, 1988, p. 16). Hence, the conflicts and dissonance in this story relating to a particular set of circumstances go unnoticed in an urge to universalize the main character and events. Thus, the interpretation of a multicultural text requires more than the consideration of image patterns, universality, mythic archetypes, and allusions.

Students in secondary English classrooms may be unaware of local realities in a story and its narrative forms; and there may be a tendency to neutralize subversive meanings in a

multicultural text (Mukherjee, 1988). Johnston (2003) also mentions some of these interpretive complexities of multicultural texts where to “introduce Black literary texts into the classroom without being aware of some of the contradictions of a culture and its production; and some of the complex feelings students have in relation to it, creates problems” (p. 18). Student responses to and interpretations of multicultural texts in the classroom (Cai, 2002; Johnston, 2003; Rogers & Soter, 1997; Nieto, 2000) needs further exploration; an examination of which can help illumine the contradictions and interpretive modes of multicultural texts.

*The Kite Runner* falls into the inclusive category (Cai, 2003) of multicultural literature as it deals with the lives, experiences and situations of characters outside of the dominant culture. This novel was selected for this study for its gripping and engaging storyline that depicts a deep friendship and loyalty between two boys growing up in Afghanistan against the backdrop of ethnic conflicts and war. It is a narrative of personal struggles of ordinary people with a realistic focus that can be related to recent events taking place in that part of the world. It is a book that fits Kafka’s definition of an awakening read: “I think we ought to read only books that bite and sting us. If the book we are reading doesn’t shake us awake like a blow on the skull, why bother reading it in the first place? A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us” (Manguel, 1996, p. 92).

Mrs. Slade, the classroom teacher, wanted her students to experience the lives of others living in a different part of the world, and as well as be engaged in the act of reading, and thought *The Kite Runner* integrated the aspects of an absorbed read. Given below is a summary of *The Kite Runner*.

*The Kite Runner* is a story about two pre-teen boys growing up in Afghanistan before the rule of the Taliban insurgents. It is a poignant tale of Amir's childhood memories, growing up with a wealthy father, when they live in a household which is looked after by the family servant, Ali and his son, Hassan, a boy a year younger than the narrator of the story. Hassan, a friend/servant of Amir, the main character in the novel, will go any length to please and look out for Amir's welfare.

Kite flying is a popular pastime among Afghan children. During a kite flying competition, Hassan, the servant boy belonging to a minority ethnic group of Shi'a Muslims, is cornered in a rough terrain and sexually assaulted by a gang of neighbourhood bullies led by Assef. Amir is witness to the act as he watches unobserved from the bend of a gully. This incident is a reminder of his cowardice because he fails to come to the aid of Hassan, knowing full well that Hassan might under similar circumstances go to extreme lengths to save him. Following this incident Hassan is in a state of shock and to make matters worse, Amir frames him for stealing his birthday watch that he claims was found under Hassan's mattress. This strained relationship results in Ali and Hassan leaving the household.

During the Russian occupation, Amir leaves Afghanistan with his father and immigrates to the United States. In their absence Rahim Khan, Amir's father's friend, lives in their home in Afghanistan. Seventeen years later, Amir is contacted by Rahim Khan to make the dangerous journey back home. Amir makes the trip to Afghanistan, where his father's friend reveals to him the family secret about Hassan, who is his half-brother. Hassan has been killed by the Taliban; and Amir has to repay the debt of loyalty by rescuing Hassan's eight-year old son, Sohrab, held captive by the childhood bully, now a top-ranking Taliban official in the country.

Amir's courage is finally put to the test when he is nearly killed in a duel with Assef, the bully from his childhood. Sohrab, who like his father is good with the slingshot, finally rescues Amir at the final moment by aiming the deadly shot at Assef's forehead. The pair make their escape to the neighbouring state of Pakistan, where Amir starts the adoption process for Sohrab, which will finally allow him to accompany Amir to the United States. It is a harrowing tale of loyalty, friendship and deep sacrifice in a land taken over by unruly forces. It unravels the helplessness of human beings caught in the grip of traditional values, faith, and loyalty against the backdrop of an extremely repressive Taliban governance.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The design of the study was qualitative and emergent (Bogdan & Biklen, 2005; Patton, 2002). I developed a multicultural unit on *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004) that provided the context for the Grade 11 students to engage with and respond to the novel in various ways. Data were collected through participant and non participant observations, informal discussions, and analysis of texts produced through student journals, written assignments and group presentations. The study involved two phases. Phase 1 took place over a period of ten days. Student journals and classroom discussions were reviewed to select a purposeful sample of response groups for Phase 2. The Phase 2 part of the study investigated the nature of shared responses of four students in one response group. This group involved two boys and two girls.

I met with the class teacher to review the multicultural unit and the implementation process. Permission was obtained from the Research Ethics board of Lakehead University, the principal of the school, and the school board. A letter containing the verbal explanation of the study was given to the students, and sent to parents along with the two consent forms.

These permission letters and consent forms have been included in the Appendices section. Twenty-eight students participated in the study for a period of four weeks. I was in the classroom during the English period for seventy-five minutes, five days a week. Extensive field notes were noted in the researcher's journal. The classroom teacher also kept a journal during this period. Data triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple data sources (Patton, 2002) in the form of researcher's journal, the classroom teacher's journal, student journals, student discussions and student artifacts. Consistency was checked through discussion with the class teacher and through constant comparative references (Bogdan & Biklen, 2005; Patton, 2002) across the various data sources. Data collection and analysis in this study moved from a broad focus to a narrower focus. The research design and methodology are described in detail in Chapter Three.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to describe the meaning-making processes of adolescent students as they engaged with and responded to a multicultural text with their peers in the classroom. The primary research question was: What is the nature of adolescents' private and social constructions of meaning as they engage with and respond to a multicultural literary text? The following are secondary questions based on the reading process and the implementation of the multicultural unit in the classroom.

- In what ways does the reading of a multicultural text in the secondary language arts classroom inform adolescents' lives as well as their perceptions of others in their school and their world?
- What is the nature of transformative possibilities that are evoked when adolescent readers respond to a multicultural text?

- What critical issues emerge in the implementation of the multicultural unit?

### **Significance of the Study**

The students in Canadian classrooms reflect Canada's increasingly diverse population, where one fifth of elementary school age children come from visible minority backgrounds (Diamini & Martinovic, 2007; Scott, 2001). This study provided insights into the nature of adolescent readers' understanding and comprehension processes as they engaged in reading a multicultural text. It illuminated the nature of engagement with, interpretation, reinterpretation, and representation of a multicultural text in the classroom. It provided insights into the implementation process of a multicultural unit and its significance in contributing to student understanding of sociocultural and sociopolitical issues in a multicultural text.

Teachers are aware of the need to include more multicultural content in the curriculum, but the lack of support material required to teach new books acts as constraints in introducing multicultural texts in the classroom on a more frequent basis (Banks, 2008; Johnston, 2003). The multicultural unit implemented in this study has illuminated challenges and complexities of teaching and reading a multicultural text in a secondary English classroom. The findings have the potential to offer useful information on theoretical aspects of the implementation of a multicultural unit, and serve as a model/unit for other secondary English/language arts teachers.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This ethnographic study was implemented within a four-week period in one school semester. Time constraints may have affected students' engagement with the multicultural text and participation in activities included in the multicultural unit. The study was conducted



towards the end of the semester when students were preoccupied with completion of unfinished assignments, and upcoming exams. Adolescents' comprehension may also have been influenced by the agenda and dynamics of the classroom in the final phase of the semester.

This study observed students' engagement with one multicultural text, *The Kite Runner*, with one Grade 11 class of 28 students representing a white Eurocentric culture. The insights gained may have been limited by the demographics of the study and affect the degree of transferability of the findings. The students involved in this study were required to read three prescribed texts for the English 11 university course. *The Kite Runner* was an additional required text to which the students had to respond during the semester.

The use of multicultural content in the school curriculum on a more frequent basis has been advocated by multicultural scholars to meet the needs of a growing diverse population in Canadian schools. Further research is needed on students' reading of multicultural texts in the Secondary school system to inform teachers' and scholars' understanding and implementation processes for multicultural literature. This study examined student responses to a multicultural text within the context of a multicultural unit. The study was qualitative; data were collected through participant and non-participant observations, informal class discussions, and analysis of texts produced in student journals, individual assignments and group presentations.

This dissertation has been organized into five chapters. The first chapter describes the purpose of the study, the background, and the statement of the problem, and the multicultural text selected, and provides an overview of the research design and methodology, the research questions, limitations, and significance of the study. The second chapter reviews related

literature and the multicultural unit plan. The third chapter provides information on the research design and methodology. The fourth chapter presents the findings and interpretation. The fifth chapter unravels the findings in relation to existing research, and concludes with a discussion of the implications for educational theory and practice.

## CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review in this chapter has been divided into three sections: reader response theory and the reading act; reader response to multicultural literature in the secondary school system; and the description of the multicultural unit. The first section reviews the literature on reader response theory and the act of reading. Next I review the research literature on multicultural literature in the secondary English Language Arts classroom; and the final section describes the multicultural unit.

### Reader Response Theory and the Reading Act

#### *Reader Response Theory*

Reader response criticism has its beginnings in the work of Louise Rosenblatt in the 1930s. Her theory deals with the reciprocal relationship between text and the reader, whereby the reader's individuality and extra-textual experiences are taken into account. In her seminal book, *Literature as Exploration* (1983), Rosenblatt describes the reader's relationship with the literary work:

A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized imaginative experience. (p. 25)

Rosenblatt regards the reader as an active agent who constructs his/her own responses to the text based on his or her experiences with the particular text. The transaction process involves the reader's past experiences and the personal aesthetic meaning derived through the words in the text. Transaction with the text allows the reader to examine his/her own cultural constructs along with an examination of the text and author relationship. A combination of past experiences and the aesthetic reading experience creates new understanding for the

reader. This transactional reading process helps students create meaningful responses through the reading of literary texts.

Iser (1978) expresses similar thoughts regarding the transactional act of reading where “literary texts initiate performances of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves. Their aesthetic quality lies in this performing structure which clearly cannot be identical to the final product, because without the participation of the individual reader there can be no performance” (p. 27). Reader response theory situates the reader in a “starring” role and the reading process is freed from “the constraints of fidelity to an origin, a unified meaning, an identity, or any other pre-given exterior or interior reality” (Leitch et al., 2001, p. 1450). The reader, in this approach, is no longer a passive recipient of the author’s ideas in a text but is “active” as he or she creates a “poem” that is cooperatively produced by a reader and a text (Rosenblatt, 1978). Tompkins (1985) also draws awareness to this spotlight being placed in the reader:

Fish’s essay, “Literature in the Reader,” makes the crucial move in reader-oriented criticism by removing the literary text from the center of critical attention and replacing it with the reader’s cognitive activity. The decisive shift in focus opens a new field of inquiry. If meaning is no longer a property of the text but a product of the reader’s activity the question to answer is not “what do poems mean?” or even “what do poems do?” but “how do readers make meaning?” (p. xvii)

The focus of my research was to describe how readers in a secondary school grade constructed the meaning-making process in the context of a multicultural text.

Rosenblatt (1978) divides reading into two broad categories: aesthetic and efferent reading. The difference between these two forms lies in the reader’s focus of attention during the reading act. In efferent reading, the reader’s attention is “focused primarily on what will remain as the residue after the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 24). In efferent reading the

reader reads for the extraction of purposeful information. In an efferent act of reading, the reader's "attention is directed outward, so to speak, toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 24). Rosenblatt designates nonaesthetic reading as "efferent" reading based on the Latin derivative, "effere," meaning "to carry away." The efferent focus is on theoretical implications rather than on the immediacy of the experience that is imagined. In contrast, in aesthetic reading, "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25). During an aesthetic reading process, the reader not only attends to images or concepts communicated through words, but also relates to the feelings, attitudes, and ideas that the words give rise to:

Sensing, feeling, imagining, thinking under the stimulus of the words, the reader who adopts the aesthetic attitude feels no compulsion other than to apprehend what goes on during this process, to concentrate on the complex structure of experience that he is shaping and that becomes for him the poem, the story, the play symbolized by the text. (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 26)

Aesthetic reading is structured by the reader's "moment-to-moment alertness to what is being activated in his consciousness by this particular pattern of words during the period of actual reading" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 26). In the aesthetic phase, the reader experiences the reading through his/her imagination and senses. Rosenblatt (1978) asserts the notion that a reader should evoke a work from the text with complete absorption, a process that involves "sensing, clarifying, structuring, savoring that experience as it unfolds" (p. 29). In aesthetic reading, the words of a text are important. The aesthetic stance "heightens awareness of the words as signs with particular visual and auditory characteristics and as symbols" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 29). The reader then synthesizes and constructs meaning offered

through verbal symbols. Rosenblatt (1978) asserts the fact that the reading phase is a combination of the aesthetic and efferent modes of reading.

The shift in reading between aesthetic and efferent is seen as a “continuum, a series of gradations between the nonaesthetic and the aesthetic extremes (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 35). In the process of reading, each individual reader focuses attention on the efferent and aesthetic facts depending on the information they would like to evoke from the relation with the text. Rosenblatt (1978) notes that during most of the reading phase, “there is a to-and-fro movement of the attention from one aspect to another of the responses activated by the text” (p. 37). The reader’s responses get shaped based on the activities the reader is involved in while reading the text. Rosenblatt explains:

Moments may intervene in a generally aesthetic reading when the reader is more concerned with the information being acquired, than with the experienced meaning. Thus parts of the text, though integral to the work, may in themselves not reward qualitative attention, being introduced to provide the reader with background information, or a conceptual framework, as a necessary foundation for the parts in which the work is to be more immediately experienced. (p. 38)

Rosenblatt (1978) suggests that introductory information in some novels may require the efferent stance, but once the reader starts following the storyline and gets involved with the flow of events, the reading stance moves to an aesthetic mode. She suggests that engagement in and response to literature is a meaning-making act, and that, in this transaction with the text, the reader brings to the text his/her knowledge and past experiences. His/her responses are unique and original: “The range of potential responses and the gamut of degrees of intensity and articulateness are infinitely vast, since they depend not only on the character of the text but even more on the special character of the individual reader” (p. 49). Thus, the reader is regarded as an active agent who constructs his/her own responses to the text. Rosenblatt points out that this meaning-making process is not constructed in a linear

fashion but is a back and forth movement that allows the reader to readjust meaning and come to a synthesized understanding. These processes allow the text to be transformed by the reader and the reader to be transformed by the text.

Texts include literary works such as short stories, novels or plays. Based on Rosenblatt's reader response constructs, researchers such as Beach (1993), Cox and Many (1992), Dias (1988), and Hancock (1993) have investigated the nature of students' responses to various literary texts. Beach (1993) describes five perspectives of reader response: textual, experiential, psychological, social, and cultural that view the reader/text/context transaction from different perspectives. The textual aspect looks at reader response through the lens of text conventions; the social theorist focuses on the social context of the transaction process and the author's context that evokes reader responses; the psychological aspect observes readers' cognitive and subconscious processes; and the cultural response concentrates on the readers' cultural and historical contexts. Experiential theories, the fifth perspective, deal with readers' meaning making-processes and their various modes of engagement with the text and with the readers' "lived-through experience or engagement with the text" (Beach, 1993, p. 50). In the experiential response perspective, readers respond through the lenses of their experiential backgrounds to the text.

Beach (1993) categorizes the experiential mode into five approaches: the engaging mode, the constructing mode, the imaging mode, the connecting mode, and the evaluating/reflecting mode. In the engaging mode, the reader is involved emotionally and engages with the text in an empathizing way; in the constructing mode, the reader enters into the world of the text and creates meaning through characters, events and settings; in the imaging mode, the reader creates visual images; in the connecting mode, the reader recounts

personal experiences related to the text; and in the evaluating/reflecting mode, the reader takes stock of his or her own experiences with the text. While engaging with the text, readers experience a range of different emotions.

The engaging mode, a theoretical construct in this research, comprises the subjective response to a text where the reader gets involved with the character's actions and can experience a heightened sense of emotion. This is evident when the reader "may be aware of a welling-up of a lump in the throat or a sense of apprehension over a character's impending doom" (Beach, 1993, p. 50). Slatoff (1970, cited in Beach, 1993) notes: "We can share the experience of Gulliver, say, feel the experience, and at the same time view him with detachment and view with detachment the part of us that is identifying" (p. 53). The personal response process is supported by reader response advocates for its role in the development of cognitive understanding (Bleich, 1978; Holland, 1975; Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1978; Sumara, 2002). It is a process that involves the individual's interpretations and reinterpretations, along with sharing and creating meaning with others in a classroom. Reader response approaches (Beach, 1993; Bleich, 1978; Collini, 1992; Rosenblatt, 1978; Sumara, 2002) regard the text as "an open-ended universe where the interpreter can discover infinite interconnections" (Beach, 1993, p. 39). Meaning is infinite and it is the reader who, through the medium of language, unravels the meaning. Collini (1992) notes that texts are designed to be read in order to "yield multiple interpretations" (p. 10) and "the glory of the reader is to discover that texts can say everything..." (p. 39). Hence, in reader response, interpretation is a method of interpreting the world evoked by the text whereby the reader comes to an understanding of a wide range of possibilities based on the reader's experience, and knowledge constructed by



their present and past social and cultural contexts (Beach, 1993; Bleich, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1978; Sumara, 2002; Tompkins, 1985).

Individual and shared interpretations of literary engagements can create insights into human experience (Courtland & Gambell, 2000; Fish, 1980; Sumara, 2002). Through interpretation of a text, the reader identifies with aspects of a text, and develops a relationship with the context of reading that leads to a web of emerging ideas and themes (Holland, 1975; Sumara, 2002). Shared experiences lead to extension of facts and discovery of information based on the contexts of reading. Sharing of information unravels insights from the viewpoints of the discussants. The sharing process provokes curiosity to learn and understand the other person's point of view. This process in turn brings clarity to thoughts and issues in context of the reading topics. Shared responses have the potential to inform each individual's comprehension in a classroom community (Courtland et al., 1999). The interpretation process is based not only on private encounters with text, but is also established through negotiations with others. Interpretive practices constitute readers, literary texts, and their interpretive experiences of reading (Bleich, 1978; Iser, 1993; Sumara 2002).

Bleich (1978) coined the term "interpretive community" to explain collective responses where readers are able to review "past, present and imagined interpretation of themselves, of others, and to contexts of experience" (p. 23). Sharing of ideas enables readers to make explicit initial ideas and experiences incurred through a first reading of a literary text (Fish, 1980; Sumara, 2002). Interpretation produces useful knowledge and has a communal aspect (Bleich, 1978, Fish, 1980). According to Fish (1980), the private interpretation of one reader progresses to a social aspect when readers share their interpretations with others. This sharing of responses affirms and negotiates understandings among readers in an interpretive

community (Fish, 1980). In an interpretive community a reader's personal interpretations go through a modification process while sharing and learning with a group of learners. The agreement comes about through listening and adjusting individual reflections to the group's interpretive discussions. From Fish's notion of an interpretive community, a social theory of response has developed that has expanded through the work of later reader response critics (Beach, 1993; Bleich, 1978; Sumara, 2002). Shared reading promotes interpretation and generation of facts that illumine understanding. Through shared reading, negotiation of differences in meaning and interpretation takes place (Bruner, 1990; Fish, 1980; Sumara, 2000). Through shared reading many ways of knowing become a reality. Thus the text, readers, and interpretative contexts form the core of reader response theory.

Galda and Beach (2001) categorize research on reader response based on text, readers, and contexts. Initially, research on text (Squire, 1964, cited in Galda & Beach, 2001) explored how the structure of a text affected the response of readers based on textual analysis of climax and flow of plot line. This focus progressed to the use of narrative theory that studied how readers situated themselves within their ideologies (Stephens, 1992, cited in Galda & Beach, 2001). Narrative theory positions the author as portraying certain ideologies and societal norms. In the narrative approach, the readers interrogate texts to the author's and their own stances regarding these societal norms. In the narrative process (Sutherland, 1985, cited in Galda & Beach, 2001) readers also challenge the author's norms as represented in the text world. Research in the 1980s (Galda & Beach, 2001) focussed on expectations, attitudes and practices of readers where development of meaningful constructs through sharing among a society of learners was overlooked. Galda and Beach (2001) note that there are unresolved

issues, as to how the understanding of a text takes place through interpretations with others in a reading community.

The act of reading through an aesthetic encounter with the text illuminates a process of understanding between text and the reader (Bruner 1990; Iser, 2000; Rosenblatt 1983; Sumara 2002). An aesthetic approach represents, “the experiencing centre from which everything considered to be art is measured” (Gadamer, 1988, cited in Iser, 2006, p. 37). Aesthetic understanding is a “constant negotiation between oneself and otherness, which means that both the horizon of tradition and that of self-understanding are continuously under adjustment” (Iser, 2006, p. 37). The reading process involves an inward, outward and reciprocal positioning. In the inward phase, the reader tries to make meaning through establishing connections to personal experiences, and in the outward phase associations are established to exterior perspectives. Iser (2000) cites Frye’s (1967) notion of the reading experience:

Whenever we read anything, we find our attention moving in two directions at once. One direction is outward and centrifugal, in which we keep going outside our reading, from the individual works to the things they mean, or, in practice, to our memory of the conventional association between them. The other direction is inward or centripetal, in which we try to develop from the words a sense of the larger verbal pattern they make. (p. 16)

The meaning making process is an inward and outward flow of movement that gets established through the links the reader makes between his personal world and the external world. Meaning also gets established through the reader’s effort to make connections throughout the various web patterns of the story line.

### ***The Reading Act***

The act of reading is a negotiation of meaning that the reader pursues through the “blanks and gaps” of a text (Iser, 2006). Iser explains the gaps of a text as follows:

Blanks indicate that the different segments and patterns of the text are to be connected even though the text itself does not say so. They are the unseen joints of the text, as they mark off patterns and textual perspectives from one another, and simultaneously prompt acts of ideation on the reader's part. Consequently, when the patterns and perspectives have been linked together, the blanks disappear. (p. 65)

The reader's viewpoint moves between textual perspectives offered through the characters, the segments of a story and the plot line. The reader's involvement with the text intensifies in trying to link the "unseen joints" of a text. Iser (2006) uses Virginia Woolf's (1957) review of Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* to elucidate his point. In her review, Virginia Woolf comments on the speculative essence of Austen's works:

Jane Austen is thus the mistress of much deeper emotion than appears upon the surface. She stimulates us to supply what is not there. What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, yet is composed of something that expands in the reader's mind and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes which are outwardly trivial. Always the stress is laid upon character....The turns and twists of the dialogue keep us on the tenterhooks of suspense. Our attention is half upon the present moment, half upon the future...Here, indeed, in this unfinished and in the main inferior story, are all the elements of Jane Austen's greatness. (Woolf, 1957, cited in Iser 2006, p. 64)

Thus the reader fills in the gaps with his/her own projected thoughts. In this process the "unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said expands to take on greater significance than might have been supposed: even trivial scenes can seem surprisingly profound" (Iser, 2006, p. 65). The reader's imagination and interaction with the text create the meaning making process. The gaps in a text function to stimulate the reader's imagination and critical thinking that, in turn, prompt the reader to construct his or her literary work. According to Iser (2006; 2000), it is the reader whose task lies in making the connections through the gaps or indeterminacies in a text and coming to a synthesis.

Rosenblatt (1978) compares the synthesizing act of reading to Coleridge's concept of the creative process based on the primary and secondary poetic imagination. Rosenblatt explains how Coleridge's (1907, cited in Rosenblatt, 1978) notion of the primary poetic

imagination has its source in the primary creative process based on visual perception. In the secondary poetic imagination phase, the synthesis of ideas takes place: “It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify” (p. 50). Even though reading is a much more complex act of perception, an analogy can be drawn between reading and the primary imagination having its source in visual perception (Rosenblatt, 1978). In the primary phase of reading the reader perceives information through cues offered through verbal symbols in a text, which later on is put together in a synthesis. Rosenblatt (1978) admits how the transactional process that evokes a poem requires “something more than an ordinary putting-together of clues” (p. 51). The reader in creating his or her poem participates in a “unique task of selection, synthesis and interpretation,” and in this process the reader likewise seems to follow the “shaping spirit” and the “synthetic and magical power” of Coleridge’s poetic imagination (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 51). Rosenblatt (1978) sums up the reading process as follows:

In broadest terms, then, the basic paradigm of the reading process consists in the response to cues; the adoption of an efferent or aesthetic stance; the development of a tentative framework or guiding principle of organization; the arousal of expectations that influence the selection and synthesis of further responses; the fulfillment or reinforcement of expectations, or their frustration, sometimes leading to revision of the framework, and sometimes, if necessary, to rereading; the arousal of further expectations; until, if all goes well, with the completed decoding of the text, the final synthesis or organization is achieved. (p. 54)

The evocation process demands an “embryonic critical testing of tentative organization” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 56) of the text where the reader sets up hypothetical frameworks and in the course of reading revises the previous syntheses or develops new structures. The reading process can suffer setbacks when the reader experiences difficulty in the comprehension process. Rosenblatt (1978) explains how this may be due to “unfulfilled

expectations, unanswered questions, details that cannot be assimilated, so that much is held in suspension until it all falls into shape, or there is a click of insight, to cite phrases that report this aspect of the reading event” (p. 55).

Sumara’s (2002) construct of reading is similar to Rosenblatt’s. He notes that the act of reading is an interpretive act steeped in associations made during and after the act of reading that involves “ever-evolving intertextual relations” (p. 33). Sumara (1996) insists that the act of reading in schools must be understood as an interpretive act and that the reading act includes the relations among reader, the text and the contexts of reading. The contexts of reading involve a reader’s previous experiences and new experiences evoked from the present reading. Sumara (2002) considers literary texts to be cultural objects that collect the experiences of a reader and represent a history of interpretations. These interpretations consist of “interpersonal, intertextual, and intergenerational memories,” and when discussed and shared, the book becomes “a focal point, a collecting place” for the readers’ and others’ interpretations (Sumara, 2002, p. 33). He refers to this focal point as a commonplace location.

The commonplace location is a site of past, present and ongoing interpretations of the reader. The commonplace location allows scope for “ongoing personal reflection” (Sumara, 2002, p. 19), and over time it becomes a text of its own. It gets created through inscriptions of readers’ responses into the text throughout the reading process, shared discussions and a re-reading phase. This creates a “generous space for interpretation” (Sumara, 2002, p. 19). These inscriptions trace the perceptions of the reader and the change taking place in his/her thinking process. Through memories incurred through the reading process, and responding

through means of writing and discussion with other readers, a “commonplace” for interpretations gets created. Sumara (2002) explains:

It is important to understand that the commonplace location does not exist in the work of literature or in the reader. Nor does the commonplace location exist in what Rosenblatt (1978) has called the transaction between reader and text. The commonplace location, in itself, is not a thing; it cannot be captured as an object. The commonplace location is an idea that represents the complex and ever-evolving intertextual relations that collect around a particular interpretive activity. Reading is one such activity. During and after reading, many associations are made with the text. As reading occurs, the reader is reminded of other experiences. At the same time, as the reader begins to interpret the new reading in relation to what is remembered and associated, these memories and associations change. It is the process of memory and re-memory that is mediated by the reading and interpreting of the text. Although this occurs with all texts that are read, the literary text has the potential to create more elaborate and intricate interpretations. (p. 24)

A literary text read by everyone in the classroom has the potential to create opportunities to interpret personal and collective experience. Sumara (2002) offers the example of how in Ondaatje’s (1992) novel, *The English Patient*, the character frequently reads from Herodotus’s *The Histories* and writes his personal reflections in the book. The English patient regards this as a “Commonplace Book,” and in the course of thirty years, *The Histories* become a different text filled with notes, travel maps, love interests, reflections, queries and inserted tokens and mementos. Through this process of including his personal thoughts and reflections, the English patient creates his “Commonplace Book.” Based on his insight into the English patient, Sumara (2002) developed the idea of the Commonplace Book as an interpretive pedagogical practice. A student following this interpretive mode not only identifies with characters and learns to broaden perception of the literary text being studied, but becomes aware of his/her own critical analysis:

These activities illuminate the processes by which humans experience a sense of personal identity and how these experiences are necessarily organized by remembered, currently lived, and imagined identifications and relationships. This formulation helps readers of literary fiction understand that while literary

engagements are considered to be imaginary, they are not considered to be less influential than other experiences. (p. 24)

The Commonplace Book practice as a reading construct maintains “relationships between language and literacy, and experiences of maintaining a sense of self” (Sumara, 2002, p. 25). The commonplace location as a pedagogical construct supports literacy activities and exploring of this sense of self through the contexts of reading (Sumara, 2002, p. 24).

Exploring of intertextual contexts takes place through re-reading. Sumara (2002) explains that “the first reading only provides a general sense of the geography of the text. It is in successive readings that the needed relationship begins to form between reader and text. This relationship is necessary for the continued development of the commonplace location” (p. 37). Sumara’s study with four secondary English teachers involved the reading and discussion of Michael Ondaatje’s (1992) novel *The English Patient*. This literary experience created the context to interpret personal and collective experiences for the members of this study group. The group then decided to re-read *The English Patient* (Ondaatje, 1992), and inscribe their responses into their texts. Re-readings of texts is an old practice that has its origins in the interpretation of Biblical texts (Bruner, 1997; Sumara, 2002). Sumara (2002) notes how certain unnoticed aspects during the first reading can gain importance during re-reading of the text. This second reading made it possible to observe the progression of their perceptions. Discussion with other readers in the group created the commonplace location where additional facts got revealed between the readers and the text. The findings from the study showed how engaging with the commonplace location allowed the sense of self to be organized by “memory, narratives and cultural artifacts” (Sumara, 2002, p. 25).



Sumara (1995) also conducted a six-week novel study using Lowry's (1993) novel *The Giver* as a common text in a research project with a Grade 5/6 class. The constructs of the research were based on Commonplace Book principles and practices, and re-reading of the text. Readers in the above study as well as this study created a location where they were able to generate their personal and collective interpretations. Sumara returned to the school a month later to re-read the novel with the students. He noted changes in students' perceptions and understandings had occurred since their first reading of *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993). Below is one student's response to her re-thinking of the novel:

Now I know what released means! When I first read it I thought when they said the pilot would be released that he would just lose his job. Now I know that it means he will be killed! When I first read this book, I thought that the idea of "sameness" was pretty good. I mean, I didn't think that there was anything wrong with that idea. But when we saw the film about *Mauritius* I started to think that maybe sameness isn't so good. (pp. 21-22)

In the above student's case the re-reading phase made her adjust her thinking of critical issues in the story. It illuminated her understanding about the notion of "sameness," and enabled her to analyse the circumstances of the novel in a critical light. Fish (1980) also mentions how a second reading can bring in new perspectives, and explains his experience based on reading of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. When re-reading this particular text, he remarks, "I no longer see what I used to see and things that I never saw before now seem obvious and indisputable" (p. 364). The re-interpretation phase of reading makes it possible for the reader to trace changed perceptions, and notice the difference in insights that lead to a clearer understanding of textual and contextual issues. These studies illuminated the fact that literary engagements through Commonplace Book practices have the potential to create "interesting sites for thinking" (Sumara, 2002, p. 36), the possibility to stretch the imagination and generate insights into human experience.

