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**The Teacher's Role in Facilitating
Critical Thinking About Social Issues**

by
Heather Evelyn Smith Hemming

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at
Dalhousie University
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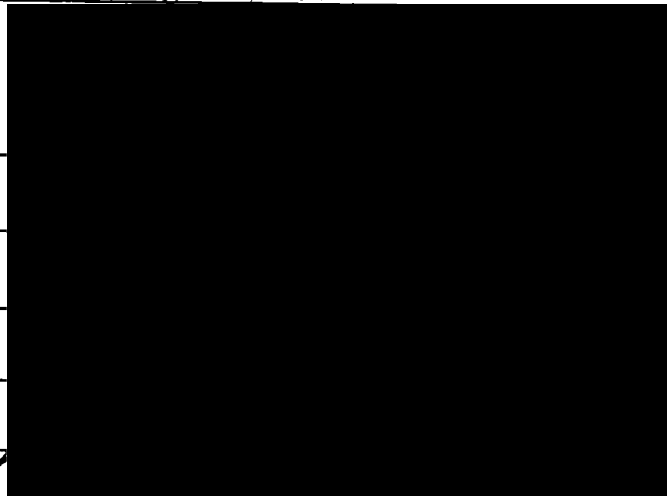
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by Heather Evelyn Hemming

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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External Examiner _____
Research Supervisor _____
Examining Committee _____



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DEDICATION

**....to my paternal grandmother,
Daisy Evelyn Smith, my first constructivist teacher
and someone whose influence
is ever-present in my life.**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues within a child-centred, whole language based curriculum.

This study is approached in two separate yet obviously related ways. First, there is a philosophical analysis of major works dealing with child-centred education, whole language and critical thinking. Second, there is an empirically based case study of a sixth grade teacher who aims to have children think critically about social issues in a whole language, child-centred curricular context. The analysis of the case study focusses on values implicit in the curriculum and explicit attempts to facilitate critical thinking about social issues.

The findings from the philosophical analysis and the empirically based case study are integrated to construct a framework for understanding the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. The qualities and characteristics of such a teacher include: directedness, democratic values, a critical stance, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, authority and courage.

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First, I would like to express heartfelt thanks to my children, Matthew and Deborah. In their unique and individual ways they supported me in this endeavour with encouraging words and understanding. I cannot express how much their love has meant to me. They gave me the courage to move forward and reclaim my life after my experience with breast cancer in 1994.

Further, special appreciation to my husband, Bruce, for his efforts to help me complete this project. Particularly in the final stages of the project, he kept the computers working around the clock and assisted in the final editing. His encouraging words were always appreciated.

I have boundless admiration and respect for "Matthew Williams" who opened his teaching to me. I thank him for providing a rich source of data for understanding the teacher's role. In addition, I wish to recognize the contribution of the children in his class. They assisted me in more fully understanding the complexities of teaching.

Special thanks are extended to my parents, Betty and Graham Smith, who have encouraged me in my many pursuits. They have sacrificed a great deal in their lives to create opportunities for me.

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Chapter One

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

- HH You speak of contexts emerging in the classroom; would you comment on the process of contexts emerging? How do you decide what becomes a question you want the students to probe a little further?
- MW We like to think that we are being very objective and very equal in terms of the treatment that we give to topics and from whom we elicit responses in the classroom. But, in fact there are all kinds of things in the classroom that happen that reveal who we are as people, as teachers and what we think is important. If there's a gender issue or something controversial that pops up in my classroom I would probably be pretty inclined to say to myself, "Well this is very interesting. We'll see what happens here." I listen and ask questions so that the kids are really put in a position where they have to compare, contrast, and re-frame what they think. I want them to consider someone else's position that is completely different from their own and think through their views.

As Matthew Williams, a sixth grade teacher suggests, the teacher's role in facilitating students to think critically about social issues is not a straightforward process. The moments when the classroom events moves towards the critical examination of social issues, to a large extent, are determined by the teacher. Further, what the examination entails is influenced by factors such as the teacher's pedagogical intent,¹ the teacher's perspective on the importance of critical thinking and the issue at hand, and the political context. What one teacher encourages students to examine may be completely ignored, or overtly discouraged, by the teacher two doors down the hall.

¹ van Manen (1991) uses the term 'pedagogical intent' to describe the teacher's intention to influence learning, p. 17.

The complex and important role the teacher plays in facilitating critical thinking within the classroom is illustrated in the introductory dialogue.

Understanding the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues, and more generally, how the teacher creates a child-centred curriculum, is a major difficulty for educators, parents and, in some instances, children. This problem has taken on a new urgency since, during the last decade, there has been a resurgence in the desire to create a child-centred curriculum.

Establishing child-centred education is not a new phenomenon as evident in the attempts made in this direction throughout this century. However, during the last fifteen years, in the area of language arts a "whole language" approach to curriculum, based on principles of child-centred education, has been widely adopted.

In my position as a teacher educator, pre-service teachers repeatedly ask me to clarify exactly what teachers are to do, and how they are to do it, within a child-centred, whole language curricular framework. Many pre-service teachers want to be provided with a checklist of behaviours which, if followed, would indicate they are "doing child-centred, whole language based teaching." Rather than focussing on underlying purposes of education, and assessing and making judgements regarding the pedagogical intent of their teaching, they assume that developing a child-centred language arts curriculum is essentially a technical problem. Consequently they seek specific advice regarding what they are to do.

The lack of general understanding related to the teacher's role in whole language is obvious in the confusion that exists with respect to conceptions of control and teaching in child-centred education. For example, many of my pre-service teachers often make incorrect assumptions about child-centred teaching. They believe that teacher control of the curriculum is replaced by student control, and that when teachers facilitate and establish a context for learning they are not really teaching. When I speak with educators working in the field, in some cases there is similar confusion and lack of understanding with respect to the teacher's role in whole language.

Some teachers, who claim to teach from a child-centred whole language perspective, adopt a *laissez-faire* approach to teaching in which the boundaries that contain the curriculum are not clearly describable. In these cases, a hands-off stance is adopted and the place of subject matter in learning, and the teacher's responsibility to facilitate the development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes, is left more to chance and circumstance than to careful planning. At the other end of the spectrum, there are teachers consciously engaged in a careful nurturing and facilitating of learning in a child-centred framework. Many of these latter teachers receive criticism from both parents and, in some cases, from colleagues who do not understand or agree with the pedagogy practised in the classroom.

During the same time that there has been a growing interest in whole language, there has also been an increased interest in the teaching of critical

thinking. In particular, there has been a concern that many students leaving school have not developed the ability to think critically (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). While a significant amount of empirical research and philosophical work has focussed on understanding the nature of critical thinking, and the importance of critical thinking to education (Ennis, 1987, 1989; Lipman, 1988, 1991; Matthews, 1980, 1984, 1994; McPeck, 1990, 1981; Passmore, 1967; Paul, 1992; Siegel 1987, 1991), educators have also been inundated with programs and workbooks which purportedly teach students to think critically, but which do not appear to be sound either theoretically or practically. Often these programs are skill lessons aimed at mastering only one part of critical thinking (e.g. making inferences in textual material or practising thinking skills in isolation with little attention to the content).

Within the published literature on whole language, and within many classrooms where teachers attempt to teach from a child-centred, whole language perspective, "critical thinking" has been identified as an area deserving of attention (Marzano, 1991; Neilsen, 1989; Newell, 1986). In particular, there is an emphasis on how students think about their reading and writing. Some view the integration of critical thinking about social issues into the curriculum as essential to whole language (Church, 1996; Harman & Edelsky, 1989; Shannon, 1990, 1992).

It is unfortunate, however, that many teachers retreat from a focus on

social issues in the curriculum. Social issues are complex and political by nature, because concerns such as equality,² justice and rights are inherent in them. For those interested in the goal of including social issues in the curriculum, knowing how to facilitate learning when dealing with the critical examination of social issues can be perplexing and troublesome.

Justification and Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a child-centred, whole language context. Rather than develop a technical response which would give detailed instructions for answering the question "What is the teacher's role?" my intention is to discuss the question from a philosophical perspective.

(i) Justification of Critical Thinking as an Aim in Education

I propose that critical thinking can be justified as an aim in education on two different grounds.

First, when individuals think critically they are in a position that allows them to be more independent as human beings than when they passively accept information, positions, and ideas. Education in general is aimed at the development of self-autonomous individuals. Rather than blindly adopting the viewpoints of others, or accepting information as fact, when there is critical

² I use the term 'equality' broadly to indicate the need for individuals to be given equal power and opportunity. This does not endorse the view that equality is achieved by treating all people the same.

thinking the individual has independently examined, assessed, and applied reason in the process of learning. When this is the case there is more likelihood that individuals will understand the foundation and rationale for their thinking and will be in a better position to assess the need to revise their thinking. Individuals will not likely make use of new information that is inconsistent, puzzling, or a validation to what is believed to stimulate independent thought, without critical thinking. Further without engaging in critical thought the individual may not have a method for, or a desire to, independently reassess prior positions or information previously accepted as fact.

There is a second ground for establishing critical thinking as an educational aim for, when individuals are encouraged to think critically, the potential exists for a particular type of relationship to develop between the individual and knowledge founded on a quality of humility. This type of relationship encourages on-going learning both inside and outside of schools because individuals are aware of their own personal limitations and those of others. Fostering this approach to learning is important because we live in a changing world and must continue to learn. Further, when we assume there is nothing else to understand about a topic or issue our growth is stunted and our development as human beings is restricted. Rather than assume that knowledge and understanding are fixed, critical thinking leads to an awareness that one must be one must be willing to engage in the on-going pursuit of understanding. When the disposition towards learning and knowledge is

founded on a willingness to call ideas into question, to assess, to reason, and to revise thinking in light of new information, there is an underlying assumption individuals need to continue to learn.

(ii) Justification of the Purpose

A need for clarifying the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues is justified on the grounds that, while this is an essential responsibility, the work conducted to date has been limited. The research on child-centred language arts curricula conducted over the last twenty years has focussed primarily on questions related to how children learn to read (Doake, 1988; Holdaway, 1979; Teale, 1982), how young writers find their voices (Bissex, 1980; Calkins, 1986), and how readers respond to texts based on their past experiences (Avery, 1985; Bloome, 1987; Hansen, 1987). As these and other questions focussed on the child gained prominence and were addressed, researchers and teachers began to ask questions related to how the teacher is to support, encourage and facilitate children in their general literacy development. Questions such as: "How is the teacher to facilitate learning?", "How does the teacher teach when students are supposed to be in control of their learning?" and "Don't teachers teach anymore?" were posed.

Those who attempted to address such questions collectively indicated that the teacher's role is multifaceted and complex. Goodman and Goodman (1990), for example, set out a number of statements in their account of the "new role" of teachers: teacher as initiator, teacher as kid-watcher, teacher as

mediator and teacher as liberator are those for which they provide brief descriptions. While initially it might appear that these accounts could shed light on the teacher's role, in many cases the descriptions serve to create further questions, contradictions and confusion. For example, Goodman and Goodman (1990) claim that it is a mistake that a teacher can control or create the points in a child's development where the child can learn easily if given assistance. They state, "The teacher is present as the learning transaction takes place but in the role of mediator - supporting the learning transactions but neither causing them to happen in any direct sense nor controlling the learning" (Goodman & Goodman, 1990, p. 236). Yet, when they discuss the role of teacher as initiator, they point out that the teacher should initiate learning by creating contexts, stimulating learners to engage in problem solving - which is an apparent contradiction. What distinction exists between creating contexts and stimulating learners on the one hand, and creating the points from which students are to receive adult assistance on the other?

Weaver (1990), provides a view of the teacher's role in her widely used textbook for pre-service teachers, Understanding Whole Language. She contrasts roles in what she labels a transactional model (child-centred, whole language) and a transmission model. Similarly, Newman (1991) discusses the teacher's role in whole language and states that "it is very different from the transmission role we're used to" (p. 18). When this dichotomy is used, contradictory messages arise regarding the role of transmission in teaching.

The polarization between a transactional model and a transmission model creates the impression that transmission is distinct from, and therefore not part of, the teacher's role in whole language.

Conceptualizing the roles and responsibilities of teachers has been complicated because, when the child is used as the pivotal point in the curriculum, there are no easy, technical prescriptions for practice. Further, as illustrated from the work of Goodman and Goodman (1990), Weaver (1990) and Newman (1991), some of the language used to describe the role of the teacher has been contradictory (Dudley-Marling & Diplo, 1991).

Through the lack of explicit attention given to addressing and/or resolving some of the tensions around their role, teachers are sometimes unsure of which direction to take in their interactions with students. Unfortunately, this has led in turn to some teachers withdrawing from the significant role they might play. It is apparent that there is a pressing need to clarify the role of the teacher.

(iii) Justification for the Methodology

To develop a framework for conceptualizing the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues, it is important to address the influences theoretical positions can have on current understandings. It is also essential to examine the teacher's role in a present-day classroom. Consequently, I approach the question of the teacher's role from two intersecting perspectives. First, I examine the question by critically analysing relevant theoretical literature in the areas of child-centred education, whole language and

critical thinking. Second, I develop a case study based on a grade six teacher, Mr. Matthew Williams, who works within a whole language approach and who believes that facilitating critical thinking about social issues is part of his responsibility.

While the teacher's role in child-centred education is of current interest, it is also an issue which has been extensively explored in the past. Several philosophers such as Dewey (1938, 1902), Kilpatrick (1951, 1918), Rugg and Shumaker (1928) Wilson (1971), and others, dealt specifically with the role of the teacher in child-centred education. Further, educational reports in the 1960's such as the Plowden Report in England, and the Hall-Dennis Report in Ontario, made recommendations endorsing a child-centred curriculum. Analysing these conceptions of child-centred education, as well as their portrayal of the teacher's role, has the potential to shed light on current issues or concerns.

While some (Goodman, 1989; Shannon, 1990) who currently write about child-centred language arts curricula reference Dewey's work as foundational, they make vague links that often do not move much beyond establishing that the focus on the child, and the child's first-hand experiences are common to both Dewey's work and whole language. Little, if any, attempt is made to link the current conceptions of whole language to the work of Wilson (1971) on the topic of interests, or to Kilpatrick's (1918) model of the "Project Approach", or to Dewey's views of the necessary pedagogical skills of teachers. Further,

analyses of some of the positive, and negative, outcomes of previous attempts to implement child-centred education are rarely addressed in relation to whole language.

An in-depth examination of earlier philosophical works has the potential to shed understanding on today's issues related to the implementation of whole language in general and, more specifically, to the role of the teacher in whole language. Some may suggest that these earlier philosophical works were conducted at a different time, and therefore must relate to a different set of educational practices. However, ideas contained in these writings are such that there is an increased potential for understanding the teacher's role in a child-centred curriculum. Although not focussed on the problems of today, when applied intelligently the earlier philosophical writings provide insights into the relationship among the child, the teacher, and the curriculum. Further justification for analysing these earlier works is established because philosophical insights can be applied to new contexts. Moreover, there can be some common truths about teaching that transcend particular contexts. Therefore, an analysis of relevant philosophical discussions may create a new lens through which current practices can be understood.

In addition to the theoretically based discussion there is an empirical component to the study. I chose to closely examine the work of one teacher, Matthew Williams, in order that I might take a detailed look at how he approached his role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. In order

that I might construct a characterization of his role, the case study is developed within an interpretive framework. With his assistance, I interpreted and constructed an image of how he facilitates critical thinking about social issues. I selected this methodology to examine Matthew Williams' work in a natural setting - his classroom. In concert with the assumptions which underlie the interpretive framework my goal was to understand how Matthew Williams facilitates critical thinking about social issues.

Overview of Chapters

In chapter two I focus on child-centred education to situate whole language within a broader view of child-centred education. Teaching occurs in a curricular context which, to a large extent, is determined by the beliefs of the teacher. When a child-centred perspective towards curriculum is adopted there are a number of core features, such as the child being pivotal to the curriculum, the use of first hand experiences in learning, attention to children's interests and needs, which influence the nature of the context.

In addressing the global question of examining the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues, there are issues related to the nature of child-centred education which need to be considered. Specifically, what are the characteristics of the curriculum which facilitate or interfere with the critical examination of social issues? What issues and concerns regarding the role of the teacher arose from previous attempts to implement child-centred education? What are the teacher's responsibilities in child-centred education?

In chapter three, whole language is described to illuminate the nature of this approach to curricula, and to identify the underlying values which might impact on the critical examination of social issues. The image of the child, the focus on language development, the importance placed on social interaction, the view of critical thinking, and the role of the teacher embedded in whole language, are examined.

Chapter four, is a synthesis and analysis of the body of literature on critical thinking. It is aimed at developing a framework for understanding how critical thinking may be part of a child-centred, whole language curriculum. To understand the role of the teacher in facilitating critical thinking, it is essential to consider the nature of critical thinking because it is difficult for teachers to nurture the development of something about which they are unclear. In chapter four I also provide an overview of the different forms and components of critical thinking. I stress the importance for teachers to have an enriched understanding of critical thinking. Components of critical thinking discussed include: logical analysis, the critical spirit, dialogical reasoning, criteria, the relationship to content, connections and caring.

The empirically based case study of Matthew Williams is the focus of the fifth and sixth chapters. To conduct this case study I chose to focus on the work of a teacher whom I judge to have a high level of expertise and experience as a teacher, and who attempts to facilitate critical thinking about social issues. In chapter five I outline the methodology for the case study. The selection of the

participant, the procedures, the sources of data, the method of data analysis, and the ethical considerations are also discussed.

In chapter six, the findings from the case study, which provides a rich data base to complement the discussions in the previous chapters, are examined. I analyze values implicit in the curricular framework Matthew Williams developed, I believe impact on critical thinking about social issues. The values discussed include: valuing each person, the importance of community, the ethics of justice and care, and critical examination as a way of learning. Additionally, I discuss those aspects of the curriculum more explicitly linked to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. The framework for discussing these findings includes: first, how Matthew Williams helps students to perceive social issues; second, his role in focussing students on details about social issues; and third, his role in helping students to frame their analysis within a broad context.

The purpose of chapter seven is to integrate the implications of the theoretical positions presented in all the earlier chapters and, from them, to construct a framework for the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a whole language curriculum based on qualities and characteristics of good teaching. The qualities and characteristics I discuss include: directedness, democratic values, a critical stance, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, authority and courage.

In chapter eight, I present concluding comments which highlight key

issues from the study, as well as implications of the research for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers in general.

Chapter Two

CHILD-CENTRED EDUCATION

A philosophical analysis of child-centred education is important for understanding the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a whole language curriculum. I believe constructing a framework of the teacher's role requires a critical analysis of theoretical influences on how teachers approach their role. Whole language has been consistently described as child-centred (Goodman, 1989; Newman, 1985; Weaver, 1990). When developing a whole language curriculum, teachers often make assumptions, and construct beliefs regarding their teaching, based on their understanding of child-centred education. Without careful examination, it is predictable that false assumptions and/or beliefs grounded in selected aspects of the theory of child-centred education will occur. While it is not uncommon for teachers to use selected aspects of a theory, a problem may be created if one component of the theory is meant to complement another.

In this chapter I will illuminate critical features of selected conceptions of child-centred education to provide direction for understanding the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a child-centred, whole language curricular context. Analysis of values and beliefs foundational to child-centred education creates a variety of vantage points for examining whole language and other child-centred approaches to curriculum. A child-centred

conception of education is grounded in beliefs and values about the rights, interests and needs of the child, the place of subject matter in learning, and the roles and responsibilities of the teacher. If adopted, these values and beliefs have a significant influence on curriculum.

This chapter will focus on how values and beliefs central to child-centred education impact on decisions made regarding curriculum, and facilitation of critical thinking about social issues. Moreover, in the discussion I will analyse the teacher's responsibilities within a child-centred curriculum and relate these to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. My intention is to use knowledge gained from previous experiences with child-centred education to shed light on current attempts to implement a whole language framework.

The analysis in the chapter will draw heavily, although not exclusively, on the philosophy of child-centred education developed this century. However, the "recognizable philosophy" (Peters, 1969) in reports and other works, and the arguments of critics, will be integrated into the discussion. I will critically examine predominant images of the child, subject-matter, and the teacher, in conceptions of child-centred education.

Underlying Values and Beliefs in Child-Centred Education

The tradition of focussing on the child in education can be traced back to Rousseau (1762), and possibly even earlier. In the present century, philosophers such as Dewey (1902, 1916, 1938), Kilpatrick (1918), and Wilson

(1971) dealt specifically with child-centred education. In addition, others have interpreted the work of developmental psychologists such as Piaget (1926) and Froebel (1840), who outline stages of cognitive development and identify the importance of discovery learning as a rationale for a child-centred curriculum.

In reports on the status of education in the 1960's, numerous recommendations were made suggesting the need for a child-centred perspective. For example, the Plowden Committee (1967), charged with both surveying the state of primary school education in England and developing a blueprint for its reform, embraced child-centred education. This report states that many British teachers and principals were beginning to think of a good school as one based upon the child, rather than a fixed curriculum imposed by the teacher. The Hall-Dennis Report, Living and Learning (1968), a study conducted in Ontario, also advocated child-centred education.

The conceptions of child-centred education which emerge from the work of philosophers, cognitive psychologists, and these reports all provide a foundation for examining the nature of child-centred education and the role of the teacher. These works were not developed from the same frameworks or for the same purposes; therefore, the nature of the discussion within each varies. The works of philosophers such as Dewey (1902, 1938), Entwistle (1970,) Kilpatrick (1918, 1933), and Wilson (1971), take a normative perspective, giving special attention to clarifying conceptions of a child-centred curriculum by illuminating particular values and issues. These works tend to concentrate on

the rights and responsibilities of the teacher, of the child, and the ethics and values involved in education. As a consequence, the discussion provides a rich base of information for identifying underlying characteristics and values in child-centred education. However, in the Plowden and the Hall-Dennis reports, underlying values are often implied in the recommendations for school reform rather than explicitly identified and discussed. Careful analysis is required to critically examine the underlying conceptions.³

(i) The Child

The child is regarded as pivotal to a child-centred curriculum. It is critical to reflect upon the image of the child that underlies conceptions of child-centred education because of its significant implications for the curriculum. In this section I will discuss the emphasis placed on the child as an individual, and the child as a social being. Secondly, I will examine the view of the child's learning embedded in conceptions of child-centred education, including a discussion of so-called "natural development" and the role of students' interests.

Clearly, in conceptions of child-centred education, the child is regarded as a unique individual. For example, Dewey (1902) considers the child's life as "an integral, a total one" (p. 5). Moreover, he regards each child as a unique being to be valued and respectfully treated for who that individual is at that time.

³ Evans (1969) p. 43 suggests that there is a value system at the heart of the Hall-Dennis report which is not readily apparent. Peters (1969) p.3-5 argues a similar point in reference to Plowden and points out that the values in such reports must be carefully analyzed.

This image of the child is similar to that present in the Plowden and Hall-Dennis reports. Throughout the Plowden Report are statements that the individuality of the child is to be valued and respected. Plowden claims for example, that "the school is a community in which children learn first and foremost as children and not as future adults" (p. 187). Clearly, this places the emphasis on the child. The Hall-Dennis Report also states that each child is unique, that they all have the right to develop to their particular potential, and the right to an education which suits them best. The Hall-Dennis Report also recommends that a young person be accorded, not privileges as such, but rights which belong to him/her.

This focus on the child as a unique individual is essential because it places value on the person. In essence this means that rather than treating a class of children solely as a collective, the teacher is responsible for being aware of, and responding to, the uniqueness of each student. While humans have many common experiences and needs, they also have unique characteristics and lived experiences. In a class which has one child from a cultural background where emotions are not discussed in public, a second who tends to be impulsive, and a third who is quiet and reserved, it is essential that the teacher be responsive to each in a sensitive and thoughtful manner. Valuing individuality encourages the teacher to avoid the pitfall of assuming that treating all students the same creates equality. However, the focus on the individual needs to be complemented by other values, a matter discussed later in this chapter.

The view that the child is to be valued as an individual with rights, rather than privileges, has specific implications for the goal of having students think critically about social issues. The value placed on the child as an individual requires that students should not be expected to regurgitate the opinions of the teacher and others. Instead, there should be a respect for the child's need to think independently.

While this is apparent common sense, a difficulty arises when the individual thinking, or lack of thinking, generates perspectives which run contrary to other goals of the educational experience. Consider the situation where a child believes it is generally appropriate to use physical contact/violence to protect oneself. While the teacher will respect the child's right to hold an opinion and need to think independently, the teacher will likely want to facilitate a change in the child's views to consider possible actions related to peaceful cooperative living. The child's relationship with a teacher, who has a responsibility to nurture learning, creates a rationale for how the teacher can respect the child's right to hold viewpoints while, at the same time wanting to change or further refine the child's thinking.

While the child is to be valued as an individual in child-centred education, Dewey (1916) argues that this does not mean the child is to be regarded as an achieved self with any degree of completeness. Instead, Dewey (1916) maintains that, "The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action" (1966 edition, p. 351). To view

the child as an individual, rather than as someone in the process of becoming an adult, might appear to be a contradiction within Dewey's outlined position. Yet, I believe his views offer a balanced perspective. They establish a rationale why educative experiences are central to children. While Dewey maintains that a child should be considered a person in all respects, he does not suggest that a child will continue to be the same person in terms of such characteristics as attitudes, habits, skills and knowledge.

It is inevitable that the child will change and grow. If this were not the case, what would be the value of education? At each point the child is to be considered a person in her/his own right. This image of the child provides a framework for thinking about the importance of teaching, for it suggests that the emphasis in education should not solely be on what this child is taught so that she/he will become x, but includes what can be done for x₁, x₂, x₃, x₄ (the same individual at different points in time), to support the child's growth and development. Many factors will influence the direction of the growth. Obviously, foremost variables include the teacher's goals and beliefs regarding the purpose of education, and the manner in which these manifest themselves in the classroom.

There is a split in the child-centred movement between those who argue that the view of the child should include the child as a member of society and those who focus on individualism. In reaction to Dewey's position, which suggests that the view of the child as an individual needs to be balanced with

the view of the child as a social being, Naumburg (1928) states, "Much of the present social philosophy that wishes to sacrifice the individual to the good of the group is nothing but instinctive herd psychology, translated into modern terms" (p. 50).

One difficulty which arises when the focus on the individual is taken to an extreme is that "individual learning" becomes the primary goal of teaching. Students are directed to individual paths for their learning. Many who use an approach which has students work through content at their own rates suggest that they are child-centred educators. However, over-emphasis on this individualistic approach runs the risk of students becoming egocentric in their learning.

The Plowden Report voiced concern that "one obvious purpose is to fit children for the society in which they will grow up" (p. 185). Dewey (1916, 1938) argues the need for the social aspects of living and learning to be given emphasis within the curriculum. Dewey thinks education must allow children to have experiences which prepare them for membership in society. This view will, of course, have different implications depending on the interpretation one makes of "membership in society".

Dewey believes that to improve life in a democracy, children need to learn to solve problems collaboratively in schools. "The teacher is engaged not simply in the training of individuals but in the formation of the proper social life" (Dewey, 1897, p. 439). Additionally, it is important to recognize that asking students to

work collaboratively will not necessarily improve a democracy. The issue of students working collaboratively is complex. While collaboration does encourage the development of social learning, it sometimes leads to other consequences. Competitiveness within the group may develop, or a group with misdirected efforts may undertake destructive activity. In either case this may actually work against the goal of preparation for participation in a democracy because rather than individuals working together for the common good they will be working against one another.

Like Dewey, I believe the focus on collaboration and group problem solving should occur in an environment where democratic values are integral. It is my view that a democratic social spirit must be cultivated in the child. If children develop a disposition towards learning and living which entails critical thought regarding equality, fair and just treatment, rights and freedoms, then I believe they will be in a better position to work towards improving a democracy.

To understand the image of the child embedded in conceptions of child-centred education, it is critical to reflect on how learning is depicted. One critique directed towards child-centred approaches to curriculum is aimed at the view that the child has a "nature" which needs to be developed primarily through self-direction. Dearden (1972) argues that the growth metaphor used to describe learning in child-centred education is problematic because it suggests that learning can be wholly explained in terms of the interaction between inner mechanisms and external conditions and forces. However, the degree to which

learning is thought to occur “naturally”, as pre-determined , varies in conceptions of child-centred education. For example, in both the Hall-Dennis and Plowden reports, learning is depicted as a process which entails development through self-direction. However, it would misrepresent the recommendations of the report to suggest that the conceptualization of the teacher did not entail influencing development.

Peters (1969), in his critique of the Plowden report, is concerned that the underlying values of the growth metaphor for learning are not made explicit. He asks "what it means to be developed." Peters makes a significant point, suggesting that embedded within a developmental perspective is an end view, not always obvious, and seldom made explicit. The impression is created that if simply provided with the opportunity, the child's development will unfold. Unless one is careful, it is easy to overlook what Dewey draws attention to, that many factors shape development, and forget that what is regarded as “natural” is not natural in the sense that development is pre-destined to unfold in a certain manner. Unless teachers are aware they influence learning, they may think they are looking at pre-determined natural development when, in reality, they are influencing the developmental process via interactions with the child.

Related to the view that learning develops naturally is the notion that children should be left on their own to discover. Rugg and Shumaker (1928) and Dewey (1938), voice concern that aimless activity be regarded as acceptable behaviour within a child-centred framework. In attempting to provide a

constructive framework for thinking about experience as education, Dewey identifies growth as essential to educative learning. I believe it is unfortunate that many of Dewey's contemporaries, as well as educators today, either ignore or misinterpret Dewey's position in this regard. As a result, Dewey is incorrectly linked to the notion that child-centred education means providing the child with an environment in which she/he is free to grow as she/he chooses without any guidance or direction from the teacher (Neatby, 1953). However, Dewey advises that "when and only when development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth" (p. 36) is there healthy growth.⁴

Dewey (1938) is careful to point out that all experiences are not to be valued equally:

Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. (p. 25)

The notion of healthy growth is helpful in that it acknowledges that the qualities of growth vary. It is important to recognize, as Dewey did, that "healthy growth" is a value-laden term. In a situation where a racist joke is told in the classroom for example, it might be considered unhealthy on the grounds that it is disrespectful of others. By contrast, however, this incident might be interpreted by the teacher as an opportunity to intervene and assist the student's

⁴ In chapter three of Experience and Education (pp. 33-50) Dewey proposes two criteria for evaluating experiences. He discusses the "principle of continuity" and "principle of interaction".

understanding of why such a "joke" is hurtful and inappropriate. Further, this intervention might create a situation in which the child experiences the process of changing one's mind in light of new information.

While telling racist jokes is never appropriate, the difficulty for the teacher lies in knowing when an event, if responded to in a particular manner, might move the child towards healthy growth. In post hoc analysis, the criteria for healthy growth might appear more obvious. However, when situations emerge in the classroom where teachers need to respond instantaneously, assessing "healthy growth" becomes complex. The teacher must react thoughtfully and sensitively.

The role of student interests is one of the areas in which there is some confusion. Many advocates of child-centred education regard the child's interests to be the impetus for learning. This position is argued in the philosophical works of Dewey (1902, 1938), Kilpatrick (1918, 1933) and Wilson (1971). Similar views are also expressed in the Hall-Dennis Report and in the recommendations of the Plowden committee. The focus on interests has repeatedly been criticized (Kroerner, 1963; O' Hara, 1929; and Woods & Barrow, 1975). Woods and Barrow (1975) suggest that starting with what already appeals to the child needs to be questioned. They point out that any agreement that education ought to consist simply of what children want to do, creates the danger of leaving critical learning opportunities out of the curriculum.

It is argued by some child-centred theorists that the child should be

provided with opportunities to pursue what is appealing and of interest, but that the child should be provided with stimuli from the environment which encourage the development of new interests (Dewey, 1938; Wilson, 1971). If curricula are based solely on pursuing what the child finds appealing, it could be argued there would be a lack of moral respect for the child as someone who needs to change and grow over time. The focus would be on self-determined learning rather than the teacher using her/his maturity to facilitate learning.

Wilson (1971) offers insight into the role of student interests. In Wilson's view, teaching should be aimed at helping children to structure experiences and activities in a manner which allows them to see the intrinsic value of learning. He (1988) acknowledges that the origin of interests is not the critical factor. For Wilson, something is intrinsically worthwhile if it "interests someone" as opposed to being in someone's interests. When based on interest, the learner is more likely to value the curriculum, resulting in a desire to learn. He argues that "what interests someone" rather than "what is in the interest of someone" should be used as a reference point in decisions about content and methods in the curriculum. However, in an apparent contradiction, he does point out that at certain times, it is the teacher's responsibility to intervene and "consider whether or not a particular interest is desirable on other grounds" (1971, p. 66). It is conceivable that on such occasions the teacher's actions may facilitate student interest but there will undoubtedly be situations in which interest will not be readily apparent. The obvious question this leads to is

whether or not there is a moral responsibility for the teacher to include content and process in the curriculum which is crucial but not deemed to be of interest to the students. Skelton (1989) raises this issue in reference to gender issues. In her study she found that, on their own, students did not see the relevance of gender issues, nor did they have any desire to explore them. In this case, without the teacher assuming the responsibility of raising the issues prior to student interest, the study of gender issues would not have become a part of the curriculum.

Basing the curriculum on students' interests is approached from a different perspective by Dewey. He (1938) suggests that many are confused about the freedom to be experienced in child-centred education. They mistakenly assume such a curriculum allows children the freedom to follow their own interests and move in any direction these interests may take them. It becomes apparent why Dewey was alarmed when building curriculum on the child's interests was interpreted to mean that students were left entirely free to follow their own desires. Dewey wants the teacher to play an essential role in the creation of a classroom environment, in which children can exercise freedom of intelligence. Further he suggests that the teacher has a responsibility to "select those things within the range of existing experience that have the promise and potentiality of presenting new problems which, by stimulating new ways of observation and judgement, will expand the area of further experience" (1938, p. 75). I support the interpretation that the teacher should play a role in

stimulating new interests which could include social issues. Further, the teacher has a responsibility to create a learning context in which the child is encouraged to examine issues in a critical manner.

