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**SPRINGBOARDS OR BOXES? THEORIZING A SOCIAL JUSTICE  
PEDAGOGY**

**by**

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my partner, Kate Krug, a brilliant academic in her own right, without whose love and support this work would never have been possible. I always thought that was just something people wrote until I undertook this dissertation; now, I know better. I could not have done this without you - thank you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation is a conceptual and analytic exploration of some of the complex and multi-faceted aspects of schooling. In this work I bring together conversations about curriculum, student engagement, and the systemic operations of power and privilege, pointing to some of the tensions and contradictions in and around the complex networks of intersections within and between these concepts. I undertake the process of theorizing a/my social justice pedagogy; in that doing I reconceptualize some of the constitutive elements of schooling: curriculum, student engagement, “at-riskedness”, as relational processes in their own rights. I also argue that there is a pragmatic need and an ethical requirement for people who are socially privileged to recognize their own privilege and call its operations into question, thereby beginning or enhancing their own development/theorizing of a social justice pedagogy.

My theorizing draws on an eclectic collection of philosophical and analytic frameworks, ranging from nineteenth century social theorists to late twentieth century works from sociology, philosophy, education, and feminist theory. As well, this work is informed by Foucault’s (1978) analytics of the operations of power relations, and by Freire’s (1998) ethics of humanization. The project of theorizing a social justice pedagogy and using that pedagogy as a foundation in and for teacher education has become my strategy for resistance to the operations of power relations which re/produce schooling as inequitable. By introducing social justice pedagogy/ies as an integral component in teacher education programs, we may find ways of subverting the processes in and through which schooling routinely re/produces the relations of power, of privilege and marginalization.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by offering my thanks to my incredible family. My partner Kate; even though this work is also dedicated to you, I want to thank you here for everything you did to help this work come to completion, and for introducing me to Foucault. Only a pair of academics would start a courtship that way. Katie, my daughter, who sailed away to the Caribbean during the winter your mother was writing this; what a wise young woman you are to be warm and away. You called every week and emailed to say “You can do this, mama!” Shane, my son, who did not go somewhere warm, but who did ensure that I ate vegetables while I was mired in this writing, and who one dismal day asked me to please finish this so maybe someday a teacher would read it and make a difference in some other kid’s life. And to my mother, Patri Leightizer Liebsch, who taught me an ethic of care and particularity every day I was growing up, through her own lived example.

To all of our friends who called, emailed, and encouraged me during the last several years. Most particularly, to Monica and Marj; thank you for always being right there. And finally, I want to thank the most incredible committee anyone could ask for or hope to work with. Dr. John Portelli, Dr. Jeanette Auger, and Dr. Ann Vibert: over the past four years you have been supportive, kind, and caring. You have shared your books, your words, your table. Toward the end of the writing, John Portelli gave more time than I could ever have thought anyone would: to phone calls (for hours), to reading drafts (immediately), to responding with feedback that made me think and occasionally laugh. This work would not be what it is without your guidance. I hope I can in my turn pass on to students the grace and mentoring I have learned from you. Thank you.

## **CHAPTER ONE SITUATING ...**

In writing these words it was hard to know where to begin precisely because beginnings not only transform what has not yet been written, but themselves are continually transformed by what is to follow, which, in turn, prompts ways of re/thinking these beginnings (Lewis, 1993, p. 15).

This dissertation is a theorizing of a social justice pedagogy; it is also (and at the same time) an interrogation of my experiences of teaching a course to Bachelor of Education students on issues of equity. Although I have made a usual practice of using the word “examine” in both writing and speaking, recently I have been making a conscious effort to change my usage of this word, having been influenced by George J. Sefa Dei’s (1996b) explanation of his own use of “interrogation.” Dei notes:

The term ‘interrogated’ is used to demonstrate a personal/political struggle and radical engagement with issues of race, racism and anti-racism. This metaphor is most useful because it suggests a more explicitly political engagement on the part of the reader than terms like ‘examined,’ for example. The concept of ‘examine’ leaves the reader in the position of not being directly involved in the process. Race, racism and anti-racism education become somehow containable within a glass box and we then extract bits and pieces of them to ‘examine’ under the lens of our anti-racism ‘microscope.’ This metaphorical distancing from racism is one part of the problem of racism. A partial remedy is the use of the term interrogate (p. 12).

Following from Dei’s example, I use the term “interrogate” to mark the same kind of direct involvement and reflection on my own thinking and teaching about the issues raised in this text. In theorizing a social justice pedagogy, I turn to the words of Marsh and Willis (1999), who point out:

Although theorizers are apparently involved in activities, the outcome of which is the completion of a theory, their real involvement is actually with the processes of arriving at such an outcome. Theorizing is thus a general process involving individuals in three distinct activities:

- Being sensitive to emerging patterns in phenomena
- Attempting to identify common patterns and issues
- Relating patterns to one's own teaching context (p. 99, emphasis added).

In this dissertation, my emphasis is on the second and third of Marsh and Willis' (1999) activities of theorizing. Utilizing both literature and my teaching experiences, the process of writing is more than a recounting of events, and more than a retelling of the viewpoints of other writers, although both of these are components of this writing. In this process of writing, reflecting on previous experiences, rewriting, re/theorizing, "the traditional dichotomy of theory-practice disappears" (Marsh and Willis, 1999, p. 99). What appears or develops in the place of a theory-to-practice unidirectional progression is a complex, intertwining, multi-faceted discussion of several aspects of the processes of schooling. Theorizing a social justice pedagogy is an ongoing fluid amalgamation of a series of moments, events, theories, accountings, and thoughts which, even in the occurring and then in the revisiting, are part of the re/formation of a new understanding. By bringing together the activities of a theorizing and an interrogation of my teaching experiences, and combining these two elements with an analytics of the operations of social privilege and marginalization, I offer in these pages a moment of coalescence in a constantly shifting terrain.

The dissertation is deeply informed by my conviction that a social justice pedagogy can most adequately, or at least more adequately, alter the experiences of students who are socially marginalized and whose marginalization is often continued in and through mainstream schooling practices and processes. As such, although I address many of the tensions, confusions, and/or contradictions present within the various components/

discussions taken up herein, this is not in any way a “neutral” piece of writing. Each of the “pieces” which I take up throughout the dissertation are aspects of a/my developing social justice pedagogy, and are implicitly or explicitly written in and through a particular politics. While I believe that developing or theorizing a social justice pedagogy necessarily includes a critical interrogation of one’s own firm convictions, there is no pretense here of this writing being anything other than a passionate argument for a particular way of teaching/seeing the world. I am aware that this stance is in itself a contradiction. That is, I discuss throughout this writing various “components” or aspects of the processes of schooling; even while I interrogate and/or critique them, and as I argue the need for a critical/ “post-” perspective in teaching practices and processes, I am aware that my own advocacy of a “right way to teach” may be perceived as dogmatic. That the type of pedagogy I suggest as being more desirable/most necessary is one which incorporates critical thinking, is achieved (at least in part) through a recognition of and analytics of the operations of power relations (Foucault, 1978), and an interrogation of the operations of social privileges, and is foundationally grounded on an ethics of humanization (Freire, 1998), does not change the fact that I am arguing for one particular way of being/teaching. As I said above, I am aware of this contradiction; it is one of many which appear throughout this writing. I balance this tension with a suggestion that a “dogma” of critical self- reflection and the importance of context relevance cannot produce the same kinds of perceptual and practical limitations that so frequently characterize dogmatic texts.

This dissertation is in part a reflective journey through my own process of attempting to be/come a critical pedagogue. As is often the case by the time of writing the introduction,

which is undertaken last instead of first, both the work and I are quite different than we were when I began. When I first undertook the actual project of this writing, I was certain of my own position as a university educator who saw herself firmly positioned as a critical pedagogue. I firmly rejected modernism and modernist stances in favour of a particular social justice pedagogy, one in which I believed passionately and also believed I imparted successfully to the Bachelor of Education students to whom I taught a course entitled Equity in Classrooms. Writing and reflecting both on my writing and on the feedback I received for a previous text led me to confront and reflect on my own teaching practices and processes. In that doing, I realized the extent to which my own processes have been shaped by primarily modernist expectations. This has in turn resulted in my re-interrogating my teaching practices of (in particular) the past five years. I offer here a brief history/autobiography, both to situate myself within this writing and to begin the articulation of an analytics of power and privilege, the latter also forming a central theme of this writing.

*Situating myself:*

I was born into and raised within a White, middle-class, Christian family comprised, until I was eleven or twelve years old, of my married heterosexual parents, myself, and my two sisters. As a White, middle-class, able-bodied, Christian, and (presumed) heterosexual female child of parents who valued formal education, I excelled in public school throughout the elementary years. Junior and senior high school were a different and much more troubled story, for a variety of reasons. I went from report cards which praised my behaviour, and carried overall averages between 95 and 100%, to routinely being suspended from classes, occasionally from school, and I finally simply stopped going to school after the end of Grade

Twelve. Since some of my high school years had been spent in the province of Ontario, which had a graduation requirement of Grade Thirteen, I did not graduate from high school. I married at eighteen, converted from Roman Catholicism to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and at twenty-two became a stay-at-home mother to my daughter and, two years later, my son. At thirty-one, newly separated, I became a single parent and a full-time university student. At that same time, I came out as a lesbian.

A few years prior to these events, which all occurred within a three month time span, one of my sisters, while doing some family genealogy work, discovered that our maternal family were/had been Jewish, and that according to Judaic custom, my sisters and I were in fact Jewish. This rather astounding piece of information was confirmed by our mother, who then added another piece of unknown (at least to us) information to the family repertoire: our paternal grandmother was a Mi K'Maq woman who had lived her adult married life in rural Prince Edward Island married to a White man, and whose children (my father and his siblings) were told that their mother was Spanish, in order to "account for" her skin colour and ways of speaking.

In the space of a few short years, I went from being a White, Christian, married, heterosexual, upper middle-class, able-bodied woman, to being a (partially) non-White, Jewish, able-bodied, lesbian single parent living on less than \$12,000 a year. This rich confusion, these shifting identities, have been largely (although not entirely) a private and individual concern for me. Over the past few years, these varying/various identity "positions" have been the subject of an on-going reflective process, one which has been both inspired by and a part of the process of my teaching a course on equity. One of the primary



components of this reflective process has been an analytics of categories of privilege, both as social categories or elements of social structure and as elements that shape my own everyday life and sense of self. I have come to realize that the privilege which I have been able to access, more, which has been freely available to me as a matter of course throughout my life, is still largely available to me even though I now see myself as a very different person than I was fifteen years ago. In short, how I am perceived by others and how I perceive myself need not (and frequently do not) bear any resemblance one to another. I am still perceived as White; as middle-class (which I once again am<sup>1</sup>); as Christian; and as heterosexual. The last two are privileges accorded to me automatically unless and until I interrupt them by some sort of coming out statement or action.

In the summer of 1998 I was contacted by the Director of the School of Education of a small-town university in the community where I then lived. One of the full-time professors in that school had resigned, and her course load required someone to take it over. Several of the faculty members knew me, knew that I had a Master's degree in Sociology, a Master's degree in Education (counselling), and was working toward a PhD in Education. The primary teaching responsibility of the newly-vacant position was a required course for Bachelor of Education second-year students on equity; I was offered a term position and accepted. Over the next three years, I taught this course eleven times to more than four hundred students who would become teachers.

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1

This refers only to income level; "class" as a social identity category comprises much more than simply income, of course. There are also matters of values, beliefs, deportment, and what Pierre Bourdieu (1973) calls "cultural currency."

Reflecting on this course called "Equity in Classrooms," I realize that while the students and I spent a great deal of time discussing the effects of power relations, of privilege and marginalization, as they pertained to themselves as teachers in classrooms and the students they would soon be meeting and teaching in schools, we spent little time talking about the operations of these power relations within our own classroom in the university. Much of my focus for these classes was to gather and present mounds of evidence of the effects of marginalization for children who come to school. In my passionate desire to "persuade" students who would be teachers that inequity/ies exist, and that the very act of schooling perpetuates and indeed, frequently creates again, these systems of inequity and oppression, I overlooked one of the prime sites for interrogation of power relations and the operations of privilege and marginalization - our own classroom, and the structures which surrounded what we did. In some limited ways, I did occasionally address these issues, but they were peripheral to what I understood to be the "real work" of our time together. That "real work" I constructed and understood to be the imparting of the convincing materials I and the students gathered and shared, in order to uncover some of the ways in which students are either privileged or marginalized through systemic operations of power relations, and then either further privileged or further marginalized through mainstream schooling practices.

As I reflect on the several years of teaching this course, I can see the ways in which, in the face of opposition from some students regarding the "nature of oppression" or the realities of oppression (or occasionally, the querying of whether oppression/s really even existed), my response each year, in preparing for the next year, was to search out ever more

convincing and irrefutable texts, ones with which the students simply could not argue, either because of the absolute convincing nature of the text or due to the sheer overwhelming volume of people all saying the same thing. Although the primary motivator which informed my own empiricist tendencies (which must be owned now that I have recognized them) is/was rooted in my passionate advocacy of the importance of “teaching teachers” about the systemic operations of power and privilege, particularly as these show up in schooling practices, I also recognize in Roberta Hamilton’s (1993) following question an underlying question of my own. This question, although not one I have overtly addressed in classroom practices, has quietly informed the choices I made to locate the troublesome interrogations outside of our classrooms and our own social bodies. Hamilton (1993), commenting on post-structural feminism and the work of Denise Riley, asks:

If the portrait of female subordination [insert/substitute here racial, class, ability/ies, sexuality/ies] is painted in unequivocal terms, there is no way to explain or, indeed, hope for transformation. If, on the other hand, female identity [insert/substitute here race, class, ability, sexuality] across culture, time, space, situation, even moment-to-moment is completely contingent, what are the grounds or purposes of a women’s movement [insert/substitute here race/racism, class/classism/anti-poverty, dis/abilities, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered movement]? (p. 23).

My gathering together of “evidence” to prove the existence of, and harm done by/through, oppressive systems of inequity, has been an attempt to sidestep the questions which might well have been raised in classes had we approached the course from the aspect of theorizing in/equities. Conveying to students hope, passion, and a capacity to transform themselves, their social world, the worlds of the students they would teach, is an important focus of this course. It has always seemed to me to be a shaky pedagogical stance to paint for/with

students such a grim portrait of the oppressions of the social world that they despaired of affecting change. At the same time, the second half of Hamilton's above question has steered me away from an interrogation of multiple identities and social processes, precisely so that students would not be left questioning whether or not there was any point at all to doing anything, since everything would/could change momentarily anyway.