A form of interpretive practice, the Commonplace Book provides clarity of meaning as students engage in exploring their responses. Commonplace Book activities “illuminate the processes by which humans experience a sense of personal identity and how these experiences are necessarily organized by remembered, currently lived, and imagined identifications and relationships” (Sumara, 2002, p. 24). Thus, the construct of the Commonplace Book induces discussion, interpretation and writing with other readers in the classroom. This practice creates a “commonplace” location for interpretation.

Sumara (1996, 2002) contends that the practice of reading literary texts in schools involves a quick or superficial reading of the text which makes it difficult for students to experience a genuine engagement with the text. He suggests that text books in the secondary English curriculum are read as “closed” texts given the time constraints in a school term. The individual and shared interpretations of the Commonplace Book practices can pave the way to document the meaning making process within a constrained time frame.

Interpretations, individual and shared, are an integral part of the meaning making process. The meaning of the term “interpretation” has shifted in the last two decades. More recently, the construct of “interpretation” is understood as a dynamic, transactional process (Beach, 1983; Cai, 2008; Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1978, Sumara, 2002; Tompkins, 1985), where the reader’s meaning making process occupies a significant place. It is a “self reflective act” that requires monitoring and eventually leads to thematizing of the interpretation process (Bruner, 1990).

Reader response theorists view the reader’s engagement with the text as a complex ecology of “Human/human, human/text, human/context relations” (Bruner, 1990, p. 11). This engagement process as noted by Bruner (1990) involves the reader’s relationship with the

text, the memories and experiences provoked by the contexts of reading, and the sharing of the text that further leads to insightful understandings. Thus, literary engagement with a text during the reading phase involves an “ongoing interpretation of the personal, the communal, and the cultural” (Bruner, 1990, p. 12). The literary engagement is a special relationship the reader develops with the text (Sumara, 2002). It is a relationship that unravels the reader’s personal and cultural history through the interpretation process. According to Sumara (2000) interpretation helps the reader to understand present, past and projected experiences. The sharing of information of the reading experience through interpretive discussions and classroom activities clarifies and transforms the reader’s memories and perceptions, and offers links to projected thought processes. The learning that takes place through these various avenues of engagement and interpreted literary encounters helps develop a close relationship with the text and generates deep insights. Sumara resembles these processes that bring about new ways of knowing to forms of geographical transformation that takes place through changes in the natural world. Thus transformative experiences with a text offer a lens to understand insightful perceptions incurred during the reading process (Sumara, 2002, 2000).

Multicultural literature has the potential to inform interpretive communities, and be sites for perceptive thinking. It creates new space for dialogic discourses and allows discussion of multiple realities and perspectives (Banks, 2008; Cai, 2008; Ghosh, 2002; Johnston, 2003; Rogers, 1997).

### **Multicultural Literature in the Secondary English Language Arts Classroom**

The definition of multicultural literature has evolved from an exclusive to an inclusive one. Cai (2003) offers a definition of multicultural literature based on its literary

and pedagogical role in education. From the literary viewpoint multicultural literature is both explicit and implicit in nature. In its explicit form a multicultural text depicts the reality and interactions between cultures in a multicultural society. Cai (2003) uses Gary Soto's (1991) *Taking Sides*, to explain the explicit aspect of a multicultural text that portrays a Mexican American boy's struggles with cultural identity when he moves to a white suburb. The implicit aspect of multicultural literature which is complex in nature, deals with the medium of language and the intended audience. In this instance, Cai (2003) refers to Hong Kingston's (1989) *The Woman Warrior*, a story of a Chinese American character growing up in California. The intended audience in this case includes both Chinese Americans and readers from other cultures. The complexity of this implicit multicultural text entails facts of cultural dynamics that are easily understood by the Chinese American reader versus the difficulty experienced by readers from the dominant culture. This category of multicultural texts may be challenging to readers who are not familiar with the culture depicted in the story. The literary definition in its explicit and implicit categories is an acceptable explanation unlike the pedagogical definition of multicultural literature.

The pedagogical definition of multicultural literature becomes a contentious issue depending on varying degrees of inclusion of cultural content in the curriculum. Cai (2003) categorizes the spectrum of multicultural content as ranging solely from minority groups represented by people of colour, to the inclusion of groups which include disabilities, age, gays and lesbians, religious and language minority groups, and groups discriminated against based on socio-economic and political issues. In its inclusive form multicultural literature deals with the lives, experiences and situations of characters outside of the dominant culture. It deals with the perspectives of diverse peoples and how they view the world. It also refers

to the construction of complex identities in a multicultural context (Banks, 1993; Cai & Bishop, 1994; Cai, 2003; Dasenbrock, 1992; Fishman, 1995; Ghosh, 2002). When the idea of multiculturalism was initially introduced in education, the movement focused primarily on ethnicity (Banks, 2004, 2008; Ghosh, 2002). Now the predominant aim is to ensure empowerment of all students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or class differences (Banks, 2004; Ghosh, 2002). The broad concept of multiculturalism in the concept of schooling includes diverse cultural groups within a school community based on: class, ethnicity, and race, gender, exceptionality, religion, language, and age (Banks, 2008; Cai, 2003; Ghosh, 2002; Gollnick & Chinn, 2006; Sheets, 2005). Multicultural scholars (Banks, 2008; Bishop, 1992; Cai, 2003; Dasenbrock, 1992) may have varying degrees of acceptance regarding the nature of multicultural literature, but there is agreement when it comes to the potential role of multicultural literature in education.

Scholars contend that multicultural literature provides scope for cognitive and affective reading to take place, and offers insights into diverse human conditions (Au, 1993; Banks, 2008; Cai, 2003; Diamond & Moore, 1995; Gollnick & Chinn, 2006; Johnston, 2003; Nieto, 2000; Rogers & Soter, 1997). Multicultural literature is an “artefact of cultural production” (Au, 1993, p. 136), the aim of which is to draw awareness to concepts of culture, diversity, equality, social justice and democracy. Multicultural literature has the potential to create dialogic discourses and empower minds (Cliff & Miller, 1997). Cliff and Miller (1997), explain that “multicultural literature...can provide opportunities for meeting many goals of multicultural education, where voices interact and students reflect, think creatively and critically, increase cultural awareness, decrease ethnocentrism, and create a global

perspective” (p. 1). Cai (2003) outlines the three roles of multicultural literature in the literary, socio-political and educational domains.

In the literary domain, multicultural literature is an aesthetic form of literary work with its own intrinsic literary nature, that fulfills a pedagogical purpose in education (Cai, 2003). These realities in a text can get depicted through cultural identities, interactions between cultures, and portrayal of an explicit culture (Cai & Bishop, 1994; Dasenbrock, 1987). Multicultural literature based on these issues has the potential to enable readers to become aware of diverse social, political, and cultural contexts, and help raise awareness of issues related to these diverse contexts. From the literary perspective, multicultural literature also has the potential to evoke aesthetic and efferent responses that develop critical thinking and analysis skills in students (Cai, 2008). Aside from its literary merit the pedagogical aspect of multicultural literature addresses the goals and objectives of a pluralistic curriculum through the use of underrepresented cultures (Banks, 2008; Cai, 2003), situated in socio-political and educational domains.

Multicultural stories provide ways for students to understand issues through transaction with multicultural texts, and provide for teachers ways of understanding regarding cultural interpretive practices (Rogers & Soter, 1997; Johnston, 2003). The texts create the contexts where students have the opportunity to voice their opinions, interrogate questions on diverse issues and rethink their understandings or assumptions of their own cultural identity and that of others, as well as their positioning in the world (Blair, 1991; Johnston & Mangat, 2004; Rogers & Soter, 1997;). Reading a multicultural text in the classroom calls for a teacher to consider the reading experience in a sociocultural and political context, where teaching is a culturally responsive act (Friere, 1970), and the student

is given the opportunity to embark on a process of self discovery and growth in social consciousness. As previously mentioned, Friere (2005) explains that the use of literature representing one culture promotes “culture of silence” (p. 46) where diverse voices are not heard; whereas “cultural synthesis” (p. 180) takes into consideration the world views of diverse cultures. It promotes discussion about inequalities, injustices and differences, and in the process brings about understanding of diverse socioeconomic and political issues. Beach (1997) explains that the initial phase of discussion on multicultural literature may show students’ resistance based on perceptions of gender, class and racial differences. These resistive stances encourage the examination of critical issues that can help resolve conflicting thoughts and make the individual transcend “an individual prejudice” perspective (p. 83). The sociopolitical domain of multicultural literature has the potential to assist students to understand about lives of others, negotiate social relationships and critique cultural assumptions about differences (Bishop, 1998; Cai, 2003; Freire, 1970; Rogers & Soter, 1997; Shannon, 1994). Negotiating meaning and understanding differences through the reading of multicultural texts is rife with educational implications.

Educators and scholars of multicultural literature (Banks, 2004; Cai, 2003; Jackson, 1998; Johnston, 2003; Nieto, 1998; Rochman, 1993), strongly advocate the use of multicultural literature in the language arts curriculum for a number of reasons. It provides information about other cultures, draws awareness of the cultural differences, and helps clarify bias and prejudices about the culture being studied. This awareness about cultures is established through a number of cultural borders. Cai (2003) mentions three kinds of cultural borders designated as physical borders, cultural borders and inner borders. When a student reads about a specific culture situated in a foreign country, the student gains knowledge

about that place across a physical borderline. Through the study of that country's traditions, history, experiences and value systems, the student acquires information of cultural differences. In this phase, the student crosses the borders of cultural differences. The third border has its domain in the reader's mind in the form of fear and prejudice regarding unknown cultures. The reading about a specific culture offers information, and hence enables the reader to bridge the inner cultural borders of the mind, and in the process brings about understanding on issues of conflict and prejudice. Therefore, the reading of a multicultural text provides information and knowledge about people, cultures, situations, and value systems. It also brings about harmony through understanding of a different cultural perspective. Thus, multicultural literature not only promotes cultural awareness but can also initiate social change based on democratic principles of social justice and equality for all citizens (Banks, 2008; Diamond & Moore, 1995, Johnston, 2003).

Cai (2003), Diamond and Moore (1995), Johnston (2003), Nieto (2007), Rogers and Soter (1997) testify to the potential of teaching multicultural literature in schools. They agree that reading and responding to multicultural literature can help students not only to understand the contexts of a literary text but help them explore issues that assist in understanding themselves, others and the world they live in. It offers opportunity to travel to different cultural sites, where through the characters the students are able to understand that they are the different ones. Furthermore it promotes understanding of diverse groups that have been marginalized, and in the process "affirms and legitimizes a culture and the human race" (Diamond & Moore, 1995, p. 13). Educators and multicultural scholars agree on the manifold benefits when multicultural literature is an integral part of a school curriculum.



Despite such benefits, multicultural literature is not used frequently in the classrooms (Johnston, 2003; Rogers & Soter, 1997). The use of multicultural literature in the school curriculum still raises questions about the selection, evaluation and the pedagogical practices in connection with the teaching of a multicultural text that will help students experience a transactional relationship with the text and connect with each other in the classroom (Banks, 2008; Cai, 2008; Johnston, 2003; Nieto, 2007). Undoubtedly there is a need to study student engagement with multicultural texts in the Secondary grades on a more frequent basis.

A number of scholars have investigated the use of multicultural texts in secondary schools. Bean, Valerio, Money, and White (1999) explored secondary English students' interpretation of a multicultural novel, *Heartbeat, Drumbeat* (Hernandez, 1992) from an engagement perspective. Respondents included 22 Grade 9 English students in two schools, one an urban magnet technology school and the other, a rural high school in Hawaii. *Heartbeat, Drumbeat* (Hernandez, 1992) documents the main character, Morgana Cruz's, search for ethnic identity. The students in this study came from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The Grade 9 students in the urban magnet technology school were Hispanic, Chinese American, African American, East Indian, and European American students. The Grade 9 students in the rural Hawaii high school also represented a diverse group of students from Filipino, Chinese, Portuguese, Samoan, and Japanese origins.

Data were collected from seven students' reading response journals as students responded through autobiographies, dialogue journal entries based on character interpretation and a research paper on the cultural authenticity of the Navajo ceremonies in the novel. Classroom discussions centered on the main character's, Morgana's, balancing act between the Navajo and Hispanic cultures. Students in both the schools exhibited enthusiasm and

connected with the character in the novel in examining issues of bi-ethnicity and biculturalism through their reading, writing and discussions. The researchers found that an aesthetic stance and constructivist perspective empowered students to agree or disagree among themselves and with their teachers. They recommended that students have more opportunities to read and talk about literature that explores ethnic and cultural identities.

Glazier and Seo (2005) studied dialogic relationships with multicultural literature in a Grade 9 language arts classroom with a diverse group of students: 41% white, 19.2% black, 21.6% Hispanic, 15.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3% other. The researchers observed the nature of discourse based on discussions of cultural differences and the nature of inter/intra-cultural understanding. The text *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (Momaday, 1996) was taught as part of a larger unit that involved poetry, drama, and media. Students worked in small groups reading chapters of the book. They shared their interpretations in large group forums, making personal connections to the text and telling their own stories. Student reading was supplemented with other related textual materials allowing scope for students to make connections across these texts and their lives. The focal point of analysis was the nature of conversation that took place as students shared their interpretations of multicultural texts and made “text-to-other and text-to-self connections,” allowing opportunity for intercultural and intracultural understanding and empathy.

Most of the discourse during the course of the study took place over the viewing of *Ghost Dance*, a film based on government treatment of the Kiowa people. The European American members of the class made the fewest text-to-self connections. Multicultural literature in this specific case seemed to evoke responses from the minority group of students in the classroom compared with the European American students. For the European

American students, reading a multicultural text served as a window to learn about other and their peers' cultures. The minority students, in contrast, felt comfortable sharing their own cultures with their peers and admitted to having learned a great deal about everyone's culture in the classroom. This study found that using a multicultural text to talk about the concepts, themes, and issues in the text, and to talk about others in relation to the text offered students the opportunity to develop a sense of respect and understanding of cultural diversity. However, the use of a multicultural text in this study fell short of the potential of serving as a mirror and window for all students in the classroom.

Beach (1997) studied students' stances of resistance to multicultural literature with Grades 11 and 12 students in three high schools, one urban and two suburban, through their response to two short stories. One story *Judgement* (Thompson, 1990), deals with an interracial relationship between a black male and white female. The second story, *The Kind of Light That Shines on Texas* (McKnight, 1992), depicts conflict between a black student and a white student who bullies the black student. Data were collected through students' writing responses, small group discussions and interviews about their responses to these stories. Content analysis of the students' responses revealed that students in the urban high school adopted a stance of "institutional racism" (p. 75), and students in the suburban schools demonstrated individual biases to multicultural literature.

Beach (1997) categorized the "individual prejudice" stances into the following categories: (1) "backlash to challenges to white privilege" (p. 75), in which students were resentful of challenges to their sense of white privilege that are depicted by the white bully in the story; (2) "denial of racial difference" (p. 77), in which students tended to minimize the role of race; (3) "voyeuristic reaction to false portrayal of the other" (p. 79), in which

students romanticized racial difference based on a cultural world that is different from their own middle class suburban world; (4) “reluctance to adopt alternative cultural perspectives” (p. 80), in which students had difficulty relating to the fictional world of the past situated in a different historical era; (5) and students’ “reluctance to challenge the status quo” (p. 81), in which they experienced a sense of shame in responding to racial conflict as depicted through the fictional character’s racial jokes. Beach (1997) suggests that students should be encouraged to empathize with characters’ perceptions and learn to understand how these perceptions are linked to institutional forces in order to progress from a stance of resistance to a transformational perspective.

Cai (2008) briefly mentioned how students in one of his advanced children’s literature classes, responded to *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* (Staples, 1989), a story that depicts the struggles of a Pakistani teenage girl situated within the tradition of arranged marriage. Students representing the mainstream culture in the class expressed strong resentment toward Shabanu’s culture, and failed to take into consideration other aspects of the Pakistani culture as portrayed in the story. He mentioned that students in this study judged people situated in other cultures based on their own standard of mainstream culture. Stereotypical perceptions regarding gender treatment reinforced students’ biases and prejudices toward the culture in *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* (Staples, 1989).

Johnston (2003) investigated student responses to a multicultural literature unit implemented in Grades 10, 11, and 12. Text selections for Grade 10 consisted of short stories from South Africa, Japan, Thailand, Korea and China, a poetry unit from *Poetry from Multiculturalism: The Issues Collection* (Wowk & Jason, 1993), and small group novel study where the class chose from four novels: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), *The Road to*

*Memphis* (Taylor, 1990), *The Honorable Prison* (Jenkins, 1989), *Forbidden City* (Bell, 1996), and *Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind* (Staples, 1989). The Grade 11 class read a variety of postcolonial selections of short stories and poems from *Literary Experiences Vol 1* (Iveson, Oster, & McClay, 1990) and were asked to read *Obasan* (Kogawa, 1983) during the summer break.

For the Grade 12 students short selections were chosen from two anthologies: *Literary Experiences Volume Two* (Iveson, Oster & McClay, 1990) and an American anthology, *Multicultural Experiences* (Applebee & Langer, 1993). The selections consisted of a Canadian text by Margaret Laurence (1994); an essay by an Indian writer, Santha Rama Rau (1990); a South African story by Nadine Gordimer (1988); two magic realism stories by Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1993) and Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferre ((1993), and two Asian texts by Diana Chang (1993) and Amy Tan (1993). The multicultural units in these three grades were implemented over one term during the winter semester, and Johnston made weekly visits to the three classes while the multicultural units were being implemented by the classroom teacher.

The themes of these text selections across all grades were centered on notions of racial identities, class, gender, religion and culture. Students were encouraged to engage in critical dialogue regarding issues of prejudice, racism, and misunderstandings in their readings. Critical dialogue with one another in the classroom on selected short stories and poetry made students aware of the potential for stereotyping based on race, gender, or ethnicity. The Grade 12 students identified with a sense of place, expectations of immigrant parents regarding their children's performance and discrimination experienced by the characters in the short stories. Grade 10 students shared their responses to Gordimer's (1988)

short story “Country Lovers” in the form of an essay. In their written responses all the students condemned issues of racism and discrimination that can tear relationships apart in a society living with apartheid. Reading *Obasan* (Kogawa, 1983) allowed Grade 11 students to explore their sense of identity.

The multicultural unit enabled students in a Grade 11 class to become aware of their personal identities and question their “previous vision of Canada as the home of equality and fairness” (Johnston, 2003, p. 120). It enabled them to explore their identities to “deconstruct repressive ideologies of the past” (p. 123), and to engage in discussion of social issues and the conflicting nature of social differences.

The following quotes illustrate one student’s response to *Obasan* (Kogawa, 1983) over time. The initial response to *Obasan* (Kogawa, 1983) was fraught with tension and bitterness over the Japanese War issue. His written response reads as follows:

I felt infuriated reading this novel. The internment of the Japanese-Canadians is nothing compared to what they did in China. They killed 15 million people there. I would have been born in China instead of in Canada if they weren’t there. I am not a racist, I just feel very bitter. That Aunt Emily in the novel really ticks me off. She shows Naomi all those documents about the “mistreatments.” If she only knew about what her own race had done! (p. 121)

After a period of three months, the above perception mellowed to a more balanced understanding.

*Obasan* got under my skin. I grew up with this hatred towards the Japanese, and I only wanted to hate them. You need an enemy sometimes to get through difficult times. After reading that novel and listening to what people had to say in class, I decided to read Kogawa’s next novel *Itsuka*. It wasn’t the same kind of fiction-it was a different book-more factual-so then I went to the library to get out other stuff to find out how true this was about the struggle the Japanese people had to get retribution. I feel a bit less bitter now. I realize it was the military, not the individual people who did those atrocities, but I do think it would be really worthwhile if the Chinese could get some retribution from the Japanese. I know that probably won’t ever happen. (p. 122)

Subjective interpretations as seen in the above instance led to a cognitive understanding of texts and offered a form in which to format personal interpretations of texts. Such engagement can lead to a “heightened consciousness” (Johnston, 2003, p. 28) that can bring about a clearer understanding of issues encountered long after the reading phase is over in a classroom. Comprehending, analyzing and understanding literature through the lens of reader response theory invite students to talk about life, friends, community, social justice and cultures. Multicultural literature offers the context to explore issues of diversity that can bring about understanding of cultural differences and prepare students to meet the demands of a global world for the twenty-first century. Multicultural literature can help transform students’ understandings and perceptions of individuals and situations whose cultural background are significantly different from their own but at the same time it can also give rise to tensions on issues of voice and marginalization (Johnston, 2003; Beach, 1997).

The multicultural unit revealed a number of challenges (Johnston, 2003). The classroom teacher experienced an ongoing dilemma in balancing students’ evoked aesthetic responses to multicultural texts with socio-political discussions as students questioned a text’s ideology or Eurocentric assumptions. Students evidenced discomfort related to issues of social change and control. Both Johnston and the class teacher strove to keep students involved emotionally and personally, as well as engaged in a socio-political reading of the literature in the implemented multicultural unit (Johnston, 2003). The multicultural unit also provided the scope to make ongoing changes in text selections and teaching strategies where the classroom teacher became a co-learner with students while reading postcolonial literature. Johnston’s (2003) study focussed on issues of colonization, power and marginalization and

the use of postcolonial texts in the class. Students were able to position themselves in relation to values and issues in the text and were able to empathize with marginalized characters.

Johnston (2003) recommended the need for new teaching resources, knowledge of postcolonial pedagogy, and the inclusion of postcolonial texts in the secondary curriculum that have the potential to make students confront social change with understanding and empathy. She suggested the need for a worthwhile reading list from which teachers can feel comfortable selecting reading material for the class, and she emphasized that the English teachers have reservations about teaching literary texts with which they are “personally unfamiliar and which have few teaching resources developed around them” (Johnston, 2003, p. 96).

My own study examined the nature of students’ evoked and shared responses to a multicultural text, *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), and explored how a multicultural text in the context of a multicultural unit can open productive interpretive sites for transformative learning. A multicultural unit plan was developed to elicit student responses and examine student engagement during their reading of *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004).

### **A Multicultural Unit: Ways of Knowing and Responding to *The Kite Runner***

Constructing a “separate activity system” is an integral part of school curriculum that allows students to develop understanding and promote participation in a classroom setting (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). Conceptual units stem from Bruner’s (1997) notion of instructional scaffolding which in turn is based on Vygotsky’s (1935) views on human development and schema theory. Vygotskian theory (1978, cited in Crain, 2000) of social constructivism emphasizes the concept of artefact-mediated activities to initiate planning and literary tasks, the goal of which is to promote understanding of concepts and ideas through



language and social participation. It is a means by which all students in a classroom can reach an understanding that enables them to reflect abstractly on the nature of things (Crain, 2000). Understanding is constructed through collaborative practices (Fish, 1980; Hunsberger & Labercane, 2002; Smagorinsky, 2003) that stem from discourse in shared activities. A conceptual unit scaffolds insight building through different ways of knowing that can take place through dialogue, writing, and graphic modes of representation (Eisner, 1994; Gardner, 1983; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000).

The multicultural unit plan for this study focused on *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004) and was developed to structure pedagogical conditions to elicit student engagement and response. The multicultural unit (Appendix 1) was planned for a four-week span and was co-developed in consultation with the classroom teacher. A key theoretical construct undergirding the unit was Wells' (2001) "spiral of knowing" that includes ways of knowing based on experience, information, understanding and knowledge building. The "experience" component supports the student's experience through some form of individual or group engagement; "information" is then generated through observation, speech, print or visual artefacts. The information becomes knowledge through dialogue that Wells terms "progressive discourse" (p. 185). "Progressive discourse" usually provides an answer or solution to the problem generated through an activity. The "spiral of knowing" through successive engagements in dialogue creates information and knowledge through problem solving, writing and graphic modes of representation.

The multicultural unit consisted of the following activities: silent reading and responding in journals, mini lessons, discussions on documentaries, a comparative essay, working on group projects, and feedback on unit collected in the form of group responses.

These approaches promoted discussion, creative tasks and reflection (Atwell, 1998; Courtland & Gambell, 2000).

Each day, students read several chapters of the novel independently in class. During silent reading the students had the opportunity to read the designated chapters, and respond in their journals. The novel was read over a three-week time period. This was a designated quiet reading time that sustained the reading process (Courtland & Gambell, 2000) for both the students and the teachers in the classroom and the time when students also made entries in their response journals following the reading event.

Mini-lessons provided the “occasion for establishing a communal frame of reference” (Atwell, 1988, p. 150), through which the teacher demonstrates the processes as a reader and writer so students can see a pattern of creating, responding to texts, making connections and predictions, and promoting sharing. Mini lessons were from fifteen to twenty minutes in duration. The teacher discussed the novel, and implemented lessons on issues students needed clarification on during their reading of *The Kite Runner*. Mini lessons were offered on the setting of the novel, characters, conflicts and the writer’s style, kite flying, comparison with *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1952), atlas lesson on Afghanistan, reading from Rumi’s poetry and excerpts from *War at the Top of the World* (Margolis, 2001) to illumine student understanding on cultural and political issues in the novel.

Group projects provided the scope for shared dialogue and discussion, metacognitive awareness (Bruner, 1990; Fish, 1980; Wells, 2001), and meanings to be expressed through different forms of representation (Eisner, 1994) and intelligences (Gardner, 1983). A list of topics (Appendix 1) were selected that would allow them to present their project through a

variety of symbol systems: video presentation; collage; discussion of topic with aid of media material; interview; music or drama or other creative format for representation.

The above approaches promoted an engaged reading of *The Kite Runner* and helped elicit thoughtful responses and an energetic participation in discussions and group projects.

### **Chapter Summary**

In Chapter two, I described reader response theory and the nature of the transactions between readers and the text. The interpretation process involves private and social encounters where meaning gets established through negotiations with others. Rosenblatt's (1978, 1985) transaction theory illumines a meaningful relationship that takes place between the individual reader and the text. Iser's (1978, 2006) spaces of indeterminacy in a fictional text are sites of insightful interpretations. Sumara's (2002, 1996) Commonplace Book practices as a pedagogical construct generates interesting and insightful understanding for readers. How this theory translates while reading a multicultural text in the classroom is the site of inquiry for this study.

I also described studies with multicultural texts in secondary language arts classrooms. The findings highlight the potential role of multicultural texts in the school curriculum, the students' reading experiences with multicultural texts, issues raised based on cultural contexts, and the dilemmas regarding the reading of a multicultural text. The findings suggest the need for information that illuminates the nature of engagement, interpretation, reinterpretation and representation for secondary school students as they read a multicultural text and how the understanding of a multicultural text is informed through interpretations with others in a reading community.

In the next chapter, the design and the methodology are discussed. I also explain the emergent themes and the data collection and data analysis process.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

In chapter 2, I examined the social and interpretive aspects of the reading act through the lens of reader response theory. I then summarized the research on the implementation of multicultural texts in the secondary language arts curriculum. Multicultural scholars have asserted the significance and potential role of studying multicultural texts in the classroom. Despite such acknowledgement, multicultural texts are still not a regular part of the secondary school curriculum. More information is needed on the nature of complexity of teaching a multicultural text, and facts regarding the situatedness of the reader, the contexts of reading, nature of individual and shared interpretations, and ways the readers are transformed while they read a multicultural text in a secondary classroom. I have identified some of these gaps that need to be addressed based on the reading of a multicultural text in the classroom within the constructs of reader response theory.

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of Grade 11 readers' engagement with and response to a multicultural text, *The Kite Runner*. In this chapter, I describe the research design, the setting, sample and criteria for purposeful sampling used to select the response group for the study. I explain my role as researcher within a participant and non-participant continuum. I then describe the methods and document analysis, and explain the themes, categories and codes that emerged. I conclude with a discussion of the ethical considerations involved in this study.

### Design

The study is situated within an interpretive constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Schram, 2003). An interpretivist researcher's aim is to make sense of a constructed reality from the viewpoint of the participants in the study. My study topic

investigated students' responses to a multicultural text in a Grade 11 language arts classroom in order to construct a "reading of multiple meanings and voices" (Schram, 2003, p. 34). Synthesizing these "multi-voiced and varied constructions" requires participation and interaction with participant perspectives (Schram, 2003, p. 34). This study is an ethnographic case study with an emergent design (Creswell, 2003; Neuman, 2000; Patton, 2002; Smith, 1991).

An emergent design was selected to enable me to observe a range of responses as students engaged with the text, and responded through various activities during the implementation of the unit. An emergent design unfolds as fieldwork progresses and the researcher has the flexibility of adapting methods suited to the specific situation (Patton, 2002). It allows the researcher to study emerging phenomena within a set period of time, allows the flexibility to take note of notable findings or responses and has scope for "creative insights" (Patton, 2002, p. 134). An emergent design was appropriate for investigating the research problem as it provides the scope to keep "looking deeper, diverging broader, and focussing narrower, always going where the data inquiry will be leading..." (Patton, 2002, p. 318), and allowing the scope to accommodate "new understandings" and "new paths of inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 331). In this study patterns and themes emerged over a period of four weeks, and data collection and analysis moved from a broad focus to a narrower focus based on the research questions.

### ***Setting***

The study was conducted in a secondary school located in a working class area of an urban school system in northern Ontario. The school has a population of nine hundred students and classes from grades seven to twelve.

### *Sample*

Twenty-eight students in an academic Grade 11 literature and language arts class participated in this study over a period of four weeks. Their responses offered the context to observe aesthetic responses as they read a multicultural text, *The Kite Runner*. Various strands of response evolved as they wrote in their journals, shared information in response groups, discussed and participated to the activities in the multicultural unit, and prepared for their group presentations. I selected a purposeful sample group of four students, two boys and two girls, two weeks into the implementation of the study. I observed the response group of four students as they engaged in discussion with the multicultural text, their group project, and the multicultural unit in the hope of establishing patterns for the social construction of the meaning making process. The class teacher also noted observations in her journal of the other student groups in the class as they discussed their group topic and ways of presenting.

Purposeful sampling allows researchers to focus on small samples of students in an in-depth manner. Purposeful sampling involves “information-rich cases” that have the scope to offer insightful information important to the research inquiry. According to Patton (2002), a small sample of “great diversity yields findings that are high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and important shared patterns that cut across and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity. Both are important findings in qualitative inquiry” (p. 235). Patton (2002) lists fifteen strategies for purposeful sampling, where each strategy serves a particular purpose with the research goal in mind. For purposeful sampling in this study, I adopted the maximum variation sampling and critical case sampling approaches. Maximum variation sampling based on diverse characteristics and having the potential for common themes and patterns to emerge

was used to select a response group of four students. My second criteria for purposeful sampling was based on critical case sampling that allowed me to select a group that has the possibility to “yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 236). It allows for the confirming and disconfirming of cases during the selection process. Critical case sampling applied to my situation as I was limited to the study of a single site.

Purposeful sampling also has its source in theory-based sampling where the researcher samples people based on their “potential manifestations or representation of important theoretical constructs” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). Theoretical sampling allows for a constant comparative method of analysis and fits into the emergent inquiry process where design and analysis are interconnected and ongoing. Theoretical sampling “permits elucidation and refinement of the variations in, manifestations of, and meanings of a concept as it is found in the data gathered during fieldwork” (Patton, 2002, p. 239). In the first two weeks of the fieldwork, as a participant observer I was collecting data and engaged in ongoing data analysis. This stage of the research required rigour in the selection process while sampling, confirming or disconfirming cases. In this phase of the fieldwork with the help of the class teacher I selected one response group comprised of four students. The response group in this study was selected on the following criteria: (1) individuals in this group made insightful observations in their journal responses and were deeply involved with the story; (2) they readily participated in discussions based on mini lessons and asked thoughtful questions; (3) they showed inclinations in music and art; (4) and critiqued the others perspective based on the documentary watched in class. There were two boys and two girls in this response group and they worked cooperatively in their group project.