(ii) Subject Matter

That the child is the focal point of the learning experience does not imply that subject-matter is excluded from conceptions of child-centred education. In this section I will examine the relationship of subject matter to learning and give specific attention to the link between content and criticism, and the notion of essential subject matter.

The place of subject matter in child-centred education is a source of much criticism (Barrow & Woods, 1989; Naumberg, 1928; Neatby, 1953). Statements such as "instead of the curriculum consisting of such things as English, Latin, and Math, which the teacher feels are important, it should be constructed with reference to the child" (Barrows & Woods 1989, p. 116), leave the impression that child-centred education could, and should, take place devoid of subject matter. While this interpretation of child-centred education has gained some popularity, neither philosophers such as Dewey, Kilpatrick and Wilson, nor the Plowden and Hall-Dennis reports advocate this position.

Learning has to be about something. It cannot take place without content/subject matter. Advocates of child-centred education suggest that we need to re-orient, rather than abandon, the place of subject matter. Covering specific subject matter should not drive the educational process. When the

desire to cover subject matter drives teaching, a danger arises that the focus will be restricted to "covering material". This raises questions regarding who decides what content should be covered and what "being covered" actually means. Dewey's conception of child-centred education guards against the creation of dualisms between the subject matter and the learner, and subject matter and criticism. He points out that we should, "abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience; cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits that define a single process" (Dewey, 1902, p. 11).

Like Dewey, members of the Hall-Dennis Commission opposed a fixed body of knowledge as the foundation of education. Here the emphasis is more on how to learn than on what is to be learned. According to the Hall-Dennis report, "the focus should be on the processes of learning rather than on the processes of teaching, and on the understanding of child development rather than on the mastery of subject content" (Living and Learning, p.130). The committee points out that, in their view, learning is not to be gauged in light of the gradual accumulation of knowledge in subject areas such as English, mathematics, science and social studies, but rather in the child developing strategies for thinking, and learning, which might be applied many contexts. Embedded in the Hall-Dennis report is the rationale that, since the future cannot

be predicted it is impossible to identify and integrate into the curriculum the body of content-knowledge students will need to know by the time they leave school. It is assumed that if students can learn how to learn, they will be well equipped with tools to help them participate in whatever type of world they encounter.

It is problematic to suggest that one could separate developing how to learn from subject matter. Dewey (1938) argues that content and criticism should be explored together.⁵ The position in the Hall-Dennis Report raises important questions for reflecting on teaching in general, and specifically on facilitating critical thinking. Can curricula, developed for the purposes of learning how to learn, exist outside of subject content? Obviously, students have to be learning how to think about something. The subject content and the method of learning are inseparable. Subject content will be learned as children develop strategies for engaging in the process of learning. Conceptions which emphasize process as distinct from content, create the impression that the two can be separated.

Facilitating the development of critical thinking can only occur within content or subject matter of some type. Rather than the teacher viewing the content as insignificant, I believe it is critical that the teacher thoughtfully considers the nature of the content and the stance towards subject matter. When subject matter is simply treated as fact, with little or no emphasis placed on examination, the purpose of the educational experience frequently becomes

⁵ Hare (1995) discusses Dewey's view of the relationship between content and criticism, p. 48.

the recapitulation of knowledge.

Embedded in the view of a subject-centred curriculum, is the idea that there is a critical body of content knowledge one must hold before one is ready to use that knowledge in personalized ways. Dewey, however, would argue that the content must be examined in a personalized, critical manner during the learning process (Hare, 1995). In child-centred approaches to curriculum (as well as all other frameworks) it is essential that the teacher demonstrate, and encourage the child to develop, a critical stance towards the subject matter. This orientation towards content is active in the sense that subject matter is being critically examined rather than passively accepted.

In Dewey's conception of a child-centred curriculum, the need for the teacher to intervene in the process of students' exploration of subject matter is not left to chance. He maintains that the teacher is responsible for ensuring that certain subject matter be integrated into the curriculum. He also suggests that the teacher's knowledge, gained from previous experiences, and, the already established "subject-knowledge", should be part of the students' educative experience. While he continually stresses the importance of the teacher building on their present experiences, he emphasizes that this is only the beginning: "The next step is the progressive development of what is already experienced into a fuller and richer and also more organized form, a form that gradually approximates that in which subject-matter is presented to the skilled, mature person" (Dewey, 1938, p. 73-74).

While the Hall-Dennis Report emphasizes that the process of "learning how" be given heightened attention, it does not totally disregard the place of specific subject-matter. In one case, cultural literacy is singled out. It is stated that "highly valued parts of our inheritance be polished and enlivened for inclusion as material likely to be encountered in appropriate opportunities for learning" (Living and Learning, p. 67).

In Dewey's, and Kilpatrick's vision of child-centred education, as well as the image present in the Hall-Dennis Report, the position is argued that education should be aimed at preparation for living in a democracy. Making a connection between education and democracy has implications for both subject content and the learning processes students will experience. I agree with the position that in cultivating the skills and willingness to participate in a democracy, it is critical that the child's view of the world is not an isolated or insular one but one connected to the social, ethical and political world of which is a part. If connections can be made, I believe children will be in a better position to understand the social world which surrounds them. Critical examination of this world will make them more conscious of their social responsibilities. Further it is significant for the child to understand what it means to be a participant in a democratic society.

Like Dewey, it is my position that the teacher plays a crucial role in facilitating growth. Part of this responsibility entails directing children's attention towards curriculum content that will help them build an understanding of the

movement and direction of social forces. As Dewey points out "it might be worthwhile to sacrifice a little of the purity of pure knowledge, to contaminate it here and there with relation to action, if we could save our country from a reaction against politics and politicians who can talk and argue, but who do not know how to act competently with reference to the social problems that have to be dealt with" (Dewey, 1958, p. 55).

The Role of the Teacher

The teacher's role in child-centred education is often interpreted to be one where the teacher stands back and lets learning unfold. Numerous attempts to implement child-centred education have been criticized because the role of the teacher has been interpreted as an instructor who remains on the periphery of students' learning. It is important to recognize that while this interpretation exists in both child-centred theory and practice, this image of the teacher does not underlie many of the child-centred conceptions.

The teacher's role cannot be explained in terms of a checklist of behaviours. The difficulty created in trying to understand the teacher's role in child-centred education is that many are searching for an answer to the question "how do you do child-centred teaching" in a technical sense. Instead, an understanding of the teacher's role has to be developed. Critical examination of the values which underpin the place of the teacher in the curriculum is an significant part of this process.

To illuminate the role the teacher should play in child-centred education,

it is necessary to outline characteristics and values that are particularly significant for facilitating critical thinking about social issues. These include the responsibility of the teacher to teach, the process of guiding learning, a focus on critical examination in the curriculum, and the teacher's part in preparing students for life in a democracy. These values and characteristics are not necessarily inherent in child-centred education, but they are present in many of the conceptualizations of the teacher's role.

(i) Assuming Responsibility

It is a mistake to assume that when the child is pivotal in the curriculum, the teacher's role is of less significance than in other conceptions. While the characteristics and values of teachers who adopt a child-centred perspective will, in many regards, differ from teachers working from perspectives that are more subject- or teacher-centred, the teacher's implicit and explicit behaviours will be every bit as influential in the child's learning. Whether it be in the selection of books, a particular line of questioning, information provided, or standing back and not interfering with the classroom activities, the teacher influences the classroom context for learning.

Dewey justifies the teacher's responsibility to influence learning. His rationale is found in both his image of the child, and in his beliefs regarding the value and purpose of education. Further, he maintains that the child should simply be thought of as an individual with a lesser degree of maturity than the teacher. Dewey (1938) states that "the mature person, to put it in moral terms,

has no right to withhold from the young on given occasions whatever capacity for sympathetic understanding his own experience has given him" (p. 38). I agree with Dewey and believe his rationale is significant for it suggests that teachers have a moral responsibility to use their existing knowledge in their interactions with the child to guide learning. Further, it implies that teachers cannot adopt a laissez-faire position without being in violation of this responsibility. An important issue teachers need to address when developing their approach to teaching is what values should underpin how they use their knowledge and understandings to facilitate learning.

Teacher responsibilities in child-centred education are described in different ways. The Hall-Dennis Commissioners advise, that "[a] child-centred emphasis heralds a demand for imaginative, resourceful and qualified teachers to create a curriculum of learning experiences on the spot" (p. 60). Featherstone (1968), similarly suggests that the role of teachers as conceptualized in Plowden, is catalytic in the sense that they help to bring about learning. The teacher (in the Plowden Report) is conceptualized as a guide to learning; someone who thoughtfully lays out the environment to permit choices, to walk about, to give advice, to listen and to set the pace of learning. These descriptions provide direction for the teacher's role. The difficulty with this type of description, as Featherstone (1968) points out, is the tendency to examine only the surface level of the descriptions without trying to understand the spirit behind the enterprise. However, to add to Featherstone's position, I believe

that teachers have to assume responsibility for developing their own spirit.

(ii) Guiding Learning

According to Rugg and Shumaker (1928), the success of child-centred education depends on the teacher. They view the teacher as having a responsibility to guide learning:

The new teacher sums up in herself the experience, the guidance, the materials, the environment - the very essence of the new school; she is the converging point for all the activities of her group...she determines the atmosphere of her school and the development of pupils consigned to her care. (Rugg & Shumaker, 1928, p. 321)

Maxine Greene (1989), in her discussion of "The Teacher in John Dewey's Work", points out that in Dewey's conception, the teacher has the power and the obligation to regulate certain objective conditions in order that worthwhile experiences are created. Specifically, Dewey (1938) thinks that the teacher needs to monitor learning: "He must, if he is an educator, be able to judge what attitudes are actually conducive to continued growth and what are detrimental" (p. 39). Further, Dewey states that, "he must survey the capacities and needs of the particular set of individuals with whom he is dealing" (p. 58).

Dewey's points noted above are significant because they suggest that the decisions teachers make about the type of classroom climate they wish to establish, influence learning in the classroom. If, for example, critical thinking is to be valued and important in the curriculum, then it would be essential that the classroom be one in which critical examination is woven into the fabric of the

class. The climate in the classroom, established largely by the teacher, will either support or discourage the examination of an array of issues ranging from why we have class rules, to the nature of the tile pattern on the floor, to why one school in the district has one computer for every ten children and another has one for every hundred.

Wilson's (1971) work on "interests" raises some valuable points regarding guiding children towards learning. According to Wilson (1971), educative teaching is whatever intentionally serves to help "children to structure their experiences and activities in ways which enable them to see more of its intrinsic point and value" (p. 68). Given this emphasis on the need for education to be of intrinsic value, it is not surprising that Wilson wants the teacher to structure experiences in order that the child's interest will be ignited.

Wilson's position on the teacher's role in structuring experiences is somewhat inconsistent with his position that education is to be driven by intrinsic value. He argues that basing the curriculum on interests should not be interpreted as necessarily congruent with what is in the child's best interests. Further, he argues that education should not be based on what are viewed as the needs of the student, for needs presuppose an end goal. The difficulty Wilson has with needs, be they individual or societal, is their reliance on the preconceived idea of an end state. However, should not Wilson's concern with the link between needs and end goal also apply to his conceptualization of the teacher's role in intentionally helping children structure their experiences? If

part of the teacher's role is, as I believe it should be, to help children find intrinsic value, this requires that teachers make decisions as they structure the environment. Making decisions requires that judgements are to be made about the direction of teaching, judgements which are ultimately influenced by a view of the end goal. If, for example, the teacher is to be effective in facilitating critical thinking, then the teacher must view critical thinking as valuable, and as such, direct the students towards such an end. Similarly, without the teacher viewing social issues as significant, they will not be a valued part of the curriculum.

(iii) Critical Examination

In child-centred education, as with all approaches to curriculum, I believe it is important that the teacher consciously considers the dispositions and skills towards learning she/he is trying to develop. An inaccurate assumption that is often made is that child-centred education automatically incorporates critical thinking. Critical examination does not just happen in a child-centred curriculum; it needs to be valued and developed through classroom experiences.

While there is transmission of knowledge and values in child-centred education (Portelli, 1996) it is the disposition to call ideas into question, and the skills to critically analyse the information that affects how children interpret what is transmitted, and the knowledge constructed. If the transmission occurs in a context in which ideas are treated as fact and non-problematic, the outcome will differ from a context in which critical examination is applied to all information.

The teacher unquestionably influences both the content examined and the manner in which examination occurs. Conversations and class events aimed at critical inquiry, as well as a curricular context which invites examination, has an impact on the learning. Rugg and Shumaker (1928) point out the importance of examination:

There is insufficient critical discussion. There is great need for hard intellectual study. Theories and practices must be called in question to compel clear thinking, if for no other reason. (p. 315)

Dewey argues the need for teachers to encourage children to adopt a reflective approach to their participation in experiences. According to Dewey (1938):

The teacher's business is to see that the occasion is taken advantage of. Since freedom resides in the operations of intelligent observation and judgment by which a purpose is developed, guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupils' intelligence is an aid to freedom, not a restriction upon it. (p. 71)

In all forms of teaching, the teacher is in a situation where it is impossible not to transmit values and information to the children. I believe it is essential for teachers to continually engage in conscious critical reflection on the nature of what is implicitly and explicitly transmitted in their classrooms. When facilitating or guiding, teachers are influencing the context in which they teach, and students learn (Portelli, 1996). One of the possible problems created when teachers do not engage in critical reflection, is that they may be unaware of the ways in which they are influencing and possibly controlling learning. A process

of critical reflection could be aimed at uncovering Kilpatrick's (1951) notion of a "map of values":

The teacher must have as an essential part of his professional equipment what is called a 'map of values'. Such a map consists of his hopes, aims, ideals - all the criticized values which he will use as aims in guiding those under his care. Everyone has in fact, such a "map," for the most part not consciously organized, but still there to call on as needed. (Kilpatrick, 1951, p. 304)

While critical reflection does not guarantee that one will be aware of all that is transmitted, it does place one in a better situation to self-monitor.

(iv) Preparing Students to Participate in a Democracy

Embedded within some conceptions of child-centred education, is the view that education should help prepare students to participate in a democracy. Some, such as Dewey (1938, 1916), Kilpatrick (1933) and the authors of the Hall-Dennis Report, hold the position that we must educate children in a context where they experience democracy. Dewey (1938), suggests that within education, it is essential that conditions are arranged in a way that is "conducive to community activity" and "that all are engaged in communal projects" (p. 58). It is within this climate, with a diversity of perspectives and needs, that the child has an opportunity to develop a socially cooperative conscience. This, in essence, is the spirit that binds rather than separates the democratic community.

In the case of Dewey, I believe the emphasis on preparation for living in a democracy is influenced as much by his view that the child is to be valued as a

person in his/her own right, as his position that schools play a role in preparing children to live in a democracy. According to Dewey (1954), "the school in a democracy is contributing, if it is true to itself as an educational agency, to the democratic idea of making knowledge and understanding, in short the power of action, a part of the intrinsic intelligence and character of the individual" (p. 37). Dewey makes an important link between preparing to live in a democracy, and the kind of skills and dispositions towards learning he thinks need to be developed for democratic life. He suggests that the student needs to develop a critical stance towards thinking and problem solving. This would involve articulating purposes, carrying out plans and evaluating results.

Like Dewey, Kilpatrick (1933) links his theories regarding education to the broader political context. In his criticism of the "traditional school" he suggests that, in general, the educational process of the past was largely anti-democratic. He believes that what students practise in schools is invariably linked to the type of citizens they will become and, therefore, if we are preparing students to live in a democracy, the students should have an opportunity to be involved as democratic participants in the life of their school. "Modern educational theory tells us that we do not learn what we do not practice.....Clearly if the world is to be democratic, our people must learn it somewhere, somehow" (Kilpatrick, 1933, p. 75). Foundational to Kilpatrick's theory is a trust in the child to develop, to ask questions, and to desire learning. He maintains that all students should experiment and develop a personal curriculum. However, he explicitly states in

his writings, that the teacher needs to play a significant role. "Must we keep our hands off and withdraw entirely? By no means. We must help them grow" (1933, p. 129).

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on creating an understanding of some of the central, recurring themes in child-centred philosophy of education. In particular I have examined issues relating to values, rights, and responsibilities as conceptualized within major philosophical works; in addition, attention has been given to major reports such as Children and their Primary Schools (referred to as the Plowden Report) and Living and Learning (referred to as the Hall-Dennis Report) both of which publicly endorse child-centred education.

Some may argue that analysing these earlier works has little to do with current child-centred approaches such as whole language. However, it is my belief that such an examination creates a new vantage point for examining, and understanding, the nature of child-centred, whole language curricula. Whole language is repeatedly described as child-centred and, as a result, assumptions are made about teaching and learning without a careful examination of key concepts, inferences made, and underlying values. Consequently, the benefits of learning from the past have been often overlooked and misunderstandings about "child-centred education" have frequently guided practice.

The discussion of child-centred education in this chapter was conducted under the sub-headings "The Child", "Subject Matter" and "The Role of the

Teacher". I provided an overview of each conception and illuminated important points related to an understanding of the teacher's role. The following summary highlights significant points developed in this chapter.

I concur with those who have identified that children need to be treated as individuals with unique interests and histories. Further, I think it is essential that children be regarded as persons in their own right, and individuals who have control in their learning. This view stresses the importance of teachers relating to each child individually. It also requires that teachers focus on both who the child is, and also who the child will become. This conception of the child encourages teachers to be conscious of how the institutional power they possess impacts on children. However, as argued in the chapter, I believe it is critical that teachers balance this view while also attending to children as social beings. Without a focus on how one child relates to others, without direction being given to children's social development, there is danger that children's perspectives will become insular. To care about the welfare of others and to think about the impact of issues on others is essential to the process of critically thinking about social issues. When the conception of child-centred education embraces an emphasis on both the community and the individual, children will be in a position where they have rights and responsibilities in the community as well as from a personal perspective. In this context, a consciousness of social issues could be heightened based on participation in the classroom community and the issues which exist there.

Throughout this discussion I have highlighted the manner in which teachers' beliefs regarding learning and teaching impact on their role. I raised questions about the view of learning as growing, suggesting that teachers need to be careful not to overlook the fact that the growing is not pre-determined but rather is shaped by many influences, one of which is the teacher. I addressed the point that in directing students towards certain interests, in making judgements about students' needs, teachers are influencing learning. The significance of this point is that in some cases teachers are not aware of the manner in which they influence learning through decisions made and values which underpin the teacher's approach.

In the chapter I expressed my concern that advocates of child-centred education take a position that children should have the right to determine their learning. If children are left on their own to learn, I believe obvious problems are created. First, there is a concern about the direction of learning. If left on their own who, or what shall keep the learning moving in a positive, healthy direction rather than allowing it to drift off into aimless activity? I believe a second, less obvious problem is created when the stance adopted by the teacher is one of standing back from any attempt to direct the learning. Given that teachers' beliefs and values, directly and indirectly, influence the learning context, the questions to be asked, are "How does standing back influence learning?" and "How does such a stance relate to the teaching of social issues?"

A further issue raised in the chapter was the relationship between subject-

matter and learning. Again, I expressed concern that content must be carefully reflected upon by teachers and my belief that teachers have a responsibility to monitor and direct students towards material that will facilitate their learning.

Clearly, in the conception of child-centred education proposed by Dewey, Kilpatrick, Rugg and Shumaker, children are not to be set adrift and left to determine their learning on their own. In all of these earlier works, the teacher is conceptualized as someone who directs and facilitates learning. Further, Dewey believes it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that a particular type of educative experience occur. Within these early conceptions, the teacher has a crucial role beyond simply placing materials and resources before the students. I concur with the view in these earlier works that teachers, because they have assumed the role of educating children, have a moral responsibility to assume control and be knowledgeable about the manner in which they influence learning, for they have assumed the role of educating children. Further, I believe that for teachers to act in a responsible manner the direction of their work must be based on sound philosophical foundations.

In the next chapter I will discuss the nature of whole language and the implications for the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues.

Chapter Three

WHOLE LANGUAGE: BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Within the field of language arts, “whole language” is a curricular framework which has had a significant impact during the last decade and a half. As mentioned earlier, whole language theorists have aligned whole language with a child-centred curriculum (Goodman, 1989; Newman, 1985; Weaver, 1990). Understanding the nature of whole language is a complex matter, for this curricular framework, like many others, has undergone changes in emphasis during the years of its development. For example, early in the history of whole language, a primary concern was understanding how children learn to read. As time passed, the process of meaning construction became a topic of concern, and more recently, there has been interest in comprehending the place of phonetics in whole language. Another fairly recent shift in focus relates specifically to the critical examination of social issues (Church, 1996; Harman & Edelsky, 1989; Shannon, 1990, 1992). As students use literacy to examine their beliefs, to write about their passions and their struggles, whole language has, at times, developed a political edge. Further, some teachers have attempted to make social issues an important part of the curriculum (Church, 1996).

The previous chapter focussed on conceptions of child-centred education prior to the rise in prominence of whole language. It broadly contextualized the

question of the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues within a child-centred perspective. The analysis in this chapter is focussed on the theory and practice of whole language to gain insight into the issue of the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a child-centred context. In this chapter I will analyse beliefs and assumptions central to whole language. My goal is to clarify the nature of whole language in order to shed light on some of the factors which impact on the role of the teacher in general, and the facilitation of critical thinking in particular. First, I will focus on the nature of the whole language curriculum, and second, on the role of the teacher in whole language. In the discussion on the nature of the curricular framework I will examine the importance placed on the child, the conception of literacy learning, the role of social interaction, and specifically, on critical thinking about social and political issues. In the discussion on the teacher's role, I will examine three aspects namely: the importance placed on reflection, the organizational responsibilities, and the nature of the teaching.

The Nature of Whole Language

(i) Focus on the Child

Like earlier conceptions of child-centred education, each child with his/her unique history and background of experiences, individual interests and needs, is placed at the centre of a whole language curriculum (Goodman, 1986; Weaver, 1990). I will address implications of this focus on the child as it relates to the area of students' interests, meaning construction and control in the curriculum.

In the classroom the child's interests, and what the teacher perceives to be the child's needs, are made essential parts of the curriculum. Moreover, the assumption is made that if the teacher and/or materials control the curriculum, the likelihood of connection between the curriculum and the child's interests and needs is significantly reduced (Harste, 1989). It is assumed that when the curriculum is based upon the child's interests, the stance of the child towards the new information will be one of interest.

The rationale for basing the curriculum on the child's interests is grounded in a concern that there be intrinsic value in education. If students are learning about something in which they are interested, they will, at some level, enjoy learning and be motivated to learn. While few would argue against the value of students being interested in their learning, it is critical to recognize the difference between being interested in learning and having one's self-determined interests driving the learning. It is my opinion that in the theory and practice of whole language the implications of this distinction have not been particularly clear.

The teacher's role in responding to the child's interests is conceptualized as encouraging children to identify and pursue learning which they find appealing. This, in turn, is believed to lead to the development of new interests. How new interests are developed requires attention. What should guide teachers as they encourage students to pursue their interests, and to develop new interests is unclear. For example, how is the teacher to deal with a situation

in which a child is interested in, and self-selects, reading material which focuses on war and violence? Should the teacher encourage the child to continue to read books of this nature? Or, is the teacher to encourage the child to re-focus on a related theme such as "peace"? At some level teachers' interactions with students, whether aimed directly or indirectly at stimulating interest, are driven by a view of what is in the students' best interests, and therefore what the teacher has deemed to be "needs". I believe it is crucial for teachers to think about the interests of the child in concert with global values about the purpose of education in establishing goals and direction in the curriculum.

The focus on the child's unique history and characteristics in whole language is, in part, rooted in a constructivist model of meaning acquisition. In a whole language framework the child is conceptualized as a builder (Pearson, 1993) - an active constructor of meaning. The child is thought to use clues from the context to construct meaning. The learner is viewed as someone who processes information by filtering it through an existing reservoir of personal knowledge and who, therefore, is continuously revising meaning (Pearson, 1993). Construction of knowledge is generally viewed as transformative in that learning is the active construction of "new" meaning for the learner, rather than the reconstruction of a body of fixed knowledge (Poplin, 1988).

This focus on "new" meaning within whole language, creates a situation in which reading is no longer regarded as an act during which the reader reconstructs the author's meaning in the text. Instead, reading is described as

the construction of meaning in which the reader re-writes the text in a personal way (Harste, 1989, 1990). In essence, this interpretation establishes the right of the reader to construct a personal meaning to the extent that this is possible.

While this shift in focus is helpful in that the reader is encouraged to assume rights in meaning construction, it is my position that extremist interpretations of this view, are dangerous. In some cases students who are encouraged to build their own meanings, do so with little regard for the rights of the author and the rights of others in the class.

Consider, for example the case of a racist or sexist interpretation which is not critically assessed, or a situation in which the meaning constructed is not connected to the text. The attitude in the classroom is sometimes, "If this is what you think the text means, then that interpretation is right for you." Embedded in this perspective is a relativist stand that there is no one right interpretation of text and that all interpretations are equally valuable and valid. The implications of this are problematic. In such a situation the meaning construction can be insular in that the reader is not required to engage in an intellectual, dialogical exchange with the author. Moreover, readers are not required to think about their interpretations beyond personal perspectives.

A further rationale for building the curriculum on the child's interests is developed from the belief that this will encourage children to take control of and gain ownership over their learning. Within a whole language framework one of the aims is to develop lifelong learners (Whitt, 1994). It is contended that when

students assume a position of control over their learning, they will be empowered. Further, it is believed that this will result in the learner seeking direction internally, rather than constantly seeking external direction from teachers and/or classmates.

In my view, the relationship between student control and teacher control is often unclear in whole language. Many times control is treated as an either/or situation. If the student is to have control, then some assume the teacher will not, or further yet, cannot have it. Unfortunately, many who have written about student control within whole language did not heed Dewey's advice to avoid creating a dualism between teacher control and student control. For example, Goodman (1986) states that teachers should "guide, support, monitor, encourage and facilitate learning, but not control it" (p. 29). This creates confusion by suggesting that such roles as guiding and facilitating can occur only in a manner which does not involve control, and that to associate the teacher's role with control is problematic. Further confusion is created because discussions regarding student control are largely presented in contexts which contrast whole language approaches with either teacher or subject centred approaches to curricula. Teacher control is not addressed within the context of student control. Unsure of the nature of teacher control in an environment where there is student control, many teachers back away.

Lindsay (1990) conducted an observational study - in whole language based classrooms - which illustrates the problem created when giving student

control is interpreted to mean that the teacher stands back. She notes that when given the option of either generating a story or copying the one generated by the teacher and the class, the at-risk students invariably copied. In addition, Lindsay describes the behaviours of children during silent reading time. Two of the three targeted low-achieving students consistently picked books which were too difficult for them and, not unexpectedly, they had little success reading them. Thus, she concludes, they spent a good deal of time each day performing a task with little meaning and little potential for cognitive development.

The issue of teacher control (as demonstrated above) raises important questions about the ethical responsibilities of those who guide children's learning. At what point is the teacher, as a knowledgeable professional, to intervene and direct the child towards what might be more fruitful activities? The lack of discussion regarding the place of teacher control has left unclear the manner whereby teachers indirectly, and directly, exercise control in the curriculum. It is inescapable that teachers have control in the curriculum. Teachers who withdraw from control still influence the learning environment. Consequently, an issue which needs to be addressed is how teachers can exercise some control, while at the same time allowing and encouraging student control.

(ii) Literacy Learning

An assumption basic to whole language curricula is that literacy learning is part of language learning. As children become effective readers and writers,

they learn an endless number of things regarding how written language works. These understandings are as diverse as how to predict patterns of rhyme in stories, how authors use quotation marks to signal conversations in texts, how the writer's voice affects meaning, and how the power of the written word can be enhanced. In this section I will address the view that literacy is a "natural process" as well as the relationship of content to literacy learning.

Learning to read and write both involve learning language. The view is held in whole language that children become competent readers and writers in a "natural" manner similar to the way they learn to talk (Doake, 1988; Edelsky, 1990; Holdaway, 1979; Weaver, 1992). The position is advanced that when children learn to talk, they are not expected to produce accurate vocalizations which demonstrate command over the language. Advocates of whole language suggest that the same type of risk-taking and experimentation, fundamental to learning oral language, are critical to literacy learning (Lindquist, 1990). Further, like oral language development, there is no predetermined clock which establishes when and how children learn to read and write (Toomes, 1990).

The whole language curriculum is often characterized as open-ended (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1991). Considerable time in the curriculum is allocated for children to experiment with language and literacy. The idea of the "open curriculum" is a context in which children from a wide range of developmental levels can participate in the same type of learning events. For example, during writing- process time or literature-reading time, all students

could participate in the same type of activity although the levels at which they might be working would vary. One student might be composing a descriptive character sketch which involves using rich vocabulary and invented spelling to communicate. Another student, with difficulty generating a connected piece of discourse, might construct a meaningful message with a sequence of pictures.

Openness in regards to time is essential because it allows teachers to create a flexible learning environment. Additionally, the treatment of time as open and fluid, rather than fixed and rigid, creates a context in which the curriculum can move in a variety of directions. Further, it allows for greater in-depth examination of a topic or issue. It is important to note that how a teacher allows and encourages time to be used influences the learning which occurs.

The view of depicting literacy development as occurring naturally and the emphasis given to self-development and self-regulation can be problematic. Embedded in this belief is the view that, while variations exist in the timing of development, all children will eventually develop their literacy given an "immersion" environment. While depicting the necessary environment for learning as one of immersion, the possibility exists that the teacher's role will not be viewed as critical to learning, thus creating a rationale for viewing the teacher as simply provider of materials which students will use to independently self-develop. It is significant, although not always emphasized, that adults and others who surround children as they learn oral language play a significant role in their learning. By the same token, the same holds for literacy learning. A

further problem is created when embedded in the view of “natural language development” is a particular conception of “natural” constructed by educators, psychologists and linguists, a conception which is often never explained or justified.

Creating connections within literacy processes, and between literacy learning and content, are foremost issues in whole language. Reading, writing, speaking and thinking are viewed as interdependent processes within a whole language framework (Goodman, 1986; Weaver, 1988). Rather than presenting a curriculum which deals with each of these processes individually, in a whole language approach a context is developed wherein the growth of one function is thought to support growth in the others (Pearson, 1990).

The focus on interdependence and commonalities encourages the content of topics within the whole language curriculum to be approached in a connected manner (Portelli & Church, 1994). What students read frequently becomes a catalyst for topics about which they might wish to write or discuss. Interdependency surfaces in the curriculum through use of such frameworks as thematic studies (Goodman, 1986) and theme cycles. Reading, writing, science, social studies and math are linked to a common theme which is studied over a period of time. Themes can deal with topics as concrete as spiders or as abstract as human relationships. The key is for the interrelationships and the conceptual information to be explored and defined through extending, refining and restructuring knowledge while also appealing to student interests. As

Gamberg, Kwak, Hutchings, and Altheim (1988) suggest, children become immersed in the theme, explore its many facets, experience a wide variety of literature, and become “experts” in areas of personal interest. Links are established inherently within the curriculum thus facilitating the process of integrating the new with the known.

One of the positive outcomes of a united focus on both content and literacy is the growing realization that reading and writing have to be about something. The emphasis in whole language has been that to make literacy authentic, it must occur in the context of meaningful content significant to the learner. It is important for the teacher to reflect on the quality of the content, how the students relate to the content, what the content attends to, and what is not addressed. This has particular implications for facilitating critical thinking about social issues. In order for such examination to occur, content, rich in social concerns, needs to be part of the curriculum. Unfortunately, in some cases while content, rich with social issues may already be available in the curriculum, it may go virtually unnoticed by the students and teachers.

(iii) Social Interaction

Whole language curricula are based, among other things, on an assumption that social interaction is integral to learning language (Deford & Harste, 1982; Edelsky, 1990; Halliday, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1981). The role of language in enhancing thought, the role of collaboration, and the link between skills and social function, are addressed in this section.

The focus on communication and social interaction has the potential for teachers to create a context in which dialogue is a major component. While there can be critical thinking without dialogue, a context rich in dialogue provides an opportunity for children to hear a variety of viewpoints, and to consider those viewpoints in relation to their own. In many of the writing events, children are encouraged to express their opinions and to think about issues contained in the books they read. Engaging in social communication requires that students are willing and able to express their ideas, and willing to listen to those of others. Members of a classroom community define themselves while interacting with others (Noden & Vacca, 1994). Students are encouraged to identify their own thoughts and the ideas of others to assess what they think about both.

Initially, students in whole language classrooms were portrayed as constructing images of themselves as competent and confident language users who experienced empowerment from their experiences of control in the learning process. However, more recent critics (Delpit, 1988) point out that not all students construct images of themselves in such a positive light. Several researchers who address the issue of constructing gender show that problems regarding stereotypes and bias can be created, in part, through the literature children read, the responses students receive to their writing (Fox, 1993; Jett-Simpson, 1993; Kamler, 1993; Temple, 1993) and the world in which they live.

A further problem is that students coming from non-mainstream cultures often define themselves in relation to the language differences they experience.

Delpit (1988) notes how each culture has many implicit rules, and that the rules of the culture of power need to be shared with minority students in order to facilitate social interaction. Unfortunately, "[i]n some instances adherents of process approaches to writing create situations in which students ultimately find themselves held accountable for knowing a set of rules about which no one has ever directly informed them" (p.287). In some social contexts it is assumed that students are able to use linguistic information to make inferences about requests, or to decipher the subtle meanings of language (Delpit, 1991). When this process is difficult, the image constructed of oneself might include self-doubt regarding personal ability and competence. Teachers in any classroom need to be aware of, and respond to, the differing linguistic backgrounds in such a way that students are not placed in a position where they construct images of themselves as less able.