One of the main themes which runs through the various discussions in this dissertation, from curriculum through student engagement to a social justice pedagogy to teacher education reform, is an analytics of the operations of privilege. Examining and interrogating<sup>2</sup> the operations of power relations through the operations of privilege makes clearer the ways in which privilege and power are interlocked, masking their own operations through their (usual) invisibility. It is a not uncommon practice to see examinations of difference or otherness from the perspective of looking at "the other," the "have-nots" or the "aren't like us." These discourses actually reify that which they purport to change; popular discourses on child-poverty, for instance, begin with a taken-for-granted assumption that poverty exists, that there is little or no value to be found in the culture of poor or working-class people, and that to be middle-class is an aspiration for those who are not. Most discussions of child poverty spend much time and energy seeking to find a causal relationship between child poverty and something - anything - else, as if to find the "cause" will necessarily lead us to the "cure."

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2

Here I use both "examine" and "interrogate" to point to the ways in which I attempt to both stand inside these operations to look at how I operate within them, and also attempt to stand "to one side" to look at/for the operations of power and privilege at the macro level.

Another of the foci of this dissertation, and the equity classes, is on the relation/s between marginalization and privilege. To borrow from Hamilton (1993):

When we come to evaluate the position of women at any point in history, we must look at the *relation* between men and women. In other words, if we argued that women were oppressed in Canada, and took as evidence the statistics on income which showed that a high percentage of women lived below the current poverty line as set by Statistics Canada, for example, and we knew nothing else we could shake our heads in despair, but we would know nothing about the relationship between women and poverty. If the statistics indicated, however, that a much higher percentage of women than men in Canada lived below that same poverty line, we have some evidence that being female constitutes an economic disadvantage in the society relative to men. But the statistics alone tell us nothing about how this comes to be: how the relationship between 'being female' and 'being poor' is mediated. As we pursue these questions we again must ask about the relation between men and women in order to explain how this happens (p. 31, emphasis in original).

In this same manner, in order to adequately and more fully talk about/theorize a social justice pedagogy, it is not enough to talk about the lives of people who are marginalized or "othered," for this may well tell us some facts about some lives, but it tells us nothing about the relations between some lives and others. To say that in the province of Nova Scotia, 24% of children live in families which live in poverty gives us a statistic (Centre for International Statistics, Canadian Council on Social Development website, February, 2002); to then know that if you are a Black child, a Mi K'Maq child, or a child with a disability your chances of being a poor child change from one in four to one in two (Raven, 2000), tells us that there is a relationship in this province between being Black, Mi K'Maq, or disabled, and being poor. Having this information then lets us ask more questions, such as: Why is this so? What are the relationships between race and socioeconomic level? Or disability and income? If disabilities are no respecter of the bodies in/on which they come, why is there a

relationship between disability and income? Do family income levels drop after a person with a disability becomes a part of that family? If so, what does this imply about our health and social systems? And so forth. While these questions and attempts to explore/answer them are not a part of the project for this dissertation, they are questions which frequently came up in the equity courses. In those classes, we would attempt to explore some of the issues surrounding the interconnections of marginalized social positions, or privileged social positions.

*Situating the students:*

In general, my experience of the people accepted into the Bachelor of Education program was that most of them occupied socially privileged spaces. They were predominantly, although not exclusively, White; most of them were physically able-bodied; most of them either currently were or had grown up in financially middle or upper middle class homes; most of them either currently were or had grown up in Christianity-embracing homes; most of them were (or appeared to be/were assumed to be) heterosexual. There were exceptions, of course; some of the students (but a very small percentage of the overall number) were racially visible<sup>3</sup>; I remember two students in my time in this faculty who were

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Since critical practice and critical thinking are necessarily on-going and self-reflective practices, I have over the past several years struggled mightily with the language available (or not) to talk about difference. Although there are those who disagree with me about the phrase “racially visible,” at this time I find it to be the most useful signifier for what I am talking about. Non-White people are visible in our social context; further, they are visible due to their racial inheritance. “Visible minority” is not only a misnomer when we talk about inhabitants of the planet, but it comes with a stigma attached, subtle but present, around the word “minority.” In a social context which practices a majority-rules form of democracy, minority carries within it a “less-than” or “loser” implication. This troubles me.

physically challenged; there were some students who had grown up financially not at all well off. Although there may have been students in the program who were gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered, none of them were out in class.

None of the above “descriptions” are intended to convey the impression that the students’ identities are/were static, any more than are my own. As Dei (1996b) has pointed out,

There are multiple sites of privilege and oppression. Individuals and groups are socially positioned in different ways in terms of privilege and oppression. Therefore, it is possible to be materially privileged and yet oppressed dialectically (p. 132).

The students in the education program also live/d within multiple sites. For instance, while many of them occupied several socially privileged identity categories, they were at the same time students, which is not generally seen as a category of privilege, although being able to attend university at all, as well as doing a second degree at university, is generally regarded as a privilege. And, while many of them had grown up in middle-class homes, many of them had also grown up in rural communities with parents who were themselves often employed within a service class, as clergy members, teachers, skilled labourers, and so forth. I offer the above descriptions of the students in these courses to outline the homogeneity of the students who were in the Bachelor of Education program in which I was teaching. However, within an analytics of the operations of privilege and marginalization as they pertain to schooling, the above is also offered to point toward the ways in which mainstream schooling practices privilege the already socially privileged in such a way that it is those students who occupy positions of privilege who more frequently gain admission to university and then to

Bachelor of Education programs. As will be made clear throughout this writing, these operations of power relations influence the processes of schooling in such a way that it is much more than “chance” or personal interest which informs who the students in education programs are.

In terms of positions of social privilege, the one place where privilege was not present in terms of numbers was in the sex ratio of the Education students. Typically, the number of women in the program was much higher than the number of men<sup>4</sup>. But even here, several things need to be brought into this discussion. First, there were evident differences between the elementary-stream students and the secondary-stream students: in the secondary-stream courses, the numbers of men and women were split fairly evenly, while in the elementary-stream, the women far outnumbered the men (one year, I counted - of more than seventy second year elementary-stream students, eight were men). I did not count any other year, but this disparity was fairly common during the time I taught at this university. Additionally, in the secondary-stream program, far more women than men had done undergraduate degrees in English, History, French, Psychology, or Sociology than in Mathematics, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, or Physical Education. Last, and significant to the course work in the equity classes in particular, (although the following showed up in all of the courses I taught) while

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Although not an integral component of this dissertation, see also Michael W. Apple & Susan Jungck (1992), for one analysis of the relations between “women’s paid work” and the deskilling and deprofessionalization of teaching. They suggest that “much of the attempt ...to rationalize and standardize the process and products of teaching...is related to a longer history of attempts to control the labour of occupations that have historically been seen as women’s paid work” (p. 23). In the numbers of women versus men in the profession of teaching, there is much more occurring than appears on the surface.



the number of women was much larger than the number of men enrolled in the program, many of the women, and many of the men as well, were adamant that feminism was “a done deal,” that men and women were/are equals in every way in our society, and that a feminist analysis of social relations was an unnecessary component of their program.

This articulation of “feminism is finished, we don’t need it any more” was familiar to me before I began teaching Education students. As an undergraduate student myself, feminism, particularly radical feminism, had been an integral aspect of my learning about myself and the world in which I had lived for thirty years without ever calling its operations into question. I took every course I could find that dealt with, or even might deal with, either feminism explicitly or women’s issues in general. Often, students in these courses would argue that women and men were/are equal now, and offer as evidence that this was so their own selves, students at university, preparing to have careers of their own choosing. For the women and men who argued that feminism was done, their own experiences with “all the things girls are allowed to do now” was not only evidence, but was sufficient evidence to support their position. As a single parent, some ten years older than many of the students with whom I took these undergraduate classes, and as an ardent feminist, I realized after some time that the difficulty I was having with these statements was that they held no validity for me; based on the life I had lived and was now living, my own experiences contradicted what I heard these younger women saying.

Initially, I thought that it was my age, the fact that I was a single parent, that I had been married at the same age that some of these students now were, that was preventing me from being able to agree with their statements. Because they were younger than I, had come

to university directly from high school, I believed that they were more legitimately students than was I, and therefore, if I did not see things as they did, I must be wrong. As some time went by, and I learned to reflect on my own lived experiences (Smith, 1987), I realized that neither I nor these younger students were “wrong” per se; we simply had differing experiences. I was living a daily experience of choosing courses that matched my young children’s school times, was switching hats between “being a mom” and “being a student” and generally found that I could do some of the things that I wanted to do, but I could not do “anything I wanted” and did not believe that if I simply worked very hard I would be able to achieve any position I desired in the world of work. These younger adults with whom I went to school at that time had, for the most part, been raised after the 1960s and 1970s second wave of feminism in North America; they believed, and frequently argued, that the statement “you can do anything/be anyone you want to do/be” had in their lives been borne out.

So I brought to the equity courses some familiarity with (although still not a deep understanding of) this articulated position of some young women and men that feminism was “done with.” I say young women and men deliberately, because while there were some young women and men who did not take up this argument, in the time I taught this course, none of the older students, male or female, ever supported this argument - at least not out loud. Several older students, women and men in their thirties and forties, argued that while women had made strong gains in the world of paid work in the past thirty years, little had changed in the private realm of childcare and housework. Even taking into account the differing viewpoints and experiences of the various students in the classes, one of the struggles I found myself grappling with, as well as trying to mediate in class discussions, was

this contention that “things are different now” with regard to sexism, sexist practices, and inequity of women vis-a-vis men. This was difficult; I certainly did not want to negate or dismiss their experiences. Nor did I want to engage in what Henry Giroux (1993) calls “a form of pedagogical terrorism which would put their identities on trial” (p. 50). Neither, however, could I support (for several reasons) an articulated argument that attempted to erase an analysis of the inequitable social positions of men and women. I echo here the struggle articulated by Ursula Kelly (Brookes and Kelly, 1992) when she notes:

I’m overwhelmed with the task at hand. To confront my needs and the needs of these young women and men in our gendered, classed, and raced practices - to struggle with them to find alternative forms of practice in schools where the ideologically dominant is rarely questioned and to remain hopeful amidst the everyday struggles - demands all my energies (p. 266).

Like Kelly (Brookes and Kelly, 1992), I am sometimes overwhelmed by the task of teaching these equity courses. To find ways of sharing with students my and their hopes and passions for transforming schooling practices, while at the same time balancing their and my real, pragmatic, practical concerns and needs around a thirty hour course is a thrilling and exhausting endeavour. There are often pieces sacrificed, left by the side of the road, because there is no time to pursue that tidbit and still ensure that there is an hour available for the students who are giving a presentation that day. There is the frustration with “chunking up” the six issues we worked with, one each to a three hour class, with little opportunity to interrogate the ways in which these issues are intricately interconnected one with another<sup>5</sup>.

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We started this course with two days spent on “foundations of equity issues,” followed by a day each on: race/racism; sex/gender/sexism; heterosexism/homophobia; classism/poverty; dis/abilities; and anti-Semitism. This left two classes to “pull it all together” and develop strategies for resistance/intervention in classroom practices. If I teach this course again in

There were/are the days where I ask myself why in the world I am doing this work, when I am discouraged, and slide into wondering why I think this work will make any difference. Then there are the moments which counter this despair; an email from a student now teaching in Hong Kong; a letter mailed from another student now teaching on a First Nations Reserve in northern Saskatchewan; a chance meeting with yet another former student at a workshop I was facilitating on issues for gay and lesbian students in schools. All three of these students wanted to let me know - had taken the time out of their busy teaching lives to share with me - that that day they had made a difference in a student's life, because our course and time together had made a difference in their lives. Those are the moments that teachers wait for - the moment when someone comes back to you to say "It matters - what you said, or did - it made a difference."

And yet, as overwhelming and exhausting as teaching the courses on equity were/are, they are also what inspires me, fuels my passion, my thinking, reading, and writing. Theorizing a social justice pedagogy is, as noted above, a process involving both "attempting to identify common patterns and issues" and "relating patterns to one's own teaching context" (Marsh and Willis, 1999, p. 99). It is the duality of teaching the courses and reading/thinking/processing/theorizing what we were doing together that has resulted in not only this dissertation, but also my on-going conviction that social transformation is possible.

The "uneasy alliance" of which I have spoken already, that peculiar melding of modernism and post-modern and/or critical theorizing which has been characteristic of my

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the future, I will do away with the "issues/topics" days, and build the entire course around theorizing in/equities and developing a social justice pedagogy.

teaching experiences, is made evident in Satya Mohanty's (1997) explication of the ultimate untenable position of relativism, which has been/is a foundational mainstay of Left political criticisms of dominant discourses and ideologies (p. 123). Mohanty (1997) acknowledges and outlines the (initial) usefulness of relativism as a political tool and response to/rejection of "...the universalist claims of Enlightenment thought" (p. 118). She states:

...the relativist thesis initially [became] a valuable political weapon. Opposing the imperial arrogance of the scholar who interprets aspects of other cultures in terms of the inflexible norms and categories of the scholar's own, the relativist insists on the fundamentally sound antipositivist idea that individual elements of a given culture must be interpreted primarily in terms of that culture, relative, that is, to its own unique system of meanings and values. Thus relativism teaches a clear political lesson: it cautions us against ethnocentrist explanations of other communities and cultures (p. 122).

This form of relativism is one which I use in teaching; the usually-mostly-privileged preservice teachers in the equity classes find relativism a useful tool for deconstructing taken-for-granted privilege, providing ways of seeing the world in a different light, as well as a useful interrogation tool for understanding the world/s they do not live in. However, relativism is a limited and often limiting tool since, as Mohanty (1997) points out:

...there is at least one rather serious problem in what [extreme] relativism entails: To believe that you have your space and I mine; to believe, further, that there can be no responsible way in which I can adjudicate between your space - cultural and historical - and mine by developing a set of general criteria that can have interpretative validity in both contexts (because there can be no interpretation that is not simultaneously an evaluation) - to believe both these things is also to assert something quite large. Quite simply, it is to assert that *all spaces are equivalent*, that they have equal value, that since the lowest common principle of evaluation is all that I can invoke, I cannot - and consequently need not - think about how your space impinges on mine or how my history is defined together with yours. ...I end by denying that I need to take you seriously (p. 131, emphasis in original).