### **Role of the Researcher**

In my role as a researcher I was both an observer and participant observer. As an observer an emergent design provided the opportunity to follow leads and participants purposefully. A researcher in the field is expected to: “Experience and reflect. To understand a world you must become part of that world while at the same time remaining separate, a part of and apart from” (Patton, 2002, p. 330).

I kept a journal as participant and non-participant observer. I noted all activities that took place on a daily basis in the classroom during the four week period of study. Teacher and student discussion, teacher directed lessons, student responses, discussions among peers, and response group conversations were noted in this journal. The journal became the site of a cross-section of responses that evolved during students’ reading of *The Kite Runner*. It contains a detail description of student responses, their questions, feelings and opinions about the characters, cultural context, state of a war torn country, racial discrimination and political regimes. The following is an example from my journal:

Students are asking questions about factual details, information that shows that they are deeply involved in the story and the reading process. Josslyn wondered how Sohrab was able to hide his slingshot that came in handy and saved Amir from getting killed in the fight with Assef. Lots of cultural implications, an interesting insight indeed! Sohrab’s loose Afghani garments (the shalwar kameez) happens to be the ideal location to hide the slingshot. He was brought dressed in decorative paraphernalia and asked to entertain on the table by performing a number of gyrating movements, a perfect way to conceal the slingshot. This has implications for content in mini lessons. A strategic selection of 2 to 3 documentaries (time permitting) watched after the first week of reading and during the third week might provide answers to some of these cultural and political issues.

Patton (2002) explains that observer involvement falls on a “continuum that varies from complete immersion in the settings as full participant to complete separation from the setting as spectator, with a great deal of variation along the continuum between these two end

points” (Patton, 2002. p. 265). My role as an observer allowed me to observe and take note as the students read and responded to a multicultural text, worked on activities outlined in the multicultural unit, worked on group projects and discussed the book with their peers. I also recorded teacher led discussions and lessons. As a participant researcher, I introduced unit segments during the course of the study, responded to student journals and participated in informal discussions regarding issues in the multicultural text. During the last two weeks of the study, I observed students in the response group as they discussed their group project topic and ways of presentation. My role as a researcher ranged from active participation to observation of the setting as an outsider.

### **Methodology**

Methods used in this study included participant and non-participant observations and analysis of documents. These documents consisted of student journals, response group observations, group projects, comparative essay assignment, recommendation piece, response to multicultural unit questionnaire, researcher’s journal and teacher’s journal and fieldnotes.

#### ***Participant and Non-participant Observation***

Lincoln and Guba (1985) regard observation as a powerful tool where

...observation maximizes the inquirer’s ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviours, customs, and the like; observation...allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment; observation ... provides the inquirer with access to the emotional reactions of the group introspectively-that is, in a real sense it permits the observer to use himself as a data source; and observation...allows the observer to build on tacit knowledge, both his own and that of members of the group. (p. 173)

As a participant and non-participant observer, I was able to observe a diverse range of student responses from a holistic perspective. During the first ten days, I observed the activities of the setting, and recorded the observations, as a non-participant observer. The

following twelve days of the study, I was both a participant and non-participant observer. During this time, I participated in mini lessons, in the response group discussions, and engaged in informal conversations with the response group members as they shared and discussed facts on their group project.

### ***Documents***

Documents for the study included:

- Student journals
- Response group observations
- Responses to the multicultural unit questionnaire
- Group projects
- Comparative essay assignment (*The Great Gatsby* and *The Kite Runner*)
- Reflection piece
- Researcher journal
- Teacher journal/fieldnotes

*Student journals.* The students each received a copy of *The Kite Runner* and a journal. Student journals provided insights into their understanding of *The Kite Runner*. Over the course of four weeks the journals were collected twice to note student understanding, and to see if they had any questions regarding comprehension of cultural words and cultural contexts in the novel. Responding to student journals provided the scope to elicit responses related to cultural contexts, reflections and intertextual relationships made during the reading process. I responded to their queries in their journals, and developed some of these questions into mini lessons, that were implemented by the class teacher. Below is an example of a

weekly response to one student journal. Josephine mentioned a number of issues throughout her reading of *The Kite Runner*. She noted:

While reading about the transition between Afghanistan to America I really thought about cultures and the barriers they create. The Afghan marriage ceremonies show how different their culture and our culture really is. I really realized how different life in other countries is. Reading these chapters put these topics into a new perspective and reality.

Following is my response in Josephine's journal:

You are an astute reader, and have made keen and perceptive observations throughout the novel. It would be nice if you could expand on these issues. (1) what you found different in marriage ceremonies in ch 13; (2) in ch 19, how is life different in other countries; and (3) finally how these chapters offered a new perspective? You have made some good observations!

*Response group observations.* One response group of four students was selected through purposeful sampling to observe the social aspects of the meaning-making process. The response group was observed for two weeks as they discussed the novel, and prepared for their group presentation. I took extensive notes of their conversations as they shared events and experiences in their lives and related them to the novel. The thick description of their conversations, and the teacher's journal that noted discussions of the other groups in the class, offered triangulation of information across the different groups that were involved in group presentation work.

*Response to multicultural unit questionnaire.* The class discussed the set of questions based on the multicultural unit in groups of four once they were done working on their group projects. They responded to a number of questions based on cultural contexts, characters, events, facts they were not clear about while reading the novel, how the various intertextual activities shared in the class contributed to a better understanding of issues in the novel, how these activities helped inform and transform their perceptions, and the activities they liked

doing in the multicultural unit, and what they could change or add in the unit (Appendix 1). The feedback offered insightful information for future planning and implementation of multicultural units.

*Group projects.* The class was divided into seven groups of four students who presented their topics in power point, poster and interview format. The range of topics included: Ethnic minorities and their treatment; Afghani pastimes; radio interview with Sohrab and his uncle; bullying; the Taliban regime; and occupation of land by a foreign force. The data collected from student artefacts was also a source of triangulation to the emergent themes of the study.

*Comparative essay assignment.* At the end of the term the class wrote a comparative essay for the exam based on the class novel, *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1953), and the multicultural text, *The Kite Runner*. Student response to the exam question provided another opportunity to triangulate data.

*Reflection piece.* The class teacher asked students to write a reflection piece explaining why they would recommend the reading of this novel in a Grade 11 academic class. The student responses were transcribed, and the analysis of these data informed the interpretation of their reading experience of a multicultural text in the classroom.

*Teacher journal.* The teacher kept a journal in which she recorded the day-to-day activities, individual student's progress during the reading process of *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), and aspects of the novel where students were experiencing difficulties in understanding cultural words and contexts. She also noted the advantages of scaffolding activities, and made suggestions to improve and modify certain activities during the implementation process. She made the following note on day 12 in her journal:

The two documentary/movies really helped students understand the conditions in Afghanistan. Viewing the film before reading the book would be preferable. I think students would have had a better idea about the country and its people. Students were very clear about how Americans seem to be hypocritical. Conroy believes that the Americans killed innocent lives at Hiroshima so why are they so irate about 9/11. As I ponder over the last two weeks, I am wishing that we had more time to spend on this novel. It is such a learning experience on so many levels. It is obvious to me that my students are interested in what they are studying right now – in a classroom of non-readers (10/32 read books for enjoyment). I am overjoyed to see that every student has read the novel and he/she is enjoying the discussions about the book. I would like to develop a media unit on Afghanistan. I have cut and saved many articles in the newspaper regarding Afghanistan. I wish there was time to do it!

The teacher journal provided added triangulation and generated useful data.

### **Research Process**

#### ***Entry***

I developed the research proposal. The four week unit entitled “A Multicultural Unit: Ways of Knowing and Responding to *The Kite Runner*” was developed in consultation with the classroom teacher. The proposal was submitted to the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board (REB) and to the Lakehead District School Board. After gaining approval from these sources, permission was obtained from the school principal to conduct the study within the school.

#### ***Data Collection***

The various sources of data collection have been mentioned above. Data collection in this study took place in two phases.

Phase 1: General observations. During this phase all twenty-eight students were observed as they read *The Kite Runner*, responded in their journals and participated in discussions. Observation in this phase was conducted during the first two weeks with the intent to select one response group through purposeful sampling.

Phase II: Purposive sample. During the end of second week the class was divided into groups of four and with the help of the classroom teacher, I selected one response group to observe the social construction of meaning as they worked on their group project.

### ***Triangulation of Data***

Credibility of qualitative research involves diligent fieldwork, and a systematic search of themes and patterns through rigorous and unbiased analysis (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Patton, 2002). This can be achieved through triangulation, a process that combines multiple data sources, methods and observers. Patton (2002) explains that “triangulating with multiple data sources, observers, methods, and/or theories, researchers can make substantial strides in overcoming the scepticism that greets singular methods, lone analysis, and single-perspective interpretations” (p. 556). Investigator triangulation was achieved in this study through the participant researcher, and the classroom teacher implementing the multicultural unit. The classroom teacher recorded her observations and thoughts on lessons, discussions, student participation, group projects and activities completed in the multicultural unit. I discussed the emerging findings with the classroom teacher to ensure information that may have been overlooked or portrayed in a biased way. This helped reduce “the potential bias that comes from a single person doing all the data collection and provides means of more directly assessing the consistency of the data obtained” (Patton, 2002, p. 560). Theory triangulation was used through multiple perspectives to interpret themes. Methodological triangulation was used to examine student responses through the researcher’s journal log, teacher observations, response group observations, student discourses, student documents and artefacts.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was an ongoing process and involved description, analysis and interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2005; Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Wolcott, 1994). Triangulation, was a key component of this study. Information derived from various sources provided scope for “cross-data validity checks” (Patton, 2002, p. 248).

The data were transcribed manually. To simplify the identification process, the first letter from each data source was used to develop the codes referred to in this study. The following codes were used to identify the sources of data:

- Student journals = SJ
- Response group observations = RG
- Response to the multicultural unit questionnaire = RM
- Group projects = GP
- Comparative essay assignment = CE
- Reflection piece = RP
- Teacher journal = TJ
- Researcher journal = RJ

Each data set was reread a number of times to identify recurrent patterns and themes. Categories, themes and sub-themes were then constructed based on commonalities across the data sources. Eight themes emerged from these sources. The themes along with subcategories and examples appear in Table 1.



Table 1

## Themes

Theme	Subcategories	Examples
Character Analysis	Analyzing emotions and guilt	So much has changed since the beginning of the novel and since Amir was a boy, yet Baba still has the same unflappable courage. He goes out of his way to save the woman from the Russian soldier and takes control of his life when he comes to America. By not wanting anyone to discover his cancer, it is evident that Baba's pride is still strong in America as it was in Afghanistan ((seems to be internalizing the wrongs he had done in life, that takes the form of cancer). (Bobby, SJ)
	Character growth	Amir is a strong character, maybe not strong physically but it takes a strong person to face the hardships he has. Also he is a caring person as he grows older which surprised me because when he was young, he treated Hassan badly by letting him get beaten and blaming problems on him. Later on Amir gets beaten to save Hassan's son and feels relief from it. This is how Amir has grown as a man. (Tim, SJ)
	Nature of conflict	Chapter 8 is the first time in this book we see conflict between Hassan and Amir. Amir actively avoids Hassan and Hassan does the same with Amir. I believe that Hassan knows about Amir's silent presence at the rape incident and is too embarrassed to say anything to Amir. It will be interesting to see how the story unfolds from here. (Miguel, SJ)
	Empathy for characters experiencing hardships	Amir and his father lost everything they had but each other when they fled. Amir learned what it is like to go without and not have everything handed to him; this is something many kids and adolescents here are unable to understand. Our lives are so much easier and better than people in third world countries, yet we constantly complain. (Ashoka, SJ)
	Empathy with character's memories	It was very emotional when Amir saw the Pacific ocean because he used to tell Hassan that someday they would walk on a beach, let their feet sink in the sand and watch the waves. Now the ocean was vast and blue but the picture was incomplete with Hassan not being there. Amir cried and tears came to my eyes. I felt pain and a deep sense of loss. (Krystal, SJ)
	Concern about character's safety	Amir is badly beaten up and Assef finally got his due. He has lost one eye for life. I am concerned about Amir's safety as he stays in a hotel to work out Sohrab's adoption papers. He better be careful about Assef's men. (Jamie, SJ)
	Struggling to make sense of character's action	When Amir goes to the pomegranate tree with Hassan, the setting makes me uneasy. I don't understand why Amir tried to get Hassan to hit him, I think it is because Amir is trying to get Hassan to break his trust or not be loyal. (Sunny, SJ)

Theme	Subcategories	Examples
	Questions character's situatedness and action	Chap 14 repeats what was said in the first chap. It made me think and recap on all the other events that have happened before this point. All of what the writer has said in the first chap makes sense now. How will Amir find a way to be good again? I am glad he decided to go back home, maybe this is what he needs and will help him. (Kelly, SJ)
Stylistic Devices	Detail in first chapter	The writing in the first ch. leaves you curious as to what the sins of his past are. Also it leaves you wanting to know why it is that he looks down an alley. It keeps the reader hooked. (Tommy, SJ)
	Precise detail in writing style	Hosseini's choice of writing is to the point and relies on precision. "They piled their things in the center of a few worn rags and tied the corners together. I remember as I was pulling away, Hassan turned to take a last look at their home" (219). With the use of short sentence structure, the idea the author portrays in a time of loss and hardship, has a forceful impact on the reader. (Bobby, SJ)
	Parallel contexts	The attacks against the Hazaras is sad and so uncalled for. To learn about the massacre ordered upon them makes me ill. Kind of the massacre of the native people of Newfoundland by the dominant English people. (Josslyn, SJ)
	Patterns	Sohrab is successful with the slingshot, and turns Assef, the bully into the one eyed man, a statement mentioned by his dad Hassan, when he was a boy in his preteen years. An interesting pattern. (Miguel, SJ)
	Pathetic fallacy	The rain that fell on the day Baba drove Ali and Hassan away for good, mirrors the mood of the chapter-tense, timid, remorseful, sad. The pouring rain happens to be the inward tears of Baba, who on the surface shows a detached self. (Josephine, SJ)
	Irony	In chapter 22, I enjoyed the irony that the author put in. It is very fitting that Sohrab turned Assef into "one eyed Assef," the name that Hassan wanted to give Assef. (Mcgriddle, SJ)
	Symbolism	In <i>The Great Gatsby</i> the clock symbolizes the relationship between Daisy and Gatsby. In <i>The Kite Runner</i> , the kite symbolizes the relationship Amir and Hassan share. Symbolism is also used through negative places and people. In <i>The Great Gatsby</i> the valley of ashes is an unattractive place. In <i>The Kite Runner</i> , Assef's brass knuckles represent power through wrong doing. (Katt, CE)
Identifying with Self	Teen suicide	The last part of the book really touched me. It was emotional for me, as it dealt with issues that I have dealt with myself. Close to the end the book comes into a very taboo subject; suicide. Sohrab attempts to kill himself, and he almost succeeds. What I find interesting was that Sohrab could have used any method, but he chose the one that is a growing problem here. It really shows how much alike us they are. (Ashoka, SJ)

Theme	Subcategories	Examples
	Parental/sibling relationship	I find it funny when Farid and his brother Wahid start to fight about cars, it shows families go through hard times but still love each other. It reminds me of my own brothers. (Sophie, SJ)
	Illness	Once again I feel sorry for Amir because Baba has been diagnosed with cancer very sad. I have experienced similar events to this as many relatives and friends close to me have been diagnosed with cancer, I know it is not a good experience. (Hash Brown, SJ)
	Bullying	We meet Assef who I knew I will hate from the beginning. I experienced bullies in my past so I can understand how these small boys feel (Maxine, SJ).
	Feelings of guilt	When Hassan asks Amir to go for a walk and Amir says no, I think it is because Amir feels guilt. I have been in situations where I have felt stupid or guilty and I also did not want to face the people involved. (Sunny, SJ)
Sociocultural Knowledge	Physical features of the land	Amir goes back to Kabul, when it is under Taliban rule. The city seems to be in ruins, even the land. It seems to have become barren, the pomegranate tree of their childhood looks like a stump with no fruits and leaves. (Krystal, SJ)
	Kite flying	I am amazed at the past times the boys have, kite flying with broken glass rope is incredible. What does the kite runner do? (Max, SJ)
	Traditions	I find it interesting that Ali married his first cousin to restore honour to his uncle's blemished name, because in our culture, an event like that would only disgrace a family. (Pancakes, SJ)
	Silence	Amir and Soraya's relationship seem to be based on a deep cultural heritage, where there is a lot of acceptance through silence. (Pancakes, SJ)
	Treatment of women	It was interesting to see how the writer describes women's situation in an Afghani culture where, "Every woman needed a husband. Even if he did silence the song in her" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 187), not like our society. This discrimination against women angers me. It makes me realize how fortunate I am to be born here. (Farlee, SJ)
	Questions character's situatedness	I think that Amir is doing the right thing by going to get Hassan's child Sohrab during the Taliban rule. Now could Amir do the right thing if placed in Afghanistan and he was living there? (Kelly, SJ)
Sociopolitical Awareness	Characters affected by the brutality of war	One thing I really feel bad for is Kamal's father, who loses so much; his wife, his son, his home that he ends up finally shooting himself in the end. It would be scarring to be 18, and witness suicide. War is brutal. (Mitch, SJ)

Theme	Subcategories	Examples
	Ethnic cleansing	When the man in black glasses killed the two people at the baseball game with rocks, I felt a lot of hate. This scene is important because it shows how Afghanistan was with the Taliban. And how the Taliban killed the Hazara mass. People lived in fear. They only started killing Hazaras because it was “ethnic cleansing” or as Assef said “taking out the garbage”. (Sunny, SJ)
	Juxtaposition of political situation in Canada and Afghanistan	The scene in ch 19 where Amir is walking through Kabul is very saddening. It gives a picture of miserable state of the children and old men, and how poor the villages and cities have become through a number of invasions. It makes you realize how much different life is in other parts of the world as opposed to us in Canada. We are truly fortunate to live the way we do .(Pancakes, SJ)
	Afghan hospitality amidst war	Farid’s starving children just stare at the scrumptious food being served to Amir at their home. They are quiet about it. I am surprised how Farid’s family gave Amir so much food when they would have none for themselves. It is amazing how kind they can be when they have nothing. It is the Taliban who are able to afford meat.The people in Afghanistan will do things for each other, are thankful for whatever they have and aren’t selfish. (Anil, SJ)
Broadening Perspectives	Role of religion and tradition	I am amazed to see how all the characters have a deep faith in religion despite the misery they live in. The Afghans living in America follow their traditions. It is important to them. (Krystal, SJ)
	Establish connections across texts and subject areas	While reading about the transition between Afghanistan to America I really thought about cultures and the barriers they create. In my ASP class we have been covering different cultures, races and language barriers. Reading these chapters put these topics into new perspective and reality. (Josephine, SJ)
	Broad and deep understanding of global perspectives	It is not the normal book a class would be taught, however, it has a powerful meaning, and should be read in class. Everyone should know about what’s going on with people in the world in different countries and racism and different cultures. The media today only tells us so much, but this novel lets us know what the people, culture, violence and chaos is like there. The multiculturalism in my opinion, opens the reader to something new, and broadens their thinking. (Sophie, SJ)
	Realization of facts	The thought of the worst sin being stealing surprised me because I never thought about it that way. All this time stealing meant taking something that belongs to someone in the form of an object. Stealing is much more than this, it can be applied in many levels .(Josephine, SJ)

Theme	Subcategories	Examples
	Formulation of opinions	We have more morals than we think, we accept racial differences, and try to promote equality for all. It is more strict there, everyone has to follow an accepted code of behavior. The women are not free to do all jobs, and religion is a big part of life. We are more lenient and merciful, and social classes are determined by materialistic aspects here rather than race. (Ashoka, SJ)
Role of teacher	Unit activities	The activities acted as a visual aid to really get an idea of the conditions and culture of Afghanistan, showed us how people live, harsh consequences for actions, war, Taliban brutality, racial discrimination and state of education. ( Lenore, RM)
	Discussions	The names, countries, religion and cultures sound the same. The teacher facilitated this process by discussing characters, their relationships and role in the novel. (Bobby, RM)
	Students on implementation	Comparing and contrasting the two novels contributed to an effective understanding of issues in two novels on a broader level. (Jamie, CE)
	Reinterpretation	On the second reading I understood why Amir did some of the things he did. For example when Amir witnessed Hassan being raped, he ran away. He was very young and scared and the bullies were strong enough to hurt him as well. (Krystal, SJ)
	Teacher reflection	There is an excitement about this book. My students are stopping me in the halls and expressing to me how much they are enjoying the novel. They are finding the book powerful. One girl has finished the novel and told me that it made her cry. I love the impromptu discussions I am having with my students. They are connected. (Mrs. Slade, TJ)
Response Group Process	Presentation format	Let's create a provocative dance to reflect bullying, do it like a story or make a video in the hallway. (Bobby, RG)
	Interpretation of information	Bullying can be defined as a provocative behaviour or physical, like when my head was pushed against the school bus window. (Krystal, RG)
	Synthesizing information	We should start with a definition of bullying and then mention forms of bullying. We should make references to <i>The Kite Runner</i> . (Krystal, RG)

The themes emerged based on frequency of responses in the various data sources. The subcategories note the topics discussed in connection to the themes. For example, in the theme, "Character Analysis," the students examined and analysed various aspects of character from emotions and guilt experienced by the characters, to character growth and the nature of conflict. They empathized with characters experiencing hardships, with their

memories, expressed concern for their safety and struggled to make sense of their action and situation. Examples have been provided for each of these subcategories from various data sources.

Students analysed various aspects of style in *The Kite Runner* in their journals, reflections and comparative essays. I categorized these responses under “Stylistic Devices.” In this category of responses the students discussed the various elements of style in *The Kite Runner*. Subcategories for this theme included detail in first chapter, precise writing style, parallel contexts, patterns, pathetic fallacy, use of irony and symbols.

They were able to identify with issues, events and relationships in the novel. These responses have been categorized as “Identifying with Self,” where the theme of empathy was evident. They identified with teen suicide, parental and sibling relationship, illness, bullying and feelings of guilt.

Students expressed opinions, generated discussion and asked questions about various cultural aspects of *The Kite Runner*. I have placed these responses under socio-cultural contexts, where students wrote and talked about changes in the landscape, kite flying, traditions, silence, treatment of women, and questioned character’s situatedness in a cultural context.

While reading the novel, students expressed awareness about the unstable political situation in Afghanistan and how characters are affected by the brutality of war, ethnic cleansing, juxtaposing political situation in Canada and Afghanistan and Afghan hospitality. These subcategories have been placed under “Sociopolitical Awareness.”

Students also established connections to cultural, social and political contexts in the setting of the novel and the present reality in Afghanistan. These aspects have been included

under “Broadening Perspectives” through which students noted role of religion and tradition, established connections across texts and subject areas, expressed insights on global perspectives, new ways of looking at facts and formulating opinions on differences between cultures.

“Role of teacher” includes the many ways in which the teacher implemented the unit and the strategies she used to scaffold students’ learning, for example, through discussions about characters and their role in the novel and through various unit activities.

“Response group process” incorporates the social construction on meaning as the group interpreted and synthesized information as well as their reinterpretation and representation of their topic.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The research project was submitted to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Lakehead University for review. The ethical approval was granted (Appendix 2). The REB requested that the letter to participants, parents/guardians, students, classroom teacher, the principal and the school board, should include the phrase “Students and teacher may choose not to answer any questions in the questionnaire.”

I also had to fill in a Research Application form for the Lakehead District School Board. The application required the submission of the research proposal along with the letter of approval from the Lakehead Research Ethics Board. I signed the Lakehead District School Board’s Code of Ethics form (Appendix 3). On completion of these documentation forms, I was granted ethical approval from the board (Appendix 4). I also obtained approval from the principal of the school (Appendix 5).

### ***Informed Consent***

The purposes of the study and ethical considerations were verbally explained to the class prior to the beginning of the multicultural study unit. Students were given a letter describing the study and invited to have their parents sign the informed consent form (Appendix 6). The informed consent protocol advised participants of the following ethical considerations:

- There are no risks or harm involved when students participate in this study.
- They can withdraw at any time.
- The anonymity and confidentiality of the students and the classroom teacher will be protected at all times.
- The data will be stored securely at Lakehead University for five years.
- The findings will be disseminated to Lakehead District School Board and the classroom teacher on request, and will be presented at education conferences and in refereed journals.

This qualitative study with an emergent design investigated students' responses to a multicultural text, *The Kite Runner* in an academic Grade 11 language arts classroom. Data were collected from several data sources: student journals, group projects, presentations, reflection assignment, comparative essay assignment, and researcher and classroom teacher's journal. Data was categorized into patterns and themes.

The next chapter describes the findings and interpretation.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of the study was to observe student responses as they read a multicultural text *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), and responded to activities outlined in a multicultural unit, in a grade eleven language arts class. These responses generated data in the form of student journals, response group observations, group projects, writing assignments, and responses to the multicultural unit questionnaire.

In this chapter, I present the background context on the school, class, the purposive sample group, classroom teacher, classroom setting, and a description of the activities in which students engaged each week during the implementation of the unit. Eight themes emerged from the data analysis: character analysis; identifying with self; analysis of stylistic devices; sociocultural knowledge; sociopolitical awareness; broadening perspectives; the role of teacher; and the response group process. Each of these themes has been grouped into subcategories. These themes and subcategories were outlined in Table 1 of Chapter three. In the final section I discuss the findings in relation to my research questions, and the related literature.

The secondary school in which the study was conducted is located in an urban centre in northern Ontario.

### **Background Context**

#### ***School***

Classes in the high school range from Grades 7 to 12. The school plays an active role in extra-curricular activities and has a strong school band, soccer, basketball and ski teams. The Communications department follows the English curriculum outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2000), and is involved in the teaching of English literature, French,

Spanish and German languages. The English language curriculum for the academic stream in the Grade 11 class consists of the study of poetry, one novel, and a Shakespearean play. The Grade 11 class in which this study was conducted had completed their reading of the required class texts for the poetry unit, the novel *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), and *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1597). There are two 16 week semesters. *The Kite Runner* was an additional novel the class read and responded to during their fall term. The students attend English classes five days a week for seventy-five minute periods.

### ***Class***

The grade 11 academic English language class consisted of 28 students, 17 girls and 11 boys. Twenty-one students were 17 years of age; and seven were 16 years of age. All were strong readers. It was a class that enjoyed socialising and talking among themselves. Ten students were involved in extracurricular activities, either in ski tournaments and/or band activities. As students in a Grade 11 academic class, they were aware of and concerned about their overall grade in English because it is used for entry level scholarships at universities.

### ***The Purposive Sample***

The class was divided into groups of four by the end of second week of the implementation of the unit. The study took place over a four-week period. During the first two weeks, I observed the students with the intention of selecting a purposive sample. The purposive sample was selected on the basis of maximum variation and critical case sampling approaches (Patton, 2002). A response group was selected based on diverse characteristics and having the potential to yield common themes and patterns. I observed one response group consisting of four students, Bobby, Krystal, Mitch and Conray (pseudonyms) for two

weeks. All four students were strong readers and writers. They were active in various curricular activities and were students who strove to achieve high grades in all their courses.

The two girls, Bobby and Krystal, were competitive students intent on getting good marks and doing well in school. Conray was an analytical student, and had problems with handwriting and spelling. He was allowed to do his writing tasks at the computer available in the library or the computer room situated on the main floor of the school. He was quiet compared to Bobby and Krystal. His participation in the discussion demonstrated that he was a thoughtful reader. For example, his responses were insightful and he made connections and astute observations throughout the story. Mitch was present during a week and a half of the group project activity. He was then out of town due to his participation in sport activities. All four were strong readers who discussed issues, made connections and drew parallels between diverse situations in the novel and in their lives.

### ***Teacher***

Mrs. Slade (pseudonym) has been an English and Music teacher at the secondary school for the past sixteen years. She has a Master's degree in English literature and a music degree in instrumental music. She strives to instill a love of reading in her students. Hardworking and conscientious, she worked diligently to complete the prescribed texts during the designated term time. It was a school term where she had a teaching load of three and a half courses instead of the usual three. For the semester during which the study took place, she had a preparation period every second day.

During the study Mrs. Slade persuaded students to complete reading *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), and stay engaged in the various unit activities. The student journals were collected on Fridays. I shared the responses and questions students raised in their journals

during their reading process with the class teacher. Students wondered, for example, about the details of how the kite game was played, where the opponent's kite can be cut down from the sky. Mrs. Slade offered a mini lesson on kite flying, and showed slides demonstrating an actual kite flying contest. Students also commented on having difficulties in identifying characters and remembering their names. She planned mini lessons to clarify the issues students had during the reading process. I observed the class as she implemented various activities in the multicultural unit.

At the start of the multicultural unit, Mrs. Slade outlined research topics for Internet search in the library in order to develop students' background knowledge on Afghanistan. She taught mini lessons to scaffold students' understanding of the novel. For example, she taught lessons on the art of kite flying in Asia, plot development in *The Kite Runner*, nature of conflict in the story, and the relationships between characters. She was also involved in preparing students for the end of the term exam so that the students experiencing difficulty could complete the course successfully.

### ***Classroom Setting***

The language arts classrooms are situated on the fourth floor of the school. There are six classrooms where English is taught to students in Grades 9 to 12. In this particular classroom, four English classes were taught each day by three English teachers. There was an amicable sharing of space and resources among teachers who shared this classroom. The classroom walls featured visuals and sayings of writers and philosophers ranging from Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the romantic poets to the writers of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The resources available in the room for students included anthologies, various literature text books and dictionaries. The desks in this classroom were arranged in two rows in a three-

sided square format in which there was space in the front and in the middle that could be utilized for presentations.

### ***Description of the Multicultural Unit***

The multicultural unit, “Ways of knowing and responding to *The Kite Runner*” (Appendix 1), was divided into three sections: before-reading activities; during-reading activities and after-reading activities. Objectives of the unit plan were based on the expectations stated in the Ministry of Education document, *The Ontario Curriculum: Grades 11 and 12 English* (2000).

Before-reading activities involved background research on Afghanistan. During this phase the students in groups of four researched topics online: on geographical location of Afghanistan, culture, religion, situation of women, government, war situation, and leisure activities. Students were required to write a summary of the articles and topics were distributed to seven teams arranged in jigsaw groupings. This assignment took place in the library during the first two class periods once the unit was implemented. During discussion time students reflected on what they learned, what they had not known previously, and what surprised and shocked them.

The during-reading phase started on the third day. Writing journals were provided to the students along with a copy of *The Kite Runner*. The daily schedule started with forty minutes of reading and responding in their journals during or after having completed the designated reading chapters of the day. Students responded in an elaborate manner in these journals, making note of their feelings about characters, characters’ actions, relationships, writer’s technique, cultural contexts, identifying with situations and expressing their views on bullying, discrimination and war situations.