The issue of students defining themselves in a whole language curriculum is interesting because in many ways it is not obvious which events would influence self-images. Is there a curriculum context in which children, and for that matter teachers, would not be defining themselves as they engage in activities? Undoubtedly all of the events in our lives help shape who we are. I believe the significant point raised in the whole language framework is that the curriculum is aimed at helping students to be conscious of how they are defining themselves. Through such activities as storytelling, narrative writing, and classroom conversations commonly found in a whole language curricular

context, students articulate their reflections and opinions of events and issues. This type of reflection is generally referred to as critical reflection.

The spirit that is meant to capture much of the social interaction in a whole language context is frequently characterized as collaborative. Classroom peers are seen as mentors, sounding boards, and sources of knowledge, rather than as competitors. Harste and Short (1988) designed a curricular model for whole language which they label the "authoring cycle." The "authoring cycle" framework suggests that literacy learning in the classroom requires students to interact, respond, reflect, discuss and evaluate. Like the conceptualization of the "writing process approach" advocated by Graves (1983), and the "theme cycle approach" described by Altwerger and Flores (1991), students engage in whole classroom activities, work in pairs, small groups, or individually with the teacher. In these situations the students not only listen to each others' ideas but, ideally, they work together to solve problems, build interpretations of texts, and create new meanings.

One obvious benefit of collaboration is that students do work together and, as such, have an opportunity to exchange ideas and to work through problems and activities together. Consequently, the classroom context where collaboration is valued, creates a possibility that students will be critically assessing their ideas relative to those of others while working within a dialogical process. However, it is essential to remember that a focus upon collaboration does not mean that critical inquiry will necessarily result. Many ideas which do

not reflect critical assessment, develop from collaborative efforts. One has only to reflect on the recent mass suicide in San Diego to recognize a group collaboration that did not arrive at conclusions and positions which would indicate critical analysis.

For the child, the concentration on social interaction provides a framework where learning about language is linked to function. Although the connection to function is considered essential to all aspects of literacy learning, an example drawn from teachers' efforts to teach parts of language can illustrate this point. When the use of quotation marks is placed within this act of communication, a potentially meaningful context is provided for the learner to understand why this punctuation is important to communication. What typically becomes problematic for learners is when they are learning the "how-to" of a skill in a mechanistic manner. If the how-to is explored within the context of why it is necessary to the communication process, then it is possible that links can be established which encourage the learner to transfer the learning to other situations.

The focus on function in whole language has, an important potential for teachers, since using function to assist the teaching of skills may be very useful when facilitating critical thinking. Rather than teaching skills in an isolated and disconnected manner, these skills could be approached in a way which assists the students in understanding why these skills are necessary in dealing with the understanding and communication of information. Like teaching punctuation, thinking skills can be practiced in isolation and many students will make the

connection to purpose by themselves. However, when the purpose for using the skill is made explicit in one context the child has a much better likelihood of applying the skill within a new context.

(iv) Critical Thinking: Social and Political Issues

In the last decade there has been a growing interest in conceptualizing whole language within a social and political framework. However, the connections between social/political learning and the child are not evident in all, or even the majority, of whole language based curricula. In this section I will highlight the influence of critical theory and philosophical inquiry on the manner in which critical thinking about social issues is presented in the curriculum.

Harman and Edelsky (1989) suggest whole language has, as a central pillar within its philosophy, a commitment to a democratic, critical, and analytical methodology. However, the political and critical underpinnings of whole language are not always present in either theoretical discussions or in practice. If a commitment to democratic values is a central pillar in whole language, then the question has to be asked, "How does this pillar become part of the foundation of whole language?"

Church (1996) thinks that it is through becoming more critical that whole language will reach its potential. She additionally points out that teachers play a significant role in establishing a critical stance within the curriculum. In her view, "To take a critical approach to teaching means to make issues of power and privilege central. It means the teacher involves learners in working towards

social justice and equity within the classroom, and thus puts the problems of living together in a democracy at the centre of the curriculum rather than at the periphery" (Church, 1996, p. 9).

There appear to be several undercurrents with respect to how both critical and political thinking are conceptualized within the whole language curriculum. In many instances those who advocate integrating critical thinking within that curriculum, do so from the perspective of combining political activism with the broader considerations of critical theory. These educators hold, as central to their beliefs, the view that schools do not distribute benefits equally to students. When this is embedded within the context of literacy learning, it is referred to as critical literacy. This approach claims to offer "teachers and students a dialectic of critique and hope with which to struggle toward personal and social transformation" (Shannon 1990, p. 161). Harman and Edelsky (1989) stress the powerful potential that whole language can have for students, especially those from non-mainstream backgrounds, who are learning to think critically about the social issues which surround them.

While recognizing the need for attention to social issues is an essential first step, there are still many unanswered questions: "How do social issues become a part of the content examined in the class?" "How is the teacher to encourage a critical examination?" and "What does a critical examination actually entail?" These are questions I will discuss in the following chapters.

Some of these issues are examined by Portelli and Church (1994). For

example, in their dialogue, Portelli and Church describe the positive impact which the study of philosophy can have for children. They point out that “Philosophy is seen primarily as an activity which involves the critical inquiry and discussion of concepts, beliefs, assumptions and practices” (p. 3). Portelli and Church comment that the classroom must provide the support and testing ground needed for critical thinking to occur. Such a classroom community is characterized by, among other dispositions, open-mindedness, a willingness to express ideas and provide support for claims; and a willingness to look at assumptions and change one’s mind if evidence shows otherwise (Portelli & Church, 1994). Portelli suggests that such critical inquiry is necessary for preparing people to live in a democracy, and that it is the teacher’s role to ask questions and guide the discussion. The direction of the inquiry which emerges from the questions and the discussion, requires the teacher’s input to help to shape the discussion.

When focussing on critical thinking about social issues, teachers must play an active role in the inquiry. In the following section I examine the teacher as conceptualized in a whole language framework.

The Teacher in Whole Language

The teacher in a whole language context is part of the curriculum. Teachers play a crucial role in establishing the nature of the curriculum and in influencing how the curriculum is developed in the classroom. In this section I highlight three characteristics of the teacher in whole language. I discuss the

importance placed on teacher reflection, teacher's organizational responsibilities, and the nature of teaching.

(i) Reflection

Engaging in critical reflection is one of the roles proposed for the teacher in a whole language context (Newman, 1992). The goal, to put it in Newman's terms, is to "get inside their teaching." The teacher is to think about what is happening in the classroom, and, more particularly about what may have contributed to an unexpected outcome. The role of teacher as one who engages in critical reflection is essential for all approaches to teaching for, if not conceptualized, any approach can be blindly applied. However, a potential problem lies in the teacher ensuring that she/he engages in critical reflection on teaching, not just reflection. While there is a fair bit of discussion about the need to "reflect on action" and "reflect in action" (Schon, 1987) there is little attempt to define what the "critical" aspect of this process actually entails. It is essential that the role of reflection is tied to a clear and just conception of what is meant by being critical.

(ii) Organization

Organizing the curriculum is part of the teaching enterprise. The manner in which the classroom is arranged, the reading choices available, the structure to the day, all influence the classroom environment and ultimately the learning. In whole language there are a number of responsibilities which the teacher must assume regarding organization. First, the environment is to be rich with

literature (Holdaway, 1979; Weaver, 1992). The range of reading materials available obviously influences what is read, thought about, and discussed. Second, the manner in which events are organized within the class impacts on the learning. If, for example, there is a great deal of discussion about the student's writing as Calkins (1986) and Graves (1983) suggests there needs to be, then students will approach their writing while thinking about the responses they receive from their peers. Third, there are decisions regarding the use of time. If long blocks of time can be scheduled, the impact on learning will be different than if students know they have only twenty minutes to devote to a task. On the surface, decisions about these issues may not seem too significant. However, in a subtle and often indirect manner these decisions can communicate powerful messages regarding what learning involves and what is valued.

(iii) The Nature of Teaching

Smith (1981) suggests that teachers often teach things they do not intend. In essence, the teacher, through the way she/he engages in teaching, demonstrates many things to students. Implicit in the classroom context are many factors which affect learning. If teachers are interested in facilitating critical thinking, then critical examination should be built into the classroom fabric. Students must have opportunities to see the teacher engaging in critical thinking about issues ranging from "why we study spelling in school," to the requirements for assignments. Through this approach critical examination may

then become a way of teaching and learning.

The nature of teaching in whole language is often a source of confusion. In many depictions, the teacher is described as a facilitator, giving the impression facilitating is distinct from teaching. One commonly adopted stance is that teachers should not directly teach anything, unless it is requested by the student that assistance be provided.⁶ This, of course, presumes that students know when they need assistance.

In the second and sixth grade classrooms which Fisher and Hiebert (1990) profile, there is an apparent neglect of explicit attention to underlying language processes unless requested by the students. The most likely explanation for this finding suggests teachers are sometimes not sure which direction they should take in their interactions with students. Fisher and Hiebert (1990) conclude that "teacher-led small groups....are in danger of being a baby thrown out with the bath water" (p. 63).

Sensitivity to individuals and to timing are both considered fundamental to the teacher's role. The teacher is to volunteer information in response to what students are actually doing; ask questions or give suggestions to those specific individuals when they are likely to prove immediately helpful (Newman, 1991).

⁶ This lack of direct teacher mediation was evident in a study conducted by Fisher and Hiebert (1990). They observed 40 days of instruction in classrooms implementing whole language programs in grades 2 and 6 and found many positive features. For example, students spent more time on literacy assignment projects than students in more traditional classes, and the tasks were more cognitively demanding than those in classes with conventional programs. Yet they noted concerns related to the teacher's role in the curriculum for they found that small-group teacher-led instruction was practically non-existent.

Teachers are to take their cue from "teachable moments". Of course, judgements about what will be immediately helpful and what are teachable moments are made by the teacher, based on an image of how the teacher thinks literacy development should occur.

Responding to the moment usually results in teaching in whole language that is flexible and fluid. In some instances the teaching might be conversational in nature, with the teacher asking questions which encourage the learner to focus on the relevant details. At other times the teaching is direct and explicit, and sometimes it is more indirect and implicit.

O'Brien (1987) suggests that teaching needs to occur along a continuum, from less to more teacher control, depending on the situation. Although not frequently conceptualized in this manner within whole language, I believe that O'Brien (1987) offers a helpful insight regarding the teacher's role. She claims that in order to make certain aspects of the curriculum more explicit, teachers must develop "enabling strategies" which encourage the students to extend and clarify their understandings. These enabling strategies can vary from something as direct as a mini-lesson focussed on a particular aspect of language, to something as indirect as changing the material available to read. The image of the teacher is one of an individual supporting learning and using resources and strategies to ensure that learning occurs. Depending on the focus of the learning, the characteristics of the students, and the situation at hand, the teaching varies. In regard to critical thinking, the teacher should have a role in

establishing a classroom context in which critical examination is an integral part of learning. In addition, the teacher should also nurture a critical disposition to learning, one that helps students to develop skills which they might use in a critical inquiry. A discussion of what these elements might entail is the subject of the next chapter.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter focussed on the stated beliefs and assumptions of the theory and practice associated with whole language. I addressed the nature of the curriculum and the role of the teacher. I discussed the emphasis placed on the child, the conception of literacy learning, the role of social interaction and critical thinking about social issues. Further, I commented on the importance placed on reflection, teachers' organizational responsibilities, and the nature of the teacher's role.

A significant issue raised in the discussion on the child is the place of children's interests as the impetus for learning. While children have been encouraged and supported in their personal inquiries, teachers have, unfortunately, not always assumed responsibility for ensuring that new interests are stimulated and that learning is facilitated. The lack of clarification within whole language over this issue of how the curriculum is to be established on student interests has had a detrimental effect on practice. There is, an obvious limitation to basing curriculum on a narrow interpretation of students' interests: if particular social issues are of no particular interest to students then they might

not become part of the curriculum.

Control in the curriculum is a second issue discussed regarding the child in whole language. Similar to earlier conceptions of child-centred education (discussed in chapter two), a major stumbling block for teachers in whole language has been finding a reconciliation between the teacher's role and the giving of control to students. In many cases, teachers have stimulated student interests and controlled learning indirectly through themes explored in the curriculum, books read, general conversations, and critical discussions in the classroom. While teacher influence is inevitable, a problem arises if teachers do not claim this responsibility, if they fail to think about the values and ideals which underpin their practice.

Another issue raised in the chapter is the assumption within a whole language framework that children learn to read and write in the same manner by which they learn to speak. An unfortunate outcome of this position is that teachers have often made a false assumption about the nature of immersion within a speaking community, a factor which has implications for our understanding the teacher's role. The assumption is made that children control and regulate the learning. However, when children are learning to speak, those who surround them influence what is learned. Without reflecting on how those who surround the child influence learning, teachers may fail to realize the impact their behavior has upon students. One of the possibilities this awareness creates is that teachers, conscious of this influence, can structure environments

in a manner such that students will be drawn to an examination of social issues. Further, when teachers immerse students in an environment rich with critical examination students will be more likely to engage in examination independently.

Social interaction is regarded as critical to a whole language curriculum. Particularly there has been a focus on the benefits of collaborative learning. One of the obvious benefits of collaboration is that students will have an opportunity to critically assess their ideas relative to those of others. A second benefit of the concentration on social interaction is that learning about skills in language use and critical thinking can be approached in a manner which assists the child to understand why skills are important to understanding and communicating.

As stated in chapter one, interest in critical thinking about social and political issues, although not widespread, has developed to some extent within whole language. It is unlikely that critical thinking about social issues will become a goal in teaching unless the teachers have a commitment to, and knowledge of, critical analysis, and an additional interest in social issues. While student interests may lead to explorations of social issues, without teacher support in the curriculum - through organizational structures and the development of enabling strategies - it is unlikely that significant interest and understanding will blossom in the classroom.

In the second part of the chapter I highlight three characteristics of the teacher in whole language. I discussed the importance placed on teacher

reflection, teacher's organizational responsibilities and the nature of teaching. In the discussion I identify that, given the teacher's responsibility to teach, and the need for critical examination, teachers must first have a solid understanding of the nature of critical thinking before they attempt to facilitate its development in students. In the next chapter I discuss assumptions about the teaching of critical thinking, the nature of critical thinking and critical thinking in the curriculum.

Chapter Four

CRITICAL THINKING

"Critical thinking", a term heralded by educators, parents, administrators, and teacher educators, is agreed by most to be a desirable aim of education. In the previous two chapters, I discussed the fact that in conceptions of child-centred education and whole language, there is frequently an aim to develop critical thinking. However, many are often unclear as to what critical thinking entails and what initiatives aimed at developing critical thinking are supposed to accomplish. If teachers are to be successful in facilitating the development of critical thinking, then I believe it is essential that they are knowledgeable about the nature of critical thinking. In this chapter, my goal is to provide insight into the nature of critical thinking and the implications for teaching if one values critical thinking.

I begin the chapter by analysing common assumptions about critical thinking which I think are worthy of reflection. Second, I discuss aspects and forms of critical thinking, with a focus on the work of philosophers who have examined critical thinking. Aspects and forms of critical thinking addressed include: the use of logic, the critical spirit, dialogical reasoning, assessment of criteria, the relationship of content, caring and connections with criticism. In the third section, I discuss what I believe to be implications for teaching critical

thinking.

Assumptions about Critical Thinking and Child-Centred Education

Consider the example of parents who want their child to become a good problem solver and critical thinker; yet, at the same time, give praise and accolades to a teacher whose primary methods of teaching are lecture, drill and practice. The teacher's foremost goals are for her students to learn the appropriate grade-level information, and to develop habits of study which prepare them for junior high. Is there a contradiction in the parents' minds? Can this teacher meet the parents' criterion of stimulating critical thinking while still retaining focus on information to be learned via methods of lecture, drill and practice? The answer to these questions is dependent on what actually happens in the classroom and, more specifically, on what happens in the child's mind. If lectures are delivered in a manner which encourages the child to pose questions, to think through solutions, then it is possible for critical thinking to be cultivated.

Consider a lecture on the nature of the universe. If the child leaves this experience with a number of isolated facts about the planets and space, then the lecture likely would not have encouraged the child to think critically. If, however, the child is stimulated to ask questions about the nature of the sky, about where it ends, and so forth, then it can be argued that the lecture stimulated the child to think critically and that it certainly aroused his or her curiosity.

In assessing whether this teacher encourages critical thinking, there is the

related issue of the significant amounts of time devoted to drill and practice and the degree to which this interferes with, or facilitates, critical thinking. As isolated activities, with no opportunities to apply the skills in a manner which encourages the assessment of information and creation of new ideas, the time spent on drills and skills would not cultivate critical thinking. However, if the drill and practice resulted in the skill being applied in a critical manner in other contexts, then it can be argued that the drill and practice could encourage critical thinking. Similarly, if the child is provided with practice at identifying fallacies in reasoning through listening to brief descriptions of arguments and is able to identify similar fallacies in other situations, then the practice may indeed facilitate critical thinking.

While it may appear that a teacher who uses significant amounts of lecture, drill and practice, is not likely encouraging critical thinking, the issue is much broader. It involves an understanding of the classroom climate where these activities occur and, in the end, the degree to which the child is thinking critically, and the encouragement he or she has been given to do so.

In many cases, however, classrooms in which there is extensive lecture and drills, would offer little, if any, attempt to facilitate critical thinking because information and methods are regarded as plain fact and non-problematic. It is important to realize that this is not necessarily the case. Parents interested in critical thinking must examine the nature of the lectures, the questions students ask, the opportunities students are given to explore options, and the cultivation

of critical habits such as the ability to reflect upon questions, to suspend beliefs, and to reason. Only then can any apparent contradiction in the parents' position be assessed.

This example demonstrates that facilitating critical thinking is complex and furthermore, that it cannot be assumed to occur only in one kind of teaching environment. Frequently, advocates of a child-centred education are quick to point out the limitations of approaches such as those used by the teacher above suggesting that more open dialogical approaches in which students are encouraged to explore and engage in problem-solving will offer more to the cultivation of critical thinking. Many also believe that the practice of open inquiry in which students engage in dialogical thinking necessarily implies critical thinking. Yet, as in the case of the example above, whether or not critical thinking is facilitated is determined by the nature of the thinking which occurs, and the extent to which it is evident and encouraged in the classroom. It is dangerous, too, to assume that an environment which is open for exploration, one in which the child is encouraged to interact with texts and people, will automatically cultivate critical thinking. Cultivation requires refinement and growth in the process of thinking critically. Whether the child is given opportunities to refine activities such as problem identification, assessment of the nature of the problem, utilization of logic to solve the problem, application of background knowledge, and reflection on the answer are all factors to consider when making an assessment with respect to the development of critical thinking.

It is inaccurate to assume that all child-centred, whole language education facilitates critical thinking. However, it is also important to recognize that many child-centred whole language advocates do state that ensuring students engage in critical thinking is essential to education. The child-centred curriculum depicted by Dewey, the aims of education discussed in the Hall-Dennis Report, and many of the current conceptions of whole language all refer to the need to develop students' abilities to think critically. Dewey (1938) was concerned when the purpose of education was limited to the imparting of information. Instead, he argued that the acquisition of information needed to occur in a context of judgement and thought. In more recent years, critical thinking has been viewed as a necessary component of whole language and other child-centred approaches to learning. Neilsen (1989) discusses learner-centred pedagogy, suggesting that in a context where students have input into the tasks being addressed, and where they have opportunities to construct personal knowledge, there is a scope for fostering critical thinking.

Unfortunately, a description of what thinking critically means, and how the teacher in a child-centred curriculum is to facilitate it, is often not clear. Usually, articles dealing with this topic begin with a disclaimer that there is no clear definition of "critical thinking". Educators working in child-centred classrooms often agree that critical thinking is valuable and should be part of the curriculum; yet there is a pervasive vagueness about what this means. In order that critical thinking be understood, that it be regarded as more than a cliché or slogan,

some clarification is necessary.

In the next section, I discuss aspects and forms of critical thinking. My intent is to examine the nature of critical thinking highlighting central issues within the literature.

The Nature of Critical Thinking

As stated earlier, educating students to think critically is regarded by many as an important educational aim. It is, for example, a generally accepted aim in whole language and child-centred education. In government (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and academic reports (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984) which examine the quality of education, it is lamented that many students do not develop the ability to think critically.

Different theories emphasize different aspects or forms of critical thinking in their analyses. Hare (1994) points out that critical thinking takes a variety of forms and that writers often emphasize those parts they find most appealing. This point is significant because, when differences exist in the way "critical thinking" is conceptualized or the forms of critical thinking stressed, it affects how educators attempt to facilitate critical thinking in the curriculum. In conceptualizing critical thinking I believe Paul (1984) makes an important point when he states that it is important to understand that to "think critically is a matter of degree. No one is without any critical skills, and no one has them so fully that there are no areas in his or her life and thought in which uncritical thought is dominant" (p.7). In the following analysis, the role of logic, the critical

spirit, dialogical reasoning, the assessment of criteria, the place of content, and caring and connections will be discussed to suggest a framework for conceptualizing critical thinking.

(i) Critical Thinking and Logical Analysis

To think about ideas and to call them into question in a critical manner requires that there be an attempt to think about logical relationships. Consider the example of the seven-year-old who returns from dance class and reports that the dance teacher wears a size 4 shoe, only one size larger than the child's. The child's mother responds by suggesting that the dance teacher must have small feet. The child replies, "Either that, or I have big feet." It is easy to see that the child has thought about the logic of her mother's ideas and the fact that there is another way to think about the situation. The child followed a line of logical reasoning when considering what was known and what might be logically concluded.

Logic is at the heart of Ennis' (1979, 1987) conceptualizations of critical thinking which he defines as the correct assessing of statements. Ennis (1979) makes a connection between rational thinkers and critical thinking. He outlines the proficiencies (observing, inferring, generalizing, conceiving and stating, offering a line of reasoning, evaluating, detecting standard problems and realizing appropriate action) and tendencies (taking into account the total situation, and accepting the necessity of exercising informed judgement) entailed in determining correct assessment. He adds that exercising good judgement is a

necessary component in the process. Ennis' account is helpful because he makes explicit some of the underlying processes involved in critical thinking. By naming these proficiencies and tendencies he encourages us to examine more closely the nature of thinking and to reflect upon what we are trying to facilitate in our teaching.

One of the limitations of Ennis' work is his focus on "correctness" for he represents critical thinking as moving to a fixed point - the correct answer. Instead, the formulating of ideas, answers and responses should, in my opinion, occur as part of a rational process in which well formulated and substantiated views are adopted with the understanding that these views may continue to come under critical review. A narrow focus on correctness is dangerous, for the need to re-evaluate may not be realized.

Ennis (1987) stresses that while logic is crucial to critical thinking, the process is multi-dimensional, for it includes logical, criterial, and pragmatic aspects⁷. By placing logic in a broader context Ennis encourages us to view logic as part of the process of critical thinking. Further, he (1987) identifies "intelligent judgement" (the need for discretionary rather than mechanical application) as a driving force within the thinking process.

⁷ Ennis (1987) discusses his conceptualization of the three domains. The logical dimension is the understanding of the relationships between words and ideas; the criterial dimension he describes as the knowledge of criteria for judging; the pragmatic dimension he describes as the effect of context upon thinking, and the purpose of the judgement. Further, the pragmatic dimension refers to the process by which the individual decides whether a judgement is good enough for the purpose of the thinking and for the type of information being considered.

A problem with Ennis' (1987) conceptualization is rooted in his decision to exclude value judgements. It is his view that judging value statements complicates the process of critical thinking. Therefore, he admits that "[a]lthough the root notion calls for its inclusion, the judging of value statements is deliberately excluded" (p. 22). He excludes such judgements because, in his opinion, doing so makes the model more manageable.

Some may argue that by pointing this out, Ennis' definition of critical thinking collapses in upon itself. A more generous interpretation might view this admission as Ennis opening the door for further refinement. My concern with Ennis' omission is of a different nature. Ennis indicates that the process is more manageable if value statements are excluded; yet he does not address the degree to which values and value statements are involved in critical thinking. Values are embedded in the questions asked and implicit in positions examined. An important function of critical thinking is the judgement of value statements. In many life situations, and particularly in the case of examining social issues, critical thinking entails a process of assessing the value statements of others and thinking about these statements in relation to one's own values.

(ii) Critical Spirit

While the use of logical analysis is important to critical thinking, for the thinking to have a major impact within one's life, there needs to be more than a set of practices and skills for applying logic. Passmore (1967) and Siegel (1991, 1988) use the term "critical spirit" to describe the driving force in the

engagement of critical thinking. Siegel (1988) depicts a "critical spirit" as the inclination, or disposition, to think critically on a regular basis in a wide range of circumstances. This spirit cannot be defined by a cluster of skills, for it is in part a way of life. According to Passmore (1967), being critical is not simply a habit, a skill, or mastery over the art of logic. He suggests that it is more like a character trait made evident by a willingness to call things into question.

Given the conceptualization of the critical spirit as a character trait, there is the issue of whether the critical spirit is generalizable, and likely to emerge in a variety of contexts. In Siegel's view, the critical spirit (but not necessarily critical ability) is generalizable to any domain or field. I concur with Siegel's advice that we could best foster the critical spirit by treating students with respect, by being open and honest with them, being willing to accept scrutiny of beliefs and practices, and by encouraging them to question their own ideas and those of others. In doing so, the values implicit in the teaching will reflect the important place of critical examination in learning.

The "critical spirit" is important to an understanding of the nature of critical thinking. It helps us to comprehend what moves an individual to apply skills, and view the world through a critical lens. It also explains why some may more readily apply critical skills than others. Consider the individual who has demonstrated skill at both judging what constitutes an assumption, and whether there is a sufficient definition, yet fails to apply these skills readily in a variety of other contexts. It can be argued that while the individual has some necessary

critical thinking skills, the critical spirit may not be well developed. Another individual with fewer skills may have developed a disposition which views the world with a more critical eye. In this case, as in all cases, if the spirit and the skills work in tandem, the thinking will be more effective.

(iii) Critical Thinking and Dialogical Reasoning

Considering the complexity of some of the issues which require critical thought, it is not surprising that a linear path of logical analysis does not depict all that is involved. Many situations require that more than technical reason be applied. Richard Paul's (1992, 1984) and Matthew Lipman's (1991, 1988) works identify the value of dialogical reasoning to critical thinking, pointing out that many problems to which individuals need to apply critical reasoning are of a dialectical nature.

Because of the complexity of social issues, and the fact that examining issues from multiple perspectives assists in highlighting these complexities, moving between one's ideas and those of others, with an openness to consider other ideas and revise one's thinking in light of new information, is essential. Through the use of dialogical reasoning, more information is made available for analysis and evaluation. Further, keeping an openness to reason about one's own thoughts in relation to the perspective of others combats an egocentric perspective. This process which is necessary for open-mindedness, requires that the individual be prepared to entertain the thought that she/he might be wrong, and must be willing to revise ideas in light of new information.

Hare (1985, 1979) argues for open-mindedness as an educational aim:

An open-minded attitude is quite compatible with having principles and convictions. What is required is...that we regard our own (positions) as subject to revision in light of critical reflection. Moreover, regarding our moral views as subject to revision does not mean that we adopt a sceptical attitude towards them. The test of open-mindedness is rather whether or not we are prepared to entertain doubts about our views. (Hare, 1987; p. 99)

The aim of open-mindedness has been criticized by Gardner (1993). He has reservations about the educational desirability of encouraging children to be open-minded, indicating that teaching children to be open-minded leads to the prescription that we avoid ways of teaching which will promote firm beliefs, that we teach children that it is wrong to have firm beliefs. Unfortunately, Gardner confuses the ideal of open-mindedness with the neutral stance in which beliefs are never firmly held. Open-mindedness is not to be equated with neutrality and/or a lack of commitment to one's views (Hare & McLaughlin, 1994). Instead, the individual can, and should, hold convictions and commitment when issues and ideas have been critically and carefully examined. It is only when relevant, new information is brought to bear on the matter that one would engage in revision to one's views.

This clarification regarding open-mindedness is important for understanding the goal of dialogical inquiry. In many cases, conversations in the classroom may mistakenly be thought of as fostering a dialogical form of critical thinking. The dialogical process is not merely stating diverse opinions, or

understanding and appreciating others' perspectives. Nor is it built (as Lipman and Paul claim) on the relativist position that all views are equally valid. Instead, positions are to be well thought out, plausible, and defensible.

Paul (1992) suggests that objectivity and rationality aimed at discovering truth are crucial to critical thinking. This involves reasoning, the application of standards, and the use of logic. I believe this description is significant for it identifies the need to consider other viewpoints in a critical light. Critical thinking involves "figuring out" that which cannot simply be a matter of arbitrary creation or production: "If what we figure out can be anything we want it to be, anything we fantasize it as being, then there is no logic to the expression "figure out" (Paul, 1992, p.18). In the process of reason and use of logic, Paul suggests that "standards be judiciously applied." The application of standards and logic requires that views are evaluated with the intent of determining truth. Paul (1992) defines critical thinking as:

...disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thinking. It comes in two forms. If thinking is disciplined to serve the interests of a particular individual or group, to the exclusion of other relevant persons and groups, I call it sophistic or weak sense critical thinking. If the thinking is disciplined to take into account the interests of diverse persons or groups, I call it fairminded or strong sense critical thinking. (p 48)

It is obvious from Paul's conception of "weak sense" and "fair-minded" critical thinking, that he regards objective analysis as supreme in the process. He conceptualizes critical thinking in a hierarchical manner suggesting that if disciplined thinking serves a particular individual or group - which I interpret to

be thinking influenced mainly from a subjective viewpoint - then it is to be thought of as weaker. This raises interesting questions about the influence of subjectivity on standards and critical thinking. For example, where do arbitrary standards come from? Further, can subjective analysis be separated from objective analysis? How do standards come to be accepted? The work on how critical thinking is influenced by criteria sheds light on these issues.

(iv) Critical Thinking and Criteria

In dialogical reasoning it is important to understand that the purpose is not merely to think about the perspective of others, but to examine one's own ideas, and those of others, in a search for the truth. As suggested above, the criteria used for evaluating and assessing affect the outcomes of the thinking.

Lipman (1991) addresses the role of both standards and criteria in critical reasoning. He specifies that we are constantly called upon to make reasoned judgements that neither our reason nor our experience has prepared us to make. The use of criteria which, among other things, includes: reasons, shared values, facts, definitions, standards, laws, principles, and conventions, are what drive judgements (Lipman, 1991). Lipman (1991) also points out that critical thinking is self-correcting, for it aims to discover weaknesses and rectify what is at fault in our thinking. He suggests that critical thinking displays sensitivity to context which, of course, makes the process more difficult to describe. He further indicates that this entails recognizing exceptional or irregular circumstances, special limitations, the context of comments, the possibility that evidence is

atypical, and the possibility that some meanings do not translate from one context to another.

What is helpful in Lipman's (1991) discussion is that he does not present criteria as existing in isolation, or suggest that our role is to merely apply the criteria to our thinking. Rather, he suggests we need to place the criteria under a critical lens. I believe that the suitability of criteria requires some attention as one engages in critical thinking. This monitoring leads to reflection on subjectivities and can assist one to engage in the strong sense of critical thinking referred to by Paul (1992). Further, by examining criteria, I believe the individual becomes more aware of how and where the standards are constructed, and how they impinge on decision making. In many cases, arriving at different interpretations, or reasoned judgements, results from using different criteria rather than because the same criteria have been correctly applied by one individual and not another.

(v) Critical Thinking and Content

In discussions about critical thinking, the emphasis is understandably on the nature of thinking. However, it is important to remember that thinking does not occur in a vacuum. It must be about something. This is the point McPeck (1990) and Barrow (1991) emphasize when they argue that the great bulk of critical thinking programs are misguided in that techniques and strategies are stressed without regard to a solid knowledge base.

Sometimes, in the zeal to articulate the need for critical thinking in

classrooms, a position is taken which focuses on process rather than product. This leaves the impression that, first, there is a need to replace teaching content knowledge with teaching a critical thinking process, and second, that general thinking skills can be taught in isolation - with little attention given to content - and then applied in many other contexts. deBono (1985) for example, developed over sixty thinking strategies which are meant to be taught and practised in isolation and then applied to academic areas.

The issue of the generalizability of critical thinking which is linked to the relationship between content and criticism, has been hotly debated by those in the field of critical thinking. If critical thinking is context specific, then teachers should be aware of the child's limited ability to transfer critical thinking from one content area to another. It may be, however, that parts of critical thinking, such as the critical spirit, are generalizable and that as educators we should encourage this process. Barrow (1991) and McPeck (1990, 1981) view critical thinking as subject-specific. They believe that critical thinking differs from subject to subject, that there are no general critical thinking skills which can be applied to all fields, and that there is no reason to expect transfer of critical thinking skills one domain to another.

Barrow (1991) voices concern over attempts to implement a critical thinking curriculum which does not relate criticism to content and argues that such programs typically avoid the embodiment of critical thought within certain complex, sophisticated and important areas of inquiry. McPeck (1990) suggests

that critical thinking is field dependent, that any attempt to teach it as a skill isolated from a subject area is to ignore the fact that the major requirements for rational assessment are epistemological, not rational. He uses the rationale that good reasons and beliefs in one field may not count as significant in another. Further, Barrow (1991) argues that critical thinking is not a skill such as tying one's shoelaces that can be completed in a variety of contexts and that generic abilities in areas like critical thinking do not exist.

To be logical about art is not a matter of combining logical ability with information about art. It is a matter of understanding the logic of art, of being on the inside of aesthetic concepts and aesthetic theory. (p. 12)

Barrow (1991) does concede there are "a few characteristics, some of them abilities, some of them habits, some of them dispositions, and some of them values, that if one has them, may be put in use in any setting" (p. 10). Like Barrow, I have difficulty when critical thinking skills are conceptualized as "if one has them [skills], one can set them in motion or put into practice in any situation" (p. 8). Many programs are developed on the premise that something as complex as critical thinking can be broken into parts, practised, and then somehow personalized into an approach for viewing the world. What tends to happen is that the skills are being practised on content designed specifically for practice with little relationship to problems encountered in everyday life.