This is one of the many contradictory moments which arises in my classroom teaching, and

it is one which I have not yet found a satisfying way to resolve. Perhaps there is no satisfactory resolution; perhaps it is sufficient that I am aware of, and made uneasy by, this contradiction, for that uneasy awareness keeps me thinking and reading and trying to work with and through the contradiction imposed by using relativism as a tool for interrogation. To share with students a way in which they might have a place to stand to interrogate their spaces of privilege as well as their spaces of marginalization is important to me; in this regard, relativism as outlined by Mohanty (1997, p. 122) has often been effective. At the same time, however, I remain aware of her statement that

one cannot both claim to hold the relativist position and expect to convince anyone who does not already believe; there is no serious way in which the relativist can ask me to take him [sic] seriously - insofar as he [sic] wishes to be consistent. ...If the relativist says that everything is entirely context-specific, that we cannot adjudicate among contexts or texts on the basis of larger - that is, more general - evaluative or interpretative criteria, then why should I bother to take seriously *that very claim*? ...Self-refutation is built into the argument, and it renders relativism less a significant philosophical position than a pious - though not ineffectual - political wish (pp. 130-131, emphasis in original).

Further to this, that is, the trouble with relativism, Henry Giroux (1993) in discussing the use of popular culture in classrooms, states that "...relativism overrides the concerns of social justice, and individual views outweigh the consequences of the actions that follow from them on the broader public sphere" (p. 54). In discussing the use of popular culture, Giroux (1993) warns that:

Any attempt to reclaim the popular in the service of a critical pedagogical practice runs the risk of at least three serious reactionary interventions. First, the popular or everyday is often used by mainstream and liberal educators merely to reaffirm the textual authority of canonical texts. Second, humanistic discourses sometimes use the popular as if it were an unproblematic mode of discourse and style, as if student voices in and of

themselves lend authority that needs no further discussion or analysis. Third, there is the risk of colonizing the popular in the interests of subordinating it to the discourse of pedagogical techniques (p. 52).

Now, Giroux is not stating that educators ought not to use popular culture as an aid in interrogating “how cultural production works within and outside of the margins of power in texts” (p. 53); this is a useful strategy for critical educators and what he terms “cultural workers.” He is warning, however, that in and of itself, use of popular culture can (like any strategy or tool or practice) be something other than a critical practice. I endeavour to carry this kind of caveat throughout the text of this dissertation; no strategy or set of practices can, in and of themselves, constitute transformative processes. My argument here is for a set of interconnecting practices and processes that inform one another and are always already subject to re/flection and re/vision.

*Situating the text:*

This dissertation is a conceptual and analytic exploration of complex and multi-faceted aspects of schooling. In this work I bring together conversations about curriculum, student engagement, and the systemic operations of power and privilege, pointing to some of the tensions and contradictions in and around the complex network of intersections within and between these concepts. I also argue that there is a pragmatic need and an ethical requirement for people who are socially privileged to recognize their own privilege and call its operations into question, thereby beginning or enhancing their own development of a social justice pedagogy. What I have done here is critically interrogated some practices of educational institutions as a problematic, with a view to understanding how these practices operate as aspects of the power relations that produce and reinforce existing social inequities.

I wanted to inquire, theoretically and experientially, into some of the practices and processes of schooling and how they might be interrogated in order to work toward a goal of a more equitable social system than the one in which we currently live.

This dissertation is analogous to a cat's cradle. For the reader who is unfamiliar with this old child's game, the "cat's cradle" refers to the various complex patterns produced when a single strand of string, knotted together at the ends to form a circle, is manipulated by the ways in which this string is wrapped around the fingers of the players. This game involves at least two players, since it is impossible to change the design while holding the strings taut. This text employs a similar process: both writer and reader participate in the understandings produced here. However, rather than taking turns transforming the configurations, in this variation on the "cat's cradle" theme the reader holds an image in place while the writer offers information, ideas, and/or alternate perspectives which transform the patterns that the reader is able to see. I use this metaphor to emphasize the ways in which I perceive the connections between conceptions of curriculum, student engagement, and teaching for social justice - the core elements in this work. In many respects, the foundational assumptions and central ideas in each of these ideologies and practices represent a single thread that appears as a different design depending on how that thread is configured or on how the configuration is viewed.

Chapter Two, "Conceptualizing Curriculum," was informed largely by my fascination over the years with observations and conversations with some teachers in public school classrooms; often, when they spoke of curriculum, they referred to the formal documents issued under the auspices of the Department of Education of the government of Nova Scotia.



I observed, however, that they frequently had at least two understandings of curriculum operating in their conversations and in their classroom practice; there was the understanding of the formal curriculum document, and then their “own curriculum” in the form of what they actually did in the classrooms, sometimes adhering to the document, and sometimes moving quite far afield from the document in order to meet the needs of their students as they understood them. As I was/am undertaking the process of theorizing a/my social justice pedagogy, I perceived present in some classroom practices of some teachers, including my own, as well as in some of the literature which I was reading, a tension which I wanted to try to make sense of and articulate. It seemed to me that I was seeing/hearing/reading a lot of work around “issues of equity,” which I understood to mean practices which took into account the inequitable systemic operations of privilege and marginalization, and then actively worked to intervene in ways that would address the inequities that some students and teachers face in schools. At the same time, I perceived that some of this “equity work” appeared to operate in and through an ethos of equal treatment as a means of addressing inequities. Equal and equitable are not the same things; I wanted some way of satisfactorily articulating the distinctions I was seeing and reading about. To this end, I developed three nominal categories to conceptualize curriculum: the traditional/conservative; the individualist/humanistic; and the critical/“post-.”

Initially, I developed these three conceptualizations based on Max Weber’s (1930) notion of “ideal types.” However, the “ideal types” approach proved too rigid; although I attempted to mark the fluidity between the three conceptions, I finally decided that either the conceptions themselves were too rigid, or the language was contributing to the perception

that the three types were intended to be bounded and delineated. I turned then from Weber's "ideal types" to Diana Fuss (1989) and nominal categories.

*Nominal categories:*

In Essentially speaking: Feminism, nature and difference, Fuss (1989) challenges the notion that essentialism and constructionism are as oppositional as they appear to be/are assumed to be. She states that "Essentialism is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of a thing, the immutable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (p. xi). Constructionism, on the other hand, is generally understood as "the position that differences are constructed, not innate" (p. xii). Fuss (1989) argues elegantly in this text that the seeming opposition of these positions is an "obfuscation," that "there is no essence to essentialism" and that "constructionism...really operates as a more sophisticated form of essentialism" (p. xii). She concludes that:

To insist that essentialism is always and everywhere reactionary is, for the constructionist, to buy into essentialism in the very act of making the charge; *it is to act as if essentialism has an essence* (p. 21, emphasis in original). The bar between essentialism and constructionism is by no means as solid and unassailable as advocates of both sides assume it to be (p. xii).

Fuss' (1989) discussion of the contradictions within a popular view of the seeming oppositionality of essentialism and constructionism is yet another of the ongoing points of analysis between varying and various theorists. These ongoing discussions and apparent contradictions of positions are evident with not only Fuss, but with most of the theorists whose work provides foundations and/or moments of discussion throughout this writing. In the spirit of a critical/"post-" analytics, contradictions are noted but are not viewed as limitations to usefulness. The specific usefulness of Fuss' (1989) project for my work is in

her development of essence, and her distinction between two kinds of essence, for it is this which informs Chapter Two and the three nominal categories developed there.

Fuss (1989) defines “essence” as “that which is most irreducible or unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing” (p. 2). Further to this, she invokes Locke’s distinction between “real essence” and “nominal essence.” Real essence is that which is most irreducible and unchanging in a thing. Through empirical observation, we can discover the inner or most basic truth of a thing or person. This is the link to Western knowledge systems and the foundation for science as a route to “truth” (p. 4). Nominal essence is a “classificatory fiction which we use to categorize and to label (p. 4).” This sort of essence is produced or assigned in and through language, and is not necessarily “discoverable” through direct observation of that thing or person (p. 5).

The essence of a thing, then, is what we can discover or recognize in it that enables us to assign meaning, or that produces a certain meaning to be attached to that thing. For example, there are many very different looking things that we could assign to (or describe as) the category or classification “chair.” Thus, a chair is a thing; it is also a category of things. We recognize a thing as a chair (and can thus assign it to the category chair) if it exhibits/shares that basic property that is necessarily common to any and all other things that also belong to the category “chair.” There is some fundamental and unchanging “chairness” that acts as the baseline. This is what makes it possible for a chaise longue, a lawn chair, a three-legged stool, and a collapsible concert chair, to all belong to the category “chair.” The fundamental property which these things all share is that they function to support the sitter in an upright or semi-upright position, some position that is not standing and is not lying

down<sup>6</sup>.

The definition of a nominal category, then, which I borrow from Fuss' (1989) work, is a classificatory fiction. I note from the outset that they are not "real" in any concrete manner; they are not intended to be "real" in that sense. They are developed herein and used solely as a means of making some kind of sense of something which I wanted to have an ability to look at/for, to talk about - that is, I perceived that there were different practices occurring in schools and in literature, and I needed some way of "naming" those differences in order to talk about them. Actually, it would be much more accurate to say that it was not the practices themselves which were different, for frequently they were not very different at all from one another in anything except their effects (and possibly in their intent). But, since I did not have a way of ascertaining the intent of the practices, I focus in this writing on searching for their different effects.

The central thesis in Chapter Two is that a/any conception(s) of curriculum foundationally rest upon understandings of the purpose of schooling, and in their turn then shape/inform all other aspects of the relations of schooling. The nominal categories are for the sole purpose of painting brush strokes of three of the most common understandings, explicit or implicit, of the purposes of schooling: to ready students for a world of work; to provide an environment where individuals (and individuality) may flourish at their own pace;

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Whenever I use this "chairness" of a chair in class, we end up having a discussion about how/why it is that even though I frequently sit on a desk or tabletop during class, we are all in agreement that the act of sitting upon something does not in and of itself turn that object into a chair. There is an understanding at work that while we can clearly sit upon objects which are not chairs, they remain not-chairs. So while the chairness of chairs is a useful example for discussing the notion of nominal essence, it is also limited.

or to build with and between all of the constituents of schooling a social justice process wherein students may learn to recognize the operations of privilege and marginalization, and how to change the inequities of their social world. Further than this, for the purposes of this dissertation, the nominal categories are not intended to go. That people do hold differing views or understandings of the purposes of schooling - that is, why as teachers we do what we do - is a foundational aspect of this writing; I do not explore it any further, but write “on top” of that statement. That these differing views of the purposes of schooling then inform the conception of curriculum one holds is also not explored in-depth in this writing; rather, it is taken as a given that (as one example) if one holds a social justice view of schooling, one’s understanding then of what a curriculum is and does will be different than if one believes that children ought to be left alone to flourish as (or if) they will.

After outlining the three nominal categories in Chapter Two, I turn to one grounded example of how we might recognize these categories in their effects. Since the categories are not static, nor separated one from another, it is only through the effects that we may be able to distinguish them. To this end, I explore and critique some of the common practices of multiculturalism, both in theory/ies and in some different types of classroom practices, with a view to linking the practices and their effects to each of the three nominal categories.

The third chapter provides another variation in the building of the complex pattern of ideas and analyses which structure this text. In order to build a necessary bridge from the conversation about conceptions of curriculum to a conversation about student engagement which then leads to talking about teaching for social justice, I begin Chapter Three with a discussion of the operations of power as articulated by Michel Foucault (1978; 1986). I

examine various understandings of student engagement, ranging from very concrete definitions of academic performance and success to much less concrete, but still as “solid,” understandings of student engagement as supporting and being supported by such aspects as rebellion and resistance.

While much of the student engagement literature I encountered foundationally rests upon particular understandings of what curriculum is and does, rarely are the connections between these two areas explicitly articulated. Yet, I believe that they are intricately intertwined; how a teacher perceives any particular student, especially as that student being either engaged or disengaged with what is happening in the classroom, is, I argue, absolutely connected to how that teacher understands curriculum. An integral component of my vision for what schooling can - and ought - to be is the discussion in Chapter Three around student engagement. As Linda Christensen (2000) puts it:

Building community means taking into account the needs of the members of that community. I can sit students in a circle, play getting-to-know-each-other games until the cows come home, but if what I am teaching in the class holds no interest for the students, I'm just holding them hostage until the bell rings (p. 5).

Students - and teachers - deserve much more than to be held hostage in classrooms. Thus, Chapter Three offers a variation on the relationship between curriculum-as-document and curriculum-as-practice discussed in Chapter Two, with the emphasis placed on the effects or operations of these conceptions as they inform student engagement as a social and interactive process. In this chapter, I posit that student engagement is a relation. Linking understandings of what student engagement is to the previous chapter, I argue that how one understands the purpose of schooling directly (although not always articulated directly)

informs an understanding of what an engaged student is (or looks like).

The final section of Chapter Three provides a grounded example of one of the central points of this dissertation, which is that in a mainstream-centred set of purposes and practices of schooling, students who are marginalized often find school a riskier and less compelling process than do students who occupy positions of social privilege, and who therefore encounter their own lives as central to schooling, either explicitly or as a taken-for-granted. In a critique of the category of “at-risk” students, I illustrate the ways in which the notion of “at-risk” both sets up and maintains as at risk the very students it purports to be supporting. It is more frequently the child who is in some way (or in several ways) socially marginalized who is more likely to be also characterized as an “at-risk” child (Wells, 1990; Reagan, 1990). For instance, children who live in families which live in poverty are often understood to be “at-risk” within the processes of schooling; children who are not White are over-represented in interventionist programs developed for “at-risk” students; children with a physical and/or a learning disability are frequently characterized as “at-risk” learners (Weis, 1988; Wells, 1990; Solomon, 1994; Fullinwider, 1996; Yeskel & Leondar-Wright, 1997; Whirlwind Horse, February 23, 2002).