The remaining thirty-five minutes of class periods involved after-reading activities. These included various scaffolding activities in the form of mini-lessons on writer style, plot development and character growth in novel, intertextual activities, watching of documentaries followed by discussions, reading excerpts from secondary sources such as Rumi's poetry (Barks, 2004), and excerpts from *War at the top of the world* (Margolis, 2001), writing and responding in groups. A number of activities planned as after reading activities during week two got moved to the third week as students were trying to catch up on their reading. These consisted of watching two documentaries, *Scared/Sacred* and *Kandahar* and reading excerpts from secondary sources. The last two weeks the students worked on their group projects. Group presentations took place on the last two days on the following topics:

1. Bullying issues
2. Radio interview with Amir and Sohrab
3. Kite flying and other pastimes
4. Ethnic minorities in the world and their treatment
5. The Taliban regime
6. Occupation of land by foreign forces
7. Poster on Ethnic minorities.

Table 2 offers a glimpse of the daily activities in which the students participated during the four week period.

Table 2

The multicultural unit on a weekly basis.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
Week # 1	Library research on Afghanistan: geographical location, culture, religion, situation of women, government, war situation, leisure activities	Sharing of research findings in jigsaw groupings	Silent reading & responding in journal	Silent reading: Ch 1-5, & responding in journal  Teacher discussion: style, comparison with <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	Silent reading: Ch 6-9, & responding in journal  Teacher discussion: reasons for the novel being an interesting read
Week # 2	Teacher directed Group activity: discussion on characters, setting, writer's style, similarities/contrast s drawn to <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	Class discussion on ways to respond in journals,  Teacher directed lesson on the art of kite competition,  Silent reading of the novel	Silent reading & responding in journal,  teacher prompted activity: How do you think Amir will make it good as he struggles most of his life?	Assessment for multicultural unit explained,  silent reading & responding in journals	Silent reading & responding in journals
Week # 3	Speed writing activity: Discuss four events (issues), person/characters that surprised, angered you or you are passionate about, relate it to your experiences and explain why?  Watched documentary: <i>Scared/Sacred</i> , discussion on documentary	Writing activity: Why <i>The Kite Runner</i> should be recommended for a Grade 11 class, structure in <i>The Kite Runner</i> discussed,  Group Project sheet discussed	Watched <i>Kandahar</i> documentary	Watched remaining of <i>Kandahar</i> , discussion on documentary	Atlas lesson: Landlocked setting of Afghanistan, excerpts read from <i>War at the top of the World</i>  reading of Rumi's poetry: Sufism, reading from "The Three Fishes"  work on group project
Week # 4	Work on group projects,  handouts of group project rubric	Discussion on comparison & contrast between <i>The Great Gatsby</i> & <i>The Kite Runner</i> ,  work on group project	Work on group project	Work on group project	Work on group project,  group response to multicultural unit questionnaire
Week # 5	Group Project presentations	Group Project presentations			

## **Themes**

The themes generated from the data sources were presented in Table 1 in Chapter Three. Eight themes emerged across the various data sources: character analysis; stylistic devices; identifying with self; sociocultural knowledge; sociopolitical awareness; broadening perspectives; role of teacher; and response group process. These themes have been further arranged into subcategories along with relevant examples. Character analysis generated responses over a wide spectrum ranging from criticism to praise for characters, expressing empathy and concern, to questioning character's situatedness.

### ***Character Analysis***

Students discussed character analysis on the emotion and guilt experienced by characters, noted character growth, nature of conflict, empathized with characters experiencing hardships, expressed concern about characters' safety, struggled to make sense of characters' action and questioned characters' situatedness.

Bobby analysed Amir's (the main character) feelings of guilt and remorse, and noted how the power of prayer offered answers to his tortured mind. She traced Amir's actions linked to his guilt and offered reasons as to how Amir can feel redeemed:

Sohrab's suicide attempt teaches Amir how strong an influence fear has over people's lives. It is fear and panic that drive him to pray after 17 years and convince him that God exists. Rahim Khan understands that Amir enjoys torturing himself with his guilt and as long as he is directing his remorse inwards, he cannot truly help anyone else. Only when he forgives himself can Amir direct his full focus on repaying his debt to Hassan. Once Amir has stopped "not wanting to have blood on his hands" he can make use of them, and that is what he does when he teaches Sohrab about kite flying. (SJ, p. 154)

Bobby made observations regarding Amir, and the changes that had taken place in him as he matured in life. She noted character growth in Amir, who was finally able to take



responsibility for his past deeds. Bobby also commented on the role of Soraya, Amir's wife, in his life:

Amir thinks things through thoroughly now and despite what he did to Hassan, is getting better at decision making (ie marrying Soraya). When it comes to the topic of marriage between Soraya and Amir, I'm glad that they are going to follow through with it for 2 reasons: 1. Amir followed his heart and will live happily with the love of his life 2. Soraya will be there for Amir when cancer finally takes Baba's life. Metastasis? By not wanting anyone to discover of his cancer, it is evident that Baba's pride is still as strong in America as it was in Afghanistan (seems to be internalising the wrongs he had done in life, that takes the form of cancer). Amir is putting his life on the line and taking risks for Hassan's son, something that he failed to do for Hassan himself. Does this mean he is trying to right his wrong? I had lost a lot of respect for Amir after he had just watched Hassan get raped by Assef but I think that I am now beginning to get it back, as he is finally trying to set things right again. (SJ, p, 156)

Krystal examined Amir's situation in critical moments, and his feelings of betrayal in light of Baba's concept of sin, and noted Baba's strength of character:

It's sad that Amir knows that all of the people at his party aren't there for him, but for his father. Amir is on the verge of a mental breakdown. He doesn't know how to cope with his problems. He is scared for life. This party reminds me of Gatsby's parties in *The Great Gatsby*. In chapter 18 Amir feels betrayed and angry as he learns of Hassan and his relationship. He is reminded of Baba's words that the greatest sin of all is stealing. He now feels his father is a thief because he stole his brother and dishonoured Ali. Despite his secret Baba was a man of courage and decency. The soldier had no morals and used his power and status to take advantage of the people of lesser power. This event brings out Baba's character when he sticks up for the woman and puts his life on the line for someone he does not know. His character continues to impress me as he grows older. He continues to be selfless, from building an orphanage to standing up for this woman, to moving to America and working at a gas station for Amir's happiness. I respect and admire him. (SJ, p. 130)

Miguel analysed Amir's conflict based on the events in his life from man versus society and man versus himself point of view:

Amir uses the contrasts of his old peaceful life as a wealthy child, with his troubled teenagehood and return to Taliban Afghanistan to communicate the intensity of his conflicts. He is willing to overcome these conflicts finally. Sohrab gives him the reason to face all of the struggles and near death experiences, as it is the conflict within, that force him to fight the conflict outside represented through the Talibans. In man versus himself conflict, Amir is pitted against his own shame and guilt, that

stemmed from witnessing his friend's brutal rape. This shame is bottled up inside, and leads to Amir doing some horribly selfish things. An example of this would be him framing his friend of robbery, so he does not have to deal with it. The meshing of his two conflicts, man vs society and man vs himself, lead him to the start of his redemption. (SJ, p. 106)

Students not only analysed the characters' actions and conflicts, they also empathized with their respective situations. They expressed sympathy and appreciation for characters who experienced hardships for their loved ones, and characters who suffered mistreatment and were discriminated against. They also expressed concern about characters placed in unsafe situations. McGriddle empathized with Hassan's and Amir's situation, when after the rape incident Hassan has to serve drinks at the party to the very person who has victimized him. It is a complex situation, where Amir, who witnessed the act, is quiet about it. McGriddle expressed awareness of the complex situation, and empathized with the characters involved:

If I were Hassan, I would have felt the same way when men were joking about my mother, although I probably would have gotten very angry. I feel bad for Hassan as he seems to take a lot of hate because of his background and because of his mother and father. The event at Amir's party where Hassan has to serve Assef makes me feel bad for Hassan. He does not deserve anything that has happened to him. I also feel sympathy for Amir, because he sees this happening, but does not know what to do about it. (SJ, p. 83)

Lorne got involved with the events in the novel. He empathized with Hassan, who kept the rape incident to himself, and with Amir, who happened to watch it, and also suffered in silence:

Reading about Hassan and his self-isolation is very saddening, I want to comfort him myself, and Amir, I want to just shake him and make him confess to what he has seen; almost wish I didn't know just what he has seen. (SJ, p. 91)

Krystal empathized with Baba's change of fortune and his sacrifice when he decided to emigrate to America. In Kabul he was a successful business man, who was well known

and looked up to for his philanthropic deeds. He left everything behind at the onset of the Russian occupation, and fled to America via Pakistan. Krystal commented:

I feel bad for Baba, who had to leave everything he worked for behind. It is amazing how at a moment's notice, they walk out of their homes with only the clothes on their back, as they make the trip to Pakistan. He comes to America so that his son, Amir can have a good and safe life. Baba who was a successful businessman in Kabul now works at a gas station. It is pitiful how Amir and Baba resort to the flea market from the status they had in Kabul. Whatever money he has, he spends it for his son. It is hard to imagine how much he had to sacrifice. (SJ, p. 108)

Josephine described how the acts of certain characters affected her: first, the rape incident of Hassan; and then seventeen years later when his son, Sohrab, out of extreme despair attempts suicide. Josephine empathized with a number of characters and their situations, and commented on the staggering sense of loss she experienced:

I would first like to say while reading the last three quarters of the book I had a horrible knot in my chest. It started when Hassan got raped by Assef. What also bothered me about it was that Assef is not much older than Hassan himself. It's just hard to believe that a kid could be capable of that. Sohrab's suicide bothered me. It never could have happened if the phone call came a bit sooner. What I really felt in this novel was the feeling of loss. So much was lost. Amir lost a brother before he knew he had one. Soraya lost the chance for a real family. Sohrab lost the chance for a happy childhood. Baba lost the opportunity to be a loving father to his son Hassan. They all lost their beloved home. The list could go on. (SJ, p. 123)

McGriddle supported the orphanage director who was helpless at the hands of the Taliban and had to look after children under challenging circumstances. The Taliban leaders provided monthly funding that was the only source of income to meet the needs of the orphan children, but in exchange the Taliban leader could take a child, whoever caught his fancy during that month. McGriddle, unlike his peers, was not critical of the director's actions but was able to understand the difficult situation the director found himself placed in during the Taliban regime, when no one else came forward to look after the orphans in the only orphanage in Kabul:

I noticed that the author uses description in chapter 20 to really reveal what the war has done to Afghanistan. As a more fortunate person, and someone who has not gone through as much trouble as the people of Afghanistan, I had to respect the director of the orphanage. He put his life at stake to help others, and even though he has to sell some children, he is saving many more. (SJ, p. 84)

Farlee was able to fathom the main character's sense of loss. Amir's stable life becomes chaotic and filled with danger when he undertakes the journey back to his homeland, Afghanistan based on a phone call from his dad's best friend. Here he comes to grip with his dad's past and learns the truth about his relationship with Hassan, his boyhood friend and servant. He accepts the truth and finally tries to set right the wrongs of his past behaviour with Hassan. He goes in search of Hassan's son, his nephew, who is held captive by the Taliban. Farlee not only empathized with Amir's experiences, but expressed concern about the safety of the driver moving around Kabul:

I feel as Amir is recovering from the shock of his lost family, so am I (ch 18). This book is well written because it can make the reader feel suspense and have emotions to the characters as if they're real people. The cab driver drives Amir through the streets of Kabul filled with Taliban, in search for Sohrab, "Is Farid safe with Amir?" (SJ, p. 97)

Students analysed characters in light of the writer's information as they attempted to make sense of the character's actions. They tried to come to an understanding as to the reasons a main character acted in a certain way. Anil tried to make sense of why Baba treated Hassan in a favourable manner given the fact of his being a Hazara. He then provided his reasons based on the implied situation in the novel:

I am getting the sense that Baba is different from other Pushtuns, in the way of his generosity to other Hazaras. First, his servant is Hazara and is allowed to live in the backyard of his mansion, in a mud hut but with a poster Baba, his master bought for him. Secondly, he allowed Ali's son to come extremely close to his own son, letting them spend inordinate amounts of time together, but not discussing the Hazara's history with Amir. Also when Hassan skipped stone more consecutive times than Amir, Amir's Baba draped his arm across Hassan's shoulders. Now, to me this behaviour seems strange toward Hazaras, because the feeling I'm getting towards

Hazaras from the rest of society seems extremely less than friendly after reading all the derogatory comments towards Ali and his son by the rest of the citizens, the opposite of which Amir's Baba has displayed towards his Hazara servants. Also, Amir's Baba let Hassan suck milk from the same woman his own son did. Baba was a good kite fighter as well and he was protective of Iran, I think more because of the derogatory remark about Hazaras than their economy. (SJ, p. 81)

Students responded thoughtfully as they analysed characters' actions, commented on character growth, and empathized with their situations. They were involved with the characters' emotions, behaviour and treatment of other characters in the novel. They empathized with characters placed in turmoil, were infuriated when decent characters were discriminated against, and were able to understand the suffering of characters placed in challenged and disadvantaged situations. The next section describes students' awareness and understanding of various stylistic devices in the novel.

### *Analysis of Stylistic Devices*

During their reading process, students made note of various stylistic devices used by the author that kept them engaged in the reading process. They examined aspects of style through details in the opening chapter, writing style, use of parallel contexts, and aspects of style through pathetic fallacy, irony and symbolism in the novel.

Chapter one in *The Kite Runner* introduces Rahim Khan, who is a close friend of Amir's father, talking to Amir on the phone from Pakistan. The scene embodies both present and the past moments of Amir's life. Students mentioned how the use of questions, certain phrases and flashback scene, and an undisclosed past created a sense of mystery that heightened suspense and provoked them to keep reading.

Bobby, for example mentioned how particular devices such as the use of questions and suspense piqued her interest, into reading the novel:

The writer writes beautifully. Many questions were asked in the opening chapter, making the reader want to continue and keep reading. When his friend says, “there is a way to be good again” it makes you wonder what had he done and why had he left Afghanistan? The opening paragraph was interesting to me. What happened on the fated overcast day in the winter of 1975? These questions make me want to know more about the story. (SJ, p. 17)

A number of students mentioned that Hosseini’s use of description through minimum words has the capacity to communicate a realistic situation and evoke intense feelings. For example, Bobby noted how Hosseini creates a realistic scene through use of precise detail:

Hosseini’s choice of writing is to the point and relies on precision. “They piled their things in the center of a few worn rags and tied the corners together. I remember as I was pulling away, Hassan turned to take a last look at their home” (219). With the use of short sentence structure, the idea the author portrays in a time of loss and hardship has a forceful impact on the reader. (SJ, p. 24)

In the multicultural unit, students were assigned a comparative essay, in which they had to compare *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), with the novel *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), the prescribed novel read previously in class. Reading the two novels illuminated their appreciation of various stylistic elements used by both writers to enhance the narrative points of view used in these novels.

Jamie compared the novels from the view point of style and setting, and commented on both these novels having their own literary merits:

Though very different stories both these important novels have immortalised a time and a place forever. The GG is complex in its many uses of imagery and personification which at times makes the novel too wordy but for the most part adds an extra layer of richness and allows the reader to really visualise what is going on. The KR in contrast contains few poetics but instead relies on a steady stream of realistic and very vivid descriptions. The multicultural novel *The Kite Runner* and the cultural *The Great Gatsby* deserve to be on the same shelf. (CE, p. 24)

Josslyn compared the style of the two writers, Fitzgerald (1953) and Hosseini (2004), and expressed her opinion of how each novel has immortalized a story embedded in these different eras:

There is no doubt that the imagery in both novels is beautifully illustrated and vivid, allowing readers to easily picture the areas through each turn of the page. Both authors manage to set the stage with their unique writing styles. F. Scott Fitzgerald's writing is far more complex, while Hosseini makes *The Kite Runner* easier to follow, with sentence structure that you don't have to try to understand so much to the point you miss the meaning and lose focus. But one thing is certain: both are extravagant stories and though are separated by the writing from two completely different generations, do not cease in the beauty of their ability to play out an unforgettable story. (CE, p. 1)

Parallel contexts were noted by some students based on events, settings, and chapter layout in

*The Kite Runner.*

Miguel commented on a number of contrasts situated in parallel events throughout the novel:

As Amir lives more of his life, trying to make a livelihood and meeting a new woman, Baba is slowly losing his. Baba's willingness to die showed his strength mentally and the lack of strength within Amir. Also the way the writer describes the family scene when Amir goes back to Kabul contrasts Amir's past and present situation. The writer's analysis is like a design, in chapter 15, Amir is in search of his new goal in life, to make things right. Rahim and him discuss the old Afghanistan that they both loved. Rahim relates terrible examples of Taliban rule. This makes a hero of Rahim and his dying wish is for Sohrab to have a good life. This hero image is contrasted to the cowardly Amir as well. (SJ, p. 112)

McGriddle also kept track of parallel contexts in the story:

The end of the novel is another little flashback, as Amir and Sohrab are kite flying. I smiled at the part where Sohrab asked if he should run the kite for Amir, and Amir said, "for you a thousand times over", just as his father used these words in Chapter 6. Amir is now Hassan; loyal and respectful to Sohrab. He's learned to love. (SJ, p. 85)

Josslyn mentioned juxtaposed settings in the novel, and how she was able to make connections throughout the various episodes in the novel. Questions she had at the start of reading were answered through establishing connections during the reading process. She was able to grasp the realities of the aftermath of war through the progression of events in the plot:

It is interesting to see how Hosseini juxtaposed settings in the novel. *The Kite Runner* starts out in a healthy Kabul but when he returns after seventeen years to redeem himself, he is greeted by the war torn bomb shelled city of the present. I am now able

to understand what war can do to a country, and that life in Afghanistan was once peaceful. (SJ, p. 9)

Bobby juxtaposed her observations on setting with the sociopolitical context of a war-torn country. She related how such a situation piqued her interest and impacted upon her reading of *The Kite Runner*. Bobby established connections between human misery brought on by religious and ethnic conflicts. She internalized the impact of misery and sorrow caused by war, and commented on how the writer's realistic depiction of this situation happened to be the focal point of interest to keep reading to the end of the novel:

In chapter ten Hosseini depicts his novel with the truth and cruel realization of the country that Afghanistan has become. The setting and landscape is war torn and distraught, it becomes an upsetting and impacting illustration, it paints a picture of misery and suffering brought on by religion and ethnicity. It is a sad story that holds my interest to the very end. (CE, p. 4)

McGriddle noted the significance of chapter layout in the novel based on the progression and unfolding of events:

With winter approaching, I like how the author was able to subtly shift attention to kite flying. Chapter 9 may be one of the most important part of the novel. It creates a basis of controversy and feelings, something to bring about future events, which it does. I never expected Baba to die, especially so far from the end of the novel. The end of chapter 15 is a wise addition by the author, he uses Hassan as a hook to intrigue the reader. The puzzle begins to look like a picture in Chapter 17. With all of the fascinating, angering and saddening truths that are revealed, Chapter 17 is very emotional. (SJ, p. 22)

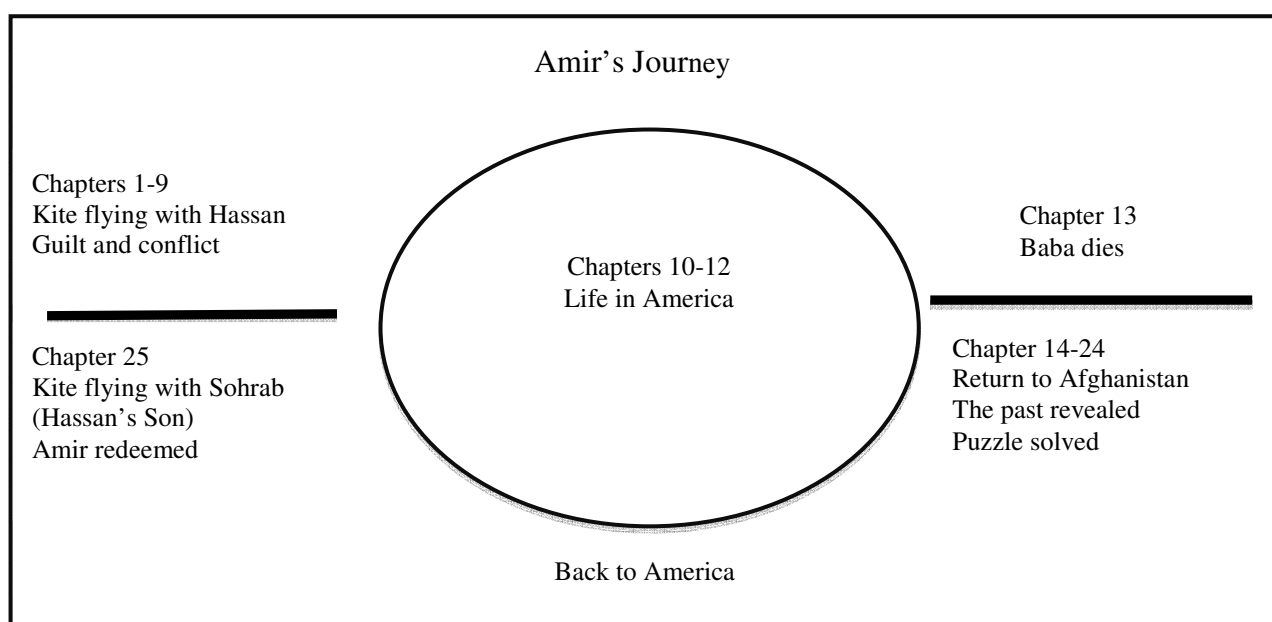
He then explained how puzzling facts became clear in chapter 17 which contains an elaborate letter written by Hassan and given to Rahim Khan (friend of Amir's father) to mail to Amir in America. Unfortunately Hassan is killed and the letter is given to Amir when he arrives in Afghanistan to rescue Hassan's son, Sohrab. Illicit relationships are kept "in the dark" in an Islamic society. During this critical point in the story, secrets of the past unfold; specifically, Amir is informed that Hassan is his half-brother. After eighteen long years, Amir atones for



his behavior with Hassan. The missing facts are supplied in chapter 17, and, for McGriddle, the missing puzzle pieces in this chapter form a pattern:

As I was reading up to chapter 17, I was confused about many things, why Baba was affectionate to Hassan, Ali leaving the house with his son, and Amir and his dad having to leave Kabul with empty hands. I was always wondering if there was a deeper meaning, or there was something I missed. Hassan's letter gave me a better understanding of what I was reading. This is how chapter 17 collected all the puzzle pieces and created a picture. (SJ, p. 22)

He drew a sketch in the form of a circle and labeled it to show the pattern of the novel.



*Figure 1. Pattern in The Kite Runner.*

A number of students mentioned a point in the story at which pathetic fallacy (the stylistic device involving nature in its stormy manifestation mimicing the mental anguish of the characters) was evident. This device is utilized in chapter nine when Ali, the loyal household servant who grows up with Amir's father, seeks permission to leave the house with his son Hassan. Some students mentioned how nature was portrayed in this instance to mimic human emotions. Bobby noted:

The rain that fell on the day Baba drove Ali and Hassan away for good, mirrors the mood of the chapter –tense, timid, remorseful, sad. The pouring rain happens to be the inward tears of Baba, who on the surface shows a detached self. (SJ, p. 85)

Josephine discussed a number of symbols throughout the novel, symbols that depict a particular time in the lives of characters in the novel:

In *The Kite Runner*, the kite is a significant symbol that represents a time when the two boys can be together and happy in public, despite their racial differences. The pomegranate tree that bore fruit at Amir's childhood home is another symbol in the novel, as it was plentiful with fruit when the two were together and had a close relationship, but became nothing more than a useless tree stump when Hassan was forced to leave Baba's home and the boys lost contact: "Hassan had said in his letter that the pomegranate tree hadn't borne fruit in years. Looking at the wilted, leafless tree, I doubted it ever would again" (276). These symbols are connected to the ups and downs of Amir's and Hassan's relationship with one another. (CE, p. 8)

Students commented on the writer's style and patterns in the form of juxtaposed settings and use of stylistic devices in the novel. As they read chapters of *The Kite Runner*, and responded to the assignments in the multicultural unit, they noted how the writer's use of various artistic elements invoked interest in the story, and highlighted detail in respect to character, relationships and happenings in the novel.

Students also projected their own life experiences, and identified with the happenings in the lives of the characters and events in the novel. The following theme describes the various ways they identified themselves with the events in the text world.

### ***Identifying with Self***

Students expressed empathy for the characters who experience sadness, hardships, and discrimination in the story, and in the process identified with events regarding teen suicide, sibling jealousy, parental relationship, sickness, being bullied, and feelings of guilt.

Ashoka discussed at length the issue of teen suicide and how it related to her life in a North American context:

The last part of the book really touched me. It was emotional for me, as it dealt with issues that I have dealt with myself. Close to the end the book comes into a very taboo subject; suicide. Sohrab attempts to kill himself, and he almost succeeds. What I find interesting was that Sohrab could have used any method, but he chose the one that is a growing problem here. Was the author trying to make a point or a connection between our two very different worlds? Or was it merely a coincidence? I know people who have also attempted, friends who have dealt with it. It really shows how much alike us they are. Just because we don't hear about it from other countries, teens do suffer from depression, self-harm and suicide. They are capable of it, just as teens here are so commonly suffering under these conditions. Sohrab's attempted suicide shows that they like us feel that badly and we react to our problems in the same way. Attempted suicide, as well as self-injury or "cutting" are past issues between me and a few of my friends. This is why I was very emotional when Sohrab tried to take his own life, because I've seen it, only it was in real life, not a novel. I have also been in positions where it seems the better way to go is to stop it from happening rather than dealing with it when it does happen. (SJ, p. 110)

Sophie highlighted an amusing bit of information on sibling relationships. She also related to difficult times families undergo, and how the bond shared by family members gives way to laughter in the midst of endured hardships in life. When Amir goes back to Afghanistan after twelve years to find Hassan's son, his only contact point is Farid, the taxi driver. Knowing that Amir has no family left in his homeland, Farid takes him to his brother, Wahid's, house for a meal. Despite the hardships in the Wahid household, Hosseini (2004), the writer, offers a glimpse of familial relationships. Sophie identified with this situation and commented:

I find it funny when Farid and his brother Wahid start to fight about cars, it shows families go through hard times but still love each other. It reminds me of my own brothers. (SJ, p. 36)

Karsa identified with the pain experienced by Amir and Soraya in being unable to become parents. She also analysed how Amir could have been able to understand his own father if he had become a parent himself:

I was sad when I found out Amir and Soraya could not have children. I think it would have been good for Amir to be a father. It may have helped him understand his own father. (SJ, p. 75)

Maxine identified with bullying and losing relatives to cancer. The relationship between Amir and his Hazara servant, Hassan, is one of friendship, two boys of similar age range growing up in the same household. Assef is a boy in the neighbourhood, who terrorizes other kids with his group of friends. He teases Amir for hanging out with his Hazara friend. Maxine commented on Assef's behaviour and reflected on similar happenings in her life. She also related to Amir's situation, when he was faced with the death of his father due to cancer:

We meet Assef who I knew I will hate from the beginning, I experienced bullies in my past so I can understand how these small boys feel, I think Hassan is my favourite character because how brave he is and not sensitive like Amir. I actually felt sorry for Amir, I have lost many relatives to cancer so I know how he feels, I predict a sad death for Baba. (SJ, p. 22)

Hash Brown also identified with the feelings Amir experienced when his father was diagnosed with cancer through similar situations in his own life:

Once again I feel sorry for Amir because Baba had been diagnosed with cancer very sad. I have experienced similar events to this as many relatives and friends close to me have been diagnosed with cancer, I know it is not a good experience. (SJ, p. 98)

Sunny reflected on his own feelings of guilt through Amir's situation, where Amir witnesses Hassan being raped by Assef and his bullies but watches in silence and keeps the information to himself. The relationship between the boys is severed. Hassan at the aftermath of this event makes attempts to break the silence with Amir. Sunny identified with Amir's state of mind when placed in this situation:

When Hassan asks Amir to go for a walk and Amir says no, I think it is because Amir feels guilt. I have been in situations where I have felt stupid or guilty and I also did not want to face the people involved. (SJ, p. 128)

Students were able to identify with various happenings in the characters' lives through their own experiences of teen suicide, illness in life, and being bullied. They related to sibling relationship and feelings of guilt in life. They also expressed curiosity and interest

about the land of Afghanistan, and its traditions, leisure activities, religion, and expressed feelings and opinions on racial discrimination, and treatment of women in an Afghani context.

### ***Sociocultural Knowledge***

Students made observations about the geographical features of Afghanistan that they found interesting. They were curious about the kite flying game and wanted to learn more about this leisure activity. They expressed interest about Afghani traditions and compared them to similar elements in their own culture. They also commented on dating rituals, marriage ceremony, relationship issues regarding half brothers, role of shame and silence and value of traditions and cultural roots. They expressed their viewpoints on discrimination issues, and tried to fathom the Hazara and Sunni conflicts in an Afghani context. They commented on the treatment of women from conservative and liberal perspectives.