A further problem with some critical thinking skills programs is they are often designed to be taught in a generic manner, to a wide range of students.

As a result of the desire to appeal to a wide student audience, the content tends to be presented in a simplistic manner. Little or no onus is placed on the learner to either refer to a base of background knowledge about the topic or to reflect on the criteria used to make judgements.

McPeck uses his view on the dependency of criticism on content to defend the position that there must be a base of knowledge developed prior to critical thinking. He also believes that critical thinking should not be introduced until students enter high school having first acquired the relevant background knowledge in elementary school. With mature high school students he advocates an approach in which the epistemology of a subject would be an integral part of the study of the subject. Here, the student would be encouraged to, first, learn the facts in a given field, and second, think about why these might be regarded as the facts. I believe that McPeck's interpretation is limited. In restricting the role of elementary education to the learning of relevant background knowledge, and by leaving the epistemological study until high school, McPeck has created a dualism between content and criticism.

The problems created by separating content and critical thinking are not new. This problem was identified by Dewey, Whitehead, and Russell, who all felt that content should not be replaced with criticism, but that criticism needs to be tied to content. They argue that critical thinking should be used to examine content. As identified by Hare (1995), the desire to separate content from criticism is unfortunately often incorrectly attributed to these early twentieth

century philosophers. I believe their concerns over the acquisition of knowledge have been misrepresented.

To try to explore criticism in isolation from content is to present a superficial understanding of critical thinking which will not lead to transfer across subject areas and into everyday life. When developing a critical approach to learning, it is essential that building content knowledge and critical thinking occur simultaneously. Otherwise, a danger arises similar to that about which Dewey warned us, i.e. the learner will be viewed as a receptacle of transmitted knowledge rather than someone whose dispositions and skills are to be applied in assessing new information. Another problem may be that the learner acquires a variety of skills which can be practised in isolation but which are not integrated into the way he or she approaches a variety of issues. If an aim of education is, as I believe it to be, to have students apply critical thinking to their world both inside and outside the classroom, then educators need to be concerned about content. We need to ask about the significance of content when students engage in critical thinking. We must also ask what we are trying to achieve.

Since exploration of content and criticism are ideally tied together, it is important that schools assume responsibility for addressing issues of significance to students and the social and political contexts in which students live. We cannot assume that simply because we have modelled critical thinking with respect to the interpretation of a text, the conduct of a science experiment, or the solving of a math problem, students will miraculously become effective

critical thinkers about other important issues in their lives.

(vi) Critical Thinking, Connections and Caring

The work of feminist theorists has, among many things, related the themes of "connections" and "caring" to the curriculum. Their work helps to build a framework for why one should consider both caring and connection when examining content and criticism. The emergence of these themes is evident in the works of women such as Nel Noddings (1988, 1984), Maxine Greene (1990), and Jane Roland Martin (1992). All suggest that we need to reorient both our thinking and our actions to ensure that connections and caring are nurtured and valued in the curriculum.

Connections, to Greene and Roland Martin, refer to a complexity of relationships which entail not separating mind from body, thought from action, reason from feeling, and self from others. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) are concerned that the acquisition of new knowledge occurs in a humanly connected manner, one whereby the teacher is constantly trying to connect new learning with both the past histories of the students and their present interests and concerns. In addition, within a feminist framework, the view is often held that the child, the teacher and the curriculum need to be connected to the ethical, social and political worlds in which children live.

One of the positive outcomes of this work is that we are challenged to make connections and caring visible in education. In referring to critical thinking, Roland Martin (1992) suggests that it needs to be more than

spectatorship or sport, and that the critical thinker needs to become connected to and to care about topics. Further, she believes that from a basis of care and connections the thinking will lead first to a response and then to action.

Roland Martin (1992) questions the need for the critical thinker to maintain distance from the object of study. She suggests that, to prepare the learner for a humane world, critical thinking needs to involve subjectivity and feelings as well as analytical and rational abilities. Roland Martin voices concern that much of what happens in the name of critical thinking is too abstract, too technical, and too emotionally distant. She thinks that there is a need for care and passion rather than a cold, analytical application of reason. These are important questions, but it is a misrepresentation to suggest that critical thinking is always the result of dispassionate, detached analytical thinking. Can one not care about something yet remain objective, apply reason, and call ideas into question? Further, cannot one become so passionate and close to something that it is hard to engage in criticism? This raises the issue of respecting the need to be conscious of distance, the ability to look at problems closely in a manner which connects passion with reason, (but, from a distance), and, finally, the self-awareness to know when one is doing one or the other.

Roland Martin (1992) suggests that when one cares, when one observes problems such as those involving social, political and ethical issues, one will be moved to appropriate action. In these cases, action and thought are interwoven. If, after critical thought, one reaches a conclusion that action is necessary, it

becomes the responsibility of the critical thinker to respond with action.

However, it is important to remember that there can be critical thinking without action. Not all critical thinking leads to a conclusion that one necessarily needs to respond in an overt manner. Further, it is important to remember that there can be action without critical thought.

Thayer-Bacon (1992) argues a related point that beyond caring about learning, there needs to be care for other peoples' ideas. Caring and valuing others' ideas form the basis of the dialogical process, and are an important part of critical thinking.

Critical Thinking and Curriculum

"UFO's have been in existence for 200 years."

"Men who wear caps go bald early."

"Girls like to shop, and they spend more money than boys."

"It's the janitors job to pick up the mess we leave. He's being paid for it. "

These statements, made by students in a grade six classroom, are fleeting and might easily go unnoticed, with little or no response from either the teacher or other students. On the other hand, they may provide moments in which the teacher can encourage critical thinking and analysis. What moves the pendulum from a surface level interpretation to a deeper, more critical analysis within the classroom is, to a large extent, dependent on how the teacher responds to each situation. While students, in many cases and to varying degrees, possess a critical disposition towards learning, the degree and quality

of critical thinking which manifests itself in classrooms will be influenced by how teachers view their roles. Further, how teachers perceive their role in ensuring that critical thinking takes place, in such a manner as to prepare students for life in a democratic, society will affect the way critical thinking is actualized.

Critical thinking has been a stated goal of education for many years; yet the manner in which practitioners have attempted to encourage critical thinking has not always been driven by a sound, well conceptualized vision. Educators often attempt to facilitate critical thinking without first conducting an examination of its theoretical underpinnings. In many cases, the roles and relationships of various forms and components of critical thinking (logical skills, the critical spirit, dialogical reasoning, criteria for assessment, content information including issues of a social and political nature) have not been articulated as a framework for interpreting methods.

In general, emphasis in the school context has been on methods for teaching critical thinking. As a result, there are countless workbooks aimed at enhancing critical thinking, and numerous teacher in-service sessions which focus on fostering critical thinking skills within the curriculum have been held. I believe that lack of knowledge regarding the nature of critical thinking does, among other things, inhibit a teacher's ability to foster the development of intellectual values such as sound reasoning, accuracy, and assessment of reasons as the students learn subject content.

When teachers teach in a critical manner, critical thinking is woven into

the fabric of the classroom environment. In "On Teaching to be Critical", Passmore (1967) argues that when children are drilled to make appropriate responses, there is indoctrination because they are following rules which have not been subjected to question or criticism. To teach critically, teachers should avoid reliance upon the wisdom of authority to drill students to respond. Instead, they should make beliefs and rules open to critical discussion. I believe it is important that students learn in an environment where they will be taught to use critical thinking skills such as logic and dialogical thinking, and encouraged to develop a critical spirit and be able to observe others modelling critical examination where content is called into question rather than given unquestioning acceptance.

I find it helpful to think of three curriculum domains which, while not completely distinct, depict the major realms in which the teacher's role is significant in facilitating critical thinking. These interacting realms include the classroom context, curriculum content, and the thinking processes of both teachers and students.

(i) Context for Critical Thinking

To encourage students to think critically, I believe the classroom context must be one in which questions are valued and students are given time to reflect and explore. The questions asked should exhibit self-reflection, examine the positions of others, and be aimed at reaching truth. If the teacher's primary goal is for students to re-state information in an unquestioning manner, the

opportunities for students to allot attention to asking questions respecting the content of readings, the statements made by classmates, and the values inherent in other's positions, will be minimal. Further, if students are only encouraged to analyse the roots of their own assumptions with questions such as "Why do I think this?" and, "What events have led me to believe this?" then the process of asking questions will be insular and limited in scope. While questioning minds might still engage in critical thinking about their thoughts and those of others independently, the likelihood is reduced when the focus established by the teacher is not firmly placed upon critical examination.

Beyond a framework for asking questions, the curriculum context needs to be organized so that teachers encourage students to explore answers to questions at length and in depth. To ask important questions, with no opportunity to use the skills of logical analysis, dialogical reasoning, and criteria assessment, is very limiting.

Matthew Lipman developed "Philosophy for Children"- a programme aimed at developing philosophical/critical thinking. Lipman's format calls for the reading of philosophically rich texts which become a context impetus for discussions. Some teachers have moved away from texts as such, and have used events, films, visuals, or quotations in place of the text. (It is important that the impetus is such that there is potential for a philosophical discussion to evolve.) The teacher's role is to enhance the children's ability to think critically as they reflect on the text or event. The discussion should focus on those things

which the students find of interest because a list of students' interests forms the agenda for discussion.

"Philosophy for Children" encourages philosophical inquiry in children by engaging them in "communities of inquiry" (Sharp, 1987). These communities support and encourage critical thinking because students engage in the generation and exchange of ideas, clarification of concepts, development of hypotheses, assessment of possible consequences, and in general deliberate reasonably together (Lipman, 1988). Open-mindedness is to be valued in this process as children listen to viewpoints and positions.

Lipman and Sharp suggest that the "community of inquiry" provides a structure for both exploring critical thinking about values and engaging in an ethical inquiry. It is important that discussion in the community of inquiry is grounded in critical analysis. Without an emphasis on critical analysis, group inquiry may result in other forms of thinking and group indoctrination can also occur in the form of collaboration.

Paul's (1984) use of the Socratic method, a tactic for teaching critical thinking, has a similar potential. The focus in Socratic teaching is placed upon asking questions rather than upon the answers. The teacher models the critical mind as the logical equivalent of the inner critical voice, by continually probing into the subject with questions. Ideas generated by the class must be dealt with carefully and fairly. By responding to students' answers with further questions, and by selecting questions which advance the discussion, the teacher facilitates

the class' ability to think in a disciplined and responsible manner.

Roland Martin (1992) suggests that critical thinking in schools is fostered in a detached manner by which she means that students are encouraged to be spectators of their own critical thinking. As previously mentioned, when I discussed "caring and connections", it is important for the teacher to allow students opportunities to respond to critical thinking with actions, if actions are required. This is the point raised by Lipman (1995) in his discussion of peace education. For peace education to be effective, there must be more than a critical analysis of a peaceful classroom and the factors which affect the level of peacefulness. The classroom context must be such that when students, through critical analysis, have reached thoughtful conclusions, actions will follow which reflect understanding the responsibilities of their thinking. However, it is important to focus on responsible action grounded in critical analysis rather than action that is impulsive.

Connection to, caring about, and interest in, the content of the curriculum are more likely to occur when the curriculum exhibits continuity rather than episodic fragmentation. If there is an inconsistent approach to discussions aimed at enhancing critical thinking, there will be a lessened likelihood that students will be connected, retain a sustained interest in the topic, and have an on-going desire to examine information in a critical manner. When interest is present, and students are encouraged to engage in critical reflection, there will likely be a greater commitment to thinking about ideas. Some would argue that

passion for a topic is a hindrance to critical thinking for opinions and ideas can become grounded in emotions rather than reason. Indeed, there are numerous situations in which care and passion have prevented one from thinking critically. If, however, the care and connection are present in an environment where students are asking questions and critically analysing their thoughts, the teacher can use care as an impetus for having students want to think critically.

The final aspect of context, one which I believe has a significant impact upon cultivating critical thinking, is the degree to which respect for others is woven into the fabric of the classroom. Thayer-Bacon (1993) indicates that critical thinking is enhanced when one cares for and respects the opinions of others. With this atmosphere established in a classroom there is an enhanced likelihood that when differences of opinions exist, students will want to engage in critical reflection to understand why others whom they respect think differently from themselves. If students do not care about or respect their teacher's and classmates' opinions, they will be less likely to engage in a dialogical inquiry with minds open to revision of their thinking based on relevant new information.

(ii) Content of Thinking

In most educational settings the content of the curriculum is, to some extent, dictated by Departments of Education. For example, in grade four social studies in Nova Scotia, teachers are expected to cover the topic of pioneers, while native peoples are examined in grade six. While these broad areas are identified as necessary content, the specific manner in which the content is

taught, and the aspects to be stressed are the responsibility of teachers. When content is viewed as unproblematic, it might seem logical for the teacher to focus on students knowing the content, with little effort made to engage students in critical analysis.

Learning content needs to occur in a context where it is intertwined with criticism (Dewey, Hare, Whitehead, Russell) rather than added on only when values which underlie the content are readily apparent and the content is regarded as controversial in nature. Having a debate about the existence of U.F.O.'s will encourage students to examine facts, assess criteria, examine alternative ideas and make judgements. However, thinking about why a plant's reproductive system is considered asexual, why the young adult author Gordon Korman connects with the audience, and why the early explorers to North America are in the first chapter of social studies textbooks, all offer the same potential. When teachers encourage students to ask these types of questions, when they approach the content in a critical manner, the values which underpin the content have the potential to surface and become part of the dialogue in the classroom. Further, the epistemology of content areas has the potential to be made explicit.

During the last decade, critical pedagogy has encouraged educators to focus curriculum content on issues of power, equality and justice. Critical pedagogy is predicated on the assumption that schools reproduce the values and prejudices of society and are institutions which operate in a political manner.

Through day-to-day lessons one of the teacher's goals is to cultivate links in the students' development to the values, powers, and debates in society through the process of critical inquiry and to prepare them to be active participants in a democracy (Shor, 1992).

(iii) Thinking Processes

Not everyone thinks about his/her thinking in a critical manner. Because critical thinking is always a matter of degree (Paul, 1992), critical thinking is never completely satisfied in an individual. Exhibiting skill at critically evaluating the claims of a scientific theory will not necessarily transfer to other areas. In the first section of the chapter, I outlined a variety of means whereby critical thinking manifests itself, and a number of factors which affect the critical thinking process. For example, I posited that logical analysis, dialogical inquiry, and critiquing one's own thinking and the criteria for judgements, are constituents of critical thinking. Skills such as careful listening, identifying assumptions, detecting fallacies, and others, are all involved in critical thinking. For these skills to be applied in a conscious and critical manner there needs to be a disposition, a critical spirit, which calls into question both ideas and thoughts. The critical spirit is not an entity in itself which exists in the mind. The critical spirit is created out of one's values towards learning, society, and self. The spirit is evident when one values a questioning stance, seeks understanding, and willingly revises one's thinking. Critical spirit, needs to be introspective to ensure that one's own ideas come under the scrutiny of both self and others.

Discussions which separate the critical spirit and critical thinking skills risk distorting the manner in which these two need to be integrated.

Skills, whether they are generalizable or not, are only skills when they are applied intelligently and with a critical conscience. In order for skills to assist the learner in thinking critically, the critical spirit must be involved. The critical spirit nurtures growth of skills because it is this spirit which gives the skills a purpose. Conversely, when there is greater critical skill the critical spirit emerges in more contexts. Thus, the relationship between critical skills and the critical spirit is one in which they support one another.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter was aimed at illuminating important understanding about critical thinking and its implications for teaching.

An important assumption questioned in this chapter was the belief that critical thinking is implicit in child-centred approaches (such as whole language) because of the practice of open inquiry. Even though critical thinking ought to be facilitated and whether there is critical examination of social issues will, to a large degree, be influenced by the importance the teacher places on critical thinking in general and the examination of social issues in particular.

It is difficult for teachers to nurture the development of something about which they are unclear. In this chapter, I provided an overview of different forms and components of critical thinking to stress the importance for teachers to have an enriched understanding of it.

The components of critical thinking discussed included logical analysis, the critical spirit, dialogical reasoning, criteria, and the relationship to content, connections and caring. With an understanding of these forms I believe teachers are in a better position to nurture the growth of critical examination. For example, the work of Ennis (1987) in the area of logical analysis assists in contextualizing the place of logic within other aspects of the process, namely criterial and pragmatic dimensions. Passmore (1967) and Siegel (1991, 1988) depicted the role of the critical spirit as an inclination or disposition to think critically on a regular basis and in a wide range of circumstances. Understanding the critical spirit helps teachers to comprehend what moves an individual to apply skills, and to view the world through a critical lens. Further, it explains why some may more readily apply critical skills than others. The disposition to "call into question" is an important part of critical thinking because, in essence, it is what moves an individual to see the need to critically examine issues independently. Fostering a critical spirit is important for it will assist children in approaching their inquiry from a critical perspective.

In addition, the work on dialogical reasoning emphasizes an important form of critical thinking. For dialogical inquiry to occur, the teacher must help students move beyond naming an issue and giving it a surface level examination to critically examining logical relationships, thinking about the criteria, and making justifiable judgements.

A further issue highlighted in this discussion is the need to consider the

relationship between content and criticism. I concur with the view that content and criticism need to be linked. Critical thinking has to be about something (content), and to avoid the learner becoming a receptacle of transmitted knowledge, content in the curriculum must be critically examined. In the case of social issues, I believe it important that children learn how to think about these issues for, ultimately, they are issues about our concern for one another and our concern for social justice.

In the next chapter, I describe the methodology for the case study component of this research. I highlight how and why I focussed on the work of Matthew Williams, a teacher who makes critical thinking about social issues an aim in his teaching.

Chapter Five

METHODOLOGY FOR THE CASE STUDY

In an attempt to understand the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a child-centred, whole language based curriculum I engaged in a case study of a sixth grade teacher, Matthew Williams.⁸ In classrooms, where the dynamics are complex and the variables are subtle, what emerges in terms of practice usually deviates to some degree from the theoretical ideal. For this reason, I think it would provide insight to develop a perspective on the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues from the context of a real-life classroom. To conduct this case study, I chose to focus on the work of a teacher whom I judge to have a high level of expertise and experience as a teacher and an individual who attempts to facilitate critical thinking about social issues. In this chapter, I focus on the methodology for the case study.

I chose to develop a case study because I wanted to depict in detail the teacher's role in a child-centred, whole language classroom.⁹ It is my view that through a detailed analysis of one teacher, carefully selected, I would be able to

⁸ The names and locations cited throughout this case study are pseudonyms, used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

⁹ Guba and Lincoln (1981) make clear that case-based research has several purposes, including to chronicle events; to render, depict, and/or characterize.

characterize the teacher, Matthew Williams, and how he approached his role.¹⁰

It might be argued that to study a teacher with an extensive background and level of expertise is problematic because Matthew Williams is not a “typical teacher”. However, this study focuses on an experienced teacher in order that I might capture and critically analyse the nature of “good teaching” within a child-centred framework.

The notion of “good teaching” is obviously value-laden. Distinctions between what is good, what is not, and what fits on the continuum in between, are based on judgements related to the purposes of education and how best to achieve those aims. Throughout the analysis (chapter six), it is my intention to illuminate some aspects of what makes Williams a good teacher.

Some may also argue that because I am approaching the study with an a priori assumption that what exists in Mr. Williams class is “good teaching”, I am not engaging in critical analysis, or that there is a boundary point beyond which my analysis will be blinded. In response to the criticism, I wish to point out that in chapters two and three, I conducted a critical examination which focussed on the nature of child-centred education, and whole language respectively, as a foundation for framing this empirical component.

In the discussions in chapters two and three, I identified the possibilities and limitations created in a child-centred, whole language curricular framework.

¹⁰ The goal of the research is not to make a bold claim of generalizability from the case study. Rather, it is discussed as an example of “good practice”.

For example, I identified the lack of clarity regarding the teacher's role and misunderstandings about the place of transmission, and the complexities of teacher and student control. Further, I wish to point out that, through this analysis, I do not presume to describe an exclusive approach to facilitating critical thinking about social issues for I realize that other curricular frameworks may be equally as effective.

In essence, I am trying to describe a perspective on practice, by analysing the role Williams plays in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a whole language context.

In the following discussion, the methodology for the case study is described, highlighting methodological issues and procedures.

Justification of the Methodology

This case study is developed within the naturalistic, interpretive paradigm. As a researcher I, together with the teacher who is the focus of the case study, develop an interpretation of how he facilitates critical thinking about social issues in the curriculum. In designing an approach to the case study, the methodology used must capture the essence of the child-centred, whole language curriculum being analysed and, further, be appropriate for the question being examined.

First, I needed to consider the nature of the curricular context I wanted to study and how best to capture an understanding of this teacher's role within that context. As discussed in chapters two and three, child-centred education,

learning is generally regarded as occurring through an interaction between the child's background knowledge and new experiences. Often, first-hand experiences that develop out of the child's interests are crucial to how the curriculum unfolds. Interactions between teacher and child, and collaboration among peers are valued. The teacher is not conceptualized as a technician who delivers a fixed body of information to students to be regurgitated at a later time, but as one who nurtures growth and learning in a variety of ways including: making materials available, providing individual assistance, lecturing, demonstrating, and questioning. Further, because each student comes to the learning experiences with different sets of understandings and experiences, student outcomes are not expected to be identical. Consequently, the method used to study a child-centred approach to curriculum needed to be sufficiently open that I could capture the complexity of these relationships in an actual classroom.

In addition, the naturalistic, interpretive framework for conducting this research is justified on grounds that this study is aimed at examining one teacher's many roles in facilitating his students' learning. I do not intend to isolate precisely defined variables, or to determine their effect on learning in general and critical thinking in particular. Rather, a naturalistic, interpretive framework involves a considerable period of observation aimed at understanding the complexity of the classroom context and it creates an opportunity to examine

the teacher's role from a variety of vantage points.¹¹ The exploration is enhanced by a naturalistic, interpretive framework because of the flexibility it provides in probing and examining beliefs, assumptions and actions.

Following the principles of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the case study was designed such that:

1. the classroom environment is not deliberately altered in any way by the study either prior to or during observations;
2. observation procedures and data collection are developed to fit the classroom context and modified during the study;
3. multiple sources of data including observation, interviews and document analysis are used;
4. categories for data analysis are derived through the researcher engaging in critical reflection on patterns observed;
5. the nature of the classroom and the learning events are described in order to consider the nature of the learning context;
6. the teacher both provides and corroborates the data; and
7. the research is based on a general question about the role of the teacher in facilitating critical thinking about social issues without specific pre-determined categories to explain the framework for the inquiry.

Method

(i) The Key Participant

To examine the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social

¹¹ Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest that naturalistic interpretive research involves "immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for the study, that values participants' perspectives on their worlds and seeks to discover those perspectives, that views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants, and that is primarily descriptive and relies on people's words as primary data" (p. 11).

issues within a child-centred, whole language based curriculum, I focussed on Matthew Williams, and his grade six class of 32 students.

My first task was to secure Williams' consent to participate in my study. Accordingly, I discussed the purpose of the research with him so that he might make an informed decision about his participation. I stated my view regarding the importance of critical thinking about social issues and I outlined behaviours I would look for when I visited his classroom. I gave him sample questions I would ask him in interviews. I informed him that I would examine the process of how social issues were raised, how he interacted with the children in critically examining issues, and how he dealt with diverse student opinions. Because the study is interpretive in nature, I told him that I could not identify all the questions prior to the study and that many questions would develop as the study progressed. I provided him with a form to indicate his consent to participate and to request permission for me to include quotations, log notes and interpretations of his work in the dissertation document. The accompanying letter made clear that as a participant he would have an opportunity to examine the interpretations and references made to his work at numerous points within the research project. In addition, he was advised that he would have an opportunity to state, and have recorded, his opinions if they differed from mine.

Williams was selected as the case study's key participant using purposive sampling, i.e. I had a specific set of characteristics in mind when I requested his participation. I wanted to examine the work of a teacher who understood and

had adopted a child-centred, whole language framework for curriculum, where there is evidence to suggest the participant believes that the teacher needs to play an important role in facilitating students' critical thinking about social issues.

Williams was selected because he is a teacher working within a child-centred, whole language framework whose aim is to have critical thinking about social issues as part of his curriculum. I based this assessment on the nature and content of many conversations with him prior to the study and on an examination of his published works. Further, I knew that he previously attended O.I.S.E. enrolled in a Master of Education programme and had taken a readings course on the topic of "values and community" from Dr. Clive Beck - a prominent Canadian philosopher of education - and a curriculum course from Dr. Michael Connelly, an internationally-known curriculum researcher. Williams has taught for eleven years. Teaching is his second career. Although he grew up in Toronto and was educated there, he completed a Bachelor of Education in Nova Scotia.

In light of the relevant information available, I believe a case study of Matthew Williams' teaching would provide insight into understanding this teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues.

(ii) The School and Local Community

Lawrenceville Memorial School is a school with grades Primary through twelve. The campus is divided into the elementary and secondary schools. Because of the age and condition of the building and the lack of facilities and

equipment, the school is regarded as one of the district's "have not" schools. Grade six, which has two classes, is the highest grade in the elementary section.

LMS is a town school and, as might be expected, the diversity of backgrounds in the class reflects the town's make-up. A substantial portion of the town's residents have upper-middle class incomes. Lawrenceville, the largest town in the area, is the county's financial and legal centre. Physicians and medical specialists live in the town because of the large regional hospital. Some residents work in a variety of capacities at the university fifteen kilometres away. In addition, a large sector of the town works in industrial jobs at plants outside the town. The headquarters for social and legal programmes are in Lawrenceville, and many residents live in the town to be close to these services.

(iii) Williams' Class

For the majority of the children in Matthew William's sixth grade class this marks their seventh year at the same school. For them, the teachers and principal are familiar. This year, three students have moved to LMS from a neighbouring school in order that they might participate in the band programme; two others recently moved to the town.

The cultural diversity in most metro centres is not evident in this classroom. Except for one student whose mother is Asian, and another student with some Native Canadian heritage, the children are white. However, there is class diversity, and so the students have widely varying backgrounds of experiences. One student lives in an apartment over a boarding house. One

morning he asked me if I had heard about the shooting on River Street the night before, he proceeded to tell me that the two arrested in the shooting lived below him in the boarding house. By contrast, several children regularly take expensive holidays with their families and are involved in a variety of non-school recreational/educational activities. Some, for a variety of reasons including a family member being ill, a parent losing a job, and separation of the family unit, are living through times of crisis.

Data Collection

The teacher and students were observed over a five-month (November-April) period. Data were collected using the following techniques.

(i) Observation

To gain an understanding of how Williams facilitated critical thinking about social issues, I spent extensive time observing in the class. Over the five months, I visited the classroom twenty-four times, spending approximately two hours on each occasion. These observations occurred primarily during the time allocated for Language Arts.

Whether obviously related to the research question or not, during my visits I made notes on all observations about the class. These notes often entailed a description of locations to which Williams moved in the class, the behaviour of the students, queries made by Williams, and direct quotations.

The reason I chose a general approach to observation was my desire to keep my perspective on what was relevant to the question as open as possible.

Wien (1991) points out, "the observer in such situations continuously makes intuitive judgments about what is important to preserve out of a stream of consciousness" (p. 57). Initially I was less aware of the importance of including descriptions of the impact Williams' values had on shaping the curricular context, such as the manner in which positive relationships were fostered in the classroom and the care exhibited by the teacher and students for individuals and issues. I came to realize, as van Manen (1991) states, that "one should not make the mistake . . . of supposing that the pedagogical life on the margin of the 'teaching/learning process' is not fundamentally connected to the central processes of curriculum and teaching" (p. 4).

(ii) Interviews and Discussions

I conducted three formal interviews with Williams. My purpose was to elicit information which would allow me to understand how he conceptualizes his role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues, and to use this information to complement the data gathered through observation. I prepared a series of questions to use in what Lofland and Lofland (1984) called "guided conversation". The interviews were open-ended, giving Williams free range to discuss whatever he felt was necessary. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The first lasted 90 minutes and occurred after nine visitations, the second 60 minutes, following the fifteenth visit, and the third 60 minutes, after the twenty-first visit.

In the first interview I used "grand tour" questions (Spradley, 1980) to

orient myself to Williams' teaching, the classroom and the curriculum (See Appendix 1 for an overview of questions). Questions focussed on how content was selected, how the time was structured, and who made decisions about curriculum topics. The second and third interviews were aimed at understanding Williams' interpretation of events observed and his perspective on themes developing from the observations. In the second interview I presented a description of the framework I was developing for the discussion of the values implicit in the curricular context in his classroom (See Appendix 2). I asked Williams to comment on the framework developed thus far and to identify in his view, any limitations. Further, specific events and reactions and issues were discussed. A similar approach was taken in the third interview (See Appendix 3). In this case I shared the framework developed for discussing the teacher's role in explicit attempts to facilitate critical thinking about social issues.

In addition to the formal interviews I engaged in on-going discussions with Williams throughout the study. This usually occurred when the children went to Music or French and recess breaks.

Data Analysis

As described above, data were gathered primarily from two sources, interviews and discussions. As I examined data from the observation notes and interview transcripts I identified categories and common themes. I questioned the relevance of all data to the research question, even that which did not on the surface appear relevant. In analyzing the data I established connections

between the statements made in the interview, and the observations. Patterns in the data which represented the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues particular to this classroom were sought. Conceptual categories were developed through a process of critically reflecting upon the concrete behaviors, events, procedures and statements made in the interviews.

The attempt to examine the relevance of all the data was critical because to consider only those events which were obviously relevant would have restricted and limited the analysis. For example, the layer of the analysis which examined the nature of the classroom context and its significance to understanding the teacher's role was initially unanticipated. Originally, I thought that I would focus primarily on incidents and events in which I observed critical thinking about social issues. As the study progressed, it became clear that to capture the essence of how Williams facilitates critical thinking about social issues, I needed to carefully study the classroom context. To separate and focus solely on occasions when social issues were examined would, in many ways, misrepresent the subtle and overt factors which influence the process. Consequently, there are two major themes to the findings: a) the values implicit in the curricular framework Williams developed, and b) explicit attempts to make critical thinking about social issues part of the curriculum.

Ethical Concerns

I attended to a number of ethical concerns in this study. First, there was the teacher's informed consent to participate. A consent form (Appendix 4) was

signed by him which requests permission to include quotes, log notes and interpretations of his work in the dissertation document. The letter states that he would have opportunities to examine the interpretations and references made to his work at numerous points within the research project. In addition, he would have an opportunity to state and have recorded his opinions if they differ from mine.

While the children in the class were not the primary focus of the study, I wanted to be able to use their classroom comments and reference them in this study. Therefore I provided a consent and covering letter (See Appendix 5) for the parents of the children in the class. This letter outlined the purpose of the study and described how the children would be involved. Further, I assured the parents there would be no adverse effects on their children if they chose not to have them participate.

Confidentiality was assured for the participants. I use pseudonyms when reporting on the study. Further, I store the tapes from the interviews in a safe location. At the conclusion of the study the tapes will be destroyed.

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Dalhousie University and the Principal of the school in which the study was conducted.

In the following chapter I will discuss the findings from the case study. My intention is to characterize how Williams approaches his teaching and his role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues.

Chapter Six

INSIDE A CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY

“Menu for the morning” were the words printed at the top of the board at the front of the room when I entered Matthew Williams’ sixth grade classroom for the first time on November 12th, 1996. Below “Menu” was written, “Week-end Reports”, followed by “Newspaper Article”, “Reading Journal”, “Silent Reading” with parentheses around the latter three, indicating these were optional selections. “Sharing” and “Spelling” were listed underneath.

I gazed around the room and found a place to assemble my belongings, while the students intermittently entered the room, talking with their classmates, laughing and gesturing. Williams, seated at the back of the room, conversed with a student perched on a stool beside his desk. Other students sat quietly, as if waiting for the day to officially begin. A few others read books or wrote in notebooks. Shortly, the hum of classroom noise was broken as the PA system crackled and “O Canada” was piped over the intercom, signaling the school day was to begin.

Williams welcomed the students back from a long week-end and made a few opening comments. The students were slow to settle, many still intent on talking to friends. “Who is she?” and “Why is she here?” I heard whispered from a couple of locations in the room. Williams introduced me to the students and told them that I would be conducting a research project in the class as a

requirement for a Ph.D. and would be visiting periodically for the next several months. After I made a few comments and answered some questions, the students settled down, realizing they were moving into “Week-end Reports”, a time to talk and connect with their peers about events significant in their lives outside the classroom.

“Would students wishing to make week-end reports raise their hands?” Williams requested. Hands rose around the room as approximately half the class volunteered to make reports. He urged students who wanted to report to pair up with someone who did not. The students quickly complied, moving about and pairing up. “You will be able to nominate your partner to make a class level report,” Williams pronounced as the noise level began to elevate from stories being told.

After approximately fifteen minutes of reporting to partners, students had an opportunity to nominate partners by articulating why they felt their partner should be nominated. Kyle nominated Evan to tell his story about a new puppy which had arrived on the week-end. After a time of talking with classmates the classroom atmosphere was electric, and Williams intervened several times asking for “respectful listening” as Evan gave his rather lengthy, highly detailed report.

As the storytelling progressed, one student became unfocussed. He sat on top of his desk, engaging in distracting mannerisms such as sticking out his tongue and lifting himself up from his desk. Williams moved to the back of the

classroom and sat beside the student. Nothing was said, but Williams' presence changed the student's behaviour. After several children responded to Evan's story, Williams told a story about his cat. He spoke of how, after several close encounters, his family had decided that the cat was road-wise, had figured out how to survive, and that maybe cats really did have nine lives. The interesting aspect of this event was that in exposing his feelings for the pet Williams revealed a sense of who he was as a person.