Within a mainstream-centred process of schooling, that is, schooling processes and practices which are predicated upon a “normalized” child who is the child of social privilege<sup>7</sup>, children who are socially marginalized are more frequently the children who are viewed through conservative and/or liberal notions of “at-riskedness” (Contenta, 1993; Dei

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I outline in detail this notion of the “normalized” child, the child of social privilege, in Chapter Two.

et al, 1997; Dei et al, 2000). As I outline in Chapter Three, notions of the “engaged” student are often based on conservative and/or liberal ideas of what an engaged student “looks like;” In interrogating some of the relational processes of schooling, I have come to view the characterization of some children as “at-risk” through the questions of “how is it that these/some students are “at-risk?” “Who put/s them “at-risk”?” and “what are they “at-risk” of/for?” Discussions of “at-risk” students seem to me to be frequently static notions of who/how students “ought to be” in schools, and when students are not conforming to the expectations of who/how students ought to be, they are more frequently labelled, and then understood, through the category “at-risk.” Since I believe that schooling processes are predicated on the expectation (although not the actual existence) of the/a child of social privilege, it is my contention that socially marginalized children are over-represented in the category/ies “at-risk.” Thus, in this last section, I begin a process of interrogating the category of “at-risk” itself.

In Chapter Four I outline what I have come to view as some of the constitutive elements in the theorizing of a/my social justice pedagogy. These elements intersect and inter-relate to form a complex network; I see each of these elements as a necessary, but not sufficient, component in theorizing a/my social justice pedagogy. These five elements are: a rejection of neutrality/objectivity and the application of an ethic of care/particularity; an awareness and analysis of power as relational; critical thinking and critical pedagogy; self-reflectivity and self-reflexivity; and a utopian vision and political action. I also address some of the critiques of these elements/components which have been raised within a critical spirit of interrogation and questioning, as well as point to some of the criticisms of social justice



pedagogies from both the “conservative far Right” and the “liberal soft Left.” I use Foucault’s (1978) notion of a reverse discourse to illustrate the ways in which these apparently oppositional discourses re/produce the very power relations they claim to resist. I discuss the ways in which the rhetoric of “no child left behind” and “we are all human” present an image of inclusivity and equality while at the same time operate to police the boundaries of the categorical “subject.” As I point out, both the “hard right” and the “soft left” are ultimately in the business of producing a particular subject as normative; the conservative hard right polices the boundary of this category from the outside, while the liberal soft left polices it from within. The normative subject is taken-for-granted in these discourses, and as such is never called into question; a social justice pedagogy grounded in an analytics of power relations begins by calling this normative subject into question.

My original intent was to use Chapter Four to answer the questions: what is social justice teaching, and how ought we as educators to be working in this direction? However, I found that what seemed to be a “logical” approach to this conversation rapidly dissolved into a circular argument in which I kept stumbling over the “why” question. My solution (although I am not suggesting that this is the/an “final/definitive answer”) was to locate social justice pedagogy as an historical concept and then to construct my representation of the constitutive elements in a manner that let me illustrate the relational and processual aspects within and between the elements. Chapter Four contains some of the foundational aspects from which my thesis emerged; that is, the processes of schooling are always political, are never neutral, and ultimately every person who interacts with schooling must choose to either sustain and maintain inequitable systems which privilege some and

marginalize others, or to work for social justice.

This issue of “choice” is neither as simple nor as binary as the above suggests. It is insufficient to simply wash away all of the tensions and contradictions inherent within a social justice pedagogy by stating that each individual must choose whether or not they will participate in/engage with such a project. Taken together with an analytics of power relations and the operations of privilege and marginalization, this matter of choice becomes immediately a much more tangled process than “simply choosing.” Simply put, within a conservative-based approach to schooling, educators who undertake a radical transformation of the purposes and practices of schooling place themselves in a risky position. The risk is present for all, but is much more present and tangible for some than for others. An educator who occupies a position of social marginalization (or more than one, since there are several), risks more than an educator who operates in and through their privilege.

For instance, as a middle-class, White woman who teaches at a university, for me to talk about race and racism from a position of race-privilege seems to be “less risky” than for an educator who is a person of colour. Students who see/hear me talking about race and racism may (and frequently do) disagree with my analysis, but because they perceive me as White, they do not say to me that I am personalizing racism, and/or “accusing” them of being racists because (if/when) they also are White. Yet, I know that this has happened to two former colleagues of mine, both women of colour, who when they have shared with students their own experiences with racism, have had some students complain that the professors themselves are racists. Even though I do personalize race by talking about my own experiences with White privilege, the “risk” for me in talking about racism through my own

race-privilege seems to be less than for (at least some) colleagues. In talking about teaching equity courses with a White male heterosexual colleague (who is also fully-tenured), we have concluded that his own responses from students indicate that he receives the same “less-risk” responses with regard to not only race/racism, but also sex/sexism and heterosexism/homophobia.

Although the issue of choice is certainly a different one for each individual, based on their social privilege and/or marginalization, as I argue in Chapter Four, choice does exist: the choice of when or whether to teach for social justice is a choice which can only be made when/once one is aware of the possibility of this kind of work. It is not my intent to simplify choice into a binary of either one does or does not, for it is not that clear-cut. In Chapter Four, I argue that there is an ethical component of this choice-making; in order to make this choice, and to own the implications/consequences of the choices we make, we need to be aware that there is a choice to be made. If/when we occupy social privilege, our social world may appear to us as a taken-for-granted reality, and we may not be aware that inequities require active intervention in order to affect change. If we are unaware of the ethics of humanization (Freire, 1998), of the implications of attempting to teach and remain “neutral” in a non-neutral undertaking that is schooling, then it cannot be said that we are making a choice, for we may be unaware that there is a choice to be made. Critical self-reflection and a critical awareness of the operations of power relations are integral components of an ethic of care. This ethic is, or should be, foundational for all teachers/educators. But it cannot be foundational if we are unaware of its existence. This is why, in the final chapter, I argue for the need to reform teacher education programs as one component to affecting larger scale

social change.

In the final chapter of this text, I move from theorizing a social justice pedagogy to outlining a strategy for resistance which can provide the means to “mess up” some of the operations of power relations. By introducing social justice pedagogy/ies as an integral component in teacher education programs, we may find ways of subverting the ways in which schooling routinely re/produces the relations of power, of privilege and marginalization. As I articulate in this chapter, the process of schooling is multi-faceted, dense, a network of relations, and changing teacher education programs is not the only space in which we need to intervene; teacher education programs may not even be the first or most logical place in which to start (if it can be said that there exists a best-first place to start at all). However, teacher education programs are where I work; these are the spaces where I can visualize possibilities of interrupting taken-for-granted operations of privilege. In keeping with theorizing a/my social justice pedagogy, I take the work done throughout this dissertation and apply it to one “concrete” aspect of the processes of schooling, seeking ways and spaces available to me in which to affect change.

*Situating the/some theoretical components:*

One of the hardest aspects of writing this dissertation was my own training to find some kind of “objective” theoretical stance which could or would provide a concrete justification for this approach to teaching. Even though I “knew” better, I was still trying to find work which would point to a tangible reason for teaching in the manner advocated in this writing: children will feel better about themselves, or children will achieve more academic success, or something. The empiricists were still nudging me along, while I tried

to resist. While I believed intuitively that there is a very real need for educators to work for/toward social justice, I also understood that in most academic traditions, as well as my own integrity as an educator, more was required than my own sense of the inherent “rightness” of this endeavour. As I struggled to find the “cornerstone” of a justification, my supervisor suggested that I read Freire’s (1998) Pedagogy of Freedom. As I discuss below, this text proved to be epiphanel for me; Freire’s articulation of an ethics of humanization resonated with the work in which I so passionately believed. Coupled with Foucault’s (1978; 1986) analytics of power relations, these two ideas provided a place to stand from which to begin both my critique of the existing practices and processes of schooling, and the theorizing of a social justice pedagogy as articulated in this work. As I discuss further in this work, Foucault and Freire are neither the only, nor the absolute defining, theorists whose work has influenced my teaching and my writing. The moments which I do take up from their work, however, provide me with two of several key elements in this theorizing.

It has been said that “politics make strange bedfellows.” The politics of this theorizing of a social justice pedagogy have resulted in a strange coupling indeed, for at first glance Freire and Foucault would seem to have little in common, and using them together may seem, if not contradictory, at least not complementary. Each of these theorists has been criticized for work they did not do, or for the ways in which they did some of the work they did do. Foucault did not address gender issues, as has been noted by some feminist theorists in their responses to his work (Hartsock, 1990; Ramazanoglu, 1993). Freire did develop a universalizing theory of oppression, which may not be as easily or readily translatable to the particulars of some oppressions as some of us might wish (Weiler, 1991; Frankenstein,

1992). It is not that I wish to brush aside these criticisms, but rather to work with/through/past them, for while there are lacks in their work, as indeed there probably are in any piece of writing/theorizing, there are also aspects of each of their works which resonate strongly for me, and which have been major influences on my theorizing of a social justice pedagogy. Here, I will briefly outline the moments of their works which form part of the foundation for this theorizing of a/my social justice pedagogy. I follow each with an articulation of some of the critiques which have been raised regarding each of their works. I note here that in no way is the following intended to be an in-depth analysis of and/or critique of the very large bodies of thought which comprise not only the works of Freire and of Foucault, but also the varied responses which each of these writers have engendered. Such an undertaking is far beyond the scope and purpose of this dissertation.

*Paulo Freire:*

The influence of Freire's writing on educators is quite possibly immeasurable. In most of the literature I read which was published within the last decade, dealing with/discussing equity issues, critical pedagogy, liberatory pedagogy, critical literacy, I found the works and words of Freire. Kathleen Weiler (1991) says that "Paulo Freire is without question the most influential theorist of critical or liberatory education. His theories have profoundly influenced literacy programs throughout the world and what has come to be called critical pedagogy in the United States" (p. 450).

Freire's last published text, Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage, (1998) published posthumously, carries these words by Patrick Clarke, a friend and colleague of Freire's for more than twenty years, and the translator of this text into English:

...the title... 'Pedagogy of Freedom' ...seems to possess the resonance required by the text itself. In addition, it haply completes the trilogy of pedagogies, beginning with the 'Oppressed' and moving through 'Hope' to that place that Paulo so struggled for and desired for everyone he met... Freedom (p. x).

Clarke's (1998) words mark one of the moments of resonance for me: to "see" oppressions, to have hope, to work toward freedom - this sums up for me everything I believe in and work toward. The real "ah-ha" moment for me in reading this text, however, was in finally discovering a place on/in which to stand in my continuing development of/theorizing of a social justice pedagogy; that place is an ethics of humanization. Until I read this text, I had struggled for ways to articulate something I passionately felt and dimly perceived, while attempting to convey in a grasping, intuitive manner: that we need to do this (social justice work) because it's the right thing to do. Now, I realize that Freire's (1998) work simply provided an elegant articulation of something in which I already believed, so that my "ah-ha" moment consisted not so much of learning something "new," or changing how I saw the world, but rather provided support for what I wanted to say. I believed Freire's words before I ever read them, that we as educators ought to teach for social justice because it is the right thing to do. Freire's articulation of an ethics of humanization provides a means to convey this.

Freire's (1998) ethics of humanization is a deeply political and passionate belief in how as human beings we ought to be with one another, and the requirement for educators to treat their students with/in an ethical responsibility, as well as to teach their/our students how to be with others in this same ethical manner. He says:

human existence is, in fact, a radical and profound tension between good and evil, between dignity and indignity, between decency and indecency, between

the beauty and the ugliness of the world. ...[I]t is impossible to humanly exist without assuming the right and the duty to opt, to decide, to struggle, to be political. All of which brings us back again to the preeminence of education experience and to its eminently ethical character, which in its turn leads us to the radical nature of 'hope.' In other words, though I know that things can get worse, I also know that I am able to intervene to improve them (Freire, 1998, p. 53).

As I noted earlier, this dissertation is not a neutral piece of writing; this theorizing of a/my social justice pedagogy is written in and through this ethic of humanization. Like Freire, I, and this writing, are passionate advocates of particular ways of seeing - and being in - the world.

As I embrace and take up this ethic of humanization articulated in Freire's work, I am also aware of some of the difficulties which have been raised with/by his works. Weiler (2001) notes her "...respect for Freire and for his passionate commitment to social justice, his steadfast stance on the side of those who suffer" (p. 74). Notwithstanding, she also points to some of the "problematic aspects of his theory" (p. 74), from a feminist perspective. She states:

On the most basic level, of course, there is Freire's failure to include the experiences of women or to analyze or even acknowledge the patriarchal grounding of Western thought. But beyond that is the question of the generalized and abstract quality of Freire's thought, his view of history as a kind of Manichaeian struggle between good and evil, with Freire representing...the forces of goodness and salvation (p. 74).

While the above is troubling for many, including myself, Weiler (2001) comments a few sentences later, with regard to the generalized and abstract quality of Freire's work, that it is "[p]recisely because Freire's work is so decontextualized and because his claims are so sweeping, [that] he can speak to readers with many different histories" (p. 75). This helped



me to make sense of something which I had not been able to understand: how could a Brazilian man, an educator who lived for years in exile from his home country, someone twice my age, someone with whom it would seem I have absolutely nothing in common in terms of who/how we live in the world, how could I find myself identifying so closely with his words? While Freire's writing has been criticized for this sweeping and decontextualized manner, I find myself agreeing with Weiler that this appears as both a problem and a strength.

In an earlier article in which she grapples with Freire in and through feminism, Weiler (1991) also points out that "...influential in Freire's thought and pedagogy were the influence of radical Christian thought and the revolutionary role of liberation theology in Latin America" (pp. 451-452). I will own that I was rather startled when I first read this, and I am not certain which was the more startling - the notion of "radical Christianity," or seeing the influence for the first time of The Sermon on the Mount in Freire's works. However, as I reread Freire's works through Weiler's comment, I recognize the veracity and viability of this statement. Given my own history with the dominant forces of Christianity, I expect that I shall work with the tensions this produces for me for some time to come.

Weiler (2001) continues her interrogation of Freire through a feminist re/reading by commenting further that

The abstraction of Freire's work, the lack of location, the visionary claims all make it possible for readers to identify themselves as either the oppressed or the liberatory teacher. But this tendency to celebrate the revolutionary teacher (an aspect of Freire's work that has troubled other readers) can also be problematic (p. 76).