Karsa had the impression that Afghanistan is a hot and arid land; he found it interesting that it snows in Afghanistan and that the kite game is a winter sport instead of a summer sport as it is in North America:

I never knew Afghanistan actually got snow in the winter, or that the schools had to be closed for it for 3 months. It must be fun, of school being closed for that long of a time. Kite flying sounds like a fun tradition for kids, a sport played in the winter unlike Canada where it is a summer sport. Even the adults get into it, probably they remember their kite flying experiences. (SJ, p. 18)

Students were intrigued about the kite flying game. They had questions about how a kite would be flown high up, and how it could descend to the ground where children were able to catch it. Jamie commented on the kite flying sport:

The whole kite flying game was a surprise to me, I had never heard of it, seems like a fun sport. I don't understand the kite part. When I think kites I think of the kite that you run in front of and it follows you. I don't get Hassan sat down and the kite came. Don't you have to run in order to have kites fly? (SJ, p. 14)

Pancakes, too, was intrigued by the kite flying game:

I enjoyed reading about how the kite tournament works and what the kite runners actually do. Incredible how meaningful kites are to kids, does the tournament have an age limit? (SJ, p. 17)

Students commented on the various aspects of relationships and treatment of people in the context of Afghani culture. For example, Kelly wondered about a number of cultural issues based on the distant relationship between Baba and his son Amir. She also commented on dating rituals where Amir and Soraya were not encouraged to meet with each other alone before they were married. After marriage Amir and Soraya experienced difficulty in having a child. They also had a difficult time deciding on adoption. Kelly discussed these issues from her cultural vantage point:

I find it weird how the main character Amir, always finds out stuff about his father (Baba) through other people, and his father never tells him those stories. His father seems nice and that he loves his son but is kind of disconnected from him. I don't understand why Amir is not allowed to talk to Soraya and why it is frowned upon. If he likes her I don't understand why he doesn't ask her out on a date. I don't really understand Amir and Soraya's whole reasoning on not wanting to adopt if they wanted a child bad enough they should adopt one. (SJ, p. 92)

Sophie analyzed relationships based on social status:

I don't understand why Amir wouldn't call Hassan a friend. I feel mad and sad right now because people like the Hazara shouldn't be treated the way they are. Kite flying and running is an activity that brings Amir and Hassan closer together but depicts the differences between the two. Even though Baba makes a point of buying the boys equally nice kites, Hassan relegates himself to holding the string and running the kite for Amir. Just as he is Amir's household servant, he is his kite flying servant. Kite flying acts as a way to show Hassan's talent and skill despite his lack of education. He has great perceptiveness, as he does not need to look at a kite or its shadow to know where it is going to land. Kite flying brings Amir not only closer to Hassan but Baba as well. It is the only sport that Amir stands out in, which matters greatly to strong athletic Baba. (SJ, p. 204)

Miguel highlighted the significance of the struggles experienced by certain characters, and the significance of the role of education as perceived by the characters:

Rahim Khan and Hassan bring war stories alive from Afghanistan. Their first hand knowledge of these things highlight their difference from Amir. Where they are Afghans to the end Amir seems to have lost touch with his identity. He had been exempt from violence the moment he boarded the plane to California, but Rahim Khan and Hassan remained surrounded by danger. They had come to know a new though terrible Afghanistan while Amir had tried as hard as he could to forget all about it and the memories that it held. The ability to read and write divided Hassan and Amir as children. Being literate when Hassan was not, gave Amir a feeling of superiority over him, causing him to abuse his privilege by playing tricks and being secretly cruel. As an adult Hassan realizes that being illiterate puts him at a disadvantage and makes him depend on others. For this reason, he ensures that Sohrab can read and write in or to avoid the same disadvantage that he has faced. Hassan's letter is a significant part of this chapter, because of the simple fact that it is written. He is communicating with Amir on an equal level, something he could never have done when they were boys. (SJ, p. 116)

Anil noted the diversity regarding marriage traditions in Afghanistan, and in North America. He commented on how the parent has to seek permission even when the young people know each other. He also noted details about the Afghan marriage ceremony:

Ch 13 shows how different marriage ceremonies and their culture in general are, so different than our culture in North America. The marriage ceremonies of N. America and Afghanistan are very different from each other. In Afghanistan the dad seeks permission from the girl's family for his son to marry. The wife has the reception party. They wear green suits and dresses to represent new life and also their national colour. In N. America, you ask the girl yourself. Girls tend to wear white dresses and men wear black suits. Bridesmaids match each other. In N. America everything is much more free for you to do. Afghanistan has more strict rules to follow. Not rules so much, but tradition. Also in Afghanistan they must get married in an Afghan hall, not a church. In N. America we usually get married in a church. (SJ, p. 99)

Pancakes noted a number of sociocultural traditions regarding marriage, and commented on Baba paying for his son's wedding unlike wedding arrangements made in North America:

Engagements are similar but marriages are different, with the eating of the sweets, Khastegar, ayena Masshaf, there seems to be plenty of odd traditions. Baba paying for entire ceremony is a bit unusual (still being extravagant). The Afghan marriage ceremonies show how different that culture and our culture really is. (SJ, p.103)

Bobby expressed awareness about the significance of cultural roots and traditions in an individual's life and how a way of life is compromised when a person gets uprooted from his roots. She also commented on Afghani marriage traditions and the state of living of people who are forced to leave their homeland:

I think it is beneficial for Baba and Amir that they purchased an old van and attend Afghan Sundays at the flea market on a regular basis, because it allows them to stay in touch with old friends and cultural roots. I realize now how different traditions of marriage are in Canadian and Afghanistan culture. While we marry a person on love and loyalty, the people in *The Kite Runner* marry based on family name and pride. At this point in the novel I don't think I'll ever look at Afghanistan the same ever again. It disgusts me to think that such racism and prejudice exists and how one group holds that much power and authority over the rest of a country. I also feel bad for Amir and the rest who fled Afghanistan and now live in America, because they lead such less fulfilling lives at this point than they could if they lived in their own land and culture. (SJ, p. 98)

She wrote in her journal that she now wanted to learn more about Afghanistan:

Reading this novel has inspired me to want to learn more about Afghanistan culture and tradition. I want to learn more about how they live day-to-day life and other customs that are not introduced in this book. I want to learn more about Afghanistan because after reading this novel, I realize how little I knew about this country and the customs and traditions that the people have. It is different from Canada and North America and I think that it would be interesting to see how they compare to everyday life here, in Thunder Bay or the rest of Canada. (SJ, p. 142)

Some students noted the lack of open dialogue among family members, and role of silence and shame in the lives of the characters. For example, Miguel expressed his opinion regarding half-brother relationships. He tried to understand Amir and Hassan's relationship from a North American perspective, where acknowledgement of half-brothers and half-sisters is not couched in secrecy:

In Ch 17, Amir discovers the fact of Hassan and him being half brothers. This bombshell in my view should not be as serious as Amir is taking it. I don't know why he's whining so much. Yes, his father took this secret to the grave but his undue aggravation about this matter is too intense. He is causing himself more grief than called for. (SJ, p. 101)



A number of students commented on the issue of silence based on self-restraint, psychological trauma and acceptance of situations in life; they voiced their opinion as to how they would have reacted to these situations. For example, Jamie was perplexed at Sohrab's silence after his suicidal attempt:

Sohrab being silent for a year disturbed me. It seems Amir and Soraya were very patient and accepting of his situation. At the end of a long year, he rewarded Amir with a faint smile, during a kite flying event, an indication that things will improve from now on. I would find it hard to wait this long. (SJ, p. 107)

Amir the main character witnessed the rape of his friend Hassan by the bullies in his town, when he was twelve years of age. He finally shares this incident with his wife when he is requested by his dad's friend to visit Afghanistan after twenty-six years. Anil questioned Amir's silence of keeping information to himself for such a long period of time:

I don't understand why Amir doesn't tell anyone what happened to Hassan on that fated day during the kite flying tournament. Amir keeps it bottled up inside. I could have found it difficult to keep it to myself. It is best to get it off his back. (SJ, p. 22)

Pancakes also commented on unexplained issues where silence seems to play a notable role. He was aware of Soraya's silent acceptance of matters in life:

Spoiling the end does suck. Afghans are odd in that respect, did Amir tell Soraya about the suicide, she sees the scars but the author didn't take time to write that conversation. Amir and Soraya's relationship seem to be based on a deep cultural heritage, where there is a lot of acceptance through silence. (SJ, p. 116)

Students mentioned that they found it hard to understand certain behaviours and attitudes of characters in the story situated in an Afghani cultural context. They also noted words and names they found difficult to understand. Anil wrote how the names appeared difficult to remember at the start of the story, and found the relationships and treatment of Hassan and Ali confusing:

Many of the characters were confusing me, couldn't put a name to the character. The confusion clears up in chapter 2. I am confused on the fact that Amir and Baba don't

make Hassan and Ali part of their family, but just make them servants. If I were Baba and Amir I would care about Hassan and Ali and invite them to be part of my family. I am confused as to why Baba treats his housekeeper's son better than Amir. I am also confused as to why he kept it a secret for such long time, was there a point that he did this? Was it an honour thing? Maybe Baba wanted to mention his secret but ran out of time. Hassan is married and expecting a child, which is so nice to find out. They come and live with Rahim Khan but why won't they live in the house with him? Why the hut? (SJ, p. 77)

Bobby, like Anil, expressed similar thoughts regarding the treatment of Hassan and Ali, who look after Baba and Amir's household:

Why does Hassan live in a shack, when Amir's Baba is such a wealthy man and they are good friends? I notice that the Hazaras are really belittled and I don't understand why? Is Baba ashamed of Hassan being Hazara? I wonder why Hassan is so loyal to Amir, while receiving nothing in return. (SJ, p. 72)

Pancakes examined the act of bullying from a sociocultural perspective, and offered an insightful example of the helplessness of Hassan at the hand of the bully:

Hassan gets raped by Assef. I was a little bit disturbed at this bullying act because it is so much different from our culture in North America. I find the way Hassan was treated, really an odd way of beating someone up, it reminds me of the sheep and Hassan being parallel. (SJ, p. 118)

Students also offered a glimpse of their analytical thought processes as they tried to comprehend sociocultural issues through asking of insightful questions. Mac raised a number of questions as he tried to make sense of characters and events:

Is Baba a man looked up to in town? Are the city officials corrupt, was Baba a bootlegger for alcohol, where is Baba late at night, why is Baba so frustrated at the fact his boy isn't like him? Is Amir gay, will Amir become a writer? Why can't they look past each other's religion? (SJ, p. 46)

Bobby posed an important question juxtaposed against an Afghani sociocultural landscape:

Would knowing that he and Hassan were related have changed the way Amir treated Hassan as children? Would he have seen Hassan as an equal? (SJ, p. 81)

Ashoka empathized with Amir' situation and became aware of her own circumstances in a North American context. She reflected on Afghani way of life along with affinities she felt with the Afghani people:

I find it interesting how the people's lives of Afghanistan are so different than ours, but the people themselves tend to act and react the same as we do. Amir and his father lost everything they had but each other when they fled. Amir learned what it is like to go without and not have everything handed to him; this is something many kids and adolescents here are unable to understand. Our lives are so much easier and better than people in third world countries, yet we constantly complain. When Amir and Baba move to America, our worlds and theirs combine and we can see the similarities and differences, between us and them, clearer than before. They are much more trusting in Kabul than we are; they have more honour as well. We may be more advanced in technology but their way of life seems almost better in terms of family, togetherness and communities. We are also alike in some ways: we work to support ourselves our families, we feel the same emotions, we both make mistakes...we are both human. We are so much alike, but what separates us is culture, our home, our language and race. (SJ, p. 99)

Farlee noted a number of facts about Afghanistan. She mentioned how reading of *The Kite Runner*, made her realize that Afghanistan was a country with a peaceful past. The treatment of women in an Afghani society made her aware of her situation in North America:

So far this book has shown me Afghanistan hasn't always been all about war and poverty as I have first thought of it. It was interesting to see how the writer describes women's situation in an Afghani culture where, "Every woman needed a husband. Even if he did silence the song in her" (Hosseini, 2004, p.187), not like our society. This discrimination against women angers me. It makes me realise how fortunate I am to be born here. (SJ, p. 33)

Shirley also expressed her view on the treatment of women. Soraya, wife of Amir the main character in the novel, has a past: she eloped with a man when she was eighteen. Now when she attends Afghani parties with her husband, some of the community members talk about her past. Soraya finds this behaviour objectionable in light of circumstances where men with more florid pasts are spared the criticism. Shirley expressed her frustration on how the women are subjected to a different set of standards from those used to evaluate men:

Soraya complains of getting her face rubbed in her past for the rest of her life, just because she had a serious affair with a man in her teen years, whereas men can do whatever they like, and still have a good reputation. It's just a joke. This is a double standard, I both disapprove of and disagree with. (SJ, p. 108)

Krystal commented on a different aspect regarding the treatment of women. She noted the respect paid to women, in that they are looked after and cared for, and the fact that parents look out and search eligible partners for their children:

I was surprised at how highly the women were treated in the Afghan flea market, where men paid respect to them, and looked after them. They kept them in the shade protected from the sun, and the men did all the hard work in setting up the ware and dismantling at the end of the day. Soraya's father was protective about his daughter's life and reputation, and was on the look out to get a proper match for her. (SJ, p. 101)

Along with sociocultural issues, students also became aware of poverty and suffering linked to the realities of war and racial conflicts. They empathized with the characters' struggles and hardships within a web of political unrest. They commented on the misery and suffering of children, and the safety of the characters in an unstable political context.

### ***Sociopolitical Awareness***

Sociopolitical awareness theme is highlighted through the plight of characters and cities affected by war, ethnic cleansing, juxtaposition of political situation in Canada and Afghanistan, and Afghan hospitality in the midst of war. Students noted various aspects of war and the ways in which it affected characters' lives in the novel. They commented on the hardships of life and the brutal laws and reprisals inflicted on the masses by the Taliban. Kelly described the plight of children growing up in a war-torn land:

The quote, "They were foreign sounds to us then. The generation of Afghan children whose ears would know nothing but the sounds of bombs and gunfire has not yet been born" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 39). This brought out the reality of the situation that is happening now and I found it really sad to imagine how those poor children have to live in fear. If I was Amir I would not know how to deal with all the stuff that has happened and is about to happen. It is a sad fact but I think it's true especially in this novel all of the events seem to be true of this statement. (SJ, p. 73)

Lorne commented on the state of the city of Kabul when the Taliban are in power:

The trip to Afghanistan is long. The dog they see that doesn't move is sad, there are so many people around, and yet no one does anything at all. It is sad that the children are starving and the only people eating meat are the Taliban, but I like how Amir leaves money under the mattress, this time for the good of the person who helped him. (SJ, p. 80)

Sunny expressed his anger at Taliban action, and the act of ethnic cleansing:

I was angry and very disgusted with this chapter. It angered me how the Taliban banned something as harmless as kite fighting, and then massacred Hazaras because of their race. When the man in black glasses killed the two people at the baseball game with rocks, I felt a lot of hate. This scene is important because it shows how Afghanistan was with the Taliban. People lived in fear. They started killing Hazaras because it was "ethnic cleansing" or as Assef said "taking out the garbage" I was extremely angry about this because everyone has the right to live, and no one should be killed because they aren't part of the dominant race. (SJ, p. 123)

Pancakes took into account a way of life in Canada juxtaposed against war-torn Afghanistan. Through his reading he grasped the tensions of the characters living amidst the uncertainties of the Taliban regime, and was reminded about his situated context:

The scene in chapter 19 where Amir is walking through Kabul is very saddening. It gives a picture of miserable state of the children and old men, and how poor the villages and cities have become through a number of invasions. It makes you realize how much different life is in other parts of the world as opposed to us in Canada. We are truly fortunate to live the way we do. I noticed a lot of tension between characters, during this chapter; this shows how stressed and scared the people of Afghanistan are. I was very disturbed when I realized how hard life can be. It makes me realize how fortunate we are. (SJ, p. 87)

Anil, too, was reminded of a number of differences in the way of life between Afghanistan and Canada. He drew attention to the grace and hospitable nature of the Afghan people despite the acute misery and poverty they live in:

In Ch 19, I really realized how different life is in other countries. We are very fortunate. I would hate to live in a place where there are people like the Taliban surrounding you. Life in Afghanistan is much different than life in Canada. In Afghanistan there is war and conflict happening. People are afraid to leave their homes. In N. America we take for granted how safe we really are. We have many objects that the Afghans do not have. Our clothing is different, our traditions are

different, and our holidays, homes, religion and culture are all very different. I also think that our personalities are different. In N. America people are selfish, proud and take for granted things that we own for the most part. Farid's starving children just stare at the scrumptuous food being served to Amir at their home. They are quiet about it. I am surprised how Farid's family gave Amir so much food when they would have none for themselves. It is amazing how kind they can be when they have nothing. The people in Afghanistan will do things for each other, are thankful for whatever they have and aren't selfish. The book is a massive roller coaster with many ups and downs, and with many characters. It lets us know in N. America what it is like in Afghanistan. (SJ, p. 133)

Bobby talked about the ravages of war, and the power one group of people can hold over an entire population:

It seems as though Hosseini chooses to focus on a wealthy family's experience to show us what a good, prosperous life was like in Afghanistan. He makes the point that it was not always a wrecked country even though it has been for as long as we have known about it. It is hard to believe that a single group of people have the ability to overturn an entire country like Afghanistan. The changes that the country suffered seem more than drastic, not minor at all. It's not as though only a few cities and villages were attacked by the Taliban, but the entire country was destroyed and stripped of its beauty. It shows the accepting and peaceful nature of the Afghan people, otherwise how can it be possible for a group of Talibans to keep an entire country living in fear and chaos. (SJ, p. 100)

Krystal commented on the brutalities of war, and how Russian soldiers took advantage of the helplessness of the general people. She was baffled by the corruption of power and position:

War starts taking over, there is havoc and chaos. I was disgusted by the Russian soldier who wanted the woman in the back of the van, it shows the corrupted state of war. If the rich people are treated like this and travel in such ways, I wonder how bad the lower class people are treated during this time. I felt really bad for the children who are starving at Wahid's house. It shows how poor people are in Afghanistan, this time due to the Taliban rule. I liked how the author made the reader believe the children were staring at Amir's wrist watch, when they were actually staring at the food. The Taliban happen to be the only people who eat meat. The orphanage does not have enough beds, mattresses and blankets. It is a very sad situation. The graphic description in chapter 21 of the dead boy at the restaurant where hardly anyone seemed to notice him, gives the reader an idea of how terrible the city has become. (SJ, p.77)

Several students considered the consequences of war where citizens must flee their homeland. Kelly wondered how it was possible for people living all their life in a place to

decide to leave at a moment's notice when war breaks out in a land. She also raised an interesting proposition based on characters' situatedness during the Taliban regime:

I found it kind of weird how Baba and Amir and a group of people just got up and left sometime after the Russian invasion. I think that Amir is doing the right thing by going to get Hassan's child Sohrab during the Taliban rule. Now could Amir do the right thing if placed in Afghanistan and he was living there? (SJ, p. 97)

Mitch also commented on the ravages of war and how characters trying to escape or survive are affected:

The one thing that stands out in Ch 10 is how realistically the war is portrayed. The citizens escaping their towns, the sounds of war, the barren and desolate wasteland of both the environment and lack of human respect. I don't know how these people seem to be coping as well as they are doing in this situation, because I think I would constantly be in a panic. I am really disgusted at the Russian soldier requesting to formally rape another woman in order for the refugees to make their way (eventually) to America, and I am really glad that Baba is another person who had been graced with the quality of bravery. One thing I feel really bad for is Kamal's father, who loses so much; his wife, his son, his home, that he ends up finally shooting himself in the end. It would be scarring to be 18, and witness suicide. War is brutal. (SJ, p. 153)

Josslyn sought clarification regarding war situations when large masses have to flee at the wake of occupation by armed forces:

However, at the same time there were many things that weren't always the clearest. Why was it that so many people were forced (practically) to leave during the Russian invasion? I was surprised when many of the people looked up to the Taliban at the beginning...I suppose it didn't take very long for that to change. It was also somewhat confusing how the Taliban came to have so much power in the first place. Why wasn't there somebody...any government...willing to do anything? (SJ, p. 109)

Ashoka commented on how the fictional tale of Amir and Hassan depicted in *The Kite Runner* becomes a heart wrenching tale that evokes images of the raging war that are an inevitable part of the landscape in present-day Afghanistan:

The novel was very powerful because it took a child, which represents innocence and freedom, and put that child into the unforgiving and messed up world. On top of that a third world country at a very bad time. We see the child grow up in this environment and we get attached emotionally to him. But what really affects, I think is that we know that all this is actually happening right now. As we read the book, we

are able to see how wrong it is that it is happening. It helps us really know how the people in places like Afghanistan feel as they live like this. The courage and strength of the characters make the book powerful. The novel looks into culture, race and feelings. It is a very insightful book. It lets us feel and know how the characters think; it makes connections and has similarities with our own lives. It isn't hard to find these similarities and differences and make connections. (SJ, p. 210)

Students expressed their interest in being able to learn about new sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives. They found *The Kite Runner* informative and enlightening. It introduced them to a new culture where they were informed about different customs, traditions and about the war going on in the present time. Reading this novel offered them a glimpse into global affairs related to armed assistance and a war where Canadians are involved. Students mentioned how reading this novel created new learning and realizations that broadened their understanding of people, their culture and ongoing wars.

### ***Broadening Perspectives***

The broadening perspectives theme addresses role of religion and tradition in the Afghani context, establishing connections across text and subject areas, understanding of global perspectives, and realization of facts and formulation of opinions. While reading *The Kite Runner* students became aware of religion being entwined with people's lives and government. They made connections to cultural issues in the text, and to texts read in class and other subject areas. They expressed awareness about the role of multicultural novels in a global world. They noted facts about Afghani culture and established their opinions based on cultural differences between Afghanistan and North America.

Josslyn wrote how reading *The Kite Runner* expanded her viewpoint where she learned of a whole new culture of which she had not been aware. She commented on how cultural and religious aspects could get tied to political agendas; reading the novel made her aware of the lives of the common people of Afghanistan:



Once I was done reading the novel (after a long night of no sleep) I couldn't get it out of my head. There were just so many things I had learned; so many thoughts running through my mind. Powerful issues overtook the story in a way, and opened my eyes to many of them, from the simplicity of a boy's childhood, to the overthrow of a government and control of Taliban. I wanted to read it all over again. There were a lot of enlightening moments and lessons learned. I learned many of the cultural aspects and values throughout it, and how important religion and tradition is to the Afghani people. Religion and tradition are deeply connected to their lives, so connected that the Taliban can use it in the most stifling ways. More importantly, the general people are people who do not intend to be cruel or harm people as many do believe the case is in Afghanistan. (SJ, p. 101)

Josephine was able to understand Baba's experiences as an immigrant in the United States. For example, information she had learned in her social science class made it possible for her to understand the nature of stress and tension that the characters experienced as they established themselves in their new countries. She mentioned the role language plays to clarify issues and conflicts in a person's life:

While reading about the transition between Afghanistan to America I really thought about cultures and the barriers they create. In my ASP class we have been covering different cultures, races and language barriers. Reading these chapters put these topics into new perspective and reality. Though I find it fascinating and enjoyable for there being so many different cultures, it is unfortunate how they can turn into misunderstandings, anger and hate. During that time in my ASP class, I was learning about race and culture, specifically about barriers between different cultures. While in the class I didn't give the topic much thought, just focussing on getting the work over and done with. But when I was reading the part in *The Kite Runner* where Baba was getting angry in the store, it instantly made me think back to the lesson. How hard it is to socialize when ones social norms are different from another's, especially how important language is in the factor of communication. So the book really helped me to think about the realism of the problem. Also learning about this before made it easier to understand Baba's situation. (SJ, p. 136)

Kelly became aware of the plight of people during war time and the discrimination against a segment of population (the Hazaras) in Afghanistan. She came to comprehend the issue of ethnic cleansing, and noted how she can now understand media news related to this matter:

When it described how some people had to live it was sad and it opened my eyes to different things. When the man in the street had to sell his leg, so he could feed his kids, was really depressing to read about. I think Farid feels that since Amir didn't stay in his country through the hard times, he feels that he can't call Afghanistan his country. Amir and his father just fled to America, while other people stayed in their country, they are the ones that can call themselves real Afghans. Orphanages in Afghanistan are horrible places, people in Canada probably don't think, or know about how bad the children are treated there, which is why Sohrab tried to kill himself. People in Afghanistan don't have a lot, especially after what happened in their country so they would do or sell anything on the blackmarket to feed themselves and their families. How people were treated in Afghanistan was also very disturbing, because no one deserves to be treated like that, we should all be treated the same. Now when I catch bits of information on radio regarding ethnic cleansing I can understand the problem better. (SJ, p. 126)

Sophie noted the new facts learned through the reading of *The Kite Runner* in respect to culture, Afghanistan and its people. She mentioned the broadening of perspectives and offered reasons as to why this novel should become a part of the curriculum:

I really enjoyed *The Kite Runner*. It is not the normal book a class would be taught, however, it has a powerful meaning, and should be read in class. Everyone should know about what's going on with people in the world in different countries and racism and different cultures. It should definitely be added to the curriculum. It is a great story and I think everyone should read it. The media today only tells us so much, but this novel lets us know what the people, culture, violence and chaos is like there. It really made me more aware of what's going on in Afghanistan and how bad it really is. It changed my perspective on Afghans and Muslims that live here in Canada and North America. I learned about the Muslim faith and different customs they have in Afghanistan. It is a very good book that changed my understanding about Afghanistan. The multiculturalism, in my opinion, opens the reader to something new, and broadens their thinking. Also it will open the eyes to a lot of students and change their mind set on the Middle East. Not only that, but it is a wonderfully written story, and is actually very easy to identify with and to understand. The characters are fleshed out very well, and the story is surprising as well as compelling. This in itself is enough of a reason to read it, but because it educates us in international affairs, it is even more recommendable. I wouldn't recommend it to anybody under grade 11 because it is very detailed. It was a wonderful learning experience. (RA, p. 13)

Karsa mentioned how the reading of *The Kite Runner* illumined her understanding of global matters, and made her aware of interconnected issues around the world:

Even though the book is about one culture, it showed the interconnectedness of the

global world on a number of issues. I would recommend this novel for a study in school because it's an amazing book to read. It's educational, very interesting and emotional all at the same time! It really opens up your eyes to what is happening in other parts of the world. It brings a much greater understanding of the world around us. It is the ordinary people who suffer through invasions, and they are many in number. Reading this book showed me we just cannot live in our own country with closed eyes. Canadian soldiers are now a part of the Afghanistan scene, and hopefully they will not behave like the Russian soldier in the story. We all have a role to play in the process of peace for the world. I would recommend this novel to another grade 11 course because it helps us really understand what's going on in Afghanistan and the world. It really shows you what is happening in Afghanistan is real through a different culture, and a deeper meaning of friendship. I also think a student should get the chance to read a multicultural book in high school because not many people in grade 11 would read one outside of school. (RA, p. 15)

Sophie commented that her understanding of sociocultural issues expanded with the reading of the novel and instilled respect for the people of Afghanistan. She also mentioned becoming aware of how a way of life for Muslim men and women changed under the Taliban rule:

After reading *The Kite Runner* I think differently about Muslims and Afghans. I do not believe in their faith so I didn't know much about the Muslim faith before. I respect Muslims more because I know more about them. I feel sympathy for Afghani people because their country had been torn apart. I could not imagine what people living in Afghanistan are feeling right now. I wish the Taliban would just leave them alone to live their lives. I have learned a lot more about Afghan culture and how they live. It sounded like an interesting place to live before war came. I would like to read more books like this, to learn about different cultures around the world. Maybe I will read more on Afghanistan. (SJ, p. 119)

Maxine, Pansy, Paulina and Jamie in their group response to the questionnaire in the multicultural unit discussed the Afghani way of life and the misery the population is experiencing due to war and unrest. Reading *The Kite Runner* made them aware of racial issues, and their own situation in Canada:

It made us feel lucky, there are very strict laws in Afghanistan regarding dress code, way of living and behaving, here people have more freedom. We are lucky to live in an area with no war and safer country, it helps us appreciate everything we have. Amir's subconscious racism is probably present in many of us. The book gave a

greater understanding of the dilemmas and cultural issues of the Afghani people: a lot of good things that the media today doesn't tend to show. (RM, p. 13)

Ashoka, Shelly, Kelly and McGriddle commented on the rigidness of Afghani customs, and reflected on their own worldview. They said:

We have more morals than we thought, we accept racial differences, and try to promote equality for all. It is more strict there, everyone has to follow an accepted code of behavior. The women are not free to do all jobs, and religion is a big part of life. We are more lenient and merciful, and social classes are determined by materialistic aspects here rather than race. (RM, p. 13)

Student insights and opinions regarding cultural and political issues were informed through reading of *The Kite Runner* and engagement with various activities in the multicultural unit.

Students in groups of four responded to a questionnaire towards the end of the multicultural unit. In this activity they acknowledged how the teacher's discussions, documentaries and mini lessons were critical to their understanding of *The Kite Runner* and the existing situation in Afghanistan.

### ***Role of Teacher***

The role of the teacher was critical to the promotion of students' comprehension of the novel. Mrs. Slade organized mini-lessons on topics students were having difficulty in understanding, arranged writing assignments and conferred with students with the goal to evoke responses and clarify their understandings of various aspects of *The Kite Runner*. These scaffolding activities consisted of an internet search, class discussions based on the characters' actions and events in the novel, viewing documentaries, specific writing assignments such as the reflection assignment, the comparative essay and mini-lessons offered on a number of topics (Table 1). Students were also asked to reread the novel and reflect in their journals, and in groups respond to a questionnaire. The student journals,

writing assignments and responses to the questionnaire illuminated the strategies they found helpful and how they clarified students' understanding and skill development. Their writing also demonstrated their metacognitive awareness of their own learning. Mrs. Slade also noted her reflections regarding effective scaffolding activities and student participation in the multicultural unit.

Maxine, Pansy, Paulina and Jamie mentioned how the atlas lesson and documentaries aided in the understanding of the cultural and political issues in *The Kite Runner*:

The atlas lesson helped clear up some confusion about the area, climate and such. We didn't know about the culture and the country in general before. The atlas lesson showed us the strategic location of Afghanistan and the dangerous Khyber Pass that leads into Pakistan. The documentaries helped in understanding things that go on in a war torn country, and the situation of women and children in that country. (RM, p. 1)

Bobby commented how the class teacher's repeated discussion about characters, their relationships and events in the story offered understanding of names and the events unfolding in the novel:

What was confusing was which character was doing what. I didn't know if the names were names, of countries, religion or cultures etc. They sound and look the same when reading. Cultures were confusing; the teacher facilitated this process by discussing characters their relationships and role in the novel. (SJ, p. 18)

Learning the skills of writing a comparative essay enabled them to develop further their critical analytical skills among texts set in different cultural contexts and time periods.

Macey explained:

*The Kite Runner* would be an excellent book to study in the 11 U English course. Contrasting and comparing the novel to *The Great Gatsby* was an amazing idea. It was a perfect choice of novels to do so. It helped develop a new skill for students, picking out the similarities and differences between two novels, with completely different countries and timeline. In *The Kite Runner* the reality of war is projected. It describes the devastation and destruction of a once beautiful country and home to many. In addition to the theme of reality, and like that of *The Great Gatsby*, is the theme of class conflict, but rather than discrimination based on wealth, it is based on race, religion, and ethnicity. Fitzgerald uses many difficult words, and there are

many words like “bakhshida” (76) and “Dhul-Hijjah” (51) of the Afghani language used throughout the twenty five chapters of *The Kite Runner*. The meanings of most of these words are learned contextually, within the text, and give the book more of an Afghani feel and meaning. (RA, p. 14)

The activities in the multicultural unit provided a realistic lens to the war-torn Afghanistan that is portrayed in the fictional background of *The Kite Runner*. Mike, Pancakes, Victoria and Vinney mentioned a number of class activities that were contributing factors to a smooth understanding of the novel:

Being attentive was necessary, the journal feedback helped with this issue, it offered answers to certain questions we had and showed us if we were on the right track in our reading process. The novel was also enjoyable to read. The class activities like the atlas lesson, poetry reading, discussion on kite flying and the documentaries contributed to a better understanding, allowed us to understand issues that might have seemed unreal. The activities made the book more realistic than just a fictional novel and linked the story to a reality base. (RM, p. 5)

Karsa, Josslyn, Bobby and Hash Brown listed unit activities that helped them understand facts in the novel during their reading phase:

The unit activities acted as a visual aid that gave an idea of the conditions and culture of Afghanistan, and showed us how people live, the harsh consequences for actions, women’s rights/treatment, war going on, Taliban brutality, and racial discrimination. The documentary showed how difficult the journey was that Amir and Baba made during the Russian invasion. The discussions of issues on Afghanistan helped give us a better understanding to when they were presented in the novel, the documentary gave a visual experience as to what life in Afghanistan was really like, destruction of buildings, poverty, injury/death, hiding instruments in the ground, a harsh landscape, how the Taliban treated people and caused them to be depressed, a curtain between the woman and the doctor, about the mullahs, and their constant loyalty to God, the dangers that can come with travel, how Kabul had become an unsafe and feared place, where people were fearful in their own country. (RM, p. 9)

Josephine, Sophie, Miguel and Mac learned interesting facts and new ways to look at issues through class discussions, interaction with group members, listening to others and watching friends compile information for their group presentations:

Through class discussions we were able to understand that even though Amir’s father and Ali’s childhood parallels Amir and Hassan’s; they still do not consider each other

to be friends in public or in the private life because of religious differences. The differences between a Sunni and Shi'a overcomes any childhood experiences no matter how intimate. Discussion with group members also made us aware about parallel situations in the novel, war torn Afghanistan contrasted to the free country of America. Before Amir and Baba leave Afghanistan, they are forced to hide out in a "...rat infested basement" (127), this basement can be juxtaposed to Amir and Baba's walk in America where they could be "...watching boys at batting practice and little girls giggling on the swings in the playground" (132). The unit activities made us acutely aware of the quality of freedom we all enjoy in Canada. (RM, p. 14)

Krystal and Bobby were the two students who responded in their journals after rereading *The Kite Runner*. They noted how they were able to understand the role of certain characters and their viewpoints from a less judgemental stance and realize the advantage of being a Canadian. Krystal mentioned:

I am glad we read this book in class, because it deals with modern day issues of which we are not aware of. It was a neat way to become attached to the characters and want to learn more about the land, its problems and people. I also never realized how the author sneakily gets the reader to fall in love with Hassan. Had Hassan not been innocent, loyal and good within, the reader would not care that he was harassed and treated badly. (SJ, p. 91)

Bobby discovered new insight when she read *The Kite Runner* a second time:

In this reading, I found a theme: "there is a way to be good again." It teaches readers that people will be human and make mistakes in life. But all you can do is try to make things right, and if you dedicate yourself, no matter how big you are messed up, you will end up being self satisfied instead of guilty. (SJ, p. 120)

Krystal noted how a second reading made her aware of the importance of wealth and class in an Afghani context as opposed to her Canadian identity:

After reading the novel again I noticed how big of a part social wealth and class played in this story, whereas in Canada it doesn't make a large difference. How can someone mistreat someone due to race, wealth, religion and social class. To me, people are people. I have a hard time wrapping my mind around this issue. It makes me thankful for the life I have. I'm glad we read this book as opposed to the usual Shakespeare, because it's modern day issues most people aren't aware of. This novel is a wake up call to people who are so protected living in countries like Canada.