"It is time for you to begin with your selections for the morning," Williams signaled to the class as the week-end report session concluded. Shuffling began as students moved to a variety of locations and tasks. This was the time students would self-select from the list of options outlined in the menu.

Susan, Linda, and Jane turned to face one another. Susan opened her notebook and began to read her response and reaction to the book Pick Up Sticks, a story about a girl named Polly whose life circumstances change when she and her mother move from the apartment building in which they live because the new owner was tearing it down. Mark and Jake brought out books from their desks and began reading quietly, almost oblivious to the others around them. "Let's ask him if he has a girlfriend," Clare giggled as Tara joined her to interview Mr. Davey, the new Physical Education teacher. A few students moved out into the hall to begin computer editing their articles for the upcoming class newspaper. As Steven moved towards the computers he requested a conference with Williams to assist with editing.

Most of the students focussed quickly and began work on their selections from the menu. However, four students sat, looking blankly at their desks, with no apparent menu selection in mind. Williams moved around the room, making comments to various individuals. In a non-threatening, non-demanding manner, he announced that "all students need to focus," and then moved into the hall where the computers were located. Within ten minutes all students were engaged in activity, although the degree of concentration varied. Many worked on articles for the class newspaper, some of which represented collaborative efforts. Personal hobby reports with titles such as Hockey, Tennis, and Golf, and diaries of past vacations such as My Trip to PEI, Summer Camp 96, and When I Went on Vacation were common. One student wrote a story about UNICEF, another, an article about the recent closure of the school library and the impact on the students and the school in general.

After recess the class moved on to the regularly scheduled spelling portion of the Language Arts programme. It began with Mr. Williams reading a story containing the focus words for the week. He had just begun to identify the focus words, when Michael was inspired to tell a long and involved story about his work in a family-operated movie theatre. Without being interrupted by his classmates or Williams, Michael told his story. After making a few comments about Michael's story, Williams returned to identifying the focus words. Next, the students were required to "give it a try" on a pre-test. Students volunteered to share their attempts at spelling the focus words by writing them on the board for

the class to examine. While in many cases the attempts were incorrect the students in the class responded to each others' efforts with comments such as "It could have been that way", "I understand why you tried it this way", "Another pattern which might work is", and so forth. As the students shared and worked towards identifying the correct spelling they reflected upon their personal efforts and those of their classmates.

In the description above, the grade six classroom, which was the focal point for this part of the study is introduced. As a snapshot, what is happening, and what has led to the creation of this particular learning context on this November morning is not readily apparent. There are subtleties which influenced the events such as the time spent listening to Michael's story, the opportunity to know one another in a personal manner through story-telling, hearing a real story from their teacher's life, the responsibility to make choices about their work, reading and writing material concerning real interests, listening to one another, and the examination of spelling possibilities in a problem solving manner. These subtleties are a reflection of values embedded in Williams' philosophy of teaching and education. In the following discussion, I analyze values which shape his teaching and the impact they have on the classroom environment

Specifically, in the first section there is a discussion of values implicit in the curricular framework Williams developed. Restricting my analysis of the teacher's role to those times in which the teacher deliberately designed events

to engage students in critical thought about social issues would create a limited perspective of specific situations and methods. After some initial observation, I realized that examining the context was essential to understanding the way Williams' values shape the curricular framework. The values foundational to the curriculum, established a tone to his teaching. They influence the curriculum in many ways, one effect being the creation of a context which supports and enhances the critical examination of social issues. Values discussed include: value of the person, the importance of community, the ethics of justice and caring, and critical examination as a way of learning.

In the second section of this chapter there is an analysis of those aspects of the curriculum more explicitly linked to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. The framework for discussing these findings includes three parts. First, there is a discussion of how Williams helps the students to perceive social issues; second, of his role in focusing students on a more detailed examination of social issues; and third, of his role in helping students to broadly frame their analysis. Framing involves helping students see a situation within the wider context of issues such as stereotyping, prejudices, rights, equality and justice. Also included in this discussion is the process of critical examination of issues in a broader context beyond the classroom situation.

Values Implicit in the Curriculum

During the data analysis, I identified values foundational to the curriculum, which I labelled as implicit. Because of the incidental and indirect ways in which they influenced the classroom context, it is my view the emphasis placed on these values facilitated “collateral learning” related to the critical examination of social issues. The need to consider this type of learning as significant and powerful was addressed by Dewey.

Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography and history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what counts in the future. (Dewey, 1938, p 48)

Clearly, the emphasis placed on the values of personhood, community, justice and caring, and critical examination in Williams’ curriculum did not develop within a vacuum. They are very much a part of his philosophical orientation as a teacher and permeated the curriculum he developed. In this section of the chapter, I discuss how these values shape the curricular context of his classroom.

(i) Valuing Each Person

One morning, early in the study, I entered the school at 8:15 AM to discuss an issue with Williams. I knew the school procedure was for children to line up on the play square and enter when the bell rang at 8:40 AM. However,

within a few moments of my arrival students began to enter the room, talking and laughing. They made their way to locations within the room and embarked on a variety of activities. Two students were logging onto the Internet, a few were in their seats, and two others were making their way to the back of the room to talk with their teacher. While on the surface this might appear to be a slight deviation from school policy, it is actually a deliberate step Williams takes to establish a positive relationship with the students.

I always greet children individually in the morning when I see them. Like when I encourage kids to come into my class if they want to before the bell rings, if they want to do something quietly in the room. Those casual little times are helpful because they can talk about things that are important to them and I can listen. The other thing too, is that if I show them genuine interest in their lives, then they are—I think that they are likely to be a great deal more interested genuinely in others as well. And the whole idea is, I'm modeling caring, I'm modeling listening. I'm sending out a message to them: "I value you as a student and as a person." I think it's very important that we don't lose sight of that. The whole teacher/student relationship is, it's very interpersonal.

A teacher valuing each child may seem fundamental to the educational experience but there are variations in the manner in which children are valued and the resultant impact on them as learners. It is the way each child is valued in this classroom which impacts on the curricular context. Beyond understanding the unique interests of each student in order to make connections to themes in curriculum content, there is a sense that Williams cares for each child as a person, that he wants to know what is happening in their lives both inside and outside of school.

Evidence of the value he places on each child as a person is seen in his

willingness to talk with the students and to have their talk ever present in the class. As human beings, one of the major ways we establish relationships with others is through oral communication. In this classroom, personal stories matter. The children have opportunities to get to know one another in a personal manner. Further, there is a tone established that what they have to say will be regarded as significant. As Williams states, "I want them to talk about what is important to them."

Some of the talk is quite informal, such as the time when Jane told about how she received the trophy for the most improved hockey player at the recent banquet. Some of the talk is connected to the content being explored in other subject areas and to stories being told in their writing, such as the occasion when Lynn wrote about her reservations concerning her upcoming trip to her father's for Easter. At other times, the talk occurs within the regularly scheduled week-end reports and sharing times. On many occasions the talk and storytelling develop "out of the blue" and, rather than being interpreted as interruptions, are generally valued, although there are times, as with any class, when the talk appears to be out of control. It is sometimes difficult to judge why the talk occurs and the purpose it might serve for the students. For example, a student might be telling a story about an event at a hockey game attended during the week-end when, almost instantaneously, the classroom erupts into numerous related exchanges among the students, and conversations rich with ideas develop.

I believe an emphasis on talk is critical, for students have unique sets of experiences, perspectives and viewpoints which become known to one another. In this context it is likely that students will develop a willingness to share thoughts and perspectives with one another. While opportunities to value the other person are created through the emphasis on talk, the significance placed on listening also contributed to valuing the person.

“Listening is one of the hardest things we do in schools,” Williams said as he intervened to re-focus the students on Adam who was telling a story about his recent trip to New York. Some students had been writing in their notebooks, one boy was playing with a toy car inside his desk, and others were, for various reasons, not listening to the story being told. These behaviors did not exhibit the listening that Williams expected. It could be argued that not all students should have to listen to their classmates as long as they are quietly going about their work, but in this classroom community, the teacher considers listening to be as essential as talking. An interesting point about his comment is that he was not requesting the students to listen to him. Instead, he was asking that they listen to a peer.

In addition to valuing students by providing many opportunities for them to talk, to tell their stories, and to become comfortable stating their opinions, Williams wants “respectful listening” to occur in his classroom.

What the kids come to expect in my classroom after they’ve had me for a little while is that there has to be careful, respectful listening to everyone at all times. And so, that’s very difficult to achieve a lot of the times in

classrooms especially when things are exciting and interesting. You have to learn to structure it so that the kids, when you're really getting that reflective and respectful listening to take place, that everybody realizes how important it is. I value respectful listening and I think out loud and I say things like, "You know what so and so just said is really an important consideration. Does anybody have anything that they want to say about that statement?"

The emphasis on listening in this classroom is significant to the valuing of each person. Williams had just identified for me his reasons for placing value on listening when a student, Molly, told a very long and involved story with details of every place her family stopped during their road trip to Connecticut. Molly appeared to have difficulty differentiating relevant from extraneous information. Williams positioned himself in full view of the students as he attentively listened. He then followed with a couple of questions and a comment regarding his own travels indicating that he often remembers or retells the trip's events based on the restaurants and eating establishments visited. From his comments and questions, Molly and the other members of the class knew that their teacher had listened to and heard her story.

A few minutes later, as the students left the room for recess, Williams, realizing it had been a stretch for most of the students to stay focussed during her storytelling, quietly mentioned to me that "Molly is a person, and in this class, she was going to be given the respect of others listening to her story." It was interesting to note that most of Molly's peers were focussed and listening. The "respectful listening" helped establish that each individual's comments and ideas were to be attended to.

The emphasis on listening is significant. While critical thinking can occur without talking or listening, dialogical thinking –as a component of critical thinking– is enhanced when one has the confidence to share ideas in the belief that her/his opinions and viewpoints will be regarded as contributions worthy of attention. Further, developing a stance towards learning which entails listening to other viewpoints, weighing their comments and analyzing them in relation to one's own beliefs, are significant for critical thinking.

The value Williams places on personhood extends to how Williams wants his students to relate to him. While it is always clear that he is a member with different responsibilities from the students', there is a sense that he wants the students to know him in a personal manner. "Mr. Williams has a pilot's licence," "When Mr. Williams was a boy one summer he went to an island and the strangest thing happened," and "Mr. Williams grew up in Toronto," were among the many comments the sixth grade students related about their teacher. While it is not uncommon for students to talk about their teacher, these comments reflect a personal knowledge of him beyond the classroom context. In an interview Williams discussed why he wants to develop this type of relationship with his students:

I see [the classroom] more and more as a place where kids are actually living their lives. And I see myself as a human being in that group too, where I want to have satisfying and interesting experiences as well. And I want to be treated with respect, and I want to be treated with care.

While there is clearly an emphasis placed on valuing each person in this curricular framework, Williams also values the need for human beings to live in community. The value he places on both is a good example of the balance Dewey (1938) suggests needs to occur between individual and social development. Consequently, living and learning in community are important to the development of the curricular context in his classroom.

(ii) Valuing Relationships and Community

“Who will be bringing salads?” “Don’t forget to make the food yourself,” reminded Williams as the students departed for the day. Tomorrow would be the second time during the school year when the students prepared and participated in a community meal. On these occasions, the class celebrated together. While the meal together might appear as extra activity, added to the teaching day “just for fun”, it is deliberately developed with the intention that students experience joy and unity as a community. While many acknowledge the need for the classroom to be a community, Williams’ conception of community-building entails more than simply a collection of students in a room working on collaborative projects. He aims to build a community with the ingredients of living and working together. As he stated, “I want the kids to understand that the ways that people live in communities are pretty universal, and that there are certain things that all human beings think are important.”

As educators we often focus on developing an intellectual community primarily through collaborative learning experiences. Frequently the view is

adopted that a collective effort can accomplish more than individual effort. Indeed, a good case can be made for this. However, when this stance is embraced, ingredients of living, such as joy and celebration, can be easily overlooked. Part of living in most, if not all communities, involves celebrating. Through festive times people have an opportunity to experience joy and happiness together. Connections and bonds between individuals can be built in a context where personal joys and achievements, as well as the joys and achievements of others, are celebrated.

In addition to celebrations, special events are incorporated into the curriculum. Three specific events occurred over the five months of this study. The first was a field trip to the rocky shore planned as a learning event in a unit of study in science; the second, a school social event planned and organized by the class; and the third was comprised of two, day-long ski trips. Although not all the students shared the same degree of enthusiasm for each activity, on all three occasions there was a general sense of happiness and excitement about being together prior to, and after, the class embarked on these events. Students returned to the classroom with a base of common experience and new, enriched images of their classmates. Michael, a quiet student who was hesitant to share his ideas in class discussions, led several of his classmates into risk-taking adventures on the trips to the ski-hill and the seashore. While somewhat hair-raising for Williams, these episodes and other similar experiences opened the door for students to know each other and relate to one another in new ways.

These examples may appear as irrelevant or extraneous, having little or nothing to do with critical thinking about social issues. Some may argue that the happiness generated in these events masks underlying problems, that it creates the illusion "life is a party," while also placing at risk the serious analysis of significant issues. However, during the observation I came to believe these joyous events affect how the community develops. Anger, hostility, divisiveness, and complacency often work against the goals of building community and can interfere with critical dialogue in the community. When there are experiences such as the celebrations and special events in Williams' class, students can become better connected through shared experiences. They experience joint responsibility for themselves and others in their group. Based on the observations made in Williams' class, it is my view that an atmosphere conducive to community level inquiry is facilitated when students value group endeavors.

In addition to the celebrations and special events, Williams concentrates on developing a community inquiring into the content of the curriculum. As discussed in chapter three, in whole language, a goal is to have students work collaboratively. Williams develops class-wide community projects as a part of the curriculum. These projects serve as a good example of collaboration. Options students select from the menu often entail projects in which they have to work through a research process, discussing findings, and designing new ways to communicate their ideas to the class.

The School Street Journal is a class newspaper, published three times this year, featuring articles by the students. Some articles are co-authored while others are individual contributions to the group project. Moreover, the classroom discussions, sharing sessions, and responsible listening all occurred within the context of the classroom community. The intent of these projects is for students to understand that meaning-making should be more than a personal process. They need to consider other people's ideas in a dialogical manner (See chapter four in reference to the work of Lipman, 1991 and Paul, 1992). Caring for and valuing others' ideas, along with a willingness to renegotiate interpretations in light of new information are essential to the dialogical process in critical thinking. A community in which sharing and working together occur creates a context where relationships and social responsibility can be fostered. Further, as discussed below, in communities, issues arise that create a context in which perspectives on the ethics of caring and justice develop.

(iii) Valuing Justice and Caring

"Stop bugging me! Stop bugging me! Stop bugging me, you jerk!" Andrew exclaimed as Drew continued to poke him in the back with a pencil.

Williams moved over to the boys and said, "Okay, what's the problem here?"

"Well Drew is poking me in the back with a pencil, and I'm trying to get my work done."

Williams replied, "Well we have rules that we all agreed upon to govern

this kind of a problem in the classroom. What are they? What can you tell me?"

Andrew stated, "Yeah, well I have a right to learn in this classroom. No one can prevent me from doing my work, and he's interfering because he's poking me with a pencil."

Drew retorted, "Oh, I didn't mean any harm. I'm just doing it for fun."

"But can you see that Andrew is not enjoying the joke. So what is the appropriate response?" queried their teacher.

At the front of the classroom is posted a "Charter of Rights and Responsibilities" for the classroom (See Appendix 6) where the right to learn is listed with other rights. This Charter, created early in the year through a classroom based discussion, serves as a framework for the students to think about their individual responsibilities and rights. Language from the Charter becomes part of the classroom discourse. "Rights" and "responsibilities" become reference points in the classroom context for discussions and thinking about students' conduct and attitudes and issues beyond. Although charters were not discussed in Dewey's work (1938) on classroom communities, given his desire to have the classroom operate as a democratic society it is conceivable that he would have looked on this approach positively.

In the first interview, Williams shared with me his rationale for the Charter.

At the beginning of the year I do a Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. We sort of look globally at what human beings are, we look at some of the ideas and the differences between what a right is and what a privilege is. Then we talk about the classroom setting. We work at the language and the concept and we develop a list of rights that we

think that everybody in the room is entitled to. And from there we go into what are the responsibilities that we have in order to have access to those rights. And then, of course, what are the consequences if we do not respect the responsibilities and we do not respect the rights of others.

Often, in theoretically-based discussions, the ethics of caring and justice are polarized. In this classroom context there was a sense that both were valued. This was particularly so when issues arose which involved conflict within the group, or when renegotiation of assignments was required for students who encountered difficulties. On one occasion the class was working in groups to complete an assignment and shortly after the class began, one student, James, left the classroom. A few seconds later Williams also left and, after several minutes, returned by himself. "Where is James? He's supposed to be here helping. Why doesn't he have to be here?" challenged Peter.

"He is not feeling very welcomed in the group right now. He would rather be alone; so he is going to work out in the hall for a bit," responded Williams in a calm yet direct manner. While this encounter was brief the students were confronted with the complexity of dealing concurrently with both caring and justice. Further, while Williams demonstrated that he was willing to bend the requirements of the assignment to attend to the needs of the students, he was also indirectly requesting them to think about why James was feeling excluded.

I spoke with Williams about the relationship between caring and justice he wished to establish in the curriculum.

MW Yeah, well I really don't see them as distinctly different characteristics of what's happening. I can see that there is a time and a place where one

applies itself better in a situation than others. But I don't think that they're really polarized. I see situations where caring about an individual is more the issue than the issue of right or wrong. I think that [caring] has to be considered and I think sometimes kids don't consider each other. I think that teachers really do model caring and justice to kids. The kids read their teacher and after a few months of getting to know the teacher. It isn't just a teacher; it's the teacher and person. So they see me in situations where I will show care, or express care, or listen to care, or value care, and there are times when we have to be more linear and more objective and analytical about it and have to sort out the rules so the justice comes into play.

HH I noticed on the Charter, it states that every person is equal and so they deserve to be treated equally, that they should be treated the same, and that no one should be given preferential treatment. Are there ever issues that come up when children are treated differently and if so, how is this rationalized to the students? Do you ever talk about that as a class?

MW Yeah I have actually. There have been times. I think that's a very good point because what we have on paper in the ideal world is the world of justice. It isn't always workable and there are times when there are exceptions definitely. To answer the second part of your question, yes. There are times when I have addressed that issue to the class and they have a lot of questions regarding justice and fairness. I'm going to take an example. I give a deadline for the class, in terms of an assignment; everyone has to be done at a certain time. Kids who are experiencing difficulty just can't manage to meet that deadline; I will give them another deadline and other kids will say, "Well that's not fair because I had to work hard in order to get the work done." I talk a little bit about things that are very complicated. Sometimes the decisions are very difficult and they're not always right. But sometimes judges have to look inside their hearts and try to give the people the benefit of the doubt and that's what I'm doing in this case. I might ask them, "Have you ever had a time when you've had a particularly difficult time and needed someone to give you a break? Well, that's what's happening here. Do you understand that there are exceptions?" Then I would give some demonstrations and examples. That has worked a fair, bit actually.

In the classroom Williams often uses classroom events that entail conflict as opportunities to discuss the complexity of caring and justice. On several occasions, issues relating to playground behavior came up for discussion.

Rather than the arbitrary application of rules, there is a sense that the students are asked to think about the context of behavior. As discussed in chapter four Roland Martin (1992) thinks there is a need for care and passion to be included in education rather than simply a cold, analytical application of reason often associated with critical thinking. Thayer-Bacon (1993) argues that in critical thinking, universal principles are overemphasized with little attention given to context. I think the example of playground behavior highlights that caring and analytical reasoning can be combined. Williams commented:

It's given kids the opportunity to see the complexity of the emotional parts of a conflict than the action or actions. Being able to understand that there's an emotional reaction. I use hypothetical examples to fish and bait the kids, and have them be more conscious of those kinds of difficulties. One day we did a really neat activity. The kids were given a scenario and they look at all the different possible outcomes based on how people act in a situation. They think about: "If you do this, then that is one of the actions and then there will be another action, and if you choose another alternative," they sort of project ahead to try and see what the outcome would be. It was really well done and the kids discussed all of the different scenarios and all of the different outcomes. It was a very helpful day. They thought about the complexity of behaviour.

Classroom issues such as discipline and assignment requirements are social situations. I believe that the manner in which caring and justice were demonstrated and presented created a framework for examining broader social issues.

Similar to the classroom situations previously outlined, issues such as sexism, racism, and environmental questions are rife with complexities. As issues of social significance have impact on real people, it is crucial that the

critical thinking process involve assessment of what is fair and just, whose needs are being met, and how to better care for society as a whole. In discussions about social issues which originate in life within the classroom, or in broader society, there is a need to think about the issues in terms of justice and caring. Williams' encouragement of such analysis and/or concern for justice and caring within his classroom, create a context which encourages students to examine issues from multiple perspectives.

(iv) Examination as a Way of Learning

Examination in living and learning together is how I would describe the context in Williams' classroom. I am not suggesting that everything is examined, but he establishes an inquiring tone which permeates the conversations, discussions, and reflections on written work. He approaches his teaching in a way similar to that advocated by Passmore (1967) in "Teaching to be Critical" (discussed in chapter four).

I think the whole idea is to build in reflective moments. So that whatever it is you're doing in the classroom with the kids, there is time for reflection on how did it go. What worked, what didn't work? What did we learn from this experience, not just in terms of the content or the process .

The manner in which the critical thinking permeates the fabric of the classroom context appears to be both spontaneous and commonplace. My observations did not lead me to believe that the teacher's decisions were always conscious. Williams is consistently attuned to the need for students to develop a critical attitude, and he regularly discourages the uncritical

acceptance of information and ideas. For example, on one occasion when the students in the class were collectively studying ships and ship building as part of their social studies curriculum, he had given them a short hand-out on Sable Island. He began by reading the text but stopped several times to pose questions. Asking these questions was not something he had decided to do prior to the reading. Rather, the questions appeared to be a reflection of his stance on the relationship between critical examination and learning. The questions asked required the students to consider the plausibility of information in the text and the implications of the information. For example, the text states that there have not been any shipwrecks on Sable Island for the last fifty years. Rather than leaving this statement as unsubstantiated, Williams requests that students first think about the plausibility of this fact, and second, about what has changed during the last fifty years which might have led to the marked reduction in the number of shipwrecks? This focus on how to examine demonstrates that Williams is conscious of the need to focus on logic in critical thinking. The students generated a number of ideas (e. g. the use of radar, the kinds of vessels) as they reflected on the questions. One child referred to the use of maps, and rather than leaving this idea as a possibility, Williams posed another question about the date of the maps used by the early explorers.

During the second interview I spoke with Williams about the emphasis on critical examination in his teaching.

I'm not that meta about critical thinking when I'm doing spelling or when

I'm just having a casual conversation with kids. But, maybe some of the strategies I'm using, like encouraging the kids to talk or asking a question that makes them think. This morning, for example, I just wanted to get them kicked into social studies so I read that little piece on Sable Island shipwrecks so that they'd have a little bit to go on when they were doing their projects. I didn't really plan to ask any of those questions - I just thought: Those would be logical questions to ask the kids. I wanted to see them interested. I wanted to pose questions that were going to draw them to the subject matter. I wanted them to think about it. That type of thing that I would do, with the piece on Sable Island, is the same type of thing that I would do if I was addressing another issue.

Questions and discussions which encourage students to justify their positions, to question the information presented, and to consider alternative viewpoints, occur commonly and consistently in Williams' curriculum. The following vignette from the classroom demonstrates how his orientation to curriculum fosters an occasion for critical examination in learning.

"I like Jane's character story," Susan responded when she had a chance to make a comment about Jane's writing in process during a class sharing time.

"But, what did you like about it? What is good about her writing?" queried Williams.

After a couple of seconds, Susan answered, "I like the way Jane got into the problem right away."

"I like the way she slipped character facts into the story like when she said that Jenny paused, then looked suspiciously over her left shoulder," commented Cindy.

During "writing response time", rather than stating that students like or dislike some aspect of another person's work, students are encouraged to think

about why they hold such a position. They are also asked to justify their comments aloud to the class. This probing, although subtle, creates an atmosphere where the students are requested to think critically by assessing and justifying their conclusions. The conversations about the writing foster criticism and an awareness of criteria, for evaluating an aspect of critical thinking stressed by Lipman (1991) and discussed in chapter four. Over time, Williams has found that many students have begun to internalize his focus on justification and have begun to predict the need to justify without his asking, "Why do you think that?"

In addition to the focus on critical examination in writing, Williams positions himself in a questioning, problem-solving stance when teaching spelling. Comments such as "Let's examine the attempts made with particular students' spelling", were common as were comments like. Rather than think about the efforts only in terms of right and wrong, think about why the word might have been spelt this way and what sound, meaning or function pattern might help us to think about how the word is spelt." I think this type of analysis encourages the children to think about the need to look at a problem from multiple perspectives.

Further, in the conversations which develop in the class, Williams encourages the students to question information. Rather than passively accepting information, he assists students in linking content with criticism as advocated by Dewey (1938), Hare (1995) and Russell (1939), Williams

challenges the students to think in terms of differentiating between fact and opinion and to reflect on how information can be assessed critically.

The following example illustrates how the request to examine information in a critical manner surfaces in the classroom. On one occasion a student had concerns about the indifference of students towards keeping school property clean.

“I think we leave too much work for the caretaker. We track snow into the school and leave garbage on the playground,” said Lindsay.

“That’s their job. They’re paid to clean that stuff up,” replied Greg. Other opinions voiced represented a polarization of views within the class.

“I am going to do a survey to see if we leave too much work for the caretaker,” said Lindsay.

“That’s a good idea. Maybe you can make up the questions for the survey today and share them with us tomorrow. Then, we can give you some feedback,” said Williams.

The next day Lindsay shared the survey questions. “Do you think the snow leaves too much work for the caretaker? Should kids pick up garbage?” The students listened carefully to Lindsay’s questions.

In a supportive but challenging way and before the students responded, Williams asked, “Can you tell what Lindsay thinks about the issue because of her questions?”

Jane commented that, “What she said only asked about too much work. It

showed that she thought that we were leaving too much work for him.” Following the point raised that Lindsay’s questionnaire was biased, suggestions were offered of possible use of her survey. “Do you think of the caretaker when you litter? “What do you think about when you throw litter on the ground? and “Have you ever picked up garbage?” were offered as possibilities from the class. It was Lindsay’s decision to use or disregard the feedback of her peers. Similar to this event, on several occasions, when a difference of opinion developed within the class, Williams encouraged the students to move beyond their current opinions, to gather relevant information, and to re-examine their ideas in light of new information. The investigative inquiry which is always followed by a class discussion of the findings is meant to challenge the students to assess their views, to have them think about the relationship of facts, possible facts, and opinions and to differentiate fact from opinion.

In this section I have attempted to illuminate values foundational to Williams’ pedagogical stance. It is important to recognize that the value placed on the person, the community, justice, caring, and critical examination all have influenced the curricular context primarily because of Williams’ philosophical position. The focus given to each of the values discussed in this section inevitably influenced many aspects of learning for the children in the class, I have shown that these values helped to create a curricular context fertile for critical thinking about social issues. In the following section I examine the explicit emphasis placed on the critical examination of social issues in Williams’

class.

Explicit Intention

Matthew Williams' pedagogical intention is to have students think critically about social and other issues.¹² During the time I visited the class I noted several occasions when Williams' role was explicitly linked to the aim of fostering critical thinking about social issues. In these cases, he deliberately attempted to influence the curriculum in a manner that focussed on critical thinking about social issues.

MW I have a pedagogic agenda. I value certain things in my teaching. I went to a concert recently at the Rebecca Cohn theatre and a jazz musician performed a number he called "Going After". I like to make an analogy to my teaching. I have high expectations for my teaching. When I am going after issues and a particular kind of thinking, I am aware of it.

It is important to acknowledge that explicit attention to critical thinking about social issues occurs primarily because Williams cares that the issues be examined in this manner. If he was not interested in exploring social issues, then it is unlikely that the elements outlined below would exist in the format described. Part of the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues entails caring about social issues and taking the position that it is essential to explore these issues in the classroom. However, caring about social issues, and caring about the critical examination of social issues, are two

¹² This goal for education is regarded as essential by Dewey (1954), Kilpatrick (1951) and Church (1996) and was highlighted earlier in chapters two and three.

different things. Unfortunately, with some teachers, caring about an issue outweighs caring about critically examining it, resulting in teachers using their power to indoctrinate students with teacher beliefs and perspectives about social issues.

In this section I have broken the discussion into three categories, and, although related, each part of the discussion reflects fundamental aspects of the teacher's role. In the first sub-section, I discuss the role of helping students to perceive social issues. In the second, the emphasis is on how Williams focuses the students' attention on the issues in order to encourage careful examination. In the third section there is a discussion of the teacher's role in assisting the students in framing the social issues.¹³

(i) Creating Possibilities: Perceiving Social Issues

Williams helps students to perceive social issues. In order to think critically about social issues one needs to perceive them, to recognize them as such. As the work on critical thinking explored in chapter four suggests, critical thinking needs to be about something. "Criticism" is linked to content. To develop critical thinking about social issues, there must be a significant effort to have content steeped in social issues.

Poverty, abuse, and racism may be obvious as issues of social

¹³ I use the term "framing" to depict a process of widely looking at the issue. This includes situating the discussion in the context of broader concepts such as equality, prejudice, stereotyping etc. Further it involves helping in the development of critical thinking skills which students might use in the analysis of other problems.

significance to some individuals. However, if one does not see certain events and problems as societal issues, there is a danger that they will be either ignored or interpreted in an isolated manner with no social connection. Many children in this classroom, may not have paid much attention to such issues. Other students stated opinions on aspects of an issue, possibly mimicking the views of others without really having examined the issue, while still others may have thought critically about certain issues of social significance.

Williams creates possibilities for seeing issues through the choices he gives students in their selection of reading material. As van Manen (1991) shows, such decisions represent choices in teaching:

Educational programs and objectives reflect in an obvious way the pedagogical intent of our teaching children. The books we offer children, the environments we create for them, the experiences we help make possible - all these may reflect our pedagogical intent. (p. 21)

As documented in chapter three, in a whole language approach to curriculum students are provided with a rich literature environment. Further, in keeping with the importance placed on student ownership and control in the curriculum, children in Williams' class are expected to read novels on a regular basis. Usually they self-select reading materials although sometimes the choice is negotiated with the teacher.

The book topics and genre vary but some have an obvious connection to social issues (See Appendix 7 for a sampling of socially relevant books found in the classroom) while others lack any such obvious connection. Many books

provide students with vantage points from which to examine issues different from those of their own lived experiences and have characteristics relevant to the facilitation of critical thinking about social issues.

It is imperative to recognize that part of the teacher's role in developing a whole language curriculum¹⁴ is to ensure that there is appropriate reading material readily available within the classroom. Books containing themes related to social issues such as violence, social class, race, and gender, found in Williams' class, are there by deliberate action. In his negotiations with students over choices, Williams often encourages them to select these kinds of books because, in his mind, they provide a necessary context for helping students begin to think critically about social issues.

While it is difficult to predict the precise effect, these book choices may have, it is clear that the reading materials encourage students to think about a particular kind of content relevant to the aim of facilitating the critical examination of social issues. The reading, thinking, and talking about the books sets up a context in which issues are placed before them. On one occasion when the class discussed the circumstances which cause people to change their values, a student in the class volunteered that she felt some of the books she had read this year had encouraged her to change her values.

In addition to the possibilities classroom literature provides for seeing

¹⁴ The teacher's role in organizing the learning environment in whole language was previously discussed in chapter three.

social issues, the classroom focus on talk, be it informal or more structured conversation or discussion, is such that it often moves in the direction of critically examining social issues. The entry point for many discussions tends to be student reflections on their own lived experiences.

At some level Williams exhibits a protectionist attitude with regard to the inclusion of social issues in the curriculum. When the curriculum is open, as opposed to tightly controlled, both topics and conversational direction are fluid. Consequently, conversations can sometimes move in a direction which the teacher does not find desirable; in other cases it is the initial focus of the discussion which can become problematic.

On one occasion a student Steven, who recently returned from a trip to Ottawa with his hockey team excitedly reported that a woman had been murdered in the hotel where the team had stayed. The body had been discovered in a dumpster outside of the hotel and the police were involved in an investigation. The students were mesmerised as Steven told his story. Several students started to question him about details about her death and some appeared to be frightened by the event. While the students were allowed to ask a few questions, the time for student questions was intentionally shortened. In the second interview I discussed this episode with Williams.

MW We got to the point in that retelling of events and it was really uncomfortable for me because I could see how mesmerised the kids were by the incomprehensibility of this whole act. Why would somebody kill somebody? Again they were really sort of there worried and wondering, and I saw this fear on their faces and I didn't know what to do. Have

some glib response and say, "Ya ...well that happens mostly in the big cities." Why do people do these things? Some of the issues, the terrible things that happen to people that kids are exposed to. It's a very difficult thing to handle. While you want the exposure I don't think it's appropriate that kids dwell on this kind of stuff.

HH Why don't you want them to dwell on it for any length of time?

MW I believe that kids need to be suitably and appropriately exposed to this kind of thing. Sometimes media, like in the Gulf War, I really couldn't stand. Kids going home and talking about the Gulf War. Kids going home and watching all of these bombs and fireworks going off night after night after night. Looking at war sort of like a cool, clean execution. Kids were really troubled in schools. Parents were reporting nightmares. Ever since that time, I'm always very worried about the emotional well-being of kids when something like this happens. My philosophy is that kids at this age and younger, to some extent, should be protected from the terrible things that happen in the world.

In the case of the murder, Williams is concerned that, for the most part, the interest exhibited by the students is on violence as an act, rather than as an issue. While discussing the act may have created the possibility to explore the issue there is also, in his mind, the likelihood that the talk in the classroom would focus on the gruesome details. Williams believes it is his responsibility to assess emotional and moral implications which might arise if students become unhealthily focussed on violent details rather than on a critical examination of the issue. His sensitivity was demonstrated on this occasion.