In positioning the revolutionary teacher "...as male and as existing solely in the public world,

[Freire's] vision...discounts the world of personal relationships or of everyday life - the world of women" (Weiler, 2001, p. 76). With much of the focus of contemporary feminist theorizing specifically focusing on "the world of women," this vision of the revolutionary teacher as both male and public raises questions for me. I wonder if it is possible to reconcile a "private self" with a desire to be a revolutionary teacher, or whether one must be let go in order to have/be the other? While I make no claim to being a revolutionary teacher, I am already aware through the past several years of teaching experience that there have been many moments when my own "private" life has become a part of the public. I think here not so much of the times when students have contacted me at home, which they are invited to do by my giving out my home telephone number - this is not the "private" to which I refer. I think instead of the times when I have come out in class, as a lesbian or a feminist or non-Christian, when what I usually think of as my "private" life is offered for a public viewing. Admittedly, I am the one who makes this offer; no-one except myself requires that I make these statements in classes. I wonder, along with Weiler, if there are "revolutionary" teachers who do not see themselves as such, or who are not seen as such by others, because Freire and "...other leftist critics of this period" (Weiler, 2001, p. 76) imagine the revolutionary teacher as male and public.

Other writers besides Weiler have raised concerns with Freire's work. In applying Freire's epistemology to a critical mathematics education, Marilyn Frankenstein (1992) notes that:

Freire's writing on the details of how critical consciousness leads to radical social change...leaves him open to Mackie's critique that by ignoring 'the political economy of revolution in favour of an emphasis on its cultural

dimensions...[Freire's] talk of revolution...tends to become utopian and idealized' (Mackie, 1981, p. 106) (pp. 260-261).

While Frankenstein appears to agree with Mackie's critique, she does not "walk away" from taking Freire up within a critical spirit. Rather, she then comments (immediately following the above):

However, Freire's comments at his 1982 Boston College course (e.g., "in meetings like this we cannot change the world, but we can discover and we may become committed") convince me that he recognizes the limitations as well as the possibilities of education in bringing about liberatory social change. His writing, possibly, concentrates on the role of human consciousness in changing the world as a counter to overly determined structuralist theories of revolution (pp. 260-261).

In commenting on Ira Shor and Freire's (1987) "What is the 'dialogical method' of teaching?" Kelly (Brookes and Kelly, 1992) notes that she "respect[s] Freire and Shor's shared commitment to disavowing authoritarianism." However, she continues,

But students bring into the dialogue patterns of learned behaviour, and deeply internalized understandings of power differentials. These, again, are 'readings' of the world which...the *apparent* absence of authoritarianism will not completely dispel. The absence of authoritarianism does not, indeed, cannot, guarantee the absence of power struggles (p. 279, emphasis in original).

To disavow authoritarianism is certainly desirable; however, one cannot be done with, dismiss, walk beyond authoritarianism simply by disavowing it. Like privilege or marginalization, the operations of which are deeply embedded within the operations of power relations, one cannot simply decide to be done with them and walk away. These operations require interrogation, an "excavation" perhaps, to make visible the "deeply internalized understandings of power differentials" (Kelly, 1992, p. 279).

Weiler (2001) and Frankenstein (1992) both note that there are differences in Freire's

works from the earliest through the last. Criticized particularly by North American feminists for his sexist language use in Pedagogy of the oppressed, Freire thanked those who brought his sexism to his attention, and changed his language (Frankenstein, 1992, p. 260). And Weiler notes that while Freire “...never put forward a self-critique of his tendency to glorify the revolutionary leader” (p. 76), in his last writings, he “...put forward a more open vision of pedagogy, one that is more inclusive and which at the same time makes fewer claims to revolutionary transformation” (p. 76).

I am aware that there are difficulties with some aspects of Freire’s works. I do not view these difficulties as a suggestion that we not use his work; I believe rather that one of the strengths of Freire’s works is in the fact that even while their limitations are being critiqued, they are also being found worthwhile. Although he has in some ways been made “larger than life,” has become an icon for many pedagogues, as I read his works, I am struck by Freire’s willingness to be criticized, and to respond to those criticisms, and more than anything by his absolute passion for learning. I leave him the last words in this section, for to me they sum up the spirit of his work. He said:

I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself (Freire, 1999, p. 35).

*Michel Foucault:*

In Foucault’s approach to understanding power I found the means to articulate a process-based analysis that provides an analytics of power relations. This analytics of power relations begins from the assertion that “[P]ower is everywhere; not because it embraces

everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). This opens the possibility to talk about power as something other than a “thing” or a commodity that is or can be held, limited, controlled, shaped, withheld, or attached to a particular individual, institution, or category. Foucault’s analytics of power opens the space to talk about power as a process without framing this as a process of cause and effect.

Foucault (1978) offers the following explication of how his conception of power works:

“...the word *power* is apt to lead to a number of misunderstandings - misunderstandings with respect to its nature, its form, and its unity. By power, I do not mean “Power” as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body. ...these are only the terminal forms power takes” (p. 92).

For, of course, to speak of power as any of the three things which Foucault says are not what he means by power would be to understand power as a thing, something with the ability to do something to someone. What is often seen, understood, and spoken of as power are rather the effects of the operations of power. Subservience of citizens, the form of the rule, or systems of domination are not in and of themselves power; rather, the power that is relational, that is present and everywhere, that is the basis of relationships, comes to rest, as it were, in these more visible tangible forms. As Foucault (1978) points out: “[power] is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (p. 93). This analytics of power relations offers an alternative understanding to a causal relationship between power and individuals and/or contexts. Taking up this kind of analytics provides

a more historical “explanation” or perhaps an exposition of power as a process which draws attention to the variety of interconnecting social processes in a given context as they intersect with and/or produce the operations of power within that context. The understanding that Foucault (1978) offers is a “...move less toward a ‘theory’ of power than toward an ‘analytics’ of power; that is, toward a definition of the specific domain formed by relations of power, and toward a determination of the instruments that will make possible its analysis” (p. 82).

The operations of power relations are so deep, so complex, and so intertwined that only when there is a deliberate and absolute interrogation of the relations of power which inform/influence/delineate the object of study or deliberation can we even begin to glimpse those selfsame masked operations; any/all discourses operate toward an end. This statement may seem too bald, as if there were a fated journey and/or destination, or a deliberate and pre-thought-out purpose or purposeful direction for the operations of power. This is not what I mean to impart; rather, there is a masked invisibility about the operations of power; this results in the production and maintenance of the status quo. Foucault (1978) employs the phrase “...a general economy of discourses...” (p. 11); it is a mistake to see discourses as separate or distinct one from another. Rather, a general economy of discourses allows us a moment of translation, a space from which to glimpse Foucault’s assertion/suggestion that a strand, a piece, of discourse even when it appears to be speaking in opposition to the status quo, still may only serve to acknowledge its existence. Further to that, the speaking in opposition to, or of, the conservative may reify its right to exist and reify the correctness, if you will, of its position, simply by arguing against it.

Foucault's (1978) analytics of power offers an approach to understanding power as a productive process "...it is always-already present, constituting that very thing which one attempts to counter it with" (p. 82). And it is through the above quote that I see a connection between Freire and Foucault. They are not talking about the same things, and yet, in some sense, they are talking about the same thing. Foucault's project was/is to understand the operations of power relations, Freire's was/is to interrupt the effects of power relations. This is how their work comes together in this dissertation. I use Foucault's work on an analytics of power relations in order to better understand the ways in which privilege and marginalization, as the effects of power relations, operate on bodies and through systems. I use Freire's work to provide an ethical grounding for looking at ways to interrupt these self same effects of power relations. My project here is not to make them compatible with one another; rather, it is to take up the moments from each which together provide ways to interrogate the operations of power relations, and to interrupt the effects of those same operations.

The various and varied works of Foucault seem to have become omnipresent in academic theorizing, particularly within poststructuralism and postmodernism (Ramazanoglu, 1993; Kendall & Wickham, 1999). In the several decades which cover publications of Foucault's works, his ideas have been taken up, criticized, embraced, or rejected, depending on the personal/political project of those who encounter him (see, for instance, Hartsock, 1990; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Kendall & Wickham, 1999; Adams St.Pierre, 2001). Whatever one may think of Foucault, at this time his work is almost impossible to ignore. In taking up some aspect of Foucault's works within this dissertation, I have learned

to tread with caution; while I am drawn particularly to his work on an analytics of the operations of power relations, which seems to open for me a space from which/within which to interrogate the relational processes of schooling, Foucault's work/s require a very care-filled reading and application (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Kendall & Wickham (1999) comment on two particular "traps" which they contend are common. I quote their text at length, in order to adequately convey the complexities of which they speak:

The first trap...is to place limits on the use of history involved in Foucaultian scholarship. ...Foucault uses history as his main technique to make his points about sexuality, madness, punishment, the self, the body, and so forth. However, [it is] wrong to try to limit this move such that [we] are free to make *ahistorical* political points about the present and/or the future. Yes, Foucault does problematise simplistic categorisations of nineteenth-century attitudes to sex, the use of madness as a fixed diagnostic category, and the portrayal of punishment as no more than a component in a means-end equation. But his problematisations never stop, his histories never stop. ... The Foucaultian method's use of history is not a turn to teleology, that is, it does not involve assumptions of progress (or regress). This is why we say it involves histories that never stop: they cannot be said to stop because they cannot be said to be going anywhere. To use history in the Foucaultian manner is to use it to help us see that the present is just as strange as the past, not to help us see that a sensible or desirable present has emerged...or might emerge. ...Foucaultians are not seeking to find out how the present has emerged from the past. Rather, the point is to use history as a way of *diagnosing* the present (Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 4, emphases in original).

Further to their discussion of the pitfalls and difficulties of using Foucault's work, they later comment on "borrowing" from Foucault and applying his method as an "aim and squirt" wall-filler" (p. 118). They say:

If you're interested in consumption, for example...you might reasonably ask why you cannot borrow from *Discipline and Punish* a few facts about the modern docile and disciplined individual and apply them to users of shopping malls. The point to remember is that Foucault's books are specific histories of specific objects, not recipes...the historical work is *problem-based*; so a



new problem will certainly throw up a new historical account. The historical account of *Discipline and Punish* cannot be carelessly used again and again. ...Foucault's work does not allow us to reach general conclusions about the content of modern life - the point is to show precisely how some event has its own specificity...

This misunderstanding is the source of the oft-repeated criticisms of Foucault that his methods do not take enough account of religion, or gender, or class, or resistance...Foucault is not telling us that power is important to our society, or that discipline is everywhere. Rather, these concepts emerge out of his work on the birth of specific modern objects. ...[W]e need...to use history carefully...to deal with only our own area of investigation (Kendall & Wickham, 1999, pp. 119-120, emphasis in original, underline added).

In addition to the various caveats of which to remain aware in attempting to take up Foucault's methods (and the above are only two, offered here to point toward the care with which we must work in using Foucault's methods), there have been serious questions raised regarding his work (Hartsock, 1990; Adams St.Pierre, 2001; see also the edited collection of Ramazanoglu, 1993). These critiques have been raised particularly by feminist theorists, concerned that Foucault erases the ground on which much feminist theorizing has stood. Ramazanoglu (1993) states that:

Because Foucault defines power as constituted through discourses, his concept of power is very different from that of feminism...Foucault's early work is concerned with domination and physical power, but he moved increasingly to a position which denied that power was a repressive force, or came *from* a dominating class. While feminists define men's power as repressive and illegitimate, Foucault moved towards a position which defines all power as productive ...

This view raises considerable problems for feminist theories of women's subordination to patriarchal power (p. 21, emphasis in original).

There are also ways in which feminism and Foucault, while "butting up against one another," are able to work with one another. For instance, in exploring one of the ongoing difficulties of some feminist work on gender theorizing, that being the "bugbear of biological

essentialism” (p. 6), Ramazanoglu (1993) points out that

Foucault offers us a theory that bodies and sex [in addition to gender] are social constructions and are produced as effects of power. This has seemed attractive to many who want to escape any charge of biological essentialism. It enables them to view bodies as only explicable in terms of truths that are socially produced (p. 7).

This attraction toward Foucault is also not without its difficulties; Ramazanoglu (1993) continues:

However, treating material bodies as wholly irrelevant to explanations of sexual and other social relations remains an area which has perhaps been the subject of too much assumption and too little analysis. Foucault’s version of social construction does not resolve problems about how we understand the body from the vantage point of subordinated women’s bodily experiences (p. 7).

Throughout both Ramazanoglu’s (1993) introduction to Up against Foucault: Explorations of some tensions between Foucault and feminism, as well as in the selections which follow in her edited text, the writers grapple with the tensions, dangers, contradictions, and the usefulness of Foucault’s work within/for feminist theorizing and politics. I take special note of Ramazanoglu’s (1993) warning of what follows “...the tendency of some of those attracted to his ideas to simplify and unify his [Foucault’s] thought” (p. 8). She points out:

Just as feminism is becoming a significant intellectual force in the production of knowledge, it is in danger of being thwarted by an elitist, but academically respectable, relativism and pluralism which ignores gender, disempowers women and diminishes difference. ...Feminists need to take seriously the political uses Foucault’s thought can be put to, and the possible uses of his work in supporting male dominance by ignoring ‘gender’ in social relations, and appearing to rise above the political implications of social divisions between women (p. 8).

We cannot afford to forget or walk away from the important work which has been/is being done in acknowledging, working with, interrogating the operations of gender, sex, sexuality,

as well as power, dominance, and relations between women and men. Neither can we acquiesce the “field of Foucault” to an “elitist relativism and pluralism.” As difficult as Foucault may be to work with, the challenges he affords to thinking through operations of power, the social construction of gender, sex, and bodies, as well as his methods: history, archaeology, genealogy, and discourse (Kendall & Wickham, 1999), are valuable (although admittedly contentious) additions to social theorizing.