Mrs. Slade commented on the high level of student engagement and her own reflections of the multicultural unit activities:

This has been one of the best units I have ever taught!! *The Kite Runner* was such a powerful book and all of my students enjoyed it-even the non-readers in the class. It was enjoyable to chat with students in the halls and outside of the classroom about this book. It was also interesting to observe how students familiarized themselves with a foreign culture – this was difficult to assess because of the immaturity of students during group activities. Many off task behaviours were noted. Often times, all girls or all boys groups worked more efficiently. There were so many times where I needed more time for group and class discussion and compilation of material from students.

Scaffolding activities implemented by Mrs. Slade assisted the students to become aware of poverty, suffering, realities of war, geographical locations of countries and their culture and the differences in cultural contexts between North America and Afghanistan. Mrs. Slade's journal reflections provided insights on the keen reading interests of students and activities in the multicultural unit. Discussions among group members facilitated the social construction of understanding of various aspects of Afghani culture and global interconnectedness through sharing of viewpoints and conversation. Conversation and sharing of information among response group members offered a glimpse into private and social constructions of meaning.

### ***Response Group Process***

The response group provided a lens to observe how adolescent students constructed meaning through group work. Their ways of responding have been categorized as follows: discussing presentation format; reinterpretation of information; revisiting format; synthesizing information and representation. In the last section, I describe briefly the topics and presentations of the other response groups.



*Discussing presentation format.* Bobby, Krystal, Mitch and Conray decided to do their group presentation on the topic of bullying. During the first group session the group members brainstormed ideas on ways to present the topic of bullying. They decided on a recorder to take notes. It took them some time to decide, and finally Krystal was given the job based on her neat note-taking skills. The group members focused their attention first on the form of presentation before compiling information on their topic of bullying. Some of the media the group members generated were: a narrative poem; interpretive dance accompanied by music; a rap; and a game in PowerPoint. The idea of the game in PowerPoint was a focal point of interest for the group. They discussed the format of the game, a component of which might include bonus points depending on creative ways bullying would be expressed by the participants of the game, in this case their classmates. All the group members agreed that the game was an interesting feature of their group topic; and they thought this game activity would enable them to achieve good marks on the group presentation. They felt comfortable with a PowerPoint form of presentation.

After having decided on the game feature of the presentation, the group members engaged in the visual aspects of bullying. Bobby mimicked an act of remonstrance where she raised her voice with an angry tone, "How dare you throw it at her! Do you want me to kick you." Krystal mentioned how they had just enacted an aspect of bullying.

*Reinterpretation of information.* The group approached their project topic by defining the actual meaning of bullying. Krystal defined the concept of bullying through physical forms of abuse. Conray reminded the group that bullying also consisted of mental forms of abuse. Bobby thanked Conray for referring to a useful aspect of bullying. They related anecdotes from a personal experience perspective. Krystal mentioned two instances of

bullying in her elementary school, one in which her head was pushed against the window in the school bus and, in the other instance, she observed how a student's head was banged against the locker door.

They then discussed bullying in *The Kite Runner*, and commented how their experience of bullying was mild and not so severe as the incidents in the novel. Bobby referred to sibling rivalry that involved hiding each other's possessions and calling of names. She also referred to the spreading of rumours among friends in a high school setting as a form of bullying. Mitch was not clear about the bullying of Hazaras in *The Kite Runner*. Conray explained about the two groups, the Pushtuns and Hazaras, and why the Pushtuns considered themselves superior to the Hazaras. He opened the novel to several pages to explain how the flat mongoloid features of the Hazaras were also one of the reasons for mistreatment, and being looked down upon by the Pushtuns, a group of people with fair and sharp features. They discussed the nature of bullying in the novel. "There is emotionally demeaning behaviour here, the way Hassan is treated and Amir behaves," said Conray. The group then focused on reasons for Amir being bullied.

They referred to instances in the book, where Amir's father watches how Amir is pushed by Assef's group, and Hassan comes to his rescue. They found it difficult to comprehend Amir's father's disappointment with Amir who fails to take a stance against the boys, whereas Hassan the servant boy has the courage to step in. In their eyes Amir was bullied for being different and, as a result, he was being picked upon. Mitch raised the issue of being different. Krystal mentioned how Amir is different. All discussed how Amir is quiet and not a physical person who exerts himself in outdoor games like the other boys in the neighbourhood. Conray, who was silent for most of the time, pointed out that Amir happens

to be someone who hangs out with Hassan, a servant of the family and a Hazara. He mentioned Amir's companionship with a Hazara to be the contentious issue that led him to be bullied by Assef and his gang of friends. The rest of the group came to an agreement regarding this important fact. They included this point in their written list that stated reasons for Amir being bullied.

The above discussions were always interspersed with talk regarding friends and what was going on in their daily lives and during weekend activities. The class teacher's journal mentioned that students had to be reminded to stay on task. During the five days of group project work, the students were repeatedly told by the class teacher to bring their research information on their topic to class. She told them this would allow the group members to discuss the presentation format, and improve and modify information before the presentation date. Krystal and Bobby decided to compile their information at home in the weekend and email it to the boys who were unable to attend a session outside of class time. Conray was working; and Mitch was leaving for a game tournament after attending week of the focus group sessions. The group decided to enter and organize information on bullying from Internet search engines.

*Revisiting format.* The group did not take the time to organize information in PowerPoint during the weekend as planned, hence at the start of the week they brainstormed a number of ways to present the topic of bullying. The group revisited their decision about format. Krystal suggested the holding of a banner on one hand while two of the group members could do an interpretive dance. Krystal also suggested a comic strip in three or four panels or a graphic novel for bullying like "sin city" or making a video game where when one breaks a nose would result in bonus points. They thought this would be a perfect way to

depict the notion of bullying, where group members create amusement for others through harassment of the victim.

They also brainstormed the idea of creating a song played on guitar and thought of including Afghani music. The story they mused, could include a boy named Stan against an Afghani boy. They inquired about the availability of acoustic guitars in the music room. There were none available. They then decided to adapt the Dr. Phil approach in presenting the topic of bullying. One of the group members suggested they should incorporate entertainment into the presentation, and the Dr. Phil approach has the potential to do so. They then concentrated as to who in the class could volunteer to take part in a skit. The girls agreed that it could be a disaster if they decided to emulate the Dr. Phil show as the group members were not good in drama. They discussed various ways to present the bullying topic through art, music, video game and drama. The art and drama options were rejected as they felt they lacked adequate skills to present facts in these mediums. They decided against the video game idea because they had difficulty in meeting after school hours. They agreed on using information from *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), and *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1597), texts they had read previously in class, along with research reports and studies available from the Internet. After discussion of the limitations of the above presentation approaches, the group finally decided to present the topic in PowerPoint.

*Synthesizing information.* On the day before the presentation the group members laid their information on the desks and brainstormed how the information could be arranged in a coherent manner. Bobby suggested starting the topic by providing a definition of bullying; Conray mentioned they should then describe the features of a bully, and their ways of intimidation. Krystal reminded them that they should not forget to draw references from *The*

*Kite Runner*. The group then started to discuss how they could synthesize the definition of bullying and forms of bullying with bullying information based on the three texts read in class in a seamless way in their group presentation topic. In *The Kite Runner*, a multicultural text, they discussed the essence of bullying in an Afghani context where rape is considered an extremely disrespectful form of abuse. Conray pointed out the situation of prostitutes in Alberta and British Columbia, where they are at the whim of the oppressors, and, living in poverty, they are not only mistreated but even killed. While he shared information, the other group members listened to him with rapt attention. They asked him how he knew about this issue, and he told them through the media. Parallels to bullying were then drawn across two texts they had read in class. They mentioned the character of Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby* who bullied his wife and mistress through physical force and abusive manner of talking. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Capulets and Montagues were always on the look out to entice a fight against the other based on an age long feud between the two aristocratic families. The discussion on bullying progressed from the personal to the social and to the integration of information and knowledge acquired through the reading of texts in the class. Throughout their discussions, the group sought clarification on ethnic groups and the cause of discrimination in an Afghani context, and being different from the accepted norm resulted in bullying, a point that was clarified through discussions intermingled with laughter and talk among the group members.

*Representation*. On the presentation day, the response group had a good compilation of information. They opened their presentation by discussing information in *The Kite Runner*, considering Afghanistan as a land populated by the Pushtuns and Shiites who have been enemies, and where the Pushtuns look down upon the Hazaras. They related the various

forms of bullying to ethnic conflicts in *The Kite Runner*, and elaborated on the use of Assef's brass knuckles as tools of bullying, and Hassan's slingshot that was used as means of protection. This discussion was followed by PowerPoint presentation in which information was compiled from Ministry documents on safe schools and the Internet.



### *Types of Bullying*

- Verbal: name calling, putting others down, making fun of someone else, provoking, demeaning chants, threats etc.
- Physical: fighting, pushing, poking, harrasing etc.
- Mental: indirectly making fun of someone (relatives, getting into victims head, racism etc.)

### *Racist Bullying*

- Bullies usually target someone because they are different in some way, whether it be the kinds of clothes they wear, what they eat or where they come from.
- Bullies feel that they are better than people because they are of a different race or culture. Racist bullies will refuse to get to know their victim and will only concentrate only on the differences they believe exist between them.
- In different parts of the world (Afghanistan), different races are treated poorly and suffer.



### *If There is No One to Talk To...*

- Kid's Help Phone
- 1-800-668-6868
- Nova Scotia Helpline
- 1-800-420-8336
- Canada Safety Council:
- 416-977-1050
- Alberta Community Crime
- Prevention Association:



Canada Safety Council

### *What does Bullying mean?*

- Lots of us joke around with each other, call each other names or "horse around," but that's not considered bullying if you have a good relationship with each other or if you don't intend any harm.
- Bullying occurs when one person (or more) repeatedly demeans another person through words or actions. It may involve direct physical actions such as hitting or shoving, verbal assaults such as teasing or name-calling, or it may involve more indirect actions such as socially isolating a person or manipulating friendships. A bully wants to put his or her victim in distress in some way. Ultimately, they seek power.

### *Bullies usually...*

- tease, threaten or physically assault others
- are hot-tempered and/or impulsive and have a hard time following rules
- are hyperactive, restless, have difficulty concentrating
- are generally offensive and tension-creating
- are aggressive toward adults as well as children
- are not anxious or insecure and typically have a positive view of themselves
- show little or no empathy toward their victims
- are involved in other antisocial activities, such as vandalism or stealing

### *Who is a Bully?*

- The stereotypical bully is a big, hulking tough boy, but in reality everyone has probably been a bully once in their life.
- Girls usually bully by: teasing each other, calling each other names, talking behind each other's backs and they try to take other people's friends away by spreading rumours and gossiping.
- Boys usually bully by fighting because they think it makes them look big in front of their friends or they think fighting is what expected of them.



### *Standing up to Bullies*



In most cases, parent's advice to bullying victims is to stand up to them. It may seem hard to stand up to bullies but once you give in to a bullies demands, it can be hard to stop!

#### How to Deal:

- There are different ways to stand up to bullies in different situations, and it is your judgement alone that can help you to decide what you think is best. Sometimes it's right to stand up for yourself and not give in to the bully's demands, but at other times it may be better to walk away. Once a bully knows that they can't exert power over you, they will probably back down and not bother you again.
- Tell someone. Tell a teacher, parent or trusted adult and confide in them to help you with your problem. You can also call a Kid's Help Phone.

## Bullying in Three Texts

- *The Great Gatsby*
  - Tom's view of white male supremacy makes him abuse Daisy (wife) and Myrtle (mistress) in form of slaps and punches.
- *The Kite Runner*
  - Ethnic conflict gets Hassan, a Hazara raped by Assef and his group of bullies
- *Romeo & Juliet*
  - Feud between two rich families makes Tybalt kill Mercutio. Romeo then kills Tybalt.

Figure 2. Illustrates a number of slides from the above presentation.

Other response groups presented their projects on such topics as radio interview with Sohrab and his uncle; ethnic minorities and their treatment; Afghani pastimes; the Taliban regime; and occupation of Afghanistan by a foreign force. Each presentation is summarized below.

- *Radio interview with Sohrab and his uncle:* In this presentation a reporter from the radio interviewed Sohrab with his uncle Amir in the States. Both Sohrab and his uncle Amir were asked a series of questions. Sohrab was asked questions on his experiences in Afghanistan, about his feelings for his uncle and aunt, and about his life in America. Amir was queried on his experiences during his rescue efforts in Afghanistan, about his reaction to Assef losing an eye in the fight and about his feelings of guilt and redemption. He was finally asked his opinion about the mistreatment of Hazaras in Afghanistan. The student role-playing the character of Amir did a convincing act of an uncle in tears and who had aged due to his experiences.
- *Ethnic minorities and their treatment:* This group did extensive research on ethnic groups on a global basis. In PowerPoint format, they referred to the Holocaust and the Jews, and discussed recent ethnic conflicts between the Tutsis and Hutus in Africa. They mentioned how discrimination is present in different forms in every country, and drew examples of conflicts between the whites and blacks, and between Aborigines and the North American settlers. Parallels were drawn to ethnic conflicts and discrimination between the Hazaras and the Pushtuns. The visual presentation of the ethnic groups and Afghani culture was accurate and picturesque.



- *Afghani pastimes*: This group was very keen about kite flying and was intrigued with the idea of making a kite and taking the class out to see if they could actually fly the kite. The lack of materials like the glass thread and the spool made them abandon the idea. The group concentrated their attention on kite flying. They explained “gudibaji,” the ethnic term for kite flying, and the game as it is played in Afghanistan. This group also focused on another ethnic game, “buzkashi,” which when translated in English means “goat-grabbing,” a game in which players ride on horses, and fight each other for the prized goat carcass. The class was attentive, and asked questions regarding the carcass game that gave the impression of the origins of polo. A visiting teacher commented on an aspect of the game in which viewers might have to put up with the carcass smell. The students in the group informed the class how the goat being slaughtered in the halal way had the blood drained out and in most cases could be a mountain goat acquired in one of the hunting trips. As a result, the smell of the carcass could not have been a problem. The group drew parallels to the novel where Amir and his father are seen attending these competitions before the Taliban regime, and how during the regime of the Taliban the same stadium where the games had taken place was now used as a theatre by the Taliban to punish Afghani citizens in inhumane ways.
- *The Taliban regime*: This group used quotes from the novel to depict way of life, judicial system, and government rule under the Taliban. They also presented visuals and included information on Taliban justice system, the severity of which allows hands to be chopped off if people wore nail polish and possessed pictures.

The group working on the Taliban regime revisited the text, and selected relevant passages to introduce the rise of the Taliban, and the pain they inflicted on the general mass of Afghanistan in the name of religion. They incorporated Baba's comment about the Muslim clerics who "do nothing but thumb their prayer beads and recite a book written in a tongue they don't even understand. God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into their hands" (Hosseini, 2004, p.18). They provided a good background search on Taliban coming to power and later being overthrown by the UN coalition forces. They discussed the Taliban's enforcement of the Sharia law that brought drastic changes to the plight of women, and offered information in the various ways this group got affected by these laws.

- *Occupation of land by foreign forces:* The group members made use of appropriate information arranged in a categorical format. In this presentation the students expanded on background facts that illumined certain aspects of the novel from a sociopolitical context. They highlighted information on the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, and its consequences on the infrastructure of Afghanistan, the land and the lives of the people. They then explored the causes that resulted in the failure of the Russian troops and the takeover of power by the Taliban. They offered insights on the popularity and decline of Taliban power in Afghanistan. They mentioned the various military forces that had ruled Afghanistan, and drew parallels to the Iraqi and Palestinian situation.
- *Poster on ethnic minorities:* This group drew comparisons to the novel, and presented information on Shiites and Hazaras. The pictures portrayed the ethnic lifestyle of the people of the land. In their presentation, the group mentioned how

the Pushtuns used the Hazaras as slaves, and how, at the present time, the Hazaras are the poor population and employed in menial tasks.

Most of the group presentations were in PowerPoint, where the visual component was linked to an Internet source. Students were attentive to the group presentations that were followed by a question and answer session.

### **Interpretation**

My research described students' engagement with and response to *The Kite Runner*. Eight themes emerged across the various data sources: character analysis; stylistic devices; identification with self; sociocultural knowledge; sociopolitical awareness; broadening perspectives; role of teacher and response group process. The interpretation of the findings is examined from the following perspectives: engagement and interpretation; social construction of meaning; reinterpretation and representation; role of teacher; and multicultural ways of knowing.

### ***Engagement and Interpretation***

Nell (1988) describes the reader's engagement with the text world as follows:

These are the paired wonders of reading: the world-creating power of books, and the reader's effortless absorption that allows the book's fragile world, all air and thought, to maintain itself for a while, a bamboo and paper house among earthquakes; within it readers acquire peace, become more powerful, feel braver and wiser in the ways of the world. (p. 1)

Nell describes the delights of reading to be a combination of absorption and entrancement, that is a "necessary by-product of comprehension (p. 199). The students in this study manifested a deep absorption during the reading process, and in their journal responses expressed an emotional engagement with *The Kite Runner* as they intertwined their thoughts and feelings with the lives of the characters in the story. Students' engagement and emotional

attachment with the characters evoked responses based on an experiential perspective, consistent with Beach's (1993) conceptualization of five response processes: engaging, constructing, imaging, connecting and evaluating/reflecting mode of response.

In the engaging and constructing modes, the reader experiences a heightened sense of consciousness through emotions and imagery. When participants engage in these modes of response, "reading serves as a means of intensifying readers' cognitive and emotional experience, an intensity that is addictive" (Beach, 1993, p. 55). For example, Josephine wrote in her journal how reading the last three quarters of the book gave her a "horrible knot" in the chest regarding the mistreatment of Hassan. Josephine not only empathized with Hassan on an emotional level but also experienced the feeling on a physical plane. In her engaged mode of response she was able to "feel the experience, and at the same time view him with detachment and view with detachment the part of us that is identifying" (Beach, 1993, p. 53).

Students identified events in the text with aspects of sibling jealousy and bullying they experienced in their own lives. These aesthetic responses are consistent with the connecting mode (Beach, 1993) as students reflected on their personal experiences while relating to incidents in the text world. McGriddle constructed meaning in the imaging mode (Beach, 1993) through the visual representation that he created and called the writer's design which was expressed in the form of a circle (Figure 1). He traced Amir's journey from childhood, life in America, the death of his father and his return to Afghanistan after twenty six-years to redeem Hassan's son from the hands of the Taliban.

In the reflective mode, Ashoka and Josslyn took stock of their feelings at the end of the reading process. Josslyn indicated that the "novel was a powerful read." Ashoka and Josslyn mentioned that even though the characters are placed in an Afghani culture, the

thread of humanity ties them together. Students' engagement with *The Kite Runner* in the various experiential modes of response demonstrated that they were able to connect with the characters in the textual world through empathizing and through similar personal life experiences.

Iser (2006) explains that the reader negotiates meaning through the “blanks and gaps of a text” (p. 65), which exist in the form of segments and patterns. These segments are “the unseen joints of the text, as they mark off patterns and textual perspectives from one another, and simultaneously prompt acts of ideation on the reader’s part” (p. 65). These gaps in a text get seamed when the reader, through a “to-and-fro” movement in the reading process, synthesizes meaning in a text. This was evident, for example when Hash Brown raised a question while reading *The Kite Runner*, and tried to fill in the gaps. He explained in his journal how in the first five chapters the characters are happy and then there is war and people are seen fleeing from the country. At this point in his reading, he felt compelled to learn the root cause of the unrest. In his following entry, after having read through chapter twelve, he noted that he was able to understand the fear and chaos caused by the Russian occupation followed by the Taliban regime that escalated the overall misery of the people. Hash Brown came to this understanding by connecting information throughout his reading segments.

Kelly, too, reflected on within the text relationships during reading to understand issues in a clearer light. While reading chapter fourteen Kelly was reminded about facts in chapter one. At this point in her reading phase, when Amir receives a phone call from Rahim Khan after twenty-six years, she paused and began to rethink the events that had taken place in the previous chapters. Reflecting on these chapters, she was able to understand why Baba

cried at the departure of Ali, Baba's childhood playmate and household servant after years of living together. The relationship between Baba and Ali, and Amir and Hassan finally became clear. In this "self-reflective act" (Bruner, 1990), Kelly demonstrated what Iser (2006) describes as reader's participation on the "unwritten" segments of a text:

Thus begins a whole dynamic process: the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these from becoming too blurred and hazy, but at the same time these implications, worked out by the reader's imagination, set the given situation against a background which endows it with far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own. In this way, trivial scenes suddenly take on the shape of an enduring form of life. What constitutes this form is never named, let alone explained in the text, although in fact it is the end product of the interaction between text and reader. (p. 276)

Kelly linked the "unseen joints" (Iser, 2006, p. 65) through her own projected interpolations and interactions with the text, and came to an understanding of relationship issues by putting together the clues read through the chapters in the novel. McGriddle also commented how reading chapter seventeen placed information read so far in the "form of a pattern." At this point in his reading, he reread chapters nine and fifteen and came to understand the significance of events in chapter seventeen.

The act of reading revealed students' efforts to arrive at meaning through establishing connections in the various web patterns in the novel. The students sought to establish meaning through the "blanks and gaps" (Iser, 2006) of a text, where the "reader's wandering viewpoint in the act of reading travels between all these segments, its constant switching during the time flow of reading intertwines them, thus bringing forth a network within which each perspective opens a view not only on other perspectives but also of the intended imaginary object" (p. 65). Kelly, Josslyn, Hash Brown and McGriddle established links between characters and events across the "indeterminate gaps" in the preceding chapters and were able to come to a synthesized understanding. Students' entrenched mode of engagement

with *The Kite Runner* through the indeterminate spaces of the text revealed a “back-and-forth movement between efferent and aesthetic modes of reading, and manifested their shift in the reading process between the non-aesthetic and aesthetic “continuum” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 35).

Cai (2008) draws attention to the oversimplification of efferent reading that signifies the reader’s goal of reading for the sake of information only. He stresses the twofold significance of efferent information, firstly, for retention purposes that serves as a threshold for “reflection, interpretation, analysis and action” (p. 214) that comes to play after and during the reading process and, secondly, offers the scope for critical understanding of the embedded sociocultural and sociopolitical implications in a text. He also cautions that the movement from the aesthetic to the critical or efferent modes should not be “disconnected or set opposed to each other” (p. 218), but suggests that the fusion of both enables readers to interpret the “textual ideological and cultural assumptions” embedded in a text (p. 218). Reading the novel through the lenses of both efferent and aesthetic stances, Kelly was able to comprehend the living conditions of a new generation of Afghani children. She resonated a way of knowing that has become a reality for the children now growing up in Afghanistan. She wrote how she felt sad and helpless to see innocent children suffer for the greed and power of one group of people ruling the country. Kelly interpreted the situation in the text through her comprehension of present and past situations in Afghanistan along with her situated context. Growing up in a war-free zone in the world, she was able to feel and understand the plight of children, and their state of mind being born into a war situation. Her feelings and realization during the reading process became a part of the writer’s lived experience. Kelly as well as Josslyn, Hash Brown and McGriddle bridged the chasm of the

indeterminate spaces through their aesthetic and efferent engagement with events and issues in the *The Kite Runner*. Thus, Iser's instances of indeterminacy in the novel provided space that allowed for the expansion of the readers' perceptions and interpretations.

One student also demonstrated Gadamer's (cited in Weinsheimer, 1985) conceptualization of reading as an act of interpretation that emphasizes the knowledge of texts, the readers' understanding that is conditioned by their own cultures, and the historical circumstances in which they are situated. The focus of interpretation is "not the validity of what is said but its individuality as the thought of a particular person, expressed in a particular way at a particular time" (cited in Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 11). McGriddle spontaneously mapped his understanding of events in *The Kite Runner* in the form of a circle (Figure 1). McGriddle's representation in the form of a circle may be explained in the Gadamerian application of hermeneutic circle (Grondin, 1999).

According to Gadamer, individuals are inclined to interpret understanding in the form of a circle that has its source in ancient rhetoric and indicates "the comings-and-goings of understanding" (cited in Grondin, 1999, p. 82) in a textual world. The metaphor of the circle in textual hermeneutics represents understanding. McGriddle's interpretive process linked Amir's (the main character) life to incidents experienced with his childhood friend Hassan, a source of remorse in his life. Amir is finally able to redeem himself when he goes back to Afghanistan to save Sohrab, Hassan's son from the hands of the Taliban. He visualized this process that has its starting point in Amir's life in Afghanistan, his homeland, where he returns after twenty-six years to set right the wrongs of his childhood. Amir makes the journey to the place of his childhood where he finally accepts responsibility for his half brother Hassan's son. In the context of reading, McGriddle created meaning through the



hermeneutic circle.

Students' understanding was further illuminated through intertextual interpretations. Sumara (2002) describes interpretation as an act of participation "in the ongoing development of the reader's self identity" and is "inextricable from the interpersonal" and "intertextual experiences of reading" (p. 95). He explains that the act of reading takes place in "relation to the contexts of reading. And so, understanding the act of reading cannot be accomplished without an inquiry into the relations among forms, readers, and overlapping contexts of reading" (Sumara, 1996, p. 1). These contexts include connections the reader makes between the text being read, other texts, past experiences with literary texts, interpersonal relationships and shared response in collaborative projects.

Students interpreted *The Kite Runner* in relation to previously learned information, personal experiences, other texts and projected thought processes. Josephine was able to comprehend Baba's situation in his new country based on the information learned in her social science class. It was while reading *The Kite Runner* that she took stock of the character's experiences in his new country. For example, she was able to understand the frustrations of Baba (the main character's father) in an incident where the store clerk wanted to see his license as ID for cashing of a cheque when he bought some oranges in the store. Baba's son, Amir, had no difficulty in accepting a business formality in America that requires checking the driver's license for identification purposes. However, Baba, who was born and spent most of his life in Afghanistan with "people who knew him and his father, knew his grandfather, people who shared ancestors with him, whose pasts intertwined with his" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 136), found it difficult to accept the norms in America, a country in which he had been living for the last two years. Josephine was able to connect and appreciate

Baba's pain and frustration to information learned in a social science lesson, and through the interpretive act that grew out of her insight. This was an "enlightening moment" for her.

Sumara (2002) theorizes that the "commonplace location is an idea that represents the complex and ever-evolving intertextual relations that collect around a particular interpretive activity. As reading occurs, the reader is reminded of other experiences. Although this occurs with all texts that are read, the literary text has the potential to create elaborate and intricate interpretations" (p. 24). In Josephine's case her involvement with the characters' lives allowed her to make the connection to ongoing learned information, and as a result brought about insightful understanding across cultural contexts. In this interpretive act Josephine developed "an intertext" that helped her collect representations of her "in-and out-of-text experiences" (Sumara, 2002, p. 34).

Interpretations can consist of "interpersonal, intertextual, and intergenerational memories" (Sumara, 2002, p. 33). Ashoka identified with events regarding teen suicide on an interpersonal level. Through her reflections she created an interpersonal space where she shared her experiences about teen suicide. In this space she elaborated on depression, self-harm and self-worth issues that can drive a teen to take desperate measures. Sohrab's suicide in *The Kite Runner* evoked memories when she felt compelled to share her experiences. There was a positive tone in her sharing of information. She mentioned that she now knows how to deal with this issue in a constructive manner if she sees her friends suffering. Hash Brown and Maxine mentioned the pain in losing relatives to cancer. They briefly commented on the poignant experiences cancer victims undergo, and were able to predict a sad death for Baba, who had been diagnosed with cancer. Through their interpretations students reflected on past experiences and were able to understand the events in poignant and perceptive ways

and in the process able to “appreciate worldviews that are rooted in notions of collectivity and connection” (Davis, Sumarra & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 11). For the participants, interpreting experiences evoked through reading not only clarified matters but also helped establish links to the happenings in the text world (Sumara, 2002, 2000).

Students discussed sociocultural and political issues that took into account the interconnectedness of political, cultural and educational implications in a character’s life. Banks (2002) describes curriculum transformation as a “paradigm shift” that takes place when students and teachers view the “American and world experience from the perspectives of different racial, ethnic, cultural and gender groups” (p. 21). Miguel’s interpretations examined Hassan’s effort in order to educate himself about Hazara culture. He was able to comprehend the importance of education in the lives of the Hazaras. In a similar note, Bobby’s awareness of cultural roots took into account Baba’s ethnic perspective while situated in the United States. Situated in her own cultural roots in Canada, Bobby demonstrated “a critical understanding of the act of reading” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35) through her insight and sensitivity that allowed her to understand Baba’s emigrated situation in the United States. With Bobby “reading the word meant reading the word-world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 32). Other students (Kelly, Josephine, Ashoka, Maxine, Hash Brown, Miguel, and Bobby) evidenced the critical understanding of the act of reading that according to Freire and Macedo (1987) can lead to transformed thinking.

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world—this movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. (p. 35)

The students through their various interpretations illumined their understanding of

personal experiences and the contexts of reading, since they were able to establish connections between their situatedness and the characters in *The Kite Runner* in an Afghani context. When interpretations get discussed and shared, the studied text becomes a “focal point, a collecting place” for the individual readers and others’ interpretations (Sumara, 2002, p. 33). The individual and shared activities the students responded to while reading *The Kite Runner* evoked personal and collective experiences.

Observing the response group members as they discussed the novel while preparing for their group presentation provided insights regarding adolescents’ social construction of meaning.