In his attempts to have children critically examine social issues, Williams also considers the interest his students have in social issues. It is evident however, that the degree of interest is not uniform throughout the class. As might be expected, some issues are of more interest to some students than

others. However, Williams interprets his role in responding to students' interests to be one of developing new interests as well as allowing them to pursue those things which they find appealing on their own. Most, if not all of the girls in the class, appear drawn to the books which contain issues of social significance. There is also a small group of four or five students who often did not attend to the content of social issues. I spoke to Williams about this difference during the second interview.

MW I think there are some kids who are quite a bit younger in their thinking and they're not really engaged with those kinds of questions. They don't wonder about those kinds of things. I have some kids that have some real learning difficulties, language processing difficulties and interestingly they also have a lot of social difficulties. Some of these kids have not put the pieces together for themselves. The correlation between language difficulties and social interaction problems is fascinating. Often the ones that are struggling with aspects of language have difficulty with articulating viewpoints on higher level issues.

HH In your classroom I see a lot of the opportunities to engage in critical thinking occur in discussions, opportunities which are often based on reflections in reading and writing. I think that is probably one of the reasons why these children are having difficulty with engaging in a discussion of the issues. Do you see any other places that their language difficulties interfere with the examination of social issues?

MW Yes, in their actions and in their justifications and how they talk about issues, especially the real world issues that occur in the classrooms with their friends: playground issues, problem issues. It can be very frustrating at times. Sometimes they are really not interested in thinking about a resolution to a problem or even understand the issue. They are still reacting. They often just only think of one possible solution and they don't deviate from that solution. They just come up with one solution, and even though they're encouraged to come up with others, they don't, or they refuse to.

This class, like any other, is comprised of individuals with unique interests

and characteristics. The resultant complexity this creates can be overwhelming. For children who encounter language-processing difficulties, the focus on language, obviously present in a language-rich, whole language curriculum, can be a problem, creating additional challenges for the teacher.

As mentioned, helping children to see social issues requires the teacher to place value on their presence in the curriculum. As indicated by Williams' work, materials and the teasing out of issues from students' personal stories and conversations are two means by which issues can be introduced. Further, incidents where racist, classist or sexist comments are made--if properly handled--create opportunities for having children examine social issues. These "critical incidents" or "teachable moments", (as portrayed in chapter three) are opportunities to facilitate learning if the teacher seizes the possibility.

(ii) Focussing on Issues

Beyond his role in assisting students to see issues, Williams supports and encourages students to examine them critically. In the third interview we discussed his perspective on this aspect of his role.

- HH It is easy for people to interpret something as an event, as an isolated episode rather than an issue. How do you help the students to focus on the issue?
- MW I try to always go after a level that is central to the concept. I try to formulate it so that kids will see it as important. I think there is a personal level of involvement that needs to be there. If I believe something is important as an issue, I tell them.
- HH You point-blank tell them?

MW I say, I think this is really important and these are the reasons. This whole values clarification thing where you share, and you keep it muddy, and you don't take a stand, isn't very successful because it lacks genuineness. What I try to do is respond and have the students respond in a genuine way.

Within the classroom, issues which Williams thinks are significant are often explicitly identified with reasons given as to why it is necessary to think about a particular issue. As he suggests, it is essential to move beyond merely labelling a behaviour as racist to an examination of information and viewpoints in a dynamic process through consideration of underlying values. This intention was obvious when he read the book, The Metallic Sparrow, to the class.

Through his reading of the book, and the probing questions he asked, moments and situations are created that encouraged students to see that they need to develop the ability to examine an issue of social class from multiple perspectives. In the second interview he spoke about this choice.

HH In regards to the books and how some of them do raise an awareness of social issues you read the story, The Metallic Sparrow. I'd like to probe you a little bit about how you were able to raise the issue at a class level.

MW I did stop and ask key questions: "What do you notice about the differences in these two pets?" When the moment was there, I worked at it. I asked the question, I went after comparison and analysis. So in my questions I was sensitive to that issue because I wanted the kids to focus on these issues in the books. I find that if I model certain kinds of questions, then they're more likely to ask those kinds of questions or think about those kinds of questions themselves. Often what I do in response letters or in book reports is to get the kids to think about the theme. What are the messages? What are the important issues here?

HH I noticed one question that I've read in a lot of your responses to their work is, "What important thing did you learn about life?"

MW That's the kind of question I ask. It's that kind of question that we often talk about. I want them to think about the significance of certain events or issues in the literature.

On another occasion he encouraged the students to look closely at an event and think about the significance of the underlying issue. Williams identifies the issue directly and the reason why it should be examined. "Today I want us to think a bit about racist jokes. It has been brought to my attention that individuals are telling these jokes at recess. I think it is important to think about this because it may be that some people here don't understand what racist jokes are and how they can hurt people. Think about what is right and wrong. It may be that you judge people by listening to these joke. Think about a time when maybe you thought it was only fun." On another occasion when the class was examining values in other cultures, Williams prefaces the examination with statements about why it is crucial to realize that people often have values and customs different from our own that we might think of as strange.

Gender, class, violence, race, and to some extent environmental issues, are most commonly raised by the students. Such occasions occurred when several students took objection, for example to the position stated by peers that "girls spend lots of money and waste it on brand-name clothes" and when many students felt that they were unfairly being blamed for aggressive behavior on the playground.

The examination of issues was regularly enhanced by the questions Williams asked. Rather than accept the opinions simply as presented, he used

the situations which had arisen to nudge students into tackling issues.¹⁵ For example, in the case of the claim about girls and shopping, he requested students to investigate shopping patterns and the impact of media advertisements. Through questions Williams encouraged the students to think about what was fact and what was opinion, requesting that they search for information to help them understand the issue more thoroughly. One of the students suggested that they might begin by conducting a survey. Others in the class pointed out the difficulty there might be in developing the appropriate questions. A group of four students agreed to conduct a survey based on questions they developed. Another three decided to compare some popular magazine advertisements, while a third group resolved to examine television advertisements.

Many educators examining the events above would suggest that Williams was responding to a “teachable moment” or a “critical incident”. In a child-centred, whole language curricular framework the teacher is meant to use “teachable moments” to gently nudge student development forward. In the discussion on whole language (chapter three) I raised the point that teachable moments do not emerge from a vacuum. Rather, they are interpreted to be teachable moments by the teacher. This process is ultimately a reflection of the teacher attending to the development of those aspects of learning which are

¹⁵ Williams positions himself similar to the teacher depicted in “Philosophy for Children” developed by Lipman (1991), discussed in chapter four.

valued. I raise this point again to suggest that these events become moments Williams could use in order to help students see social issues because he wants to facilitate the development of their critical thinking.

Williams' willingness to be flexible in time-scheduling in order to provide ample time for exploration and reflection is imperative if students are to engage in critical thinking. Many social issues are such that students are not in a position to identify relevant facts, concepts and possibilities if only short periods of time are made available to them. For many, there needs to be time to think and ponder. As Williams put it, "If we want to go after having the kids successful at anything they have to have immersion in opportunities."

In this classroom, time is not neatly allotted in such a manner that students are consistently given a block of time to complete an assignment or an investigation. There is an overall feeling that learning is not being hurried. Further, as is obvious in the example of the study into shopping and spending patterns, the direction of inquiry develops spontaneously when an interest arises to examine a particular problem. Allowing interest to provide direction for inquiry, and being flexible with the time allotted for examination is possible when the focus within the curriculum is upon the students and their learning rather than upon covering subject matter on a pre-determined time schedule. The focus on the children's learning is evident in the manner used by Williams when he responds to individuals within the class.

It is obvious that while Williams is working at a macro-level within the

class, he is also responding to individual student's development. As he puts it, "When you're at the front of the class, it is like you are throwing a net over a school of fish. You are going to get some of them, but others are not there." One-on-one conferences, comments made on pieces of writing, questions asked in reference to work on an individual and personal basis creates significant challenges, but Williams uses these opportunities to nurture each student's individual growth. In a child-centred, whole language approach to teaching, nurturing is fundamental, for the role of the teacher is conceptualized as someone who provides this type of support.

MW Often times I'll be working at critical thinking, when I'm conferencing with kids. I try to do some personal work. That's the moment when I'll be able to bring them along to a point where I can ask them questions that are critical or further their thinking. It's a hard one to do though, especially with thirty-two kids.

While class level inquiry is crucial, because comments made within that context tend to sustain the inquiry, there is also the need for nurturing development at the individual level. For a critical disposition or "critical spirit" to develop there needs to be wide application of critical thought. This means going beyond discussions with the class. The students need to assume a critical stance in all aspects of the curriculum. Williams holds individual conferences with students in his efforts to nurture this type of critical interaction with learning events.

For teachers such as Williams, attempting to facilitate critical engagement

with learning within a whole language, child-centred curriculum is challenging, for children are exploring a variety of topics and engaging in a choice of tasks. This can, as Williams suggests, make the teacher's role very demanding. Ultimately, students must develop strategies and skills as well as a disposition to examine their learning in a critical, on-going manner that goes beyond classroom discussions and conferences. In the following section I discuss the manner in which Williams assists students in constructing a framework for considering social issues in a broader context.

(iii) Framing Social Issues

Williams assumes responsibility for helping the students develop ways of thinking critically about social issues, intentionally directing the students to think in particular ways. By "particular ways", I am not referring to his assumption of particular positions, but rather to the fact that he gives his students a means for broadening their thinking.

Williams requests that the students think about the content from the frame of "What did you learn about life?" thus establishing a stance which encourages the child to move beyond the literal meaning to construction of new viewpoints.

In addition to making the content rich with social issues, Williams views part of his role to be ensuring that students develop skills that enable them to independently approach their inquiry in a critical manner.

MW I believe that students need to have some support so that they can actually have some guidelines for how to research, how to debate, how to work in groups. So it's almost like a cue for the teacher too: "Don't forget

to spell out some of the parameters for how the kids are expected to do this activity instead of just assuming that they can do it." It's almost like a mini lesson. When you're doing a formal debate, this is the protocol, this is the format. When you're researching to assess support for your claim let's look at some questions you might ask yourself.

In a whole language curriculum one of the emphases is on personal meaning construction. The assumption is not made that the meaning is contained solely in the text. In Williams' classroom, students are not taken step by step through reading selections so they can "understand it". Additionally, there are no workbook exercises for finding the main idea, or exercises for identifying the most significant social issue within a passage. The focus is on interpreting and substantiating one's own interpretation. Further, students are encouraged to hold tentative viewpoints, kept open for revision, as they continue to read, discuss and investigate.

One of the concerns I have about the practice of child-centred education lies in the tendency of many teachers to back away from establishing truths and firm positions. As I discussed with Williams in the second interview, this tendency creates a softness within the construction of viewpoints. Because whole language, child-centred education has been presented as a pedagogy where students are encouraged to construct their own meanings, and state their own viewpoints, the position has sometimes developed that all opinions are equal. This was, and remains, a serious concern for me. Because Williams is someone who I know values critical thinking, I probed him further on his view

regarding truths, positions and revising thinking. As our dialogue indicates, this was a perplexing area for him.

MW I think we need to give them time and to provide the structure for finding a solution to the problem. It isn't so much the outcome that we want, it's the process. And we want them to be able to entertain the idea of multiple ways of looking at an issue and considering somebody else's point of view, having them realize that there isn't just one right answer necessarily. It's really neat to see kids come in with really strong opinions and those might be representative of what their parents think or what their family thinks, where they're coming from, and they have definitive ideas about violence in hockey, for example. It's interesting to see some of the kids that have definitive mind sets about things and don't shift their thinking at all regardless of the conversation, regardless of the different points of view. It isn't so much that I want to change their opinions about things, I just want them to sort of imagine that there's another way of looking at the problem. The whole idea of having a set definitive outcome isn't really what I'm after and I don't think it's achievable.

HH At one end of the curriculum there is the search for truth and at the other end of the continuum is the relative position that because of subjective knowing, any opinion is equal and is as valuable as another. I'm just wondering how you respond to that.

MW That's a tough one. I would say that umm, I would have to say that there's sort of a delicate, very, very subtle, delicate balance between the kids understanding absolute right/wrong and ethical issues. I have to keep my distance from imparting what I think to be, sort of, my leanings towards things. I think kids do need to know though that there is a collective right and wrong based on society and based on the way that we operate as a community and as a school. That's why I think the whole rules, rights, responsibilities, class charters, school discipline stuff is so important because we do have to consider others and we do have to consider what our collective right and wrong issues are. So...I'm not really answering the question.

HH I think what I hear you saying is that you think it's important to hear different perspectives and different views, and at the same time you want to nurture an open mind in which students don't think necessarily that they have the correct answer but are willing to entertain other answers. But that, in fact, there are some cases right and wrong answers. Like, for example, sexism, is it ever right? Or racism, is it ever right? Is that

correct? Is that fair?

MW Yes, that is correct. I try to stay away from truth because that is sort of like definitive - absolute. I see meaning being made as not to be definitively the right set of values and the right way of thinking. Some kids will see things with more certainty than they did before. If you look at spiritual thinking, it is a journey that people engage with, it really is an evolution. Even devoutly religious people, I think, still have to question.

HH The stance is this is what I know this to be, keeping in mind that I always need to call things into question.

MW I can see how difficult it is to move beyond just that anybody's opinion is equal and everybody has the right to express their opinion. The work I did three years ago on human rights really advocated for individual right and responsibility. Further, that there are basic rights we have and we need to respect those rights in other people. I have moved. I think it is important to understand the concepts embedded in individual rights but that the collective responsibility we have is important too. We do have to, especially the teacher, make it clear, and hope the students will come to the understanding through the teacher's guidance to see there is right or wrong.

As these exchanges indicate, Williams found it challenging to integrate a child-centred, whole language perspective on meaning construction into a framework for critical thinking in general, and a study of social issues in particular. In his mind the frame or perspective he tried to develop involved three positions embedded in his stance towards critical thinking. First, he wanted students to realize that we are all entitled to an opinion. However, I would argue (and he would agree) that this does not mean that all opinions are equally valid. Second, Williams' stance posits that there is a responsibility when constructing positions to consider other viewpoints; however the stance he adopts does not de-emphasize that one should pass judgements on the

positions of others in a critical manner. Understandably, when trying to encourage and support all students to develop positions, and have them feel safe when sharing their views, he has reservations about the consequences when judgement statements are made which then threaten the future participation of students in the dialogue. A third component of his stance was his position that students need to realize that they do not necessarily hold the correct answer. While keeping an open-mind towards revision of one's thinking is essential to critical thinking, this does not necessarily mean one is to conclude that there are no right answers.

The reference to "no absolute right and wrong" in our dialogue, and the fact that he alluded to collective right and wrong, suggests that this is another perplexing area for him. I believe that students need to frame their consideration of others' views with the assumption that it is possible to be mistaken and, accordingly, a close examination of another perspective is necessary.

Another aspect of Williams' role is structuring the learning event in such a way that a broad view of social issues embedded in the activity is encouraged. During class the topic of racism came up with reference to the book Maniac Magee, the story of a white boy who, after his parents die, lives in a predominately African-American neighborhood. "I'm not going to tell you what racism is. I'd like you to break into groups of four and discuss what you think racism is. In groups, one student should record the ideas. Everyone needs to contribute and there needs to be respectful listening. After ten minutes, one

person from each group will share the ideas generated. Move your chairs to face one another. Actually I'd like you to think about the question in this way." Williams moved to the board and writes "Racism is when:" then directs students to remember examples from their reading.

Sara queries, "And in true life?" as conversation erupts and noise fills the room. At this point there is little interference from Williams as students worked in their groups.

After approximately fifteen minutes, during which time Williams circulates around the room primarily listening to conversations, there are reports from groups. "As you listen, think about whether you agree or disagree and what you think about the issues," he directs the children. Williams moves to the board and records key phrases from the comments generated (See Appendix 8 for a list of statements recorded). With the list in front of them students reflect on related experiences and ideas which they then shared them with the class. These exchanges are fairly spontaneous and consequently move in slightly different directions rather quickly. During the exchanges, Williams is deliberately quiet. He intervenes only when he thinks a need exists to refocus the discussion. The following classroom dialogue illustrates this point.

"There was a picture on the front of the paper of a black guy who was eating a toonie, like it was a doughnut the day toonies came out. I think that is racist," states Jim.

"You shouldn't be judged like that because.... It's like racism," adds

Jared.

Williams intervenes with a question, "What is it about the picture that makes you think that it is racist?"

"Ummm...it's because it makes him look stupid and people will laugh at him," responds Sara.

"The people in Japan think they are smarter than us," adds Blake.

"Do all of the people in Japan think this?" queries Williams. There is no response; so he adds, "How do we know any of the people in Japan feel this way?"

"People thought if you were smarter, you would be richer and that you were better. They made fun of Lawrenceville," comments Susan.

"Cartoonists make fun of people. Why is that not racist?" poses Michael.

"Some people get paid to make fun of other people."

In this situation, Williams encourages the students to look at the situation in the text read in a broader manner. His questions and the time he allotted allowed the situation to become the starting point from which a broader examination developed. This emphasis encouraged the children to think about social issues from a wider perspective.

In several cases there are statements generated that had the potential to enhance the discussion, but were given little if any attention. For example, Jake, in a report from his group, makes reference to the fact that Hitler was racist, to which a classmate volunteers, "I thought Hitler was communist. Communists

believe people are equal.”

Another student responds with a question, “Was Hitler a fascist?” With no follow-up the reporting switches to another group. During the fourth group’s report it is stated by Jeffrey that, “The Lions club in Lewis won’t let black people join - so it’s racist.”

“Is this what is true about the whole organization?” inquires Williams.

“One guy quit down there because of it,” asserts Jake.

“What are they?” questions Lisa.

“They are a group that does good work in the community,” retorts Jason.

“Huuumm,” laughs Jane sarcastically from the back of the room.

In these two situations, one where Williams had an opportunity to develop a discussion on fascism, and another where under other circumstances he likely would encourage students to find out facts, reflect upon the definition and criteria developed for identifying and assessing racism, the discussion was dropped. During an interview I asked Williams about handling the situation in this manner.

MW Kids are bringing a conviction and that information is absolute. I was worried that information was true. I didn’t want to have the child be challenged by me because it would be a personal thing that they were bringing to the class. I would have to challenge the credibility of it, we would have to dig deeper and find out if in fact that was the truth, and I would have liked to pursue that, but I felt I had to be very careful, because that might be an uncle or a relative or who knows what the family thinks about all this. When you start crossing those boundaries with really strong values, you can turn the child away. They can become more firmly entrenched. The parents could be ultra-conservative, right-wing racists. Who knows?

- HH It must be hard when you come up against students who come from those kinds of homes.
- MW Absolutely. You know they are there because you know the parents. You have to keep that in mind. That's one of the reasons why values education is always in trouble.
- HH Do you find this restricts you?
- MW Sometimes I take the careful way out. That conversation could have gone in a variety of directions. I've seen kids get very embedded in their views. Sometimes the kids will get more militant. Sometimes it backfires. There is a political reality out there that has to be figured in the equation.

The political reality to which Williams refers is a complicated issue influencing the context wherein the teacher attempts to facilitate critical thinking about social issues. While the teacher's aim may be to have students focus on issues, and think critically about them, the reality is that some children come from homes where they will be harassed for expressing viewpoints which differ from those of their parents. Some children come to school with firmly entrenched opinions which are challenging to deal with in discussions. Further, some parents take exception to the teacher encouraging students to examine social issues, arguing that they, not teachers, are responsible for a child's moral development. I have identified this "political reality" to suggest that the teacher's role is one of some delicacy. While there is a need to aim for critical thinking about social issues, the responsible teacher must also consider the safety and welfare of the students.

Concluding Comments

Ideally one would want students and teachers to critically examine all types of content. However, it is essential to remember that not all content is present in the curriculum, and within the content that is present, social issues are not always emphasized. Selections of content are often made by the teachers and are influenced by curriculum guides from departments of education. Some content, such as mathematical equations, the science of the human body, and the history of Canada are areas almost always included within the curriculum. However, the focus on social issues is not always evident and in many cases, is not existent to any degree.

It is conceivable that attention to the examination of social issues could emerge in the exploration of such matters as mathematical equations and problem solving, where determining the effect of laying 30 kilometers of new highway on the environment becomes an issue, sex education in health, and so forth. However, in many cases social issues are overlooked.

In all curricula, but particularly in one when the topics for study are not pre-determined but are conceptualized as emerging from the children's interests and what the teacher judges to be in the interests of the children, the stance of the teacher towards the importance of social issues is ultimately influential in fostering critical examination. I emphasize this point to suggest that if critical examination of social issues is to have a significant impact upon the curriculum, teachers need to place value on this examination. As indicated in the case

study of Williams, when critical examination of social issues is valued, then the teacher can make efforts to be attuned to, and create, situations which foster this examination. Further, the nature of the examination the teacher attempts to foster does not occur in a vacuum. The role the teacher plays is founded on beliefs and philosophical positions of which the teacher may or may not be conscious.

In the first section of this chapter I argued that values implicit in the curricular framework Williams developed had a significant effect on the context created for critical examination. When I questioned Williams regarding the impact of the value he placed on the person, community, justice, care, and examination, he suggested that while "one could never prove the effect" it was his hope and intention that the context created would be fertile for critical thinking. Further, in section two I described the manner in which Williams brought explicit attention to critical thinking about social issues.

In the introductory comments to chapter five I suggested that through this case study my intention was not to isolate variables and measure their effect. Instead, I wanted to illuminate what it is that makes Williams a good example of someone who facilitates critical thinking about social issues.

In conclusion, I wish to summarize the points I have made. Williams has clear intentions for his teaching, part of which entails facilitating critical thinking about social issues. He also reflects critically on his values and beliefs regarding teaching, learning and education. He makes conscious decisions

such as establishing positive and personal relationships with students and encouraging them to question.

Williams thinks in terms of his responsibilities as a teacher. As a mature and knowledgeable person he contends that it is his responsibility to direct and nurture learning. Consequently, in his classroom, while there is student control exhibited by way of choices made in terms of assignments, areas of inquiry and viewpoints expressed, there is a clear sense that he exhibits teacher control aimed at supporting, facilitating and directing learning.

There are other specific qualities to Williams' teaching I wish to highlight. First, he thinks critically - constantly and consistently - and demonstrates this to students in casual conversations and formal instruction. Critical thinking is not an on-again/off-again phenomenon in his classroom. In addition, Williams is sensitive to the possibilities of the moment and the needs of the child. He is spontaneous and willing to move with currents that develop in his classroom, making the most of opportunities that arise. He is resourceful and knows how to use available resources wisely to focus students on relevant social issues such as racism, classism, sexism, violence and environmental concerns. Finally, he does not leave the examination of social issues to chance. He has clear expectations about the importance of such issues in the curriculum, and he deliberately focuses students on these issues and assists them in developing a framework for critical examination.

Chapter Seven

THE TEACHER'S ROLE: QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

This study is aimed at developing an understanding of the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a whole language, child-centred curriculum. In chapters two, three, and four, the nature of child-centred education, whole language curriculum and critical thinking were discussed with a view to illuminating important features of each concept and discussing implications for understanding the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. Further, an empirically-based case study of Mr. Matthew Williams, a sixth grade teacher, was developed in chapters five and six to complement the discussions in the earlier chapters. The purpose of this chapter is to integrate the implications of the theoretical positions presented in all the earlier chapters and to construct a framework for the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a child-centred, whole language curriculum based on qualities and characteristics of good teaching. The qualities and characteristics discussed include: directedness, democratic values, a critical stance, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, authority and courage.

It is intended that this chapter will provide educators with direction and insight for comprehending the nature of the role of the teacher in facilitating critical thinking about social issues beyond a set of methodologies

In chapter one, I voiced my concern that often questions posed focus on

how to effectively teach within a whole language, child-centred approach to teaching. In many cases, particularly with pre-service teachers, there is a request for a technical checklist of appropriate teacher behaviors. Throughout the discussions in the previous chapters, I have highlighted the complexity of teaching within a child-centred, whole language framework in general. I have also focussed attention on some specific considerations for understanding the role of the teacher in facilitating critical thinking about social issues.

This chapter, based on a synthesis of the discussions in previous chapters, identifies qualities I believe essential to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. Because this study focuses on child-centred, whole language curricula, I will contextualize the discussion within this particular curricular framework. Direct answers for those seeking a technical response are not provided. Instead, qualities which offer direction for practice and create a means for conceptualizing the teacher as a person (Hare, 1993) are offered.

Qualities

(i) Directedness¹⁶: A Sense of Possibility

It may be argued that the act of teaching, which embodies a particular relationship with the child and the curriculum,¹⁷ implicitly represents a

¹⁶ The term "Directedness" is used by Greene (1978), p.51.

¹⁷ I refer to curriculum in a broad sense including: subject-matter, processes, values, and the social environment.

philosophical position. In many cases this philosophical position may be driven less by the teacher's well-conceptualized ideals - the teacher's directedness - than by the position inherent in practices adopted. Directedness is linked to teachers' values and the ideals which give direction to their life and work. Many criticize the notion of ideals, discrediting their importance by suggesting that they are statements which are unrealistic. Rescher (1987) writes of the importance of ideals.

The person for whom values matter so little that he has no ideals is condemned to wander through life disoriented, without guiding beacons to furnish that sense of direction that gives meaning and point to the whole enterprise. Someone who lacks ideals suffers an impoverishment of spirit for which no other resources can adequately compensate. (p. 144)

Unfortunately, when teaching is reduced to a set of practices to be employed, teachers are not usually conscious of normative perspectives which underlie their practices. Their practices become like habits, only faintly linked - if at all - to a sound philosophical foundation. This is not to suggest that habits always develop out of unexamined assumptions. Maxine Greene (1978) speaks of the need for teachers to be awakened and to ponder the underlying reasons of their role.

I am convinced that, if teachers today are to initiate young people into an ethical existence, they themselves must attend more fully than they normally have to their own lives and its requirements; they have to break with the mechanical life, to overcome their own submergence in the habitual, even in what they conceive to be the virtuous, and ask the "why" with which learning and moral reasoning begin. (p. 46)

"Traditional practice" is often criticized by advocates of child-centred and/or whole language frameworks as being driven by sets of misguided

practices rather than by a well-conceptualized vision of education. However, it is my contention that a similar criticism may be made of many teachers who attempt to develop a whole language curriculum. As discussed in chapter three, many of those who advocate a whole language approach to curriculum stress that it is not a method (Edelsky, 1990; Goodman, 1986; Newman, 1985).

However, for many teachers it has become conceptualized in terms of typical techniques (such as literature response journals, reading-writing conferences) or methods (such as the discovery approach, thematic studies, and inquiry).

Unfortunately, as Church (1996) observes, widespread implementation of whole language has left many teachers with primarily a new set of practices. In many cases it has led to a routine which amounts to little more than a different set of practices than those associated with "traditional practice".

Many who write about whole language argue on the other hand, that it is a "philosophy" to be embraced rather than techniques or methodologies to be employed (Altwerger et al, 1987; Edelsky, 1990; K. Goodman, 1986, 1989; Newman, 1985, 1990). The focus on philosophy may indicate directedness in teaching, but what does embracing a "whole language philosophy" actually mean to teachers and their work?

For some teachers, thinking about the nature of whole language as a curricular framework encourages them to question their role and to rethink the aims and direction of their teaching. When I interviewed Matthew Williams he commented on the need for directedness in his teaching. He spoke, first, of the

need for macro-level directedness, wherein the teacher considers global issues, and second, of micro-level directedness, wherein the teacher makes decisions about individual situations. He views the sense of directedness as essential for teaching:

I am the one who has the responsibility to think about the direction of education. It's my pedagogical responsibility to lead and direct and make decisions. As teachers we need to make decisions constantly about individual situations and the global direction.

While directedness is a quality in Matthew Williams teaching, it is my belief that for others the framework has not inspired a thoughtful reflection on philosophical questions nor the development of a vision for their teaching. While whole language is claimed to be founded on a set of beliefs about teaching and learning (outlined in chapter three), these beliefs must be more than blindly adopted positions and implemented curricular practices in order for quality of directedness to be present. For ease of communication, many who write or speak on the essence of the framework reduce the theory to a few basic axioms to be considered. Unfortunately, many teachers either do not have sufficient theoretical background and philosophical understanding to question fully the theory proposed, or they are not disposed to engage in such an inquiry.

As discussed in chapter two, others working within a whole language framework focus on critical reflection as a tool for thinking about their practice (Newman, 1990; Patterson et al, 1993). Teachers seek to understand the particular individuals, actions, policies and events present in their teaching, define areas which are problematic and follow through with action. In these

cases the teachers use and develop their directedness. However, I wish to identify what I view as a limitation to the use of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.¹⁸

Teachers construct what is called “personal, practical knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) based on the particulars of their individual situations in order to better understand their teaching experiences. While the focus on personal experience and subjective knowing is crucial, and has often not been given the status it deserves, it is essential that the increased attention given to developing theory from practice does not downplay the significance of examining already established theory and its implications for practice. This concern is important because it suggests that there will be limitations to the directedness if a vision is based primarily on what teachers see and call into question.

Hare (1993), in a discussion of the nature of critical perspective, suggests that, “It is not easy to gain the necessary distance from our practice which would enable us to see things in perspective and to notice what we are doing and what is missing” (p.3). While it is always critical to question what one sees, this perspective can be limited in that what one sees is directly influenced by personal background knowledge and the questions one wants to address. For example, if the teacher’s background knowledge and primary interest in curriculum and pedagogy are focussed on teaching techniques, what motivation

¹⁸ These terms were originally coined by Donald Schon (1983, 1987).

will there be to expand critical reflection to an examination of other issues?

There is a danger that when the vision for curriculum and pedagogy is grounded solely in personal experiences that: 1) significant questions that need to be considered will not be asked; and 2) teachers will be less likely to see more global issues.

There are often further problems which interfere with the teacher's sense of directedness in whole language. Often the list of statements which provides an orientation to whole language curriculum is primarily derived from, first, reactions to other approaches to curriculum and, second, from other generalized statements about practice. There is a "recognizable philosophy" (Peters, 1969) within the list of statements but it is often implicit. It is recognizable and open for personal scrutiny if the teacher asks significant philosophical questions.

Barriers which interfere with this type of examination occur when: 1) teachers are told they are to implement whole language; 2) there is resistance to changes in curricula; 3) one gets caught up in a band-wagon approaches to change; or 4) there is no apparent reason to engage in such a personal inquiry. Whole language has, in many cases, become a movement rather than a philosophy in education. Edelsky (1990) suggests that being part of a movement can be supportive in that teachers have a chance to re-think their ideas about teaching in community with others. However, I contend that movements can be problematic in that fundamental questions are left unaddressed because they might be considered threatening to the community.

For many teachers, a relatively unquestioning stance can, unfortunately, often develop. On one occasion, I visited a teacher who is highly regarded in her school district. As a specialist in whole language she has taught undergraduate pre-service teacher education courses in literacy and she wanted to speak with me about the “case study” assignment requirements for a course I was teaching. She was concerned that I required my students, one of whom was her student teacher, to identify objectives for their individually-based teaching of a student encountering difficulties. She found this problematic for she asked: “What right did any person have to set objectives for another person’s learning?” She was unwavering in her belief that students need to assume control in their learning and failed to realize that by not wanting to articulate objectives for learning, she was still influencing the learning which took place. While she was willing to call my views into question, she was resistant to re-examining her beliefs. This example demonstrates the point I raised in chapter three when I suggested that when teachers stand back, they still influence learning.

Church (1996) identifies one of the major difficulties during the wide-spread development of whole language practice as the confusion over the distinction between whole language as a movement and whole language as a philosophy and suggests that “movements spawn orthodoxies and surface understandings”(p. xxi). Rather than the often referenced process of “becoming a whole language teacher” or schools “going whole language”, teachers should engage in a critical examination of the underlying theory of whole language and

relate this to the development of a personal framework and pedagogical stance. This would entail a vision of the purpose of education, the ideals at the heart of their work, and their role as teachers.

To describe pedagogy in terms of a pattern of conduct has limitations; to describe the essence of pedagogy as a set of espoused beliefs which have not been personally subjected to a philosophical analysis also has serious limitations. A philosophically based vision of education - directedness - involves more than espousing statements such as that the curriculum should be founded on students' interests, that the teacher needs to guide learning, and that critical thinking should be facilitated. In addition, questions should be asked such as what the purpose and value in founding the curriculum on students' interests is, what developing a curriculum based on student interests means, what the teacher's responsibilities are, what critical thinking means, why we want students to think critically, and why critical thinking about social issues is important.

What does it mean to have directedness and how is it connected to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues? According to Greene (1979), directedness is teachers awakening to their values and to the conditions working upon them. I have linked directedness to vision because I think that an essential quality for teachers is a well-developed sense of which direction they are headed in their teaching. This does not suggest that the vision is fixed and not subject to revision. This process requires choosing between alternative visions. However, there must also be a willingness to revise

the vision in light of new information which has, necessarily, been thoughtfully and critically assessed.

Such a vision, requires reflection on the future and a personal theory of how to achieve what is deemed significant for the goals and aims of education. Teachers need to focus on where they are headed and why they want to go there. This vision will influence consciously chosen, deliberate efforts as well as those instances when the teacher's behavior seems an almost mindless enactment of beliefs. In the case of Matthew Williams, cultivating the development of critical thinking was not limited to explicit efforts. As discussed in the previous chapter, the value placed on each child encouraged the children to feel comfortable, to want to share their ideas, and to feel comfortable communicating their positions. Further, Williams established a classroom climate that valued listening to the viewpoints and opinions of others. The value placed on sharing and listening enhanced the possibility for critical conversations to develop because students were encouraged to express their own positions and to listen to those of others. What teachers say and do when they are not consciously attending to critical thinking is equally as important as their explicit efforts.