*Acknowledging the relationship between ethics and moral regulation*

Continuing in the critical spirit of my own struggles with this work which I do - not only this writing but also my teaching practices - it is incumbent upon me to here acknowledge that in taking up this ethic of humanization, I am participating in (or suggesting a participation in) the production of teachers as self-regulating subjects (Foucault, 1986). By using ethics as a place on which to stand and from which to work, in my suggestions that teachers *ought* to work in this way, I am myself engaged in a process of subject-constitution, and a form of moral regulation. In order to address (although not necessarily to resolve) this, I suggest that in advocating an ethic of care and of humanization, this/these ethic/s may well produce a context which is ultimately freeing rather than constraining. Some may ask how an ethic may be freeing rather than constraining; I turn again to Foucault (1988), and his argument in An ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, that it is a care for the self that makes it possible to participate in care for the community and in community building. Although this is how I “make sense” of using an ethic as possibly ultimately freeing, I am becoming uneasily aware that this is quite likely to be a temporary resting place in my theorizing; Ramazanoglu (1993), in commenting on Jean Grimshaw’s (1993) “Practices of

freedom,” notes that

[Foucault’s] analyses of Greek morality revolves around the care of the self, producing the self somewhat like a work of art. ...Greek morality was elitist and male-dominated, but Foucault assumed the Greeks to be free and so did not attend to gendered differences in the care of the self, or questions about morality and the effects of different codes of conduct (pp. 13-14).

Clearly, my position in this space is open to further interrogation and analysis, as it should be within this self-critical ethos.

*Critical incidents:*

Throughout this writing, I include “critical incidents” from my own teaching experiences. These narratives are offered as illustrative moments, and are offered within the spirit of “doing” a self-reflective, self-reflexive critical pedagogy. In every instance where a story is offered, the occurrences themselves are as factual as any telling may be. That is, they are offered within a context in order to situate the story itself, but I acknowledge that both the telling and my interpretation of the event are always offered as seen by me. Others who were present may have taken away different understandings of the event and its significance. Lewis (1993) notes:

The importance of the feminist focus on ‘the story’ born of experience is not the vacuous and gratuitous telling of our private stories as a cathartic moment but...to emphasize that subordinate groups live subordination and marginality through our subjectivity, that we live it through social relations which are inscribed in personal practices which are, in turn, reflective and constitutive of our social organization....[N]ot only is ‘experience’ that through which our subjectivity is constituted, but it is also the substance of theory - that on which we hang the meanings we make of the world (pp. 9-10).

Melding the theory one already has with practice, reflection, practice, new theorizing - rather than developing a theory as either the first necessary piece of work or the end result of one’s

work, theorizing a social justice pedagogy (or any pedagogy) allows for an ongoing praxis which speaks much more readily to this kind of work.

Additionally, I will note here that with every critical incident, names of people have been deleted; although this occasionally makes for a moment of awkwardness in the writing and the reading, it would be unethical of me to include names of people involved. Every critical incident I share has taken place within an open classroom, which makes the story a piece of semi-public “knowledge.” On some occasions, I teach in classroom contexts where the students and I necessarily set up boundaries of safety which include an agreed-upon measure of safety that no stories shared in the class will leave the room. There are no instances where I have recounted narratives from such a class within this writing.

When I discuss incidents which happened in some of these classrooms (or as a result of something which happened in class), it may seem that I am indulging in a blaming stance. Such is not my intent, although I am aware that intent and effect are often quite different matters, and that a statement such as “it was not my intent to do harm” in no way alleviates the harm that was (unintentionally) done. Rather than placing some sort of “blame” in the recounting of incidents, the inclusion of these incidents has two points or purposes: first, an attempt to explore the ways in which the incident itself came “from somewhere” and, for me, led to “somewhere else;” and second, to make evident the on-going struggle I have and do experience between my own developing social justice pedagogy and the pragmatic realities of teaching a ten week, thirty hour, course on issues of equity in classrooms. It was recently pointed out to me that “it’s very difficult to argue for a particular pedagogical perspective and simultaneously achieve a tone and stance that treats dissenting views fully, fairly, and

respectfully all the time” (Vibert, 2002). This is not meant to brush aside the importance of trying, but to acknowledge that I am not always successful in the endeavour.

*Situating myself theoretically:*

Earlier, I discussed the ways in which this writing and theorizing are informed by Freire’s (1998) ethics of humanization and Foucault’s (1978) analytics of the operations of power relations. I also said then that while these two “moments” from Freire and from Foucault are integral, indeed foundational, for this theorizing, they are two of several either writers or bodies of thought which inform this work. I take a moment here to once again situate myself, and to ground the eclectic collection of theoretical perspectives reflected in this theorizing. While there is much which I admire within critical pedagogy, within poststructuralism, within postmodernism, I cannot lay claim to “being” any of these things - as I discuss below, in terms of “naming” or situating myself theoretically, I am much more of an eclecticist. The closest I can come to “being” something is found in Marsh and Willis (1999); they suggest that “...those engaged in curriculum theorizing can be placed into one or another of four groups” (p. 101). They outline these four groups as:

1. In one group are system-supportive theorizers, who tend to prescribe the ends and means of education in terms of its present structures. They can be labelled “system-oriented proponents.”
2. In a second group are theorizers concerned about decision making between morally engaged individuals within the context of existing social structures. They can be labelled “system-supportive explorers.”
3. In a third group are theorizers easily identified because they are firmly opposed to present structures and have alternative prescriptions in mind to overcome perceived inequalities in society. They can be labelled “system-alternative proponents.”
4. In a final group are theorizers chiefly concerned about the individual and how the curriculum can promote the individual’s personal growth. They can be labelled “system-alternative explorers” (p. 101).

As I believe will become quite clear throughout this writing, I am a “system-alternative proponent.” That is, I believe that there are difficulties with schooling as it is, and I am involved in this dissertation and in my teaching (and my life) with exploring alternatives to the inequitable system which I perceive contemporary schooling to be.

In addition to teaching university courses with Bachelor of Education students, since 1994 I have been a therapist in private practice. My work as a practising counsellor and as a teacher of counselling theories has led me to use different approaches to framing and/or understanding what is going on for various clients by using whichever perspective best suits the context. This is not to suggest that my therapeutic practice is not grounded in understandings of various therapeutic theories/theorists. The reverse is true; in order to be able to choose between various theories to explore with clients the “best fit” for them, I am required to be fairly well-versed in the differences between varying psychoanalytic approaches. Gerard Egan (1998) explains eclecticism in the helping professions:

[some] helpers, without declaring allegiance to any particular school, stitch together their own approaches to helping. This borrowing and stitching is called ‘eclecticism’ ... Effective eclecticism, however, must be more than a random borrowing of ideas and techniques from here and there. There must be some integrating framework to give coherence to the entire process... (p. 340).

Since no one theoretical perspective can adequately deal with all of the vagaries of individual contexts, rather than letting the theory “frame” the situation, I use elements of different approaches (Freudian, Jungian, Adlerian, etc.) as sense-making strategies<sup>8</sup>. In this

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Further to the “legitimacy” of eclecticism, the two texts I used in teaching a theoretical foundations course both discuss eclecticism as a viable therapeutic approach. While Peter Bankart (1997) includes a discussion of eclecticism within a chapter on “The behavioural

way I find that I am better able to respond to the particular issues at hand.. As a result, I tend to be an eclectic thinker and theorist, and the theorizing that happens throughout this work reflects this kind of eclectic mix of sense-making strategies. It is not my intention to provide a particular theoretical frame nor to offer a perspective which emerges as a synthesis of the theoretical perspectives which inform this work. A synthesis would suggest that I somehow reconcile the contradictions between Freire and Foucault and the other theorists whose work appears in these pages; this is beyond the scope of my project. While I can and do recognize the contradictions, I do not necessarily reconcile them. My theorizing is itself informed by an approach which focuses on the operations of a variety of interconnected social processes which operate as relations. The “integrating framework” which gives “coherence to the entire process” in this writing is the theorizing of a/my social justice pedagogy.

The significance of this dissertation is in the articulation of all of these pieces in one piece of writing. There is an enormous body of literature in the field of curriculum theories and theorizing, but much of it is written solely to talk about curriculum, as if curriculum were a static and isolate-able entity<sup>9</sup>. Rarely is there a discussion of the connections between conceptions of curriculum and student engagement, for example.

Additionally, with only a few exceptions, as I read about curriculum theory, I found almost no discussions connecting the idea that how one understands the purpose of schooling

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revolution in psychotherapy,” James O. Prochaska and John C. Norcross (1999) devote an entire chapter to a discussion of eclecticism as a separate approach to psychoanalysis.

<sup>9</sup>

This notion of curriculum as being isolated from its context has been the historically favoured position. Critical pedagogues, in particular, do not adopt this stance, but view curriculum as a piece of a contextualized whole.



will fundamentally inform how one then conceptualizes curriculum<sup>10</sup>. That is, it has been a basic belief of mine for some years that teachers teach for a reason, that each of us as educators holds some idea or understanding of why it is that we do what we do, whether we have consciously thought this through or not. Resting “on top” of that belief lies some kind of notion or understanding of what a curriculum is, what it is for, what it looks like. Again, this may be either an implicit or an explicit understanding. What I did not find as a common discussion in the curriculum readings was an articulation of this idea that what each of us as a teacher/educator believes in will fundamentally inform our ideas of/about the nature and purpose of a/the curriculum.

In the same vein, as I discuss in Chapter Four, while there is now a large and ever-growing body of literature talking about how to “do” social justice teaching, most of that literature skips over, or takes for granted an assumed agreement, on why we ought to teach for social justice (Bigelow et al, 1994; Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Bigelow et al, 2001). I began with a conviction which is unshaken at the end of this writing, and that is that schools as a social organization perpetuate systems of inequity. The project of theorizing a social justice pedagogy and using that pedagogy as a foundation in and for teacher education has become my strategy for resistance to these operations. This transformation of teacher

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This idea does show up in some contemporary work by critical theorists, particularly with reference to recognizing the ways in which values which one holds, examined or not, influence what one may/does understand the purpose of schooling to be. However, often the idea needs to be “teased out” even from this work. One of the most useful texts which I have found regarding curriculum theory which explicitly addresses the notion that one’s understanding of the purpose of schooling will then inform how one understands what curriculum is and does is Marsh and Willis’ (1999) Curriculum: Alternative approaches, ongoing issues (2nd ed.).

education may open a space in the process through which teachers can alter their classrooms and perhaps students' lived experience of schooling.

For me, this writing has been an adventure in grounding the kind of politically aware pedagogy that I, and many of my colleagues, practise inside an ethical, philosophical, and pedagogical framework that can be used to articulate processes that I had previously understood at an intuitive level. Mac Farlane et al (Fall/Winter, 1993) state: “..we cannot continue to work with the notion of a universalized experience of gender [race, class, sexuality, ability, and so on] oppression” (p. 1). In writing this dissertation as a theorizing of a social justice pedagogy, I have tried to articulate a way of theorizing the various and varying people, practices, conceptions, ideologies, and operations of power relations which come together to in/form many contemporary public schooling experiences for the students and teachers who attend them.

## **CHAPTER TWO CONCEPTUALIZING CURRICULUM**

In theorizing a social justice pedagogy - that is, grappling with the “what,” the “why,” and the “how” - I began to see connections between the various things I was thinking and reading about. It seemed to me that some of the components or aspects of schooling which were/are frequently (although not always) taken up as somewhat static and bound/able categories or ideas, are more usefully visualized as relational processes. That is, it has been both a useful and, for me, a necessary piece of this theorizing to try to work with some of the ways in which one “piece” of schooling, seemingly discrete, is actually an integral aspect of some other “piece” or “pieces.” Thus, in theorizing a/my social justice pedagogy, I began to look at notions of/understandings of curriculum, trying to connect these discussions with the more obviously processual aspects which I was also attempting to interrogate.

The point of this chapter on conceptualizing curriculum is not to develop a definitive (or even tentative) definition of “a” curriculum. Indeed, since “...Portelli (1987) [has suggested that]...more than 120 definitions of the term [curriculum] appear in the professional literature devoted to curriculum...” (Marsh and Willis, 1999, p. 7), attempting to develop one overarching definition of the term would appear to be a fruitless task. In theorizing a social justice pedagogy, in this chapter and the next I develop the idea that two of the cornerstones of schooling practices (i.e. curriculum and student engagement) rest upon particular notions of the purpose of schooling. Curriculum and student engagement are interpenetrating relational processes which operate in relation to one another as well as to the underlying notions of the purpose(s) of schooling. These two interconnected processes, I

argue, are predicated upon particular idealized notions of “the child/student” for whom mainstream schooling practices are developed.

Several things in the above paragraph require unpacking: my own ideas of what a curriculum is; the connections between the/an understood purpose of schooling and “the curriculum;” and the idealized notion of “the child/student.” In this chapter I provide further articulations and my own definitional journeys around these key concepts. This chapter also provides an articulation of three nominal categories of curriculum, and a critique of some of the practices of multiculturalism and their effects. The critique of multiculturalism is offered as a site for analysis, a context in which we may be able to distinguish between the three nominal categories as they appear in classrooms. I offer distinctions between these categories not through their visible practices, (since any given practice may appear in any of the three nominal categories), and not through their intent, (since intent is a nebulous and largely immeasurable item), but through their effects, since it is the effects which we can frequently see, and which are so different from one person to the next.

*“Defining” Curriculum: Sketching the Conceptual Terrain:*

It became a part of my project, then, to start to think about curriculum not only as the documents, guides, sets of outcomes, etc. which are often the operating understanding of what a curriculum is, but to look at curriculum as not only a process, but a relational process. I have come to understand this relational process as one which both “comes from” somewhere and which “goes to” somewhere. Not that I see this as a necessarily unidirectional or linear process, but that I have come to recognize the effects of various conceptions of curriculum as at least appearing to “come from” understandings of the

purposes of schooling, and “going to” notions/understandings of student engagement.

Throughout this writing, I work from/within the position that

...curriculum is neither a scientific nor an academic discipline. It is a field of inquiry that touches on ethical choice and epistemology and is also concerned with explaining educational phenomena ranging from state and school district policies to classroom activities (Cherryholmes, 1982). It looks for general principles, but it also looks toward individual experience. In so doing, it links thought and practice. The issues with which it deals are so diverse and variable that creating a single theory of curriculum seems impossible (Marsh and Willis, 1999, p. 136).

In theorizing a social justice pedagogy, a process which includes doing/performing/implementing practices and strategies for classroom activities, I bring a conviction that schooling processes can be (more) meaningfully connected to the lives of children who might otherwise be marginalized/excluded. I begin this process with a discussion of curriculum.