### ***Social Construction of Meaning***

One of my research questions was to examine the nature of adolescents’ social constructions of meaning as they responded to *The Kite Runner*. For this purpose, I observed one response group comprising four students. The group activity provided a “commonplace location” (Sumara, 2002), through which the group members were able to discuss, interpret and reinterpret information on the topic of bullying in relation to their lives and *The Kite Runner*. Their discussions on the topic of bullying were constructed based on their experiences in high school as well as elementary. They also discussed bullying from the Pushtun and Hazara perspective in *The Kite Runner*, and established connections to the topic of bullying across texts read in class and information gained through media. From a personal level the discussion proceeded to bullying in the textual world.

Engagement with group members allowed the opportunity to reflect on personal and shared experiences. Sharing experiences of bullying peers and being bullied, the group members took stock of part of a growing stage in their lives and were able to reflect on their

growth that took place in the interim years from elementary to secondary school. In this phase of their conversation, the group members allowed themselves to be a part of each other's world in "intimate and connected ways" (Wells, 1994, p. 247). The group members not only recalled childhood memories of bullying, but also discussed these acts through a critical lens that provided them with a glimpse into their inner selves. They analysed the moral nature of these acts and relegated them to an immature phase in their lives. These discussions rooted in reflection and analysis in the context of *The Kite Runner* created scope for focal practice, "an interpretive event that occurs when one becomes committed to the making of something that provokes attention to detail, requires the development of interpretation and production skills, and sustains attention, energy and interest" (Sumara, 2002, p. 150). Interpretation of aspects of bullying became opaque through reinterpretation in the textual context.

Sumara (2002) notes that interpretations based on reading lead to "remembered and associated" memories that lead to further understandings on the discussed topic (p. 24). Group projects played the role of "cognitive amplifiers" (Bruner, 1971, p. 53) that allowed for the expansion of thought processes and scope for the development of "a set of mental muscles that enable one to tackle intellectual tasks that would otherwise be beyond one's powers" (Wells & Wells, 1992, p. 122). The discussions about bullying proceeded from personal experiences to events in *The Kite Runner*. In the textual world, Mitch sought clarification on reasons why the Hazaras were bullied in Afghanistan. The group members felt comfortable asking questions about issues on which they were not clear. The act of bullying in the form of rape was discussed in a cultural context, in which understanding was illuminated through Conroy's rereading sections from *The Kite Runner*. Through rereading and

referring to ethnic issues in the text and those raised in class discussions, on world conflicts regarding the Irish feud and apartheid in South Africa, the group members gained a clearer understanding of the Pushtun and Shiite conflict. They realized the mild nature of bullying in their lives and in schools, and mentioned school policies in place in North America. Links were further established on the topic of bullying to the texts previously read in class, *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), a novel set in the 1920s, and *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1597), a play written in the late 1500s. Through inquiring about issues that needed clarification, rereading and discussing, the group members listened to each other with respect, and took pride in the knowledge of their group members.

Previous studies of multicultural literature at the secondary level (Beach, 1997, Cai, 2008, Johnston, 2003) illuminated resistance to the ideas and issues raised in the studied texts. In contrast, students in my study illustrated acceptance, intellectual curiosity and capacity for making interpersonal and intertextual connections. The response group format in my study provided the opportunity for group members to actively participate and generate discussion on their group topic in an experiential, textual, and global context. Observation of their group talk revealed ways adolescent students examine, explore, and establish meaning with respect to issues in a multicultural text. Discussions and re-reading created sites for reinterpretation and presentation of understanding.

### ***Reinterpretation and Representation***

Reinterpretation provided opportunity for students to reflect upon the novel *The Kite Runner*, revisiting and reviewing facts. Reinterpretation in two student journals illustrated new ways of looking at characters and the writer's style.

Krystal and Bobby, two students who reread *The Kite Runner*, expressed surprise at

being able to see matters in the novel in a different light. Krystal commented on the writer's craftiness in creating the character of Hassan, who is humble, meek, loyal, dutiful, and not afraid to take action in order to protect Amir, attributes that endear him to the reader. On a second reading, she gained insight on Hassan's special qualities, and attributed this fact to the writer's deliberate design to arouse the reader's intense feelings for this particular character. A second reading also enabled her to recognize that her judgment of Amir at the time of the rape incident was harsh. A second reading enabled her to take into account the realistic components of this event, in light of Amir's age and the complex issues of the Hazara and Pushtun conflict that has created the notion of the victor and the vanquished in society.

A second reading enabled Bobby to realize how fortunate she is to have been born in Canada, a country free from ethnic battles and civil war. Bobby expressed her gratitude in being Canadian. "In order for the topography of the text to be more deeply interpreted, it needs to be negotiated more than once" (Sumarra, 2002, p. 122), a fact Krystal and Bobby demonstrated through their rereading of *The Kite Runner*. Reinterpretation broadened students' perception about characters and the writer's design, and made them aware of their Canadian situatedness. Rereading enabled them to generate personal insights.

Group projects also provided a medium for reinterpretation and representation. Multimodal forms of representation provide opportunities that foster diverse ways of knowing and expressing meanings, a critical component of curriculum. Eisner (1994) states that the repercussions of a narrowly defined curriculum are as follows:

When the curriculum of the school defines representational options narrowly—when such options are largely restricted to the use of literal language and number, for example—it creates educational inequities and, moreover, fails to develop the aptitudes that many individual students possess. This in turn exacts a cost from the society at large, since the development of aptitudes is perhaps the major means through which humans contribute to the commonweal. (p. 86)

Eisner (1994) further indicates that each of these forms has its “potentialities and constraints” and that each “both reveals and conceals” (p. 86); among these forms of representation, “film and video exploit vision, text, and music...create meanings that no single form of representation could make possible” (p. 18). A creative way to incorporate multiple representations of meanings is making it a part of unit planning that provides “opportunities for students to construct and express meanings through multiple sign systems and transmediation” (Courtland, 2010, in press).

In this study, a great deal of conversation took place among the response group members about deciding on a presentation format. They discussed representing their interpretations of this topic through dance, rap, drama, and comic strip. They considered but rejected each medium based on such factors as limited time, getting group members together on designated hours, and talent they felt they lacked to represent the topic of bullying. Eisner (1994) confirms this phenomenon, namely that, when “skills necessary for using a form of representation are not available or the encouragement to use them is not provided, the kinds of meanings that an individual might secure from such forms are likely to be forgone” (p. 47). Nonetheless, a large amount of time was spent trying to find a creative form to bridge the topic in the textual world to an expressive medium of music, art and dance, indicating the appeal of the “sensory systems” (p. 45).

The group members finally agreed to produce a PowerPoint presentation, as the class had access to a projector and laptop, and all the members had computers at home. They reached a consensus in presenting their topic in a digital form, which did not require the physical presence of all the group members at a designated time and place, and yet made it possible to synchronize the information contributed by each member in a coherent form. In



deciding to do the presentation in PowerPoint, the group made use of both traditional text and digital media to communicate and locate information both in and outside of school hours, and in the process integrated multimodalities. Their PowerPoint presentation, which included visual and sound effects, showed how the members were able to use information from multiple sources, from which they accessed material, especially from school board and government web sites. The Internet was an important tool for compiling of information, an indication that media texts are a dominant form of text in the lives of adolescents.

### ***Role of the Teacher***

The role of teacher was a critical factor in the teaching of the multicultural text in this study. Teachers are apprehensive about teaching cross-cultural texts for a number of reasons: they feel they do not possess expert knowledge on the multicultural text; they are concerned that they may have to deal with unanticipated student responses verging on reactive dialogue; they fear that issues discussed can create resentment and tension in the classroom; and they are worried about the availability of multicultural texts and the lack of adequate teachers' aids and curricular materials (Banks, 1993; Dasenbrock, 1992; Fisher, 2001; Johnston, 2003). To address these deeply entrenched dilemmas, Dasenbrock (1992) offers the following suggestion:

What I would encourage instead of cultural studies is cross-cultural studies, the development of curiosity about—if not any expert knowledge of—other cultures, other peoples. If we are to do this, we must break with our assumption that the only proper place from which to apprehend a work of art is the position of possession, the position of the expert. What we need is a model of reading, of interpretation, which redescribes the scene of reading not as a scene of possession, of the demonstration of knowledge already in place, or as a failure of possession, but as a scene of learning. (p. 39)

Mrs. Slade, the teacher in this study, approached the teaching of *The Kite Runner* from Dasenbrock's vantage point of student learning. In this process, she played both the role

of facilitator and co-learner. The teaching of multicultural literature can also create the situation when teachers may be the “cultural outsiders” and the students from diverse ethnic backgrounds may be the “cultural insiders” (Dong, 2005, p. 38). In Johnston’s (2003) study with Grades 12, 11 and 10, students read a number of multicultural novels and a wide selection of multicultural stories and poems. Students in Johnston’s study came from diverse ethnic backgrounds and the classroom teacher happened to be the “cultural outsider.” Unlike the context in Johnston’s study, both the teacher and students in my study were “cultural outsiders.” Mrs. Slade was willing to take the risk of becoming a learner along with the students. Teaching multicultural texts within the contexts of “cultural insiders” and “cultural outsiders” not only includes Dasenbrock’s notion of the expert teacher, who takes into consideration that it is not possible for any individual to possess expert knowledge on all matters, but also involves Freire’s (1998) construct of a progressive teacher who possesses the quality of humility rooted in “courage, self-confidence, self-respect and respect for others...no one knows it all; no one is ignorant of everything. We all know something; we are all ignorant of something” (p. 39). These perspectives were evident in ways Mrs. Slade implemented scaffolding activities to support student understanding.

For example, the students experienced difficulty in understanding the names of people and places during their reading of the first three chapters. Mrs. Slade offered mini-discussions on characters, conflicts, and character growth. Discussions on characters and progressive events in the novel clarified the confusion around names. These discussions followed a traditional approach to the teaching of literature which Frye (1988) describes as the principles of literature that “not only has a narrative movement and a unified structure; it also has a context within literature, and it will be more like certain works of literature than

like others” (p. 111).

Students also had questions about the making of a kite, about the details of the kite competition game, and about the Sunni and Shiite conflict. Mrs. Slade incorporated a lesson on kite flying in which she explained the construction of kites and demonstrated the actual kite flying game on the Internet. She invited response from students, asking if they had found more information on the facts discussed. As an observer, I noted that it was a learning experience for both Mrs. Slade and the students as they read Internet sources to gain insight on an Afghani pastime and issues of conflict and tension that were embedded in the Afghani culture. These lessons generated further questions and responses on ethnic groups and the war situation that were clarified through class participation, discussions and writing assignments (Table 1). Mini lessons and class discussions illuminated their understanding of characters, the Shiite and Sunni divide, the mistreatment of the Hazaras, and the role of women in an Afghani context. These discussions sharpened students’ verbal and written skills, helped them to formulate opinions, and deepened critical analysis skills that allowed them to go beyond the text and establish global connectedness.

The teaching-learning relationship took place at both the macro and micro levels (Wells, 1994). At the macro level, the unit activities and daily routine surrounding these activities were explained and initiated. At the micro level, the teacher took into account the students’ “zones of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1935). Assistance and guidance to facilitate student understanding were provided through scaffolding activities (Table 1). Throughout the implementation of the multicultural unit, Mrs. Slade was attentive to the progress students made in the reading of the novel, and to those aspects which were causing them difficulty. She sought ways to elicit indepth responses through group work, prompted

discussions from all students in the classroom, and reflected on the quality of the activities in her journal on an ongoing basis. Students attested to the fact that the teacher's interventions to scaffold learning, the discussions of characters and their relationships, lesson on kite flying, and the atlas lesson gave a reality base to a fictional novel and in the process illuminated their understanding of the novel.

The implementation of the multicultural unit progressed from a "situational praxis," to "one that is grounded in human experiences within the classroom situation" (Aoki, 2005, p. 116). Situational praxis has its roots in Aristotle's holistic approach whereby knowing is guided by theoretical knowledge and reflective engagement. "A situated curriculum is a curriculum-as-lived. It is curriculum in the presence of people and their meanings. It is an experienced curriculum" (Aoki, 2005, p. 231). Modifications and adaptations in this approach are put into place as where appropriate to accommodate the learning needs of students. Unlike the "master curriculum which is typically unproblematic" (Aoki, 2005, p. 118), the curriculum on a situational praxis takes an examined, reflective and interrogative perspective to real life issues studied in a learning unit.

Mrs. Slade reflected in her journal on scaffolding activities in the multicultural unit that needed modification and prioritization in order to maximize student learning, participation, discussion and retention of knowledge, and activities that aided in-depth understanding. She noted the two documentaries, *Scared/Sacred* and *Kandahar* to be effective sources in promoting others' points of view in regards to suffering caused through war, the 9/11 disaster and the volatile situation where people from different parts of the world are involved. Students researched background information on Afghanistan for two days in the library before the start of the multicultural unit. Mrs. Slade reflected that this research

assignment would have been more effective if it had been conducted after having read the first three chapters in the book. In this way, the students might have made more insightful connections to sociocultural and political issues in the novel during the reading process.

The students were given sample topics for group presentations. In this part of the assignment, the class teacher reflected on the fact that the task could have been more challenging if it had been based on self-selection, and if it allowed for the task to evolve with the flow of the students' proximal zones of development (Vygotsky, 1935). She also noted how forms of representations in group projects, shared responses, and in-depth response to cultural nuances and global connectedness were compromised due to time constraints.

The implementation of the multicultural unit thus progressed as situational praxis, in which Mrs. Slade's judiciously incorporated lessons centered on the learning needs of the students. These lessons entailed much thought and reflection based on content and the designated time in which the study had to be completed. This process exemplified Aoki's (2005) notion of situated praxis:

The implied form of the theory/practice relationship is that theory and practice are in dialectic relationship. To implement within this framework is to reflect critically on the relationship between curriculum-as-plan and the situation of the curriculum-in-use. (p. 118)

Unfettered by the hegemony of "curriculum-as-plan," the implementation of the multicultural unit progressed from the threshold of a situated praxis, and provided an avenue for multicultural understanding.

### ***Multicultural Ways of Knowing***

Multicultural literature has been defined as an aesthetic form of literary work that portrays diversity, and provides a lens into multicultural understanding (Banks, 2005, 2008; Cai, 2003; Dasenbrock, 1987; Johnston, 2003; Wham et al., 1996). Multicultural

understanding took place within the sociocultural and political contexts of *The Kite Runner*. Students were intrigued by a number of Afghani leisure activities; demonstrated a keen perceptiveness with respect to cultural nuances; expressed opinions about traditions, war and world politics; and established a connectedness to the human race across a cultural divide.

Kite flying as a sport is an integral part of *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), in which the characters from the adults to children participate in a kite competition. The students expressed a keen interest learning more about the kite sport. Students did not confine themselves to kite flying only. One group explored another popular form of sport in Afghanistan known as “buzkashi” for their group presentation. Studying Afghani pastimes enabled them to draw parallels to their Canadian games of hockey and soccer. Similarly becoming aware of the richness and diversity surrounding Afghani marriage rituals enabled them to reflect on the specific details of marriage rituals in their own cultural contexts. Students demonstrated keen perceptiveness in matters of cultural nuances.

Jamie, Pancakes, and Kelly noted the issue of silence and patience in the various aspects of relationships in the novel. They found it “odd” that these characters are able to live in silence, keeping critical events in their lives to themselves, without sharing them with their life partners. While the students may have found it difficult to explain such situations, they were able to come to a logical understanding by acknowledging that Soraya’s and Amir’s relationship is based on a “deep cultural heritage.” In this instance, the students achieved clarity by seeing silence as rooted in the Afghani cultural context. Sifianou (1997) mentions silence to be a “complex and diverse phenomenon” (p. 8), a topic that has intrigued philosophers; it remains a source of interest to researchers in the domain of social science.

The students negotiated understanding through a web of complex culture. According

to Aoki (2005), this attempt to understand the experiences from another cultural viewpoint is “an ambivalent space of both this and that, of both East and West, wherein the traditions of Western modernist epistemology can meet the Eastern traditions of wisdom” (p. 319). Pancakes, Anil, Kelly, and Jamie manifested keen perceptiveness in being able to sense the presence of calm acceptance expressed in the form of silence among characters in *The Kite Runner*. These students embedded their understanding of having to maintain secrecy and silence in context of age-old Afghani traditions.

Students, however, found it difficult to understand certain behaviours and attitudes of characters in the novel, for example, the treatment of Hassan and Ali in Baba’s household and Soraya and Amir’s dating process. Farlee, Krystal, and Bobby also expressed frustration and anger at the treatment of women that consisted, on one hand, of being subjected to a different set of standards from those applied to the men, and, on the other side, the respect paid to married women and fathers looking after their daughter’s welfare. Students were able to construct reality from an Afghan perspective. The students were able to “read and listen to the voices of the victors and the vanquished” (Banks, 2005, p. 31). Students were able to feel for the characters, analyse their situation against the backdrop of war and ethnic discrimination, and understand the complexity of issues embedded in religion and culture encompassing ethnic groups in the world. They were able to understand the perspective of the “other” from a transformed viewpoint (Banks, 2008; Sumara, 2002). This perspective is consistent with the findings in Johnston’s study with Grade 11 students where the reading of *Obasan* (Kogawa, 1983) created the space to discuss and explore a phase of repressed history in Canada.

In this study with *The Kite Runner*, empathy with characters and their situation was a

key response of students. None of the students' responses expressed resentment against the Afghani culture, as opposed to Cai's (2008) study with an advanced children's literature class. In his study, students representing mainstream culture empathized with the protagonist, in *Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind* (Staples, 1980), through her struggles against arranged marriage, but voiced resentment against her culture and in the process overlooked other aspects of the Pakistani culture. Students in this study were critical of Assef's bullying, but did not express resentment against the Pushtuns as a group of people who discriminated against the Hazaras.

The findings of this study are unlike those of Beach (1997), who found that students were resentful and resistant in their responses. Students in Beach's study identified instances of racism in the stories, but failed to empathize with others' experience of racism, unlike the students who in reading *The Kite Runner* empathized with the characters' hardships and struggles, condemned acts of discrimination, and expressed concern for characters' safety in a war-torn country. The students in this study represented mainstream culture, and the story of *The Kite Runner* is far removed from their cultural context. Given the denominators of the ethnic composition of the students and the cultural content of *The Kite Runner*, their journal responses and discussions were rife with sincere concern as they juxtaposed the characters' experiences of hardships, discrimination, and brutality with their own situated state of safety, peace, gender equality, and living in a society that has constitutional rights and freedom of speech for all groups of people. Through juxtaposition of their situated selves, the students were able to comprehend the lives of the characters situated in their Afghani context. They projected their sense of self rooted in a Canadian landscape, and expressed pride to be Canadians, who try to treat gender and multicultural identities with equality and respect.



Reading *The Kite Runner* in the classroom made students aware of their Canadian identity in terms of culture, tradition, and ideology, quelling the fear in Hirsch's (1987) view that multicultural literature has the tendency to dissipate identities of mainstream students. Responses to *The Kite Runner* affirmed their own cultural identities in a positive and fostering light. It confirms, as Diakiw (1997) suggests that "as individuals we hold a complex set of loyalties and cultural identities, particularly in Canada" (p. 40). He notes Canadians have strong bond to place, to ethnic and cultural heritages, and to other distinguishing characteristics such as religion, and to Canada itself.

Loyalty to the humane nature of an individual was a priority in the students' responses. They were able to comprehend issues of fear, misery, and safety experienced by children growing up in a war-torn region. They empathized with the adults resorting to less than honest ways to provide a home for orphans and make ends meet for the family in the black market. They commented on media that highlighted sensational information regarding the Taliban and the land of Afghanistan, but that failed to take into account the courage, strength, integrity and suffering of Afghan children, men, and women living in a war zone. They acknowledged that, despite the differences of territory, language, and culture, above all the Afghans are like them, people with feelings and emotions tied together through the common thread of humanity.

The meaning-making process in *The Kite Runner* was mediated through teacher-directed discussions on narrative structure in terms of characterization, imagery, and plot development and through students' transactional engagements with the text. In transactional engagements, students were involved in an aesthetic mode that contributed to an enhanced consciousness about the characters, their problems and hardships in life as depicted in the

novel. They interpreted the plight of the characters through intertextual connections established through self, texts, and learning contexts in other subject areas. Empathy was a key element in their engagement process because it was embedded in the experiential mode of response and contributed to their construction of intertextual connections. These intertextual interpretations illuminated their understanding of the characters' lives being intertwined with sociocultural and sociopolitical issues embedded in the textual world of *The Kite Runner*. Discussion of sociopolitical issues took place on discrimination against Hazaras, misery caused by the Russian occupation and the Taliban rule, and the impact of war in the lives of the characters. Examples of issues of ethnic conflicts and war were then established on a global basis.

In chapter four, I described the context of the study, the multicultural unit, "Ways of Responding and Knowing," themes which emerged from the analysis of data, and the interpretation of the findings. Students' interpretations illuminated insights into their meaning-making processes. Students identified with characters based on their past experiences and through empathizing with the characters' situation. Empathizing played a critical role in their understanding of how sociocultural and political factors are intertwined with the lives of the characters in the novel. This understanding helped establish connectedness across cultural divides and allowed for self-evaluation of their Canadian identity and analysis of the Afghan sociocultural and political contexts. The experience of reading and responding to *The Kite Runner* enabled the students to become a community of readers who shared and analysed information on personal, textual, and global levels. The multicultural unit and the role of teacher provided the threshold that allowed them to reflect

and become aware of their personal growth and ideology, about cultural nuances in an Afghani context and racial and ethnic conflicts on a global basis.

In the final chapter, I discuss conclusions as they relate to the reading of a multicultural text in a Grade 11 class. I present implications for practice and recommendations for practice and for future research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to describe the meaning-making processes of adolescent students as they engaged with and responded to *The Kite Runner*. Participants in the study were the students and the teacher in a Grade 11 English class. The design of the study was qualitative and emergent. The study involved two phases. Phase I took place over the first two weeks, and focused on the whole class to select a purposeful sample of response group for Phase II. Phase II focused on one response group consisting of four students. Data were collected over a four-week period from several data sources: student journals, group projects, reflection assignment, comparative essay assignment, and response group discussion, as well as the researcher and classroom teacher's journal. Analysis was constant-comparative (Patton, 2002).

Eight themes emerged from the analysis of data: character analysis; stylistic devices; identifying with self, sociocultural knowledge; sociopolitical awareness; broadening perspectives; role of teacher; and response group process. Interpretation was organized into five perspectives of students' engagement and response to a multicultural novel.

I begin by discussing the conclusions. This section is followed by a discussion of the implications for practice, preservice teacher education and future research. Recommendations are integrated into this section.

### **Conclusions**

The context for the study was a multicultural unit on *The Kite Runner*. The unit was based on Smagorinsky's (2002) ideas of conceptual units integrated with Eisner's (1994) goals of representational forms that provide opportunities for students' sustained engagement

over time. With this goal in mind, in collaboration with the class teacher I organized activities to elicit responses in the form of student text, and provided topics in the form of group projects to allow scope to construct re-interpretations and representations. The unit incorporated activities to scaffold students' understanding of concepts in the novel particularly regarding sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts.

The teacher's role was significant in scaffolding students' understanding of the novel through her ongoing monitoring of their progress and her timely interventions based on her assessment of their instructional needs. In their initial phase of reading of the novel, students experienced difficulty in differentiating the names of places and characters in the novel. Teacher-initiated discussions on characters, relationships between characters, and progression of events in the novel helped students understand the happenings in the cultural landscape of *The Kite Runner*. These discussions progressed according to Frye's (1988) notion of literary structure based on a set of principles regarding the teaching of literature. The study illuminated the teacher's reflections on her own role and exemplified the dialectical relation between the "curriculum-as-plan" and the "curriculum-in-use" (Aoki, 2005, p. 118). As well the teacher placed herself in the role of co-learner. The teaching of multicultural texts involves the dynamics of being a "cultural insider" or "cultural outsider" (Dong, 2005, p. 381), and the teacher in this study along with the students were cultural outsiders. The teacher as co-learner encouraged a mutual learning environment that generated discussions and multiple points of view.

The study demonstrated the continuing robustness of Rosenblatt's (1983) transactional model of reading of the nature of engagement and response, of Beach's (1993) experiential modes of engagement, and Iser's (2006) conceptualization of how the readers

negotiated meaning through the “blanks and gaps in the text” (p. 65). Students responded in the engaging, constructing, imaging, connecting, and evaluating/reflecting modes of response (Beach, 1993). Iser’s (2000) indeterminate spaces in a text offered scope for reflection and allowed meaning making to take place through the constructs of focal practices (Sumara, 2002).

Through the experiential modes of engagement, students were able to identify with the book’s characters’ in an Afghani context. Empathy for the characters in their situated context was a key element in these responses. Unlike respondents in some previously reported studies (i.e., Beach, 1997; Cai, 2008; Johnston, 2003), who showed resistance to non-mainstream cultures, issues, and perspectives, none of the students in this study expressed resentment about Afghani culture. While the students were critical about Assef’s bullying acts, they did not express resentment against the Pushtuns as a group of people who discriminated against the Hazaras, visible through their Mongoloid features and belonging to a Shiite sect in an Afghan society. Resentment towards a culture may not have been evident due to the sensitivity portrayed through an “array of human joys and sorrows, aspirations and defeats, fraternizings and conflicts” (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 51) that happen to be significant themes in the story of *The Kite Runner*. Empathizing with the characters’ situations enabled the students to develop awareness of the sociocultural and sociopolitical issues in the novel.

They demonstrated sociocultural awareness about marriage traditions and rituals, pastimes, treatment of women, and silence and secrecy in relationships. As well, they were able to comprehend the sociopolitical contexts as they discussed, considered and reflected upon the Sunni and Shiite conflict, discrimination against the Hazaras, Russian occupation, the Taliban regime, misery of war, and stationing of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

Empathy emerged as a significant response to these various issues and contributed to an awareness at a global level. Similar to the study of Glazier and Seo (2005), the students in this study through engagement with the various modes of experiential response and intertextual relations identified with the lives of the characters, set in a cultural context different from their own.

Intertextual connections were established in relation to participants' lives, to other texts, and to previously learned information. Differences across cultural contexts were bridged through students' shared experiences on issues of teen suicide, sibling and parental relationships, illnesses, feelings of guilt and bullying. Identifying with characters through these issues created common grounds that made students wonder how alike teens, children, and relationships are around the world. Students interpreted events not only from a personal perspective, but also through connections to facts learned in other subject areas and texts. Their contexts of reading contributed to their insights in understanding the plight of characters in a war zone and the importance of culture in their situated lives while living in the United States.

Interpretation as a transactional construct (Beach, 1997; Bruner, 1987; Rosenblatt, 1978; Sumara, 2002) served as an avenue to develop critical analytical skills that intensified in the reinterpretation phase of their responses. The group projects provided scope to revisit texts as students prepared for their group presentations. Students' metacognitive engagement was a significant skill in this assignment since it allowed students to move beyond issues related to the text and make connections in a global context. The response group I observed in this study chose bullying as their group presentation topic, leaving room to extrapolate the myriad of insights that can be gained on complex presentation topics. The group discussion

on the topic of bullying stemmed from their shared personal experiences in elementary school followed by trying to make sense of the act of bullying in the context of *The Kite Runner*. They sought clarification among each other regarding bullying in the Pushtun and Hazara conflict. This process was accomplished through rereading sections from the book and discussing information with group members and drawing examples on a global basis by referring to the Irish feuds; this process illuminated facts about the Pushtun and Hazara conflict in an Afghani context. This process affirmed the importance of discussions and dialogue that have the potential to optimize learning and new insights (Bruner, 1997; Courtland et al., 1999; Fish, 1980).

The study illuminated students' multicultural ways of knowing. I have portrayed this meaning-making process in Figure 3.

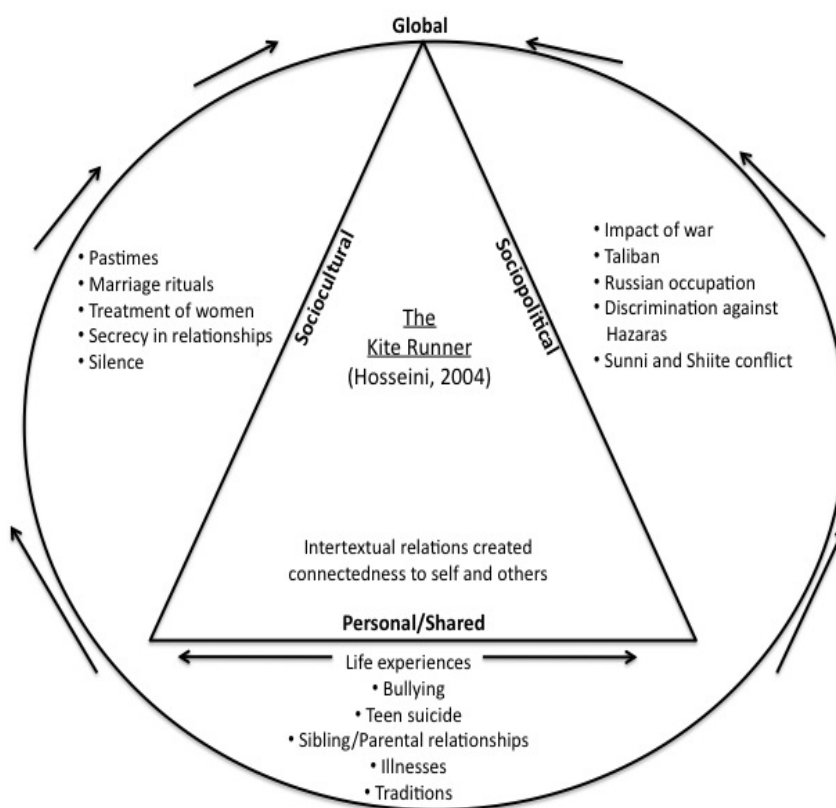


Figure 3. Making meaning in a multicultural text.



The diagram summarizes how students constructed meaning in *The Kite Runner* through the three domains situated in the personal/shared, sociocultural, and sociopolitical contexts. Meaning in these domains has been represented through a triangle, in which the personal and shared category, a dominant site of responses, has been placed at the base of the triangle. Students' responses on topics such as bullying, teen suicide, sibling/parental relationships, illnesses, traditions, and war are connected to the characters' sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts in the novel.

Students discussed the sociocultural aspects based on pastimes, marriage rituals, treatment of women, secrecy in relationships and the issue of silence. They expressed keen interest about the kite flying game in the novel, and also explored other leisure activities in Afghan culture. They discussed marriage rituals, treatment of women, secrecy in relationships and issue of silence embedded in the text, and reflected on these aspects from their situated cultural perspectives. Sociopolitical issues were discussed in relation to war, the Taliban regime, the Russian occupation, discrimination against the Hazara group of people and the Sunni and Shiite conflicts. Shared information about these issues led to deep understanding of historical and contemporary conflicts across the globe. They talked about the Irish feuds, Aboriginal issues in Canada and the Tutsi and Hutu conflicts in Africa. Through interpretations and reinterpretations of issues in these three domains, students came to an understanding of interconnectedness across a cultural divide.

The diagram in Figure 3 crystallizes the meaning making process whereby students came to an understanding of the characters' plights entwined in the sociocultural and sociopolitical context of *The Kite Runner*. Thus, this study has shown that reading a

multicultural text has implications for manifold learning dimensions to take place in a classroom.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The findings of this study have implications for reading a multicultural text in the secondary English classroom for language arts teachers, professional development, and preservice teacher education programs. I have integrated below a discussion of the implications followed with the suggested recommendations pertaining to each area. I then provide the recommendations for future research.