The conception of the teacher as someone with a vision of the purpose of education and a well conceptualized pedagogical stance is not new to child-centred education. This is certainly the view Dewey (1938), Kilpatrick (1933) and Rugg and Shumaker (1928) promoted earlier this century. Furthermore,

they all argue for a particular type of vision which is significant to understanding the teacher's role in cultivating the development of critical thinking about social issues. They explicitly link education to a vision which entails preparation for living and actively participating in a democracy.

In current whole language based conceptions of child-centred education the same attempts to ground the framework in philosophical analyses of teaching are not as evident. Edelsky, in her commentaries on whole language, makes reference to democracy and a critical stance on living, a point raised also by Church (1996) and Shannon (1992). However, as identified in chapter three, this call to ground whole language in a global vision of the place and purpose of education and the link to participating in a democracy is not consistently voiced from all sectors working within a whole language framework. While whole language is often described as child-centred, and Dewey's work is cited as foundational, little effort is made to address the fact that Dewey's conception of child-centred education was contextualized within broader philosophical and political parameters.

Harman and Edelsky (1989) state that democratic, critical, and analytical work is intrinsic to whole language.¹⁹ I also believe that the ideals of social justice and equality need to be embraced in the teacher's vision - which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section on democratic values. I would not,

¹⁹ Harman and Edelsky use the term "intrinsic" in reference to whole language. I have interpreted them to mean that democratic, critical and analytical work is inherent in whole language.

however, say they are intrinsic to whole language. In statements of this type, the teacher is presented as almost a neutral entity who provides a particular type of learning environment and then watches learning unfold as students take control. However, as addressed in chapter two and three, the teacher is never neutral and is always in a position to influence students in a variety of ways. It is because of this influence that teachers need to be ever-mindful of their vision and sense of directedness.

(ii) Democratic Values

In my opinion, it is essential that linking social issues to critical thinking not occur primarily because the teacher is looking for controversial content. It is easy to envision situations where teachers use social issues, because of their controversial nature, as an instructional strategy aimed at the improvement of critical thinking. Teachers should view social issues as more than problems on which to practice. Rather, the critical examination of social issues should be recognized as an crucial aspect of education which encourages the students (and teacher) to be concerned about issues of rights, justice, freedom and equality.

While there are a variety of interpretations of the phrase “participating in a democracy”, I believe that helping students to think critically about social issues has great potential in preparing them for democratic citizenship. Osborne (1993) points out that “we have not, for the most part, taught the kind of citizenship that stresses the importance of active, critical participation directed

towards the enhancement of democratic values" (p. 6). If teachers are committed to citizenship in a democracy, they should be continuously aware of opportunities to cultivate the following virtues: equitable behavior, open-mindedness, concern for social justice and willingness to engage in shared decision-making. Wood (1988) argues that what is part of the curriculum is a political decision based on a conception of a just society and a good life.

Some of the more recent literature on whole language (Church, 1996; Harman & Edelsky, 1989 ; Portelli & Church, 1994; Shannon, 1992) addresses the need for teachers to give their work a more critical/political edge. While whole language theory draws, to some extent, on Dewey's notion of learning as experience (noted in chapter three), it is my view that relying more on Dewey's concepts of democracy and schooling would provide a stronger rationale for including the critical examination of social issues within the curriculum. In the discussion on child-centred education (chapter two), I identified the link Dewey makes between education and preparation for participating in a democratic society.

It is generally agreed that to participate in a healthy democracy there must be open dialogue and critical examination of issues of social concern. Dewey clearly envisions the teacher as having an important role in helping students to develop their willingness and ability to perform such a task. More recently it is argued that a democracy faces the need for citizens to become empowered to participate and that the teacher and the curriculum should help

prepare students for this participation (Wood, 1988). Matthew Williams considered preparing students to live in a democracy and to provide experiences based on democratic principles to be part of his role as a teacher. As he stated:

I believe, like Dewey that democracy and education are related. What that relationship should be I am not exactly sure. While I want to prepare my students to live in a democracy, my goal is not grounded solely in the future - that the child will participate. Instead, I want the children to understand and develop attitudes, skills and knowledge which will help them participate in democratic communities in the now.

Without a personal interest and desire to understand social and political issues, and without a commitment to democratic values, it would be difficult for teachers to fully appreciate significant dimensions of social issues. Matthew Williams, for example, in his teaching of social issues was driven by his democratic values. He articulated his commitment to justice, equality, open-mindedness to his students. Further, he organized class events that brought to the forefront issues rich with social implications for justice, equality, freedoms and responsibilities. Moreover, he actively engaged in professional development focussed on the understanding of democratic values.

But what of the teacher who has a critical disposition, who tends to call all things into question, but lacks interest in, and knowledge about, social and political issues? While the critical spirit is essential, it needs to work in tandem with critical thinking skills and content. It is highly conceivable that a critical disposition would lead the teacher to realize the need to understand social and political issues. However, because there are degrees of critical thinking there will be limitations to how far one is able or willing to allow the critical spirit to

move.

Frequently, social and political issues are embedded in practices that are enveloped in a taken-for-grantedness attitude, which hinders the ability to recognize the need to call them into question. Consider the example of a school that has a history of hosting banquets for male sports teams. There may be an attitude that “We are not being sexist; it is just the way we have always done it.” Without a desire to think in a substantive way about the social and political implications of actions, it is possible that this incident and others like it might not be interpreted as political and social issues.²⁰ Matthew Williams encouraged students to move beyond a taken-for-grantedness attitude. For example, he encouraged his students to research the legitimacy of claims that the grade six students were the cause of playground problems, that girls spend more money on frivolous things than do boys, and that hockey players were violent.

As argued in chapter four, content and criticism need to be tied together. The acts entailed in critical examination in one domain will not necessarily be the same as those used to approach criticism in another. Further, reasons in one field will not necessarily count as good reasons in another. This point is particularly significant to understanding the need for the teacher to have an interest in, and knowledge about, political and social issues. When teachers are interested and knowledgeable, they are in a better position to ask critical

²⁰ This example demonstrates how knowledge is socially constructed. I am not suggesting that an extreme, relativist position should be adopted. Rather, that critical thinking needs to be directed towards analyzing the assumptions underlying the knowledge we construct.

questions, make comments, and offer relevant information. Without such interest and commitment to understanding social and political issues, the emphasis placed on critical examination may be cursory at best or insignificant at worst. It is difficult to imagine an effective teacher of mathematics not being interested in understanding mathematics. It is also not difficult to envisage the problems which would be created by a lack of interest and commitment to understanding mathematics. A similar situation would exist with a teacher who lacks a commitment to understanding social issues and their political implications.

In the case of Matthew Williams, profiled in the previous chapter, I identified the explicit attention he placed on ensuring social issues became part of the curriculum. Books, newspaper articles, and other sources rich in possibilities for examining social issues were always present in the classroom. Further, he encouraged conversations to move in a direction that critically explored social issues. Deliberate efforts were made to nurture the critical examination of these issues because they are issues of significance to Williams himself. For example, if he had not seen the prejudices and stereotyping in his class as problematic, he likely would not have encouraged the students to think a little deeper about their personal beliefs, to gather new information, to reflect on the source of information that they used to form their viewpoints, to consider other interpretations, and to stay open to revising their opinions. Further, he is willing - although on some occasions hesitant - to provide the students with

critical information (established from his political viewpoint) to use in their inquiry. He influences the direction of the examination in such a manner that rights, just and fair treatment, and prejudices are addressed.

I use the example of Matthew Williams to illustrate that the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the issues is significant. In his case, he is “going after” a particular type of relationship. When the teacher is not interested in social issues and their political implications, there is still a relationship but it is neither positive nor close. To students, this stance communicates the position that political and social issues are not important enough to be part of the curricular content. This creates a difficulty, for when the teacher does not encourage the students to become involved in critical examination, many of them will not be challenged to do so independently. Unfortunately, rather than supporting critical examination, there are missed opportunities for revision and/or expansion of the children’s (and the teacher’s) thinking.

Some may present the argument that the teacher has no right to assume responsibility for influencing how children think about social issues, a position argued by many extremists. However, it is imperative to consider that when the teacher tries to remain neutral for fear of influencing children’s thinking, she/he still has a relationship with the content which influences the nature of the critical examination. The so-called “neutral” position is really non-existent because the teacher is still influencing the relationship.

One of the contributions critical pedagogy has made to education in

recent years is the focus on political issues (as pointed out in chapter four). Critical pedagogy is founded on the position that schools reproduce within their boundaries the values and prejudices of the greater society. Further, to a large extent it is believed this occurs unconsciously through practices such as ability groupings, class-outings that only some people can afford, sexist and racist literature on the bookshelf, and biased grading systems. I have found that many teachers, when they recognize their behavior is problematic, are appalled. The difficulty is that in many cases they do not recognize the value issues within their own practice. I am not suggesting that ability grouping and other related issues would necessarily be the content teachers might focus on with their students. My point is that attention to, and interest in, social issues, and a knowledge of political implications, would encourage teachers to look for issues of social and political significance.

(iii) A Critical Stance

To facilitate critical thinking about social issues in the curriculum, it is important that teachers also engage in critical thinking and adopt a questioning stance towards learning and living. There needs to be a disposition and willingness to call things into question. Students learn from how teachers teach. In my observations in Matthew Williams' classroom it was interesting to note how students often took on the critical stance modelled by their teacher. Over time I observed that the questions Williams asked, were reflected in the types of questions the students asked. Students repeatedly requested one another to

justify their positions and viewpoints in a manner similar to that demonstrated by Williams. In addition to the students being influenced by the types of questions Williams asked. His interest in content rich with social issues appeared to foster interest in these issues in his students. He allowed the students to hear him articulating the positions he adopted. "I try to explain my reasons why things are organized or set-up the way they are in the classroom. I want them to understand why I hold certain positions." Further, Williams allowed and encouraged the students to ask questions around the curriculum including the rules and procedures of the classroom. In the third interview he commented on what he believed to be the impact of his critical stance.

One thing that is satisfying for me, is that after a certain period of time when they get to really know me, they anticipate some of my questions and perspectives. So when they are responding to people's stories or sharing, some of the kinds of comments I make or made at the beginning of the year become the kind of questions and comments they make. They sort of take it over and they start using what I modelled and it becomes part of the culture of the classroom.

If teachers teach in a critical manner, then students will have an opportunity to observe and experience the teacher's willingness to call into question, to assess and evaluate positions, and if necessary revise thinking in light of new information. Further they will witness teachers' willingness to take a stand on an issue, provide the evidence on which positions are based, and be open-minded in their thinking. I agree with Passmore (1967) that the teacher needs to welcome criticism and set an example with respect to the quality of the critical spirit. In the classroom this includes the teacher modeling her/his own

critical thinking in an ongoing manner with a willingness to call all aspects of the learning into question - including classroom rules as well as content.

As indicated in chapter four, critical thinking is always a matter of degree (Paul, 1992). There is no absolute criterion which defines one as a critical thinker. However, it is crucial that teachers have well-developed skills that work in tandem with the critical spirit to have criticism permeate the curriculum. In one of my interviews with Williams, he stated that "Critical thinking is the way we should look at everything." For teachers interested in facilitating the development of critical thinking, a critical stance would be of obvious benefit.

As discussed in chapter six in reference to Williams' teaching, children learn indirectly a great deal from their environment. The example of the teacher in approaching problems, the questions asked and the advice given in everyday situations are of significance. The impact of the environment on learning is discussed by Dewey (1938) and Smith (1981), who similarly argue that demonstrations by the teachers show students, both directly and indirectly, what is valued. When teachers assume a critical stance in their teaching and attitudes towards such matters as interpretations of a novel, application of school rules, and evaluation of their teaching, they demonstrate and encourage critical examination. If the teacher primarily drills the students with facts, stock responses, and procedures, then she/he is not demonstrating a critical stance - although possession of facts and skills may be a necessary condition of making a critical response.

When critical examination is the stance adopted, then questions permeate the curriculum, as in the case of Matthew Williams' class. Beyond saying, "I like this..." and "Jason is a good character in the book...", students are required to think about their own justifications, positions, and alternatives. Moreover, students have an opportunity to see skills and tools for critical thinking used in a meaningful manner to solve real problems and to approach issues in the classroom. Rather than practice the skills of justification, identifying fallacies, and examining the problem from another perspective, the skills are integrated into the discussion in which content is called into question.

In a child-centred, whole language curriculum the learning context is open and fluid in the sense that prescribed subject matter does not control the curriculum. However, as discussed in chapter two, this does not mean that the children are left to aimlessly wander, for the teacher has a responsibility to nurture learning. Williams clearly agrees with both of these positions. While the teacher is always in a position which will influence the children with whom she/he works, when the curriculum is open and fluid, this influence may at times be less obvious. The adoption of a critical stance will affect the nature of questions posed, the evaluative comments the teacher makes, and the stance of the teacher towards the content of the curriculum.

Critical thinking should have a significant role in meaning construction. Unfortunately, critical thinking qualities, such as willingness to examine from multiple perspectives, being open-minded, assessment of the appropriateness of

criteria, and the making of justified judgments, are not always the means by which children construct personal meaning. Furthermore, teachers have not always encouraged critical thinking to be a significant part of the process of meaning construction, resulting in unsubstantiated viewpoints and a general lack of accountability as to "why" a child thinks in a particular manner. Use of a critical stance towards social issues would require that the teacher and students think about issues of justice, freedom and equality relative to the meaning being constructed.

There are several factors which might interfere with the teacher adopting and demonstrating a critical stance vis-a-vis the curriculum. First, there is the obvious problem that the teacher may have had personally limited experiences which have not encouraged her/him to develop a disposition which calls things into question. Second, the institutional context in which one works also may discourage and/or interfere with the teacher demonstrating to the children those things which she/he might place under scrutiny.

Consider the common example of what a teacher perceives to be an unfair procedure or discipline policy within the school, or the unwillingness of the administration to consider the context in which a behavior occurs. In the case of Williams, he is able to demonstrate the use of the ethic of caring and justice when he critically reflects on behavior or assignment requirements. This obviously allows the students to see the teacher's critical stance. But what if Matthew Williams worked in a school where the willingness to engage in a

critical assessment of the situation was made more difficult because there was an unbending application of school rules?

Further, in the case of a beginning teacher working under the terms of a probationary contract, there will be limitations in what the teacher will feel comfortable questioning. While the teacher may privately be thinking critically about an issue, there may be political pressures that restrict her/him from demonstrating this to the students. Consider the case of the teacher who is concerned about the actions of her school board which excludes children from a particular community from attending a new state-of-the-art school being built in the area. Demonstrating a critical stance towards this issue might be considered a danger to her job security.

The issue of demonstrating a critical stance is sometimes compounded further by political pressures within the community. Some parents and educators believe teachers should not attempt to help their students develop critical thinking about social issues. These individuals argue that the school's role is primarily that of developing "basic skills" and knowledge in specified subject areas. Others believe that teachers who assume responsibility for students' critical examination of social issues are indoctrinating children with their own viewpoints and social agendas. In some cases, undoubtedly this is true. In addition, there are some parents who do not want teachers to adopt a critical stance towards social issues in particular.

At the beginning of this study, I was asked to explain my research

interests to a woman who responded by stating that she did not think it was the teacher's role to encourage students to critically examine social issues. In her mind, helping children to think about social issues was the responsibility of parents. Social issues have a nature which often leads to conflicting explanations being generated based on different value systems. To avoid exposing children to these issues, some parents and members of the community - such as the woman above - will actively work to prevent teachers from demonstrating a critical stance towards specific content. This is the basis of the right-wing political movement to censor curriculum books and ban content. When successful in their endeavors, direct limitations are placed on the teacher's ability to engage in a critical stance.

(iv) Thoughtfulness and Sensitivity

Sensitive and thoughtful teachers pay attention to the many factors which affect the complex environment in which they work. They also ponder the nature of the context and how best to make it work for all of the students. There is a sense of caring and being careful in teaching. While caring about the child is essential to teaching, sensitivity is often that which keeps the teacher in touch with each child as a person with a unique history and present-time life circumstance within the home and school.

In the case study of the previous chapter, Williams demonstrates a sensitivity to the individuals in the class. He is aware of the value to be derived from directing a child towards a particular book, from engaging in particular lines

of questioning, and from reassessing the classroom rules to deal with individual situations. Williams identifies part of his role as being sensitive to the many students in his class and points out the difficulty created for teachers to be sensitive when class sizes are large .

There are all these different agenda that various kids have. That's one of the challenges of teaching, being sensitive to who they are, what is important to them, and understanding their needs. I have to observe them very carefully and pay attention to their comments, behaviors and in some cases their lack of action. It requires a lot of energy to be attuned to what is going on with all the students. That is one of the reasons I object to class sizes being what they are.

Unfortunately, if teachers care but are not aware of the subtleties of the moment, the care can be lost or not evident. For example, much information can be gained from the cues of an individual's posture, inability to focus, or the frustrated look on a face. Comments such as, "If I had only known", or, "I had no idea" often punctuate new understanding of information or outcomes which were completely unexpected.

While one can be sensitive without being thoughtful, I have deliberately linked them together in this discussion of qualities, for it is my view that thoughtfulness which assists the teacher in knowing when and how to respond to situations. Rather than responding in a routine or patterned manner, or impulsively, a thoughtful response is often what is required to gently nudge the child's development in a positive direction.

There are many factors which can interfere with the teacher being sensitive and thoughtful. First, the teacher's working conditions can interfere

with the ability to be sensitive and thoughtful. Classes of thirty or more students make it difficult to be sensitive to each child's uniqueness; thoughtful and deliberate responses sometimes suffer. Williams, who places a priority on knowing his students personally, spoke of the difficulty in relating meaningfully with all his students. However, as discussed in chapter three, a child-centred, whole language curriculum is predicated on knowing and responding to the unique needs of each child in the class. In my observations of Matthew Williams' classroom it was evident that some of the children were quiet and shy while others experienced difficulty with language. In a classroom of thirty-two students, it is difficult for teachers to "have some sense of what it is that children bring with them, what defines their present understandings, mood, emotional state, and readiness to deal with the subject matter and the world of the school" (van Manen, 1991, p.7).

Another school condition, which may interfere with the teacher's sensitivity and thoughtfulness, is the manner in which time is used. When time is tightly controlled, with a primary emphasis placed on a finished product, windows of opportunity for the teacher to observe and respond to the child's thinking in a thoughtful manner which nurtures critical thinking will be reduced. I believe that it is imperative for the teacher to be sensitive to the fact that children need time to think. Critical thinking does not always involve being able to make quick decisions. Therefore, posing questions in a thoughtful manner and allowing students time to ponder before they are expected to give a response is

important.

In whole language approaches to curriculum, teachers often have a flexible, open-ended structure in the use of time. Rather than allotting students forty minutes to complete a character story, teachers encourage students to spend as much time (within limits) as needed to write a first draft, conference, edit, and revise their work. During this process the teacher has an opportunity to observe and facilitate learning. The students' thinking is made visible through their work, and the teacher, if sensitive and thoughtful, can use these opportunities to facilitate learning in general and critical thinking in particular.

In addition to being sensitive to the unique needs of the children within the class, I think that teachers need to demonstrate sensitivity and thoughtfulness when social issues become part of the curriculum. Teachers should be sensitive to the existing understandings within the class, the issues which might cause divisiveness, the "political reality", and where the exploration of issues will likely take the students. This information will not always be easy to attain. It requires that teachers be sensitive, picking up on information from the class in order that they can respond thoughtfully and responsibly when social issues are examined.

(v) Authority²¹

As discussed in chapter three, in a child-centred, whole language

²¹ By authority, I refer to the quality of using the teacher's knowledge and understanding to make informed and responsible decisions. This is not to be confused with the teacher as authoritarian, whereby the teacher is conceptualized as "the authority" and the goal is to control student's learning to conform to the desires of the teacher.

curriculum, children are given control of their learning. Unfortunately, many teachers dichotomize the relationship between teacher and student control suggesting that giving students control means taking away teacher control. As argued earlier (chapter three), this creates many problems. First, teachers retreat from their involvement and responsibility for fear of taking too much control away from students. Second, because they assume the posture of not controlling learning, teachers often become blind to the ways in which they actually do use authority to control the classroom curriculum. I spoke with Matthew Williams about how he conceptualized authority in teaching and the confusion that exists between using authority responsibly and an authoritarian model of teaching.

The whole idea of authority is a really big one. All the way along in my teaching I have wrestled with what authority should be. I believe that teachers have to be responsible, in charge and orchestrating what happens in the classroom. It's the qualitative aspects of how we use authority that is important. I've seen a lot of teachers use that power in ways that I do not respect and I think that is mis-educative. In some cases it is like teachers tell students either directly or indirectly that if you don't respect me, I am going to have to use my authority and you will respect me but I don't have to respect you.

Like Dewey, I believe that it has been an error to establish an "either-or" relationship between teacher and student control in the curriculum. Further, it is essential that teachers demonstrate qualities of authority. Callan (1993) suggests that there is no apparent incompatibility between the demands of a democracy and a regime which gives teachers the substantial degree of authority which good teaching requires. Similarly, teacher authority is not

incompatible with child-centred, whole language education. Indeed, I believe the opposite to be the case.

In many cases, discussions of teacher authority are predicated on the belief that teachers have a right to authority and control. Because of this rationale, and the fact that schools give teachers institutional power, many working within a whole language framework have found the concept of teacher authority to be problematic. In my experience, many teachers refer to the need to monitor teacher control. While monitoring and self-evaluation are always critical teaching components, my concern is related to the rationale behind the monitoring. Is the purpose to eliminate or make invisible teacher control in the curriculum, or is it to assess the criteria of wise and responsible use of teacher authority for the enhancement of learning?

Many educators have difficulty comprehending how a teacher is to assume authority in the curriculum when children are supposed to have control and be the gravitational centrepiece of the classroom. Thus, the issue of teacher authority within child-centred education is ambiguous. It is my opinion that part of the difficulty for teachers has been their conception of authority at the heart of their analysis. As Matthew Williams explained in one of the interviews, because he wanted to stay away from an authoritarian model of teaching, initially in his teaching he was hesitant to assume authority.

I think probably one of the most important things for me in my evolution as a teacher is understanding authority. When I began as a teacher working in a child-centred context, I did some things that were authoritarian. I felt very bad about that kind of a model, that demonstration for the students.

Now, while I still assume control and make decisions I explain why and to the students and my goal is to have facilitate their learning. Even though I joke with them sometimes about the “Big Cheese” or the “Supreme Being” they laugh because they see that I do have to assume that kind of authority.

To assume teacher authority does not mean that control of the curriculum is placed exclusively in the teacher’s hands. Further, I am not suggesting that students should lack any right to make decisions about their learning. Rather, I think it is essential that students make many of the decisions about their learning. However, it is my view that there is an ethical foundation to the teacher’s authority. Teachers have both a duty and a responsibility to educate. Therefore they need to assume authority and make authoritative decisions. However, this does not take place without first considering the child’s interests. Authoritative decisions place an obligation upon the teacher to consider the normative interests of the students.

An issue which needs to be considered is how teacher authority is used. Because teachers are more mature and knowledgeable members of the educational community than students, Dewey (1938) sees teachers as having a responsibility to guide learning. If the teacher’s authority is used to indoctrinate students with information, opinions and attitudes, then the conception of education in which the teacher exercises authority is problematic. Indeed, there is a healthy place for teacher authority in a framework for education which upholds the need to prepare students to participate in a democratic society. In this case the teacher will use her/his authority to structure the environment,

establish agendas for learning, ask questions and prompt students to think critically with the teacher's own critical spirit ever present.

It is the teacher's responsibility to ask open-ended questions which encourage students to think and respond critically, to encourage the students to bring their ideas and background knowledge into the classroom and to structure the classroom environment in such a manner that critical examination is facilitated. In the case of facilitating critical thinking about social issues, the teacher uses her/his authority to maintain focus and direction in order that students might examine issues beyond surface level understandings, to think dialectically about the implications of the issues for different individuals, to find out relevant information, and to consider what assumptions are being made.

The justification of teacher authority should not be concentrated on the rights of the teacher. Rather it should focus on the responsibility of the teacher to nurture learning. It is not a clear-cut authority whereby the teacher directs all aspects of learning. Instead it is one which enables the child to follow interests, to engage in problem-solving, to develop a critical stance towards learning, to acquire and apply subject-matter content, and to activate and nurture the child's potential.

The process of "enabling" requires teachers to assume authority. In some cases the authority of the teacher is implicit and not always obvious, giving the impression that the teacher is not assuming authority or exercising it. Consider the example from Matthew Williams' class where he has the students self-select

activities from the “menu for the day”. In other cases the authority is more explicit. An obvious example from Williams class was his request for “respectful listening”.

In regards to facilitating critical thinking about social issues, the authority of the teacher is crucial for a basic reason. The notion of teacher facilitation is grounded in the position that teachers have a right, and more importantly a responsibility, to influence learning in such a direction. The development of critical thinking in general and, more specifically, critical thinking about social issues in the classroom, occurs primarily because teachers want, and allow, this process to occur. The authority of the teacher needs to be used to support the nurturing and facilitating of critical thinking. It is essential to realize that the quality of teacher authority is used in concert with the other qualities and characteristics detailed above. The directedness, democratic values, critical stance, sensitivity, and thoughtfulness inform the authority.

(vi) Courage

The quality of courage is important to the role of the teacher in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in a child-centred, whole language framework. While we often speak of courage in reference to various aspects of our lives such as “courage to fight a disease”, “courage to keep going when times are tough”, “courage to stand up for our principles and beliefs, particularly when surrounded by others with conflicting positions”, rarely is dual reference made to teaching and courage except, perhaps, with regard to facing a

particularly unruly class. Hare (1993) indicates courage to be a critical quality for the teacher, making specific reference to moral courage. As Hare states, "Courage would hardly be necessary in teaching if society welcomed and applauded the teacher, who, for example, pursues the ideal of critical thinking" (p. 48).

I wish to discuss two ways in which courage is an essential quality for teachers to possess when facilitating critical thinking about social issues. First, there is the need for courage to encourage students to critically examine social issues, even though it often results in students (and teachers) questioning their personal values and the values within the home and community. Second, there is a need for courage to critically analyze one's own vision and philosophical perspective regarding teaching and education, and to reflectively examine the critical comments of others.

As discussed earlier (chapters two and three), in whole language, child-centred education the child's interests help establish direction in the curriculum. In Williams' class, it is obvious that student interest in caring for the environment, sex-role stereotyping, and racism are important curricular items. Yet, as argued in the previous chapter, the manner in which the teacher responds to these "teachable moments" is what allows them to become issues for class inquiry.

Courage is required to nurture critical conversations and learning about issues in a substantial manner within the class. If the teacher retreats when

such issues arise, the opportunities to facilitate a critical examination will obviously be missed. Lisa Siemens (1994) speaks of courage when discussing her decision to have her second grade students' "big questions" play a prominent role in the curriculum.

When at last I found the wisdom, or the courage, to ask my students what it was they were wondering about, what worried them, what they noticed about the world, I was humbled by the depth and profundity of their questions: "Why do people get old and die?" "What happens if you get old and you are not married?" "Who had the idea for the earth?" "Do people get headaches because the earth is always moving?" "Why did Vietnamese people come to Canada?" "Do dogs have wars?" (p. 360)

Further to facing questions raised by students, often the process of critically examining these issues creates a classroom milieu which is highly interactive and spirited. Supporting students as they take control of their learning and engage in critical conversations and discussions of issues will often create a spirited classroom dynamic.

Concerns about "classroom management" may, however, prevent teachers from allowing the critical examination to unfold. While there are techniques which teachers can use to orchestrate such examinations, there is often a free-running, roller-coaster quality inherent in the discussions which take place. When students are intensely interested, when they are challenged to think critically about issues, they respond in ways which demonstrate their interest. In institutions where there are expectations about the teacher's ability to "control the class," courage impacts on to the teacher's willingness to allow an interactive and dialogical inquiry to occur.

As discussed earlier, embedded in social issues are underlying values. When social issues become a part of the curriculum, teachers must be prepared to deal with the consequences arising from the opinions and viewpoints expressed by the students. In the case study of Matthew Williams there are statements made which create obvious challenges for the teacher. For example, in the conversation on racism cited (chapter 6), a child made reference to the fact that African-Americans were not permitted to become members of a community service club. Williams knew he was in a delicate position because, as he stated to me, there is a "political reality" which he felt needed consideration. In this instance the "political reality" prevented him from asking such critical questions as "What information supports the claim? "If this is true, what does this mean in terms of other issues such as rights, values and equality? "Are women permitted to be members of the Lions club?"

I realize this was a very difficult situation for Williams, but the non-response raises some interesting questions. If the teacher does not ask questions which encourage the students to examine this event in a critical manner, is she/he reinforcing the status quo? Is she/he giving the impression that, when issues are personal to class members and threaten existing practices within the community, we do not need to exercise our responsibility to respond in a critical manner? I have previously identified the great amount of indirect learning which occurs in classrooms. In this situation, what messages are being communicated?

Like Matthew Williams, I believe that there is a “political reality” about which teachers must be conscious. However, I find it problematic that a teacher’s concern for how a critical discussion of social issues may be viewed by others can place serious restrictions on which issues are discussed. In meeting the challenge of political environments, the quality of courage is essential. When teachers stand back and take what might be perceived as a neutral stance, they are making indirect statements about when critical thinking should be exercised.

Williams’ lack of response to the issues raised in his class regarding the Lions Club raises another interesting point about courage. Courage needs to be tempered with thoughtful consideration. Without sensitivity to the consequences of behaviors and a thoughtful reflection on the impact of our actions, what might be regarded by some as courage actually is foolhardy. It may be, as Matthew Williams decided, that this was not the occasion in which fruitful learning would have occurred if he had encouraged more examination.

The challenge for teachers is to develop means for addressing these issues while also being conscious of the implications for the learner. Having the courage to confront social issues, while also working within the complexities of the political world, does not create an easy path for practice. Hare (1993), building upon a point by Aristotle, reminds us that courage has to be guided by judgement, for courage can turn into recklessness and foolhardiness. While courage is needed to foster critical dialogue and thinking about social issues,

there is a requirement for the teacher to act responsibly.

Burbules (1990) cautions that when we help children to consider different ways of viewing the world, to challenge their conceptions and understandings, we must be conscious of where we leave them. I concur with Burbules and believe it is essential that teachers facilitate critical analysis and, in some cases the destruction of preconceptions. Teachers must support children and provide them with time and personal space for the construction of new ideas.

The second area where courage is crucial to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues is in regard to the personal examination of one's beliefs and pedagogy. Hare (1993) points out that it is important to have the courage to confront the fears of seeing one's beliefs crumble. Teachers need to have the courage to be open-minded, to critically analyze their vision of education in general and their views about the place of critical thinking in the curriculum in particular.

When one holds firm beliefs, such as many of those who advocate whole language, it is essential for such a person to maintain an open mind and assess his/her own beliefs. For anyone, but especially a teacher trying to facilitate critical thinking, to lack courage to continually review and revise one's thinking is a dangerous position. Children would most likely fail to identify (at least at a conscious level) the inconsistency in a teacher who, while encouraging students to think critically about social issues, fails to engage in a critical assessment of her/his pedagogy.

The lack of courage to revise thinking about pedagogy creates an additional problem. Critics, usually other teachers and parents, will logically argue that teachers' unwillingness to apply the same standard of criticism to their own thinking about pedagogy is inconsistent with requesting students to exhibit critical examination with regard to their learning.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I have identified qualities and characteristics which I have argued are essential to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. Directedness gives teachers a sense of why their teaching is important and the direction it should take. Democratic values establish a particular orientation to the vision for education which encompasses an interest in and understanding of democratic virtues such as equality, justice and freedom. A critical stance creates a classroom atmosphere where critical examination becomes a way of learning. Sensitivity and thoughtfulness are qualities which allow the teacher to identify, and respond to, the unique needs of each student. Authority, grounded in the teacher's responsibility, establishes the teacher's role as someone to guide and direct the learning about social issues. The teacher's role in facilitating students to critically examine social issues is challenging and subject to tension both internal and external to the classroom. The quality of courage helps teachers move forward in their efforts to have students think critically about social issues.

This discussion may create the impression that I think these

characteristics and qualities must be well-defined and in place before a teacher can begin to facilitate critical thinking about social issues. Such, however, is not the case. They are qualities and characteristics which should become further refined and developed as the teacher engages in the role of facilitating critical thinking about social issues. While I have separated them in the discussion, in many ways they support and synergistically interact with one another in the teacher's role of facilitating critical thinking about social issues.

Chapter Eight

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Whole Language is a curricular framework which has had a major impact on literacy learning and teaching during the last fifteen years. As stated in chapter one, this framework has led to the development of research regarding how children learn to read and write, the linking of literacy to content area study, and spelling development. Attempts have also been made over the years at relating the need for students to think critically to child-centred, whole language approaches to a curriculum. However, these attempts usually occurred as a consequence of the emphasis placed on the child constructing personal meaning, rather than from a well-conceptualized understanding of critical thinking.²² Further, the emphasis on critical thinking has not always been grounded in a vision of why critical thinking is important to an educated person. There has been some interest in relating critical examination to an inquiry about social issues (Harman and Edelsky, 1989; Church, 1996; Shannon, 1992, 1990) but little research has focussed on the role of the teacher in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in child-centred, whole language curricula.

In this study, I have approached an understanding of the teacher's role in

²² Whole language has been linked to some extent with critical pedagogy (Church, 1996). Some teachers have focussed on critical thinking as a way to "empower learners". Similar to Ellsworth's (1989) critique of critical pedagogy, these efforts have typically developed in such vague and abstract terms that they fail to serve as a basis for action.

facilitating critical thinking about social issues in child-centred language arts curricula from two perspectives - philosophical accounts and an empirically based case study. First, in chapters two through four, there were philosophical accounts of child-centred education, whole language, and critical thinking. An empirical component, a case study of a teacher, Mr. Matthew Williams, was the focus of chapters five and six. In chapter seven, I synthesized the findings in a discussion of qualities and characteristics critical to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the implications of this research for teachers, teacher-educators, and for future research. In addition, I will provide some concluding remarks.