Although “curriculum” is frequently spoken of as if it were a concrete and defined/definable object or document, I view curriculum as much larger than the guides or texts which contain the information, facts, and/or outcomes which educators are expected to share with students and/or have students achieve<sup>1</sup>. Regardless of what any individual educator’s notion may be of what is constituted by “the curriculum,” one of the foundational tenets of this work is the idea that how one understands the purpose of schooling directly influences what one then believes the curriculum to be. This connection between a/any understanding or idea of the purpose of schooling and the conception of curriculum is not

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I am not intending here to convey the impression that I am alone in this view, of course. Many educators and theorists share this same view; at this point I am simply sharing my own views/conceptions of the/a curriculum.

one I found commonly discussed in the literature I read (although this dissertation is not an exhaustive literature review in this area). However, as George Wood (1998) points out “...each proposed curricular formation carries with it a distinct social outcome - a notion of what body of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values students should gain in order to live in a particular social order” (p. 167). Wood’s (1998) definitional statement allows a fluidity for understanding curriculum/a as a relational process, whether we are speaking of formalized notions of curriculum as comprised of/by texts/documents/guides, or the everyday practices within schools. The relational process operating here is between notions or understandings of the purpose of schooling and the/a conception of curriculum held.

Marsh and Willis (1999) distinguish between the planned, the enacted, and the experienced curriculum (p. 5). These important processes are always present in whatever conception of what a curriculum is is held - from the most conservative of notions regarding the purposes of schooling to the most “alternative” notions of schooling purposes and practices. Further to these distinctions, while it is not possible to control (or to guarantee) the experienced or received curriculum, I suggest that the more inflexible and rigid the planned and enacted curriculum are, the greater the possibility of rupture between the planned and the experienced. This holds true regardless of the understanding of curriculum in use: while more traditional understandings of the purpose of schooling may result in a more rigid and inflexible adherence to the formal curriculum, and a critical pedagogy may build in more flexibility for allowing for/incorporating experience as the process of planned/enacted/experienced unfolds, there is variability in and between conceptions of curriculum, and regardless of the amount of flexibility within any individual educator’s

pedagogy, the experienced curriculum is always an unknown until after the planning and enactment have taken place. As Marsh and Willis (1999) point out:

Inevitably...gaps arise among the curriculum that is planned for the classroom, the curriculum that is enacted in the classroom, and the curriculum that individuals experience in the classroom (p. 4).

This is why curriculum is perhaps most accurately understood as a process; the experienced curriculum, that is, the impact and/or effect for any one student or group of students, if folded back into the process of planning and enactment, may be a crucially important component.

Without constructing “a definition” of what a curriculum is or is not, I offer my own understanding here. I view a/the curriculum as a network of social processes which include: a set of foundational assumptions about the purpose of schooling; a set of documents/guides outlining the particular content/methods of/for schooling; both the spoken and unspoken comments, discussions, and actions which occur in schools; the bodies, minds, and spirits of all of the people involved with school; and the operations of power relations which come to rest on a/any/all bodies, constituting each of us as racialized, sexualized, gendered, classed subjects. In short, without meaning to make my view of curriculum so nebulous that it has no coherence, I see anything and everything that connects with/to the daily (weekly, monthly) life of school as a part of a/the curriculum.

Conceptions of curriculum are neither static nor isolated one from another; conceptions of curriculum are fluid and shifting, with cross-overs between definition and practices from one to another. Curriculum development and implementation always operate inside a social context; what is seen (or used) as a radical curriculum in one context may be perceived or operate as a conservative curriculum within another context, and, of course, vice

versa. The preceding statement refers largely to curriculum-as-document; what I mean here is that a text taken up within a radical pedagogy may also be taken up within a conservative pedagogy. From the stance of critical, postmodern pedagogues, it is acknowledged that when the context changes, so does the curriculum, in the form of what is received or even imparted, such that it could not then be said that they are “the same” curriculum at all.

Although the conversation contained herein is necessarily linear in style, print text not readily lending itself to any other structure, it would be both misleading and incorrect to discuss conceptions of curriculum as if they are linear or static in terms of time and/or social contexts. Curriculum has traditionally been spoken of as if it were somehow linear and evolutionarily<sup>2</sup> progressive: “[c]urriculum development itself was...often influenced by a scientific faith that the best was yet to come, i.e. that more effective knowledge awaited more refined and rigorous scientific experimentation” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, 1995, p. 42; see also Marsh and Willis, 1999, pp. 45-91). To speak of curriculum as if it has an evolutionary process evokes the notion that curriculum is some kind of entity, rather than a context-relevant social process that is always-already in progress.

Ideas, strategies, or issues in the varied discussions of curriculum from a century ago appear in and through contemporary conversations about the nature and efficacy of curriculum documents, practices, and processes (Marsh and Willis, 1999, p. 47). Within a critical interrogation of curriculum, this fluidity is both necessary and desirable; it is

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I use this phrase to mark the vernacular manner of speaking, as if somehow each new development of curriculum, or each new conversation, is somehow better, more developed, than the last.



necessary to confuse the conversation precisely that we may have it. I do not view this “confusion” of curricula as a negative. As Philip Jackson (1992) asks:

...is [confusion and conflict] necessarily undesirable, no matter how discomfoting and disheartening it may strike some observers? Might it be that some of the conflict, such as that generated by competing views of what our schools are for, for example, constitutes a healthy tension that needs to be preserved and managed rather than eliminated or resolved? (p. 4)

This possibility of healthy tension seems to me to be not only a desirable position, but a logically necessary one. I view the discussions, confusions, and conflicts as contributors to a developing vision of multiple perceptions of the purposes of schooling, and therefore understandings of what (or perhaps how) curriculum is. Recognizing multiplicitous understandings of curriculum, then, allows for the possibility that all of its aspects can continue to be interrogated.

In addition to a desirable confusion, there is at this time an urgent need to “make trouble”<sup>3</sup> with and for conversations about curriculum. Roger Simon (2001) writes:

Streamlining of school services through budget cuts, adoption of province-wide standardized testing, re-written mandatory curricula with a focus on a profusion of fragmented learning outcomes, the cutback of teacher development support and preparation time, and the vast reduction in structures that enable local participation in school governance...have become the conditions under which education is taking place in most schools in the country. (p. 11)

Any one of the issues which Simon lists should be cause for concern, discussion, and action.

All of them taken together (and this is a comprehensive but not exhaustive listing of the

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The phrase “making trouble” in this context comes from Judith Butler’s (1990) Gender Trouble. She writes: “...I concluded that trouble is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it” (p. vii). If trouble is inevitable then using it as a forward impetus rather than trying to avoid it would seem to be a most useful project.

issues in and of education at this time) ought to alarm us greatly. Trumpet calls announcing “the crisis” in schooling are hardly new, and sometimes seem to be not even newsworthy. There is, however, disagreement about just what this crisis is. Positions range from calls for stricter accountability of/for teachers, a return to teaching “the basics”, and suggestions for a standardized, nation-wide curriculum (Wells, 1990; Nikiforuk, 1994; Rimm, 1997), to suggestions that we more adequately recognize the professional capabilities and authorities of teachers, a querying of just what “the basics” might be, and who ought to be deciding what is basic, and critical inquiry and interrogation into the implications of a national standardization of curriculum (Weis, Altbach, Kelly, Petrie, and Slaughter, 1989; Grumet and Pinar, 1995; Portelli and Vibert, 1995; Murphy, 2001).

Timothy Reagan (1990) has suggested that the cyclical nature of the crisis in/of schooling, and subsequent calls for educational reform are not new (p. 103); further to this, he suggests that

...critics of American public schooling periodically [descend] on educators, filled with short-term (but nevertheless righteous) wrath and indignation, nearly all of which can be expected to dissipate and be forgotten as some new national crisis or fad emerges to occupy their, and the general public's, attention (p. 103).

A general familiarity with some of the history of public schooling in Canada and United States of America leads me to agree with Reagan's (perhaps somewhat cynical) statement, at least in part. It does appear that there is something of a historical cycle to calls for educational reform in response to a perceived or actual crisis in/with education. And, at least some writers have suggested that while a great deal of energy, time, and other material resources have been expended in dealing with this/these crisis/es, little changes. Catherine

Cornbleth (1990), for instance, notes that “...curriculum policymaking and planning have become increasingly complex and contentious. ...The attention to curriculum, however, tends not to translate into genuine reform in schools and classrooms” (p. 156). Marsh and Willis (1999) point out that

..the high school curriculum recommended by the NCEE [National Commission on Excellence in Education] in 1983 bears an uncanny resemblance to the high school curriculum recommended by the NEA’s [National Education Association] Committee of Ten in 1893 (p. 85).

Regardless of the actual “nature” of the/a crisis in/with education, conversations about this crisis are imperative. Further, these conversations need to incorporate all facets and aspects, not simply strands, that comprise the face and body of education. Particularly when theorizing a social justice pedagogy and incorporating discussions of systemic inequities and school reform, we must recognize that “...missing are reform proposals that would sufficiently restructure schools to create a different learning environment to overcome the existing inequities in schooling based on factors such as social class, race, and gender” (Pink, 1990, p. 125).

Curriculum operates within a social context and relationship; student engagement does likewise. Calls for schooling reform need to take into their accounting all of the seemingly disparate, but actually intertwined, bodies of thought surrounding what schooling is, and what it is for. At the end of Class warfare: The assault on Canadian schools (1994), Maude Barlow and Heather-jane Robertson say: “...if the improvement of education required only another few hundred pages of recommendations, this book would not have been necessary. The problem is not one of technique, but of commitment; education is not short

of advice, but of common purpose” (p. 236). Silence, apathy, or presumed neutrality are not inert; rather, they are powerful supporters of the status quo. Working with the confusion, the tension, the multiplicitous understandings of the purposes of schooling, in order to maintain a dialogue, may not move us toward a common purpose of schooling; in fact, agreement on what “a common purpose” might or ought to be strikes me as both impossible and undesirable. But maintaining a dialogue may help to ensure that important questions continue to be asked regarding the purposes of schooling and what the face/s of curriculum may/could be.

*Outlining the organizing frameworks and the nominal categories:*

*The “normalized” child:*

One of the central informing threads of this dissertation is my belief that general public schooling practices and processes are predicated upon a normalized (although usually unspoken) child/student - the child of social privilege. This “child” of whom I speak is of course not an actual child, but an idealized child - and as such, does not exist in any body. But if/since schooling is predicated on this supposed child (my argument for the existence of the socially privileged child follows below), it then follows that some of the central practices of schooling operate on top of the foundation of the supposed existence of this child. This is the mainstream-centred curriculum; both the formal curriculum, in the form of documents, outcomes and objectives, curriculum guides, etc, and the informal curriculum, that is, the everyday practices, assumptions, codes of behaviours, the expectations, etc, of schooling, are predicated upon the being of this “normalized” child.

It is my contention that both the formal and the informal curriculum of schools are

set up for this child - and it is the students/children who are members of a marginalized group (or more than one such group), who end up being alienated from school and its curriculum/a: for instance, First Nations students who study elementary Social Studies texts entitled “People of Canada” and find no mention of First Nations peoples, either historical or contemporary, but rather read that Canadian history, culture, and society apparently began with the arrival of European peoples. Or, when they do find themselves/their people represented in the text, they are actually misrepresented to teach students that First Nations people live in teepees, wear loincloths and body paint, and are represented either in a romanticized manner as living an idyllic life “on the land” or are presented as a backward people who needed rescuing from their mode of existence<sup>4</sup>.

Before I outline the three nominal categories I offer in this chapter, in order to ground the discussion of why I felt a need to develop these sense-making strategies/categories, I turn first to an in-depth discussion of the operations of social privilege and marginalization. When we make sense, or attempt to make sense, of the world around us, our most common tool for sense-making is to work in/through that which we already “know” (Smith, 1987; Code, 1995). We do this by employing meaningful categories which provide us with a template for understanding and responding to a given situation. In order to understand ourselves in relation to the people in our lives and world, we organize ourselves into

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Although I do not have references for the particular Social Studies texts I refer to here, they were in use in (at least some) Nova Scotia upper-elementary schools two years ago. A graduate student in a course for which I was the instructor was a First Nations woman and a school teacher. As a part of her in-class presentation, she brought to class three Social Studies texts which offered the information I have shared here.

“identity categories” (Anderson, 1996). Every one of these identity categories is part of the relations of privilege and marginalization. A category constitutes a position of privilege when members of that group are afforded “the luxury to simply see oneself as an individual” (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997, p. 9); when the group is afforded “not simply an advantage, but an advantage gained by means of force or through discriminatory laws” (Joseph & Sumption, 1979, p. 29); and privilege is “an invisible package of unearned assets which [can be cashed in] each day, but about which [we] are meant to remain oblivious” (McIntosh, 1998, p. 79). A category constitutes a position of marginalization when the above are not true.

Whether we are using the category of sex, race, age, religion, sexuality, ability, class - no matter what we use, each and all of them are used in a stratifying way to “sort” ourselves - who do we belong with, who do we not. When we identify ourselves in any way we do two things, simultaneously; we say “this is who I am” and we say “therefore, that is who I am not.” One of the primary results or effects (indeed, it may even be the primary aim) of this sorting is that some people then have access to privilege and some people do not, or can access lesser amounts of privilege. Privilege, like power, is the result of a relationship - a process between two or more (either individuals or groups) which operates at so many levels that the operation itself is usually invisible. The effects, however, are anything but invisible - the effects are what we call in everyday language: sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, ageism, classism, ableism, racism<sup>5</sup>, and so forth.

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5

There are several arguments for and against the conceptualization of race as a social construct. Two of the most powerful of these arguments are that 1) race does not exist, it is

When children come to school, they bring with them their lifetime of social learning and the effects of that learning. While any child may or may not be aware of concepts such as “privileged” or “marginalized,” they are very aware of the effects of these processes upon their own lives. They know what they can and cannot have based on their family’s income, or lack of. They are already aware that if they are not White, they are less likely to see representations of themselves on television, in movies, in books, and that when they do see themselves represented, it is less likely to be in a positive manner than if they are White (Sullivan, 2000, pp. 206-207). They already know that if they live in a wheelchair, there are places their friends can go that they cannot.