Reading a multicultural text in the classroom is rife with implications in the learning and metacognitive domains. This study has reaffirmed that reading a multicultural text helps students explore multicultural and social justice issues that relate to their sense of identity, others and the world in cultural and political contexts (Banks, 2008; Beach, 1997; Cai, 2008; Johnston, 2003). The Applebee report (1993) listed the top ten titles used in Grades 9 to 12 in public, Catholic and independent schools. These same titles remain an integral part of the language arts curriculum today. Reading canonical literature exclusively is a curricular reality in the Ontario secondary schools; unfortunately such a restricted curriculum has the tendency to perpetuate “the hold of anachronistic behaviour” (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 265), and to inhibit the teacher’s role to “liberate imaginations...with a broad range of literature, including works, both present and past, that reflect cultures quite different from the students’ own” (Farrell, 1990, xi). Curricular and educational researchers have been asserting that “the proper content of school curricula is located in the world in which children will live, not in the remote and passive past” (Eisner, 1994, p. 14), and that the “curriculum should be an

evolving, changing document, rather than something rigid and unbending” (Probst, 1988, p. 217).

Johnston (2003) expressed concern that secondary language arts teachers regard the curriculum as “a static notion, consisting of a stack of old texts, usually from Britain and the United States, that they feel have stood the test of time” (p. 61). Being unaware of “the power of the literary canon, such teachers resist any notion of change” (p. 61). Even when aware of the possibility of the inclusion of multicultural texts in the curriculum, lack of resources and familiar teaching strategies stand in the way of bringing about the much needed change (Johnston, 2003). It is time to open up spaces in the language arts curriculum and make place for contemporary multicultural fiction. The students in this study have unanimously supported the idea that students should read *The Kite Runner* in the Grade 11 class. For this idea to become a reality, secondary English language arts teachers should include multicultural fiction on their list of texts.

### **Recommendations for Teaching, Curriculum, and Teacher Education**

1. School boards should collaborate with secondary school departments to invest in and replenish their resources with contemporary media material and documentaries on multicultural, political, and global issues.
2. School libraries should make efforts to purchase contemporary resources on global affairs and social justice issues to support the study of multicultural texts.
3. Department library budgets should allocate funding for class sets of multicultural fiction and sufficient texts for small groups.

To bring about conceptual change that will create time and space to incorporate multicultural literature and pedagogical practices for the teaching of sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts, secondary teachers will need more than a set of materials and resources. Teaching multicultural texts and implementing new pedagogical practices require collaborative efforts that can be sustained through professional learning communities and ongoing professional development. Bringing about curricular change at the teacher level is associated with interactions among teachers (Fullan 2007). The goals of professional learning communities involve shared knowledge of learning, effective practices, commitment to change and improved student outcomes, and ensure continued sustainability to adaptive changes (Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 2007). Professional learning communities can provide the setting where a teacher who has planned and implemented a multicultural unit(s) or those who would like to begin can share experiences with colleagues in the department and other schools. Ongoing professional development would provide teachers with an introduction to the theory, rationale and practices involved in unit planning, implementation and assessment.

4. Professional learning communities should allocate time at the department level to allow for meaningful interactions to take place among colleagues regarding the potential role of reading multicultural texts in the classroom. This dialogue will provide opportunities to share knowledge about the teaching and implementation of multicultural units, to identify the multicultural texts that might be suitable for secondary students to read, and to share successful teaching strategies and learning outcomes.
5. In order to incorporate multicultural texts in the language arts program, professional learning communities should also make space for workshops in

collaboration with the Faculties of Education. This initiative will further inform and reinforce new pedagogical knowledge on the teaching of multicultural texts, conceptualizing of multicultural units, and incorporating multimodal opportunities for scaffolding, engagement, and response.

The response-centered multicultural unit implemented in this study provided scope to foster critical thinking skills through individual and group activities. It helped students to examine sociocultural and sociopolitical issues in the context of the text and to make connections on a global level. Activities and strategies in a multicultural unit are significant tools to accelerate and enable teachers to monitor the learning of students while they are reading a multicultural text in the classroom. Responses evoked in this study indicate the need for careful planning of activities that have the potential to illumine challenging sociocultural and sociopolitical concepts and issues in a multicultural novel, and to promote the students' desire to agitate and advocate for social justice.

6. Teachers should anticipate and address students' developing understanding through organizing mini-lessons and selecting resources, such as documentaries on sociocultural and sociopolitical issues in context of the multicultural text that will illumine understanding and offer scope to generate discussions and debates.
7. Teachers should explore ways of mediating students' understanding through integrating multimodal activities that will allow students opportunities and time to examine and explore cultural and political issues through multiple ways of knowing.

Since preservice education of teachers plays a significant role in bringing about the desired improvements in successful schools (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Eisner, 1994; Fullan, 2007), faculties of education should develop collections of multicultural children's and young adult literature, and incorporate selected multicultural works into the curriculum and instruction of English language arts courses for teacher candidates in elementary and secondary pre-service programs.

8. Preservice teacher candidates in secondary English courses must be provided with opportunities to explore a selection of multicultural texts, strategies for developing and implementing multicultural units to optimize sociocultural and sociopolitical understanding that will expand the boundaries of the imagination and promote intellectual growth suited to the learning needs of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the global social issues they will encounter as adults.

### ***Recommendations for Further Research***

Investigating my initial research question as to how students establish meaning while reading a multicultural text provided scope for further questions about response-based approaches to the teaching and learning of multicultural texts.

1. What are the processes in which young adults engage to negotiate private and social meanings derived from the sociocultural and political issues in contemporary multicultural texts?
2. What types of reading strategies and response practices maximize students' metacognitive awareness of social justice themes and issues in multicultural texts?

3. What is the nature of discourse as students engage in conversations about cultural and political issues embedded in a multicultural text in the secondary English curriculum?
4. How does the use of multicultural texts inform students' understanding of Canadian diversity and community, as well as national and global social issues?
5. How do multimodal forms of response to multicultural texts mediate students' understanding and reflection?

This study has manifested the benefits of reading a multicultural text in a Grade 11 class. It has further demonstrated the fact that meaning-making of a multicultural text is a fusion whereby the pedagogy of educational researchers, contributions of multicultural scholars, curriculum planners and the role of teacher each has its unique place in facilitating understanding of a multicultural text in a secondary school curriculum.

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## Appendix #1

### A Multicultural Unit: Ways of Knowing and Responding to *The Kite Runner*

#### Overview of Activities

Before Reading Activities	During Reading Activities	After Reading activities
Background search on Afghanistan: A landlocked country, its people, govt. & culture	Silent reading & responding in journals	Class discussion: on plot development, character growth, Shiite & Sunni conflict
	Watching of documentaries <i>Scared/Sacred</i> <i>Kandahar</i>	Working on group projects,
	Mini Lessons: Atlas activity, kite flying, reading from secondary sources	Questionnaire response to multicultural unit, Group presentations

## **Curriculum Expectations**

The multicultural unit will meet the strands for the English compulsory course for the English, Grade 11, University Preparation (ENG 3U) course as follows: Literature Studies and Reading, Writing, Language and Media Studies.

### **Literature Studies and Reading**

Specific Expectations

By the end of this unit students will:

- Analyse and interpret information, ideas, themes, and arguments in print and electronic texts.
- Select and use a range of effective reading strategies to reread a text closely to relate repeated images to a theme.
- Explain the influence of social and historical values and perspectives on texts and the interpretation of texts.

### **Writing**

Specific Expectations

- Investigate potential topics by posing questions, identifying information needs and purposes for writing, and developing ideas from primary and secondary sources.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the uses and conventions of various forms by writing persuasive and literary essays, reviews, short narratives or poems, and summaries.

### **Language**

Specific Expectations

- Communicate orally in large and small groups for a variety of purposes, with a focus on listening for main ideas and significant supporting details; clarifying and extending the ideas of others; completing assigned tasks for the group; working towards consensus; and accepting group decisions when appropriate.

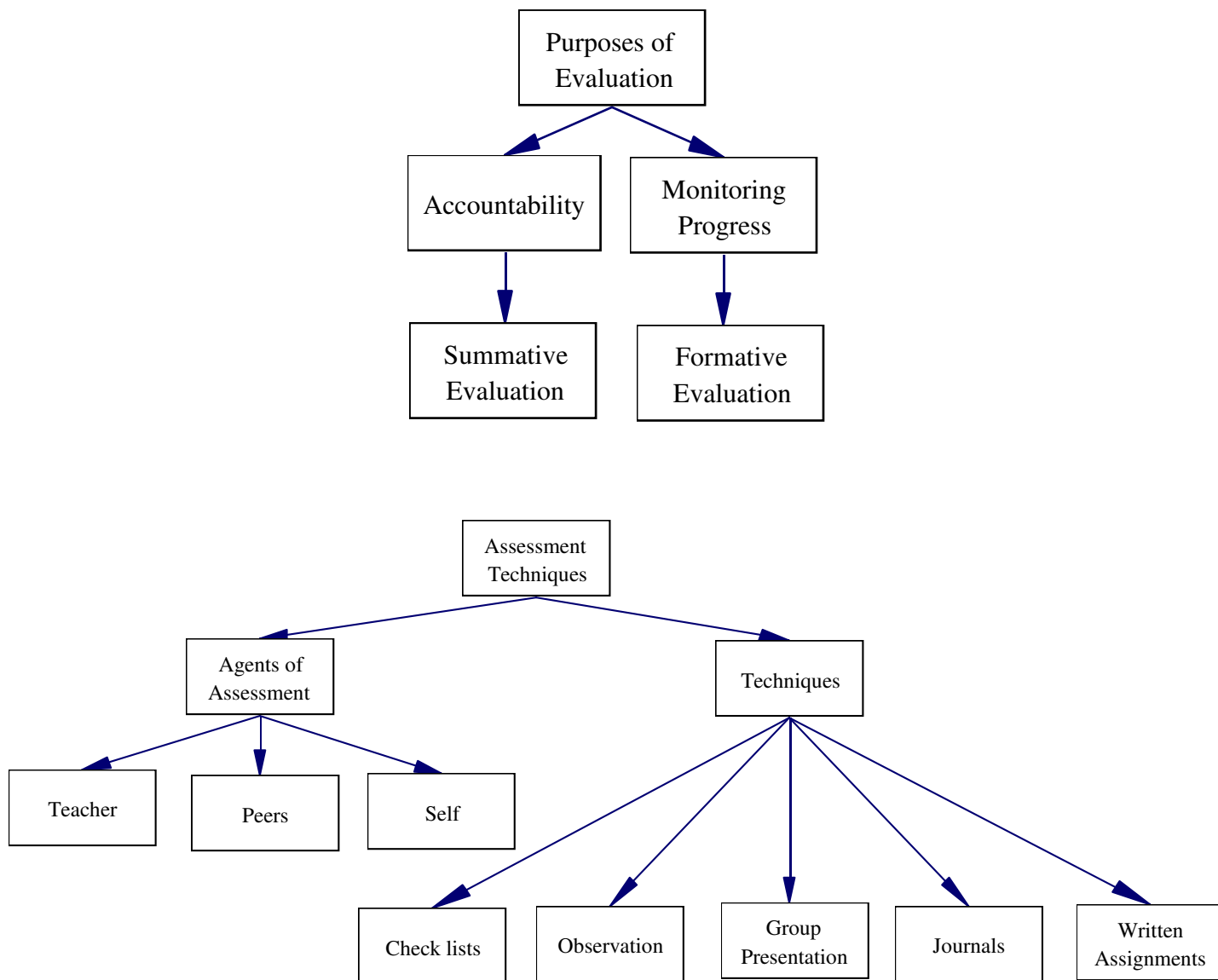
### **Media Studies**

Specific Expectations

- Demonstrate critical thinking skills by identifying bias and by analysing explicit and implicit messages in media works.
- Design or create media works based on ideas, themes, and issues examined in this unit.

From Ministry of Education document (2007): The Ontario Curriculum: Grades 11 and 12

### Assessment and Evaluation for the Unit



## Handouts for Students

### Reading Response Journal

A Reading Response Journal consists of your views and thinking as you continue reading the novel. It is an effective way to reflect on your reading process as it helps you to reflect thoughtfully on a personal level as you read. The journal is a place where you reflect on thoughts about the novel and note down any observations, questions, ideas, and confusions you experience while reading the book.

The following are a few suggestions you can apply while reading the book. It consists of a number of prompts that may or may not apply to your reading situation. You can ignore the prompts and include other ideas as they emerge through your reading process.

1. I do not understand.../ I now understand...
2. I noticed that.../I wonder about...
3. I predict...
4. A question I have is.../Why does...
5. This story (event, character, phrase) makes me feel...
6. If I were (name a character) at this point, I would...
7. I think the setting is important because...
8. I really like/dislike this (idea/person/attitude)
9. I think the relationship between (character) and (character) is interesting because...
10. This scene, character, event or situation reminds me of...
11. I experienced a similar situation
12. Something I noticed about (appreciate, don't appreciate, wonder about)
13. I now realize/think that...
14. A phrase (or line) I like



<b>K-W-L Strategy Sheet</b>		
What we Know	What We Want to Find Out	What We Learned

Source: Adapted from D. Ogle, "The K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text," *The Reading Teacher*, February, 1986, 364-370.



### Group projects

For the group project you will be working in groups of four. Prepare a 10 -15 minute group presentation on a topic of your choice. Following are a number of ways you can present your topic: through video presentation; collage arrangement; discussion of topic with aid of media material; through an interview format; music or drama.

Following are some suggested themes or issues to which you might respond to *The Kite Runner*:

- 1) The *Kite Runner* is a story about two pre-teen boys growing up in a neighbourhood in Kabul. They have their neighbourhood bullies led by Assef, a boy who grows up and still keeps bullying people around him. (Bullying and its consequences)
- 2) Kite flying is a popular pastime among Afghan children. (A land, its culture and recreations)
- 3) Hassan, the servant boy belongs to a minority ethnic group of Shi'a Muslims. Amir is criticized by the neighbourhood bullies in being friends with Hassan. (Ethnic minorities and their treatment)
- 4) During the Russian occupation, Amir leaves Afghanistan with his dad and emigrates to the United States. (Immigration and the state of the immigrant in his or her new homeland)
- 5) Amir has to leave Afghanistan during the Russian occupation. (Occupation of a land by foreign forces)
- 6) The Taliban insurgents rule the capital city of Kabul. They have destroyed architecture and fine arts in Afghanistan. (The Taliban regime)

NB: Please consult with and get the approval of your teacher about your choice of project or another project which may be of interest to your group.

### Group Presentation Rubric

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Organization</b>	Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.	Audience has difficulty following presentation because student jumps around.	Student presents information in logical sequence which audience can follow.	Student presents information in logical, interesting sequence which audience can follow.	
<b>Subject Knowledge</b>	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about subject.	Student is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions.	Student is at ease with expected answers to all questions, but fails to elaborate.	Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) by answering all class questions with explanations and elaboration.	
<b>Graphics</b>	Student uses superfluous graphics or no graphics	Student occasionally uses graphics that rarely support text and presentation.	Student's graphics relate to text and presentation.	Student's graphics explain and reinforce screen text and presentation.	
<b>Mechanics</b>	Student's presentation has four or more spelling errors and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has three misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no more than two misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	Presentation has no misspellings or grammatical errors.	
<b>Eye Contact</b>	Student reads all of report with no eye contact.	Student occasionally uses eye contact, but still reads most of report.	Student maintains eye contact most of the time but frequently returns to notes.	Student maintains eye contact with audience, seldom returning to notes.	
<b>Elocution</b>	Student mumbles, incorrectly pronounces terms, and speaks too quietly.	Student's voice is low. Student incorrectly pronounces terms. Audience members have difficulty hearing presentation.	Student's voice is clear. Student pronounces most words correctly. Most audience members can hear presentation.	Student uses a clear voice and correct, precise pronunciation of terms so that all audience members can hear presentation.	
				<b>Total Points:</b>	

Source: Ministry of Education: The Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner (2002).





Viewing sheet for the documentary film: *Kandahar*

As you watch this documentary please respond to the following questions in your journal.

1. What are some of the dangers the character faces in her search for her sister in Afghanistan?
2. Which situation in the film affected you the most? Explain.
3. While searching for her sister, the main character meets people who offer help and advice. Which character or characters appealed to you and why?
4. Would you undertake such a journey fraught with danger and uncertainty? Explain.
5. Why do you think the situation is so volatile in Afghanistan?

**Appendix #2 Ethics Approval from Lakehead University**

# Lakehead

UNIVERSITY

Office of Research

December 6, 2007

Tel (807) 343-8283  
Fax (807) 346-7749

Ms. Mary Mallik  
Faculty of Education  
Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Road  
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 5E1

Dear Ms. Mallik:

**Re: REB Project #: 032 07-08**  
**Granting Agency name: N/A**  
**Granting Agency Project #: N/A**

On the recommendation of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project entitled, "Adolescent Readers' Response to Multicultural Literature in the Secondary English Curriculum".

Ethics approval is valid until **December 6, 2008**. Please submit a Request for Renewal form to the Office of Research by November 6, 2008 if your research involving human subjects will continue for longer than one year. A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project. Research Ethics Board forms are available at:

<http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~researchwww/internalforms.html>

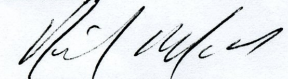
During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Completed reports and correspondence may be directed to:

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of Research  
Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Road  
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1  
Fax: (807) 346-7749

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,



**Dr. Richard Maundrell**  
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/len

cc: Dr. Mary Clare Courtland, Supervisor, Education  
Faculty of Graduate Studies  
Office of Research

**Appendix #3****Lakehead District School Board****CODE OF ETHICS**

The researcher must abide by the following code of ethics:

1. The research procedure shall not be harmful in any way to the subject participating.
2. The researcher will be under the jurisdiction of the administration and the Principal of the school selected for research in terms of his/her conduct while working in the school.
3. The data collected in the performance of the research will be kept in strict confidence. No names of persons tested, their test results, or the names of the teachers, Principals, or schools, shall be mentioned or attention be unduly attracted to them during the course of or following research undertaken unless authorized by the administration. General or specific results as would be used for research papers for scientific journals will be accepted.
4. The researcher shall not, in any way, attempt to attract the interest of the media to his/her research unless authorized by the administration. If the researcher is contacted by representatives of the media, the researcher is bound to say nothing about the research unless the researcher has been given permission by the administration.
5. Research that is not supporting or facilitating the operation of the system is subject to the discretion of the administration and the school Principal(s). If the administration and the Principal refuse the use of school facilities to the researcher external to the system, the researcher must accept this decision.
6. In accordance with this research policy, any researcher that is undertaking research in this system that identifies Lakehead District School Board in any manner, must obtain the approval of the administration for the use of the data.

Date: 16/11/07

Signature: Mary Mallis

**Appendix #4****Ethics Approval From Lakehead District School Board**

**From:** Rowan Seymour  
**To:** Mary Mallik  
**Date:** Wednesday - December 12, 2007 9:17 AM  
**Subject:** Research Proposal Approved

Mary

Your research proposal entitled, "Adolescent Readers' Response to Multi-cultural Literature in the Secondary English Curriculum, has been approved for implementation in Lakehead Public Schools. We look forward to receiving your final report.

Good luck.

Rowan

Rowan Seymour  
Education Officer  
Lakehead Public Schools  
807-625-5280



## Appendix #5

### Letter and Consent Form for the Principal of the High School

Dear Mr. Warwick,

Thank you for agreeing to allow me to conduct a qualitative study in a Grade 11 English classroom in your school. I have developed a four-week unit entitled, A Multicultural Unit: Ways of Knowing and Responding based on the reading of *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004). The unit is divided into three broad sections: before reading activities, during reading activities and after reading activities. The unit expectations are based on the Ontario Curriculum: Grades 11 and 12 documents.

The study is of an emergent design and the activities in the unit will evolve based on the reading and various individual and group tasks in the classroom. The findings of the study will contribute to the literature on reader response in the area of adolescents' response to multicultural texts. It will also help us to understand critical issues regarding the teaching and learning of multicultural texts.

I shall be an observer and participant observer in the classroom while the multicultural unit is implemented by the class teacher. During this period I shall observe students as they respond to the multicultural unit and work in groups. I shall hold informal conversations; discuss issues related to *The Kite Runner* and conduct a one-hour audiotape focus group interview based on focus group questions with two groups of students. The focus group questions are based on their reading of *The Kite Runner* and their understanding of the story through sharing with group members. I shall also collect information through student journals, class presentations, class discussions, questionnaire sheet and final projects. Students have the option to choose not to answer any questions in the questionnaire or any focus group interview question. Should the student decide not to be a part of the study, he or she will participate in the curriculum activities during the class period, but his or her responses will not be used for the study. Information will also be collected through a teacher questionnaire. The teacher may also choose not to answer any question on the teacher questionnaire.

The research will be conducted in accordance with the guidelines established by the Research Ethics Board of Lakehead University. The following ethics considerations will be taken into account for the participants taking part in this study:

- That there are no risks or harm involved should the students and the teacher participate in the study.
- They may withdraw at any time.
- The student may choose not to answer any questions in the questionnaire or any focus group interview question.
- The teacher may choose not to answer any question on the teacher questionnaire.
- Anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.
- The data will be stored securely in the Faculty of Education for five years, and then destroyed in accordance with the Lakehead University *Research Ethics Policy*.

- The findings will be disseminated to Lakehead District School Board and the classroom teacher on request, and presented at education conferences and in refereed journals. The dissertation will be housed in the Education Library, Lakehead University.

I look forward to conducting the study in your school. If you have any questions concerning the study, you may contact me or my supervisor or the Research Ethics Board at 343-8283.

Sincerely,

Mary Mallik, PhD Candidate  
[marmalli@gmail.com](mailto:marmalli@gmail.com)  
1-807-476-0944

Mary Clare Courtland, PhD  
Professor  
Faculty of Education  
Lakehead University  
[mccourtl@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:mccourtl@lakeheadu.ca)  
1-807-345-4695

### Consent Form

I have read and understand the purpose of the research study being conducted by Mary Mallik. I understand the following ethics considerations:

- There are no risks or harm involved for the participants in the study.
- They can withdraw at any time.
- Students may choose not to answer any questions in the questionnaire or any focus group interview question.
- The teacher may choose not to answer any question on the teacher questionnaire.
- Their anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.
- The data will be stored in the Faculty of Education for five years, and then destroyed.
- Findings will be disseminated to Lakehead District School Board and to you on request, and presented at education conferences and in refereed journals. The dissertation will be housed in the Education Library, Lakehead University.

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Principal's Signature

-----  
Date

## Appendix #6

### Letter of Consent – Parents/Students

Dear Parents, Guardians and Students:

I am a secondary English teacher. I am also a student in the Joint PhD in the Education Studies program at Lakehead University. I am conducting research on students' comprehension of multicultural texts. I have developed a four-week unit on *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), entitled *A Multicultural Unit: Ways of Knowing and Responding*. The unit expectations are based on the Ontario Curriculum: Grades 11 and 12 documents. The activities in this unit will promote understanding of informational and literary texts and will help students to develop critical appreciation for multicultural texts. Along with gaining knowledge in informational and literary texts, students will also have the opportunity to learn about another culture.

I would like to invite your son/daughter to participate in the study. I shall be an observer in the classroom while the multicultural unit is implemented by the teacher. During this period I shall observe students as they respond to the multicultural unit and work in groups. I shall hold informal conversations; discuss issues related to *The Kite Runner* and conduct a one-hour audiotape interview with two groups of students. I shall also collect information through student journals, class presentations, class discussions and final projects. Should the student decide not to be a part of the study, he or she will participate in the curriculum activities during the class period, but his or her responses will not be used for the study.

The findings of the study will contribute to the literature on reader response in the area of adolescents' response to multicultural texts. It will also help us to understand critical issues regarding the teaching and learning of multicultural texts.

The research will be conducted in accordance with the guidelines established by the Research Ethics Board of Lakehead University. Should your son/daughter participate in the study, you should be aware of the following ethics considerations:

- There are no risks involved when students participate in this study.
- They can withdraw at any time and choose not to answer any question in the questionnaire form.
- Their anonymity and confidentiality will be protected at all times.
- The data will be stored securely for five years in the Faculty of Education, and then destroyed in accordance with Lakehead University *Research Ethics Policy*.

I have discussed the unit with the students and have invited them to sign the consent form. If you have any questions concerning the study, you may contact the Research Ethics Board at 343-8283 or my supervisor, Dr. M. C. Courtland or me.

Sincerely,

Mary Mallik, PhD Candidate  
[marmalli@gmail.com](mailto:marmalli@gmail.com)  
1-807-476-0944

Mary Clare Courtland, PhD  
Professor  
Faculty of Education  
Lakehead University  
[mccourtl@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:mccourtl@lakeheadu.ca)  
1-807-345-4695

### Consent Form

I have read and understand the purpose of the research study being conducted by Mary Mallik. I understand the following ethics considerations:

- There are no risks involved should my son/daughter participate in the study.
- S/he may withdraw at any time.
- His/her anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.
- The data will be stored in the Faculty of Education for five years and then destroyed.
- Findings will be disseminated to Lakehead District School Board on request and presented in conferences and refereed journals, and the dissertation will be housed in the Education Library, Lakehead University.

My son/daughter ----- may participate/may not participate in the study.

-----  
Parent's Signature

-----  
Date

I consent/do not consent to participate in the study.

-----  
Student's Signature

-----  
Date

## Appendix #7

### Letter for the class teacher

Dear Mrs. Heroux:

Thank you for agreeing to implement a multicultural unit in your grade 11 classroom. I have developed a four-week unit entitled, A Multicultural Unit: Ways of Knowing and Responding based on the reading of *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2003). The unit is divided into three broad sections: before reading activities, during reading activities and after reading activities. The unit expectations are based on the Ontario Curriculum: Grades 11 and 12 documents.

The study is of an emergent design and the activities in the unit will evolve based on the reading and various individual and group tasks in the classroom. I would like your input on ongoing day- to-day activities during the duration of the multicultural unit. I would also appreciate your keeping a journal, recording insights of student responses and progress as they read the novel, and the limitations and aspects in need of modification.

The findings of the study will contribute to the literature on reader response in the area of adolescents' response to multicultural texts. It will also help us to understand critical issues regarding the teaching and learning of multicultural texts.

The research will be conducted in accordance with the guidelines established by the Research Ethics Board of Lakehead University. You should be aware of the following ethics considerations:

- That there are no risks involved should you participate in the study.
- Anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.
- The data will be stored securely in the Faculty of Education for five years, and then destroyed in accordance with the Lakehead University *Research Ethics Policy*.

I look forward to conducting the study in your grade 11 classroom. If you have any questions concerning the study, you may contact the Research Ethics Board at 343-8283 or my supervisor and me at the addresses given below.

Sincerely,

Mary Mallik, PhD Candidate  
[marmalli@gmail.com](mailto:marmalli@gmail.com)  
1-807-476-0944

Mary Clare Courtland, PhD  
Professor  
Faculty of Education  
Lakehead University  
[mccourtl@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:mccourtl@lakeheadu.ca)  
1-807-345-4695

### Consent Form

I have read and understand the purpose of the research study being conducted by Mary

Mallik. I understand the following ethics considerations:

- There are no risks involved should I participate in the study.
- I can withdraw at any time and may choose not to answer any question in the questionnaire form.
- My anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.
- The data will be stored in the Faculty of Education for seven years, and then destroyed.
- Findings will be disseminated to Lakehead District School Board on request and presented in conferences and in refereed journals and the dissertation will be housed in the Education Library, Lakehead University.

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-----  
Teacher's Signature

-----  
Date



## Appendix #8

### Letter for the Lakehead District School Board

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a secondary English teacher. I am also a student in the Joint PhD in the Education Studies program at Lakehead University. I am conducting research on students' comprehension of multicultural texts. I have developed a four-week unit on *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), entitled *A Multicultural Unit: Ways of Knowing and Responding*. The unit expectations are based on the Ontario Curriculum: Grades 11 and 12 documents. The activities in this unit will promote understanding of informational and literary texts and will help students to develop critical appreciation for multicultural texts. Along with gaining knowledge in informational and literary texts, students will also have the opportunity to learn about another culture.

I shall be an observer and participant observer in the classroom while the multicultural unit is implemented by the class teacher. During this period I shall observe students as they respond to the multicultural unit and work in groups. I shall hold informal conversations; discuss issues related to *The Kite Runner* and conduct a one-hour audiotape interview, a focus group interview with two groups of students. The focus group questions are based on their reading of *The Kite Runner* and their learning through discussion with group members. I shall also collect information through student journals, class presentations, class discussions and final projects. Information will also be collected through a teacher questionnaire. Students may choose not to answer any questions in the questionnaire or any focus group interview question. The teacher may choose not to answer any question on the teacher questionnaire. Should the student decide not to be a part of the study, he or she will participate in the curriculum activities during the class period, but his or her responses will not be used for the study.

The findings of the study will contribute to the literature on reader response in the area of adolescents' response to multicultural texts. It will also help us to understand critical issues regarding the teaching and learning of multicultural texts.

The research will be conducted in accordance with the guidelines established by the Research Ethics Board of Lakehead University. The participants in the study will be informed of the following ethics considerations:

- There are no risks or harm involved when they participate in this study.
- They can withdraw at any time.
- Students may choose not to answer any questions in the questionnaire or any focus group interview question.
- The teacher may choose not to answer any question on the teacher questionnaire.
- Their anonymity and confidentiality will be protected at all times.
- The data will be stored securely for five years in the Faculty of Education, and then destroyed in accordance with Lakehead University *Research Ethics Policy*.

- The findings will be disseminated to Lakehead District School Board and the classroom teacher on request, and will be presented at education conferences and in refereed journals.

The unit will be discussed with the students and they will be invited to sign the consent form. I have also filled in the forms for research procedures required by the Lakehead District School Board. If you have any questions concerning the study, you may contact me or my supervisor, Dr. M. C. Courtland or the Research Ethics Board at 343-8283.

Sincerely,

Mary Mallik, PhD Candidate  
[marmalli@gmail.com](mailto:marmalli@gmail.com)  
1-807-476-0944

Mary Clare Courtland, PhD  
Professor  
Faculty of Education  
Lakehead University  
[mccourtl@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:mccourtl@lakeheadu.ca)  
1-807-345-4695

## Appendix #9

### Verbal Explanation to Students

I am Mrs. Mallik. Currently, I am a student in the Joint PhD Education Studies program at Lakehead University. I am conducting research on students' comprehension of multicultural texts. I have developed a four-week unit on *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), entitled A Multicultural Unit: Ways of Knowing and Responding. Your class teacher, Mrs. Heroux will be implementing the unit.

The unit is divided into three broad sections: before reading activities, during reading activities and after reading activities. You will be reading *The Kite Runner* in class, writing your responses in a response journal and responding to a number of activities in the multicultural unit. Your work on this multicultural unit will be graded by your class teacher, Mrs. Heroux. I shall be an observer in your class, participate in response groups, class discussions and collect samples of your journal entries, questionnaires and group projects.

The findings of the research will help us to understand critical issues regarding the teaching and learning of multicultural texts. The research will be conducted in accordance with the guidelines established by the Research Ethics Board of Lakehead University. There are no risks involved when you participate in this study. You can withdraw at any time. Your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected at all times. The data will be stored securely for five years in the Faculty of Education, and then destroyed in accordance with Lakehead Research Ethics Policy.