Implications

This section explores the implications of the study for practicing teachers, pre-service teacher education, and future research directions. While specific implications are discussed, it is necessary to note that the discussion of qualities and characteristics presented in the previous chapter is essentially a discussion of implications. From the conceptual analyses of child-centred education, whole language, critical thinking, and the case study, I integrated the findings to construct a framework of characteristics and qualities which gives direction to the question of the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. However, beyond this framework there are other implications I wish to highlight.

(i) Implications for Educators

1. Many factors influence the curricula teachers construct in their classrooms. In whole language curricula, teachers embrace certain beliefs (discussed in chapter three) regarding the nature of learning, the position of the child, and the role of the teacher. In many cases these beliefs are grounded in the meaning teachers construct when reflecting on their practice, their adoption of a framework of stated beliefs (whole language theory), and social practices.

As discussed in previous chapters, there are several limitations to the manner in which whole language has been interpreted, and the curricula which have been developed. With regard to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues, questions about why social issues are important to the curriculum, what critical thinking is, and how teachers consciously and unconsciously influence learning, all need to be addressed.

I believe that a barrier interfering with the consideration of these questions results when whole language is described as a philosophy. This reference to whole language as a philosophy is unfortunate. It has led teachers to focus on a set of beliefs and convictions without first giving attention to the crucial role philosophical inquiry has in making conceptual clarifications, examining values, and assessing underlying assumptions.

If teachers are to develop directedness in general, and a facility for encouraging critical thinking about social issues in particular, they must first develop a philosophical mode of inquiry to think about their teaching. Specific

issues raised in this research, issues that require attention from teachers, include: 1) Should the teaching of critical thinking be an aim in education? 2) What are the teacher's moral and ethical responsibilities in facilitating critical thinking about social issues? 3) What dispositions and skills should be developed in the classroom? 4) What values are implicit in practice and how do they impact on learning?

I realize that the hectic life of teachers makes it difficult to find time for engagement in such reflection. It would therefore be helpful if schools provided regular opportunities for teachers to discuss topics such as direction, vision, values, morals, and social influences on how teachers construct their role (Church, 1996, Sergiovanni, 1992). Structures which allow and encourage educators to examine and reflect on teaching must be in place. Further, teachers' efforts to engage in this type of inquiry need to be supported and valued by administrators. This support needs to be more than simple tokenism. Instead, institutional mechanisms that encourage continuous discussions about educational issues such as critical thinking and social issues should be implemented. Through discussion, teachers can become more conscious of the complexities inherent in their role and the significance of their responsibilities.

2. In addition to developing a vision for teaching, I identified sensitivity and thoughtfulness as significant qualities for facilitating critical thinking about social issues. These qualities, which cannot be taught formally, require the "personal embodiment of a pedagogical thoughtfulness" (van Manen, 1991,

p. 9).

When I observed Matthew Williams and his careful crafting of questions, his willingness to step back and let the students carry the conversation, the comments he made to individual students, and the class-level projects, his sensitivity and thoughtfulness were obvious. At other times, critical moments, ones in which he nurtured growth and development, appeared instantaneously. While he likely did not anticipate all of these moments, his sensitivity and thoughtfulness allowed him to take advantage of them when they did arise. It is important to note that while these moments were not always planned, the response was generally grounded in his sense of direction in his teaching.

Teaching moments are, for the most part, created by students and teachers. Astute attention to opportunities is essential. Further, the manner in which teachers respond to the moments which develop is crucial. For example, if an opportunity arose for an examination of violence in sports, the teacher's opportunity would be enhanced if she/he had given prior thought to the techniques of teaching by discussion (Bridges, 1979; Lipman, 1980), the use of case studies, or establishing classroom debates.

While I have not focussed on techniques in this study, a further implication is the need for teachers to consider relationships which exist between techniques and normative aspects of teaching.

3. I believe this study also demonstrates the need for teachers to think about their influence over children's learning. The language of both whole

language and child-centred education repeatedly emphasizes the student's ownership and control in learning. It would be a mistake for teachers to assume that giving students control in some way diminishes the manner in which teachers influence learning.²³

As suggested in the profile of Matthew Williams, the influence is both direct and indirect. Further, influence is a way of life in an institution where teachers are charged with the responsibility to educate. While it is easy to recognize the influence of indoctrination, it is not as easy to assess the influence of teachers who keep their viewpoints out of the classroom, who take a neutral stand when issues arise and leave the fate of critical examination of social issues in the hands of students. While indoctrination is obviously problematic, the avoidance of social issues and/or the adopting by the teacher of a neutral stance is also problematic, for the importance of critical examination can be undermined and a complacency about social issues implicitly supported when neutrality is assumed to present.

4. A related implication is that for teachers to be effective in facilitating critical thinking about social issues, it is necessary for them to be knowledgeable about social and political forces. Further, in chapter seven I made reference to the need for teachers to possess democratic values, and to embrace democratic

²³ Portelli (1996) points out and elaborates on the position that since we do not live in a completely neutral context, the teacher is inevitably bound to influence the students by his or her presence in class (p.18).

principles in their teaching. It is unlikely that critical thinking about social issues will become a goal in teaching unless teachers have commitment to and knowledge of, democratic values, critical analysis, and social issues.

While there are various conceptions of democracy, I have aligned my position with both Dewey's (1958) and Wood's (1988) participatory view of democracy as a way of life. In this conception, all individuals need to play a role in determining the values that guide the political process. They must also have the confidence to take an active role voice in process. If teachers approach the curriculum from the standpoint of democratic values grounded in a participatory conception, then the examination of social issues will be from the perspective of how issues of social concern relate to equality, freedom, and responsibility. In situations where teachers have an interest and commitment to social issues there will likely be greater probabilities of such an occurrence. At the same time, without these characteristics, there will be serious limitations placed on the process of facilitating critical thinking about social issues. While student interests may lead to an exploration of social issues, without teacher support for such inquiry it is unlikely that significant interest and understanding will blossom in the classroom.

If teachers are to be successful in directing attention towards issues of social significance, if they are to encourage critical inquiry, they need to have a strong knowledge of issues. They must also be aware of the social and political forces which impact upon these issues. If teachers have a commitment to

democratic values, attention to these issues will likely develop. Therefore, I have linked the implication that teachers are knowledgeable about social issues to the need for teachers to possess democratic values. However, It is important to recognize that a commitment to democratic values is not inherent in a child-centred, whole language perspective.

5. If teachers want children to critically think about social issues, then teachers need to ensure that social issues are explicitly addressed in the curriculum. In the case of Matthew Williams, the emergence of social issues in the curriculum was not left to chance. The books in his classroom, the direct and explicit attention paid to discussing social behavior, and the questions he posed about equality, bias and prejudice, all placed emphasis on social issues. In child-centred education, one of the primary ways in which the teacher influences learning is through the establishment of the classroom environment. For critical thinking about social issues to be given heightened attention in the curriculum, careful attention must be given to its presence in the curriculum.

6. Teachers need to be conscious of the values implicit in the curriculum, and the influence they have in teaching. As discussed in chapter three, a value which tends to surface in whole language curricula concerns the individual's right to construct personal meanings. If this right is not balanced with other values, such as caring for the wider community, and other democratic principles, it is highly conceivable that meanings will be constructed which are in violation of social justice. Should this occur there would be a negative impact on others

in the class. There is a problem implicit in the stance of respecting the right of individuals to construct personal meaning if this results in the creation of a context in which the rights of others within the community²⁴ are violated.

7. It is important for teachers to assume a responsibility for teaching. One unfortunate outcome arising with the widespread development of whole language is the view that some teachers no longer see their role as teaching and are hesitant to assume the responsibility of authority .

Teacher as facilitator, teacher as mediator, are two common descriptions used to depict the teacher's role in whole language. While these terms may not appear to be problematic, in many cases they have been interpreted in such a way that the teacher's role in relation to authority and influence is not given careful consideration. This attitude is demonstrated in the comments by Anne Whitt (1994), a secondary teacher who developed a whole language curriculum and later published an article in The Reading Teacher, about the changes in her teaching. She writes, "The whole language teacher is not a provider of knowledge but a facilitator of discovery" (p. 493).

Throughout this research I have used the phrase "facilitating critical thinking" as an aim for the teacher. However, at no point did I wish to create the impression that I view teaching and facilitating as a dichotomized relationship.²⁵

²⁴ I refer here to both the community within the classroom and the wider community of society.

²⁵ Stewart (1993) discusses the trend to try and establish a false dichotomy between teaching and facilitating.

Instead, the image of the teacher I portrayed was one who is actively engaged in direct and indirect teaching and an individual who needs to thoughtfully reflect upon her or his responsibilities.

8. Another implication for educators which arises from this research is the need for teachers first, to develop an understanding of the nature of critical thinking, and second, to reflect upon why critical thinking is important in the curriculum. While educators have argued for the importance of critical thinking in the curriculum, in many cases this has occurred without a clear conception of the nature of critical thinking.

In the forward to Siegel and Carey's (1989) monograph on critical thinking, published by The National Council of Teachers of English, Jerome Harste (series editor) argues that critical thinking is often too narrowly defined as a set of skills, that "instead of defining critical thinking as a special kind of thinking, the authors of these monographs argue that *all thinking is critical*" (p. vii). While the conception of critical thinking I have presented in this research is based on more than a set of skills, it is essential that teachers reject Harste's position that all thinking is critical thinking. If this position were true, why would we aim to develop critical thinking?

Teachers need to thoughtfully examine the nature of critical thinking. The aspects and forms of critical thinking discussed in this research included logical analysis, the critical spirit, dialogical reasoning, criteria, and the relationship to content, connections, and caring. With an understanding of these forms of

critical thinking, teachers will be in a better position to nurture the growth of critical examination.

Unfortunately, in whole language it has often been assumed that conversations about books, writing, and life in general, will sustain a dialogical inquiry and critical thinking. While these conversations do allow social issues to be raised, the conversations often do not move much beyond sharing. For dialogical inquiry to occur, the teacher must help students move beyond naming an issue, beyond giving it a surface level examination, to a critical examination of logical relationships, to thinking about the criteria, and judgements which they are able to justify.

(ii) Implications for Pre-service Teacher Education

Pre-service teachers are often driven by a desire to learn to teach. Generally, they want to understand how to teach. Consequently, they focus their learning about teaching on technical questions such as "How do I?" and request specific, concrete answers. Unfortunately, often theoretical, philosophical aspects of their education are not considered to be of as much value to their efforts to find out how to teach.

In the framework established for this study, and in the discussions throughout, it is my obvious belief that the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues needs to be addressed from a philosophical perspective. This belief, and the findings of the study, suggest the following implications for teacher education:

1. There is a need to examine the curricula of teacher education programmes and to assess whether these curricula challenge students to seek out an understanding of foundational issues. For pre-service teacher educators to develop directedness and a vision for their teaching, they need to be repeatedly provided with opportunities to think about the values fundamental to their teaching. While these issues are frequently the focus of courses in “Philosophy of Education”, methodology courses such as “Teaching Elementary Language Arts” should also be taught from perspectives which embrace questions about the purpose and ideals of education, and the relationship of curricular practices to these goals. Within the framework of how to teach, there should be reflective awareness of pedagogical intent (van Manen, 1991) in order to focus teaching on what is both right and good for the child.

2. Philosophy of Education is a discipline that incorporates the exploration of normative issues. It involves a particular type of inquiry which attempts to clarify conceptions, analyze assumptions, and scrutinize theory and practice. Unfortunately, in some situations, Philosophy of Education courses have focussed primarily on articulating espoused beliefs about teaching with the aim of developing students’ “Personal philosophy of education.” While reflecting about one’s beliefs is essential to teaching in general, the image I have created of the teacher’s role would suggest that pre-service teachers (like all teachers) need to expand the scope of their reflection to encompass more than a statement of personal convictions. Without a focus on the conceptions of others

regarding education, teaching, and curriculum, and without a normative analysis of education available through the exploration of existing works in the field, reflection may well be narrow. Analyzing the works of others, in a community of inquiry, creates a context for dialogical thinking which encourages the pre-service teacher to develop a sense of vision, an awareness of values, and engagement with critical inquiry.

3. As suggested at the beginning of this section, most pre-service teachers define their goal in teacher education programs as finding out how to teach in concrete and specific ways. If teacher educators are to be successful in moving conceptions of teaching - in the eyes of pre-service teachers - beyond technical models and towards the encompassing of more normative aspects of education, it is essential that the orientation of practica supervisors reflect that change in their approach to evaluation.

When I reflect on the courage, thoughtfulness, and general risk-taking involved in Matthew Williams' teaching, I become concerned that many pre-service teachers will be unlikely to attempt the type of teaching he demonstrates for fear of not providing an efficient and controlled environment. In the practica there should be efforts to link the normative aspects of the program to practice teaching. These questions may then be posed: "Why is critical thinking important?" "What are you trying to accomplish by setting up a community of inquiry in your classroom?" "What is a community?" "Why is it essential for students to examine social issues?" Without integrating normative and technical

aspects of teaching in the supervision, students will continue to place their primary focus on how to teach.

4. There is a need for teacher educators to encourage pre-service teachers to reflect upon issues of teacher control and the role of student interests in the curriculum. Like many educators, pre-service teachers often find it difficult to understand these concepts. Specifically, more attention should be given to the question, "What does basing the curriculum on the child's interests and giving students control actually mean?"

It is imperative that all teachers assume responsibility for developing new interests. A narrow interpretation of basing curriculum on students' interests, has the obvious limitation that, if social issues are not of particular interest to students, then they might not become part of the curriculum.

(iii) Implications for Future Research

There are questions which I believe are significant for future research:

1. What impact does the "political reality" of teachers' lives have on their teaching? It was obvious from my conversation with Matthew Williams that he felt restricted in his ability to facilitate critical thinking about social issues because of the political context within the community and, to a lesser extent, within the school. While possession of directedness, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and courage are all important qualities for facilitating critical thinking about social issues, if the teacher's actions are controlled by the "political reality", to what extent does this restrict or impose barriers on an exploration of those

issues which are raised in the class?

2. How does the student's personal distance from the issue affect the process of critical examination? Teaching within a whole language framework relies, to a significant degree, on students' personal stories as an impetus for curriculum. When stories and issues develop from personal experiences, intense emotions often become evident. Further, responses within the classroom discussions may sometimes be viewed as personal attacks. When there is personal distance from the event or issue discussed, there is an assumption made that it is easier to be analytical, and to think critically. There is a further assumption that the outcomes of such discussions are less likely to create personal attacks.

The relationship between distance and critical thinking remains somewhat unclear. When individuals are connected, when they care about the issue in a personal manner, there may be a greater desire, and commitment, to attend to the issue in a careful and critical manner.

3. How do students implicitly and explicitly influence the critical examination of social issues? In this study I have focussed on the influence of the teacher in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in the classroom. By giving emphasis to the teacher's role, I do not mean to suggest that students do not influence the nature of the inquiry. One direction for future research is to examine how students influence the nature of critical examination. In Matthew Williams' class, some students appeared to have more influence over the class

level examination than others.

Concluding Remarks

It is my belief that this study demonstrates the importance of educators looking both forward to the future, and backward to the past. As mentioned earlier (chapter two), while whole language advocates often reference Dewey, using his writings to suggest that whole language has grown out of a child-centred tradition, there has been little effort given to analyzing insights about children, teaching and curriculum presented in these earlier works.

Some may argue that analyzing these earlier works has little to do with current child-centred approaches to education. However, such an examination creates a new vantage point for examining and understanding the nature of child-centred, whole language curricula. When whole language is described as child-centred, assumptions are often made about teaching and learning without a prior careful examination of key concepts, inferences, and underlying values. Consequently, the benefits of learning from the past have often been overlooked, and misunderstandings about “child-centred education” have guided practice.

I think it is crucial to consider the conception of the child as the centre of the curriculum. However, rather than thinking of the child as an individual, I view the child as a person who embodies unique characteristics and history and someone situated in and influenced by a social existence. The focus on the individual child was one of the factors that assisted Matthew Williams to develop

thoughtful and sensitive responses in the classroom. It helped him to know when it was important to intervene, when it was necessary to step-back, and why students responded as they did.

Yet, like earlier philosophers (Dewey, Kilpatrick, Rugg and Schumaker) and some researchers currently working in the area of whole language (Church, 1996; Shannon (1992) I believe that the focus on the child cannot remain solely on the child as an individual. Instead, the focus needs to include the child as a social being. In Dewey's conception, the child as an individual is balanced with the child as a member of community, thus creating a social component to the curriculum. It is my belief that a focus solely on the individual risks the child developing an egocentric perspective on learning and living. Moreover, an emphasis on the child as a social being illuminates how knowledge is socially constructed, reinforcing the point that moral positions and values are influenced by social situations.

A further point I wish to highlight is that a dichotomized conception of control has dominated thinking about teaching in child-centred conceptions. Teacher control and student control are treated as a zero-sum game. The focus on children as individuals in their own right, with control in their learning, has led to an assumption (by many) that children should have the right to determine their learning. If children are left entirely on their own to learn, then obvious problems are created. First, there is a concern about the direction of learning. If left on their own what will keep the learning moving in a positive, healthy direction

rather than becoming aimless activity?

A further, often less obvious problem is created when the stance the teacher adopts is to stand back and expect learning to take place by itself. Given that teachers' beliefs and values influence the learning context both directly and indirectly, the question needs to be asked, "How does standing back influence learning?" In the case of social issues, if teachers stand back there is a great likelihood that social issues will not become a significant part of the curriculum and that stereotypes and prejudices will remain unexamined.

Clearly, in the conception of child-centred education proposed by Dewey, Kilpatrick, Rugg and Schumaker, children are not to be left at sea to determine their own learning. In all of these earlier works, the teacher was conceptualized as someone who directs and facilitates learning. Further, Dewey believed it was the teacher's responsibility to ensure that a particular type of educative experience occurred.

I concur with the view in these earlier works that teachers, because they have assumed the role of educating children, have a moral responsibility to assume some control and be knowledgeable about the manner in which they influence learning. I also believe that for teachers to act in a responsible manner, their work must have a sense of direction.

In chapter seven, I integrated the implications of the previous chapters to construct a framework of qualities and characteristics for the teacher's role. The qualities and characteristics discussed included: directedness, democratic

values, a critical stance, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, authority and courage. It is my view that these qualities and characteristics interact with, and support one another. Moreover, they become further developed and refined as the teacher engages in the role of facilitating critical thinking about social issues.

Directedness - a vision for teaching - was identified as significant because it gives teachers a sense of why their teaching is important and the direction it should take. It is essential for teachers to understand why critical thinking is necessary. Democratic values establish an orientation to teaching which encompasses a commitment to virtues such as equality, justice, and freedom. Out of commitment teachers will be drawn to personally examine social issues and to have students engage in critical examination.

If teachers engage in a critical stance, a classroom context is created in which examination becomes a way of learning. In facilitating critical thinking about social issues, it is important that teachers interact with and respond to children in a manner which is sensitive to each child's unique situation while also considering the needs of the community. Further, it is necessary that teachers be reflective and thoughtful in the manner in which they facilitate the examination. Authority, grounded in teacher responsibility, is essential to the conception of the teacher as someone who has a responsibility to guide and direct learning. Examining social issues in the classroom is challenging, but the quality of courage helps teachers to move forward.

In conclusion, I emphasize once again the need to question the belief that

critical thinking is implicit in child-centred approaches (such as whole language) because of the practice of open inquiry. While techniques such as journal writing, classroom discussions, thematic-based study, and literature-response open the door for critical examination, it should not be assumed that the use of such techniques will automatically lead to critical thinking. Whether or not these activities result in the critical examination of social issues will, to a large degree, be influenced by the importance the teacher places on critical thinking in general and examination of social issues in particular. However, interest and commitment to critical thinking about social issues must be coupled with teachers' knowledge of the nature of critical thinking, and teachers' demonstration of critical thinking to students. It is difficult for teachers to nurture the development of something about which they are unclear.

I have a concern regarding the manner in which the relationship between critical thinking and whole language has sometimes been constructed. Harman and Edelsky (1989) state that "democratic, critical, analytical work is intrinsic to the practice of whole language"(p.405). As discussed earlier, it is problematic to suggest that a critical stance and democratic values are "intrinsic to whole language". Such a position leads to the inference that efforts to implement, or develop, a whole language based curriculum will automatically, and inherently, ensure that students to critically examine all content, including that related to social issues. Educators must realize that whole language, like all approaches to teaching, is influenced by a teacher's willingness and desire to have particular

types of learning to occur.

Reflecting upon the characteristics and qualities identified as important to the teacher's role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues, I realize this responsibility is challenging and may appear overwhelming. I marvel at teachers like Matthew Williams, who daily enter their classrooms with a sense of direction and purpose, whose work expands far beyond motivating children to engage in activities. It is this sense of direction and purpose which sustains their commitment to important educational goals, which inspires them to have students think critically about social issues.

Appendix 1

Questions for First Interview

1. How do you conceptualize your role as the teacher?
2. What are the goals of your teaching?
3. I noticed that in your writing and in the class there is an emphasis on "human rights". Were there significant events in your life that led you to thinking this was important?
4. Could you tell me about the "Bill of Rights" that is constructed at the beginning of the year? Why do you do it? Do you ever refer back to it?
5. One of the observations I made while visiting your classroom is the time you spend valuing the students as individuals. I am wondering the degree to which this is a conscious decision?
6. What is critical thinking?
7. How do you deal with diverse opinions over controversial issues? Consider the situation that arose in the discussion over spending patterns of females and males.
8. How do you deal with the position of power you hold in the classroom?
9. How do you select content for the curriculum? Who makes decisions about curriculum topics?

Appendix 2

Questions for Second Interview

In my dissertation I develop a case study of you as a teacher and your role in facilitating critical thinking about social issues. After the time thus far spent in the class, I believe that the classroom context you have created (with the student's help) has as much to do with engaging students in critical thought as the specific social issues that arise for discussion.

In the first section I discuss what I have identified as the major elements. This is the framework I have developed for discussing the curricular context.

1. Respect for individuals
2. Development of relationships and community
3. Examination - as a way of living and learning
4. Development of the ethics of caring and justice

1. Do you agree that these are the major elements? Are there others that I have missed?

2. Two aspects of your curriculum I would like to probe are the "celebrations" and the experiences not typically part of the curriculum. I see them not as extras but as part of the curriculum developed. What do you hope to accomplish with these events? What happens when there is not full participation and how does this impact on the class?

3. Many people separate the ethics of care and justice. How do you conceptualize them and how do they relate to your teaching?

4. I noticed that the nature of the content in some of the books in the classroom deals with social issues? How is it that students come to read these books and how do you ensure that students think critically about the content?

5. One of the issues about critical thinking which I have been thinking a lot about lately is closeness and distance to the topic. Some feminist philosophers are suggesting that students need to be closely connected and to care about the topics they are studying. A more common stance discussed

in the literature is to maintain distance and objectivity. What do you think about this issue and how does it affect your practice?

6. Do you engineer times for critical reflection such as some of the learning events outlined in the social studies material you developed?

7. Do you teach the students how to debate?

8. Some students rarely speak? Why do you think this happens? How do you facilitate their critical thinking?

Appendix 3

Questions for Third Interview

1. Are there specific social issues you feel are important for your students to think about?
2. I would like to recall a situation from the classroom and have you comment on the manner in which the discussion unfolded. Specifically could we discuss the occasion about the exclusion of African-Americans from the Lions Club?
3. How do you focus students on issues beyond events?
4. Could you comment on how you encourage students to structure ways of thinking about issues ? For example, when you discussed the book Metallic Sparrow.
5. Why do you integrate the work on values with the content on health and reproduction?
6. How do you interpret and use your authority in the classroom?
7. What does building the curriculum in the students' interests mean to you?

Appendix 4

Consent Form

Teacher's Form

I consent to participate in the study conducted by Heather Hemming on the role of the teacher in facilitating critical thinking about social issues in child-centred curricula.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time. Further, I understand that confidentiality will be ensured by the use of pseudonyms in reporting on the study.

Further, I am aware that the time commitment involves Heather Hemming visiting my class for twenty-four mornings of observations, three interviews of approximately 45 minutes each. I understand that Heather Hemming will tape record the interviews and I give my permission for her to do so. I also understand that I will have an opportunity to review and revise the recording. The tapes will be stored in Heather Hemming's office at 214 Emerson Hall, Acadia University, Wolfville, NS. Only Heather Hemming and I will have access to the tapes and, when the study is concluded, they will be destroyed.

I give my permission for Heather Hemming to include quotes, log notes and interpretations of my work in her dissertation document. I understand that I will have an opportunity to examine the interpretations and references made to my work at numerous points within the research project. In addition, I will have an opportunity to state, and have recorded, my opinions if they differ from those of the researcher.

Name

Date

Appendix 5
Consent Form
Letter to Parents

Dear Parents/Guardians:

My name is Heather Hemming. I am a graduate student at Dalhousie University in the School of Education. I am conducting a study on how teachers help students to think critically about social issues such as human rights, equality, etc. as part of my graduate work.

I have identified Mr..... as a teacher whose work I wish to study because I believe he is working diligently to make such issues as these part of the curriculum. The study involves my visiting and observing in Mr. classroom during language arts periods. I will be trying to understand how Mr.....encourages the students to think about social issues. I will examine how discussions related to social issues develop in the classroom and how Mr.....follows up on ideas discussed. While I will primarily be observing Mr..... I am now at a phase in the study where there will be occasions where I will want to tape-record the classroom discussions. These tapes will be stored in a safe place and will be destroyed at the end of the study. Mr.and I will be the only people who will have access to the tapes.

I am requesting your permission to observe your child and, on occasion, tape-record her/his comments for the purpose of trying to understand how teachers help students to think critically. In the reporting of the study, your child's name will be changed to ensure confidentiality. I assure you that there will be no adverse effect upon your child should you refuse to grant permission for your child to be observed and/or tape recorded.

If you have any questions I would be very happy to answer them. Please make Mr..... aware that you would like to discuss the study with me and we can set up a meeting.

I give my permission for Heather Hemming, to observe and tape-record my child's comments for the purpose of understanding how Mr..... helps students to think critically about social issues, in the manner outlined in the letter above.

APPENDIX 6

Class Charter

Gr. 6 Charter of Rights and Responsibilities

<i>In our class we have the individual rights to:</i>	<i>This means that:</i>	<i>With each right we have these responsibilities:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety 	no one can push, tease, bother or hurt us	We must not violate the safety and security of others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn 	1) everyone can come to school and 2) we don't have to put up with someone who interferes with our learning	to not interfere with the learning of others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice our opinions 	it is o.k. to have our own point of view	to consider the opinions of others and to take turns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the washroom and water fountain 	our physical needs are met	to not use the washroom unnecessarily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be treated equally and fairly 	everyone is treated the same way no matter if you are different than others-because no human being is more important than another	to treat others fairly and with respect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have our belongings be secure 	our belongings and personal things should not be touched by others without our say so	to respect the privacy of others

Appendix 7

Books

Laurence, D. (1975). **Dragonwings**. Scholastic Inc. Story of boy Moon Shadow who lived with his mother and grandmother in a small village in China. He moves to America to start a new life with his father in a strange land America. He has to learn new customs, a different language, and new ways of dealing with people.

Coman, C. **What Jamie Saw**. Front Street Inc., P. O. Box 280, Arden, Nc, 28704. Story of Abuse.

Walsh, A. **Somethings Wrong with Kyla's Mother**. (Newwaves series), Nimbus Publishing Limited. PO. Box, 9301, Station A, Halifax, NS. B3K 5N5- Alcoholic mother and the manner the family copes.

Barkhouse, M. (1994). **Famous Nova Scotians**. Lancelot Press, Hantsport, NS stories of people in the history of Nova Scotia. The author recounts the exploits of explorers and environmentalists, writers and artists, political and educational leaders, soldiers, athletes and business people.

Palermo, S. (1991). **Chestnuts for the Brave**. (Newwaves series). Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing Inc. Story of eleven year old Gabriella and her family. Set in 1962, the Marafiotti family is bound from Italy to make their new home in Halifax. As Ella adjusts to her new life, she learns to reconcile her family's Italian ways with her Canadian friends more laid-back lifestyle.

Paulsen, G. (1985). **Dogsong**. New York, NY: Puffin Books. The story of a boy who takes a dogsled team to escape the modern ways of his village and find his "own" song.

Smucker, B. (1979). **Days of Terror**. London, England: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited. This is the story of a young boy caught in the tensions of revolutionary times. Set in 1917, and the years that follow, the story tells of Peter Neufeld and his family. Sickened by the the horrors of anarchy, famine, and the Russian Revolution, the family decide to exodus to North America.

Spinelli, J. (1990). **Maniac Magee**. Toronto, Ont: Scholastic When Jeffrey's parents died his life changed. He moved to a home where he was the only white person living in an African- American community.

Woolaver, L. (1991). **The Outlaw League**. (Newwaves series). Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing Inc. This story is about an "outlaw baseball team." The Town Council decides to introduce strict regulations. The team has a hard time conforming to the new rules.

Richardson, G. (1991). **The Migration of Robyn Birchwood**. (Newwaves series). Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing Inc.

Ellis, S. (1994). **Out of the Blue**. Toronto, ONT: Groundwood Books. Megan finds out a surprise on her twelfth birthday. She has a sister her mother had given up for adoption before she was born.

Appendix 8

Ideas Generated in Discussion on Racism

- judging others before they know them
- Race/religion shouldn't matter
- whites only ones to tease - dominant
- Martin Luther King
- hurting others because of looks
- Better
- different - teasing - name call
- organizations are formed e. g. KKK
- immigrants (different cultures)

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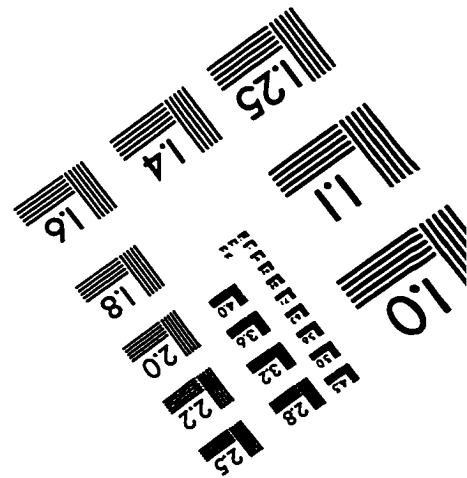
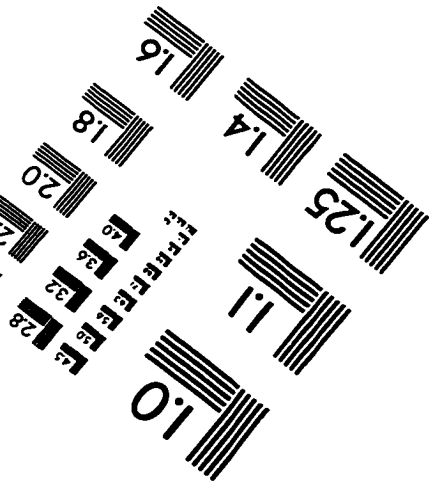
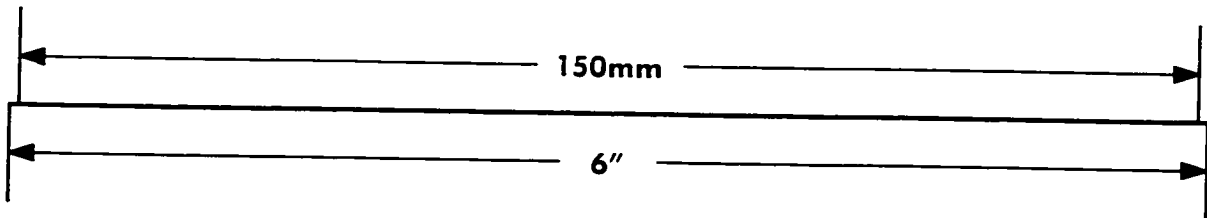
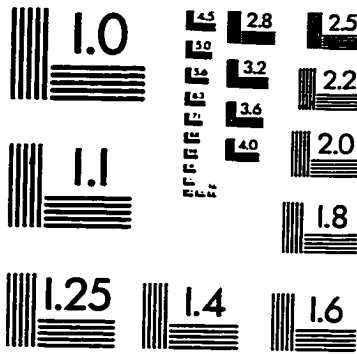
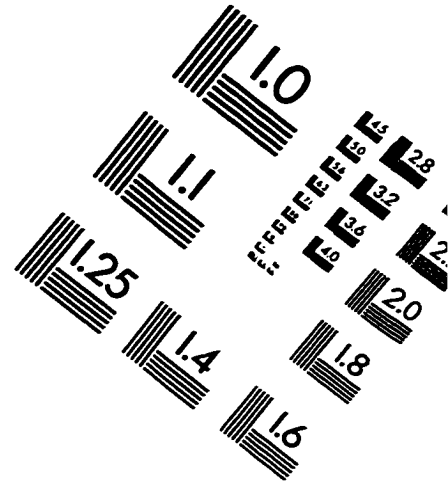
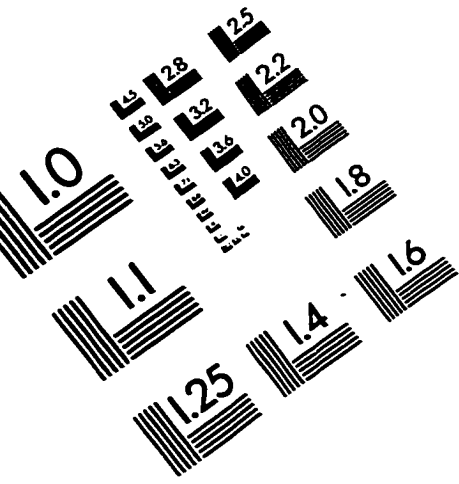
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