Schools are predicated upon an assumption of a particular child; that “normative” child constitutes the “privileged” category in this context. So what does this normative child look like? We need ask ourselves only “what is the privileged position?” for the social identity categories which we use to distinguish one from another, and we will have a sketch of this normative child of whom I speak. I offer the following:

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a construct, and 2) whether or not race “exists,” the effects of having a/any particular skin colour (often conflated with “race”) are very real. Since developing and continually building a theoretical analysis (of anything/everything) is integral to a critical/ “post-” pedagogy, one of the tensions for me in discussing issues of race is that on the one hand, I accept the argument that race is a construct, while at the same time, I recognize that this position does not do away with a need to interrogate - and change - discriminatory practices which are a result of the privilege of some “races” and the marginalization of others. Butler (1993) notes: “...to claim that race is produced, constructed or even that it has a fictive status is not to suggest that it is artificial or dispensable. ...calling race a construction or an attribution in no way deprives the term of its force in life” (pp.247-248).

(Figure 1)

<b>category:</b>	<b>privileged</b>	<b>marginalized</b>
sex	male	female (since we only recognize the binary of either male or female)
gender	masculine (for male) feminine (for female)	any gender presentation which does not match the sexed body in socially accepted ways
class	economically, middle-class and higher	poor, working poor
age	mid-range - generally about 25 -55 years old	children, adolescents, elderly
race	White/Caucasian	non-White
religion	Christian	explicitly non-Christian
sexuality	heterosexual	non-heterosexual
ability	able/bodied & minded	physically and/or mentally challenged

There are others, of course, but the above are the most commonly used social categories (Anderson, 1996; Fleras, 2001; Mooney, Knox, Schacht, & Nelson, 2001). Take then, the column of words listed under privileged, and we can see our normative pupil, he who school is predicated upon and most intended for. The “normative” category is itself an effect of the operations of power relations. The “normative” category is also itself a relation. In effect, the “normative” category is the “unmarked” category and becomes visible only in relation to the “marked” category as the baseline from which we “mark” difference (de Beauvoir, 1952). The relations in and through which the “normative” category is produced and maintained are productive in the sense that they are also part of the process of subject



constitution, and are themselves discursively constructed and contextually defined (Foucault, 1978, 1986). The processes in and through which normative categories are produced and maintained as such render these as dominant categories, a process which Foucault (1988) describes as follows:

When an individual or social group manages to block a field of relations of power, to render them impassive and invariable and to prevent all reversibility of movement -- by means of instruments which can be economic as well as political or military -- we are facing what can be called a state of domination. It is certain that in such a state the practice of liberty does not exist or exists only unilaterally or is extremely confined and limited (p. 3).

As an effect of these processes, schools are inequitable; the processes of schooling both produce and reproduce inequitable social systems (Shor, 1992; Contenta, 1993; McLaren, 1994; Ghosh, 1996). This re/production results in a circular process of schooling which ensures that only those who reach “the top of the system” (Connell, 1993, p. 12) are in their own turn prepared to enter into the circular process at another spot. Beginning with the normative student who is detailed above, this circular process appears thus:

- 1) all students who are not members of the privileged identity categories are “marked” as different (Garrod, Smulyan, Powers, & Kilkenny, 1992; Gilligan, 1993; Orenstein, 1994; Dean, 2000).
- 2) curriculum for schools was and is written by people who are situated within their own lives and therefore their own “knowledge/s.” Each and all of us is/are informed by our own social location, and bring those ways of knowing ourselves and our world to any endeavour we undertake (Smith, 1987; Smith, 1990; Code, 1995). This also applies to developing curriculum.

3) children are also situated within a social context. As they come to school, then, the “everyday” of schooling speaks to the lives of some children and not to others. This meant (and means) that some children are more readily able to access, to accept, what school offers them. Many of the formal curriculum documents as well as many of the everyday practices of schooling are already familiar and comfortable for some children - those whose socially privileged lives are the lives spoken (Oakes, 1988; Weis, 1990; Roland Martin, 1992; Solomon, 1994; Dei, 1996b; Swope & Miner, 2000; Whirlwind Horse, 2002).

4) the children whose lives are such that they may access schooling and the “stuff” of schooling more easily, accepting that theirs are the lives being spoken to and of, often are more “successful” in school, are more likely to graduate, go on to post-secondary education, and in their own turn are more likely to become writers of curriculum documents, teachers, administrators, and other people positioned in places where they may influence schooling and what is done and offered there (Connell, 1993; Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1998; Banks, 2001).

5) the corollary of #4 is that children who find school unfamiliar, inaccessible, or hostile, are much more likely to leave school, often at the earliest possible opportunity. They, in their turn, will be less likely to become educators, administrators, or writers of curriculum; thus, they will not be able to bring the experience and knowledge of their lives to the writing of new possibilities for how to do school, and what goes on in schools (Wells, 1990; Gow, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Contenta, 1993; Barr & Parrett, 1995; Miner, 2000).

The last “step” in this circuitous process leads us (as a circle will inevitably do) back to “step” one. Because students who are not members of socially privileged categories are

not as readily able to access the “stuff” of conservative-informed schooling, they are marked before they enter school, and as they travel through school, as “different.” Schooling is taken-for-granted in both its processes and the “knowledge/s” it passes on to students. The marked student of “step” one then frequently proceeds to cycle through to “step” five. As I said, this is a circle.

As I have stated previously, this dissertation is centrally informed by an analytics of the operations of privilege and marginalization. In developing and articulating the “appearance” of the “normative” child, that is, the child of social privilege, I am of course aware that, like my own identity/ies and my confusions with/around them, nothing is as simple and neat as it may appear in the above outline. An analytics of the operations of power relations produces a context-relevant understanding of the ways in which various social processes interact and intersect in the lived realities of each and all of us. Individuals in the context of schooling (or anywhere/everywhere else, but I am speaking here of schooling) are never “only” raced, or classed, or sexualized, and so forth. Identity categories are neither fixed, nor static; gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, etc., operate as interpenetrating power relations which shape lived realities simultaneously. In some contexts the operations of categories of privilege may be mediated by the operations of marginalization, and vice versa (Dei, 1996b). One is not “only” Black, or Asian, or White; at the same time, one is also a man or a woman, and one is either able-bodied or not, and lesbian or gay or not, etc. An awareness and analysis of power as relational and multi-focal brings the relational aspects of the context to the foreground, rather than simply the/a category.

*Developing “sense-making” strategies:*

Working with and through some of the ways in which the operations of social privilege and marginalization impact on students/children, coupled with the idea that curriculum is a relational process, that is, both “coming from” and “going to” somewhere, and in teaching the equity courses with preservice teachers, I began to observe my own and others’ classroom practices with these processes in mind. I could see that there were all kinds of classroom practices and activities which took place in my classroom and others: games, lessons, planned moments, and those that occurred spontaneously. My conviction grew that there was something occurring with/in these processes which I wanted to know more about. Most particularly, as time went on I became more firmly convinced that there were ways in which the hidden/masked operations of privilege were informing the everyday schooling practices of/for students and teachers in ways which reinforced an inequitable status quo. I knew both from my own “best intentions” and from conversations I had with some teachers that many of us were actively working to interrupt the inequities we could see operating around us and in our classrooms. I also knew that many of us were both puzzled and frustrated when our interventions did not proceed as we had planned, and inequities were not redressed. In fact, sometimes inequities were blatantly reproduced in and through our best intentions, or through sheer oversight of the possibilities of a particular undertaking.

For instance, I often (used to) use a deck of cards as a quick and easy way to divide students into groups; everyone who has a four form a group, everyone who has a seven form a group, and so forth. However, one year I used playing cards in a different manner, with one resultant incident which I simply had not foreseen. I wanted the class of some thirty-five

students to do critical responses to the weekly readings; I divided the class into four completely arbitrary groups based on the suits of the cards: clubs, diamonds, spades, and hearts. I handed out cards to each student and then recorded their individual category: in week two, the hearts would hand in a critical response, week three the diamonds, and so on. Shortly after we had finished the recording process, a student came into the room and sat down. He was a member of this class, but had been in the wrong room for a while (this was the first class). When he realized that everyone at his table had a playing card and he did not, he spoke up to tell me this. I picked up the top card from the pile left on my desk and said "You're a spade." Only then did I look up and really look at him, to see that he was a Black man. The shame I felt must have been reflected on my face, for he looked at me and said "Relax, it's just a card." I have not used playing cards as categorizers since then, but I do use the telling of the incident itself to talk with students about the ways in which harm can be done to someone not through intent, but simply through failure to think through possibilities. That incident has had the effect of my trying to think through even the "simplest" of activities or gestures prior to usage. Although I continued to, and no doubt will continue to, make errors of either omission or commission, the development of a social justice pedagogy is an on-going process, and mistakes, reflected upon and learned from, can be a part of that process.

As I puzzled through the various pieces of writing, thinking, teaching, and observing, I wanted some kind of way to distinguish between/among what was happening around me; I wanted a sense-making strategy that would allow me to look at the "coming-from," the "going-to," the operations of power relations and of privilege and marginalization, the

everyday experiences of children and teachers in schools, and to try to see the effects of all of these relational processes, and then to talk about it. In general, I perceived three broad differences in understandings of the purposes of schooling, with connections to other schooling processes: there was/is the conservative notion that schooling is about getting workers ready for the job market; a liberal notion that children ought to be treated in school as individuals; and a critical notion that schools are (or can be) a site for socially just transformation. Although the preceding is quite rough, it provided me with a place from which to begin to try to sort through some of the processes of schooling which I wanted to interrogate. I finally decided to try to develop three different categories to describe/discuss some of the aspects of schooling in general, to try to interrogate some of these processes, and to try to view the effects of schooling through these three different categories.

Before I move into a discussion of each of the categories, the distinctions between them and the effects of them, I will take a moment here to discuss the use of nominal categories. These categories are not intended to be read as prescriptive or exhaustive. They are very broad-based; I developed them solely to try and view the relational and interconnected processes between privilege/marginalization, curriculum conceptions and practices, and student engagement, within a theorizing of a social justice pedagogy.

The difficulty in naming (anything) is the concern that in naming, that which is named is then viewed as closed, rather than remaining fluid. In developing the three nominal categories used in this writing, it is not my intent to close the categories, but to mark them in order that I may point to some general terrains. It is necessary to name things in order that we may develop a coherent way of talking about them; at the same time, naming may result

in a rejection of aspects which could be or ought to be included within, but end up being isolated from the conception (Fuss, 1989). I have grappled with this tension not only in developing the three nominal categories, but also in naming them. I heed the words of Roger Simon (1992), who, in Teaching against the grain, says:

I hope that my words will not be read as those of 'a critical theorist' or 'critical pedagogue', imprisoning them within the barbed wire of academic fashion. Such constructions create ideological warrants for professorial authority that continue to reproduce the oppressive structures of university life (p. xviii).

The tension then is that in order to talk about it I have to name it, but in naming it, I attach the risk that I will impose conditions upon it, marking it as thus and not so. I remind the reader here that as I describe and discuss some of the distinguishing characteristics and effects of the categories, I am not suggesting that these characteristics are isolated to any one conception or are absent from other conceptions of curriculum and schooling practices.

I am aware that in my attempts to describe the three different purposes of schooling which I have perceived, and which I articulate here, the discussion appears to set them up as operating "against" one another. This is a tension with which I have struggled throughout this writing, and with which I will continue to struggle; I do see these three broad differences in understanding the purposes of "what schools are for/are to do" as operating in and through the various processes and relations which I discuss in this writing. At the same time, even as I work to develop more fully my theorizing around these distinctions, I remain aware that they continue to appear as distinct entities, and that, particularly with the critical/ "post-" category (discussed below), I appear to be setting these categories up in a binary relationship of either "bad" or "good." Rather than attempting or suggesting a judgemental binary, I echo

Karen Anderson's (1996) reminder that

...categories and conceptual systems and their meaning...[are] the way we make sense of the world on an everyday basis. ...[To] question those categories and concepts...means that we must also question the way we make sense of the world and be willing to consider that the categories and concepts we use, and the meanings we impose on the world as a result, are not natural and common to everyone (p. 40).

Further to this, Anderson (1996) states that

What sets sociological concepts apart from everyday, common-sense ones is that they are deliberately constructed as tools to help sociologists reflect on the meaning and significance of the social world we live in (p. 45).

I have attempted here to represent these dense networks of interconnecting relations in a clear, straightforward manner. But the effort to describe power relations in a concise manner has required that I hold the processes "still" for at least a moment, in order to articulate both the interconnections and their effects. This holding "still" then seems to render the categories static. The nominal categories I have constructed in this writing, then, are deliberately constructed to assist in my endeavour to make visible some of the processual relations which I interrogate in this work. At the same time, I leave them, and myself, open to further questioning and consideration.

Further to this binary positioning of the categories themselves, it also may appear that I am setting up individual teachers as being either "good" teachers or "bad" teachers. As with my own social positioning(s), teachers are multiply situated. When I discuss a particular practice, or include a specific example of an incident which took place within a classroom, I am not suggesting that the teacher/s involved were somehow neglectful in their response, or that they are "bad" teachers who simply need to be somehow "enlightened."



Rather, in recounting these various incidents, I am trying to illuminate the context of the occurrence and then, most particularly, to interrogate the event for its effects, and how those effects may be connected to, and/or interrogated by, an analytics of the operations of privilege and marginalization. The difficulties presented in attempting to do the last may, once again, make it appear that I am sitting in judgement on individual teachers from a loftier, more enlightened space as an academic intellectual. While nothing could be further from my intent, I have previously noted that intent which results in harm is still harm, and the non-intention of causing the harm does not erase the effects of the harm that was unintentionally done. In the process which is this theorizing, I believe the “stories” from my classrooms and those of other educators to be an important component of the process; as Janice Newton (2001) writes in the introduction to Voices from the classroom:

If we are to progress and develop effective pedagogy...we must develop a scholarly approach to our teaching practices. We must examine what works as well as what does not work and share the results of our reflections and research in teaching (p. 2).

I can say only that I have attempted to share these stories in as respectful a manner as possible.

Rather than produce new definitions, I have developed the three nominal categories used here, to distinguish between modes or conceptions of curriculum. These conceptions are representations, and the ideas contained within each/any are not limited to a particular time period; there are visible strands of thought which cross decades and move between the categorical boundaries. Current conservative calls for stricter accountability of/for teachers have informed educational practices for decades; in a similar manner, ideas familiar to

contemporary critical pedagogues can be heard/seen in curricular discussions over a century old (Marsh and Willis, 1999, pp. 45-91). For example, Pinar et al (1995) point to Lester Frank Ward's Dynamic Sociology (1883), in which Ward argued against the fundamentally conservative ideas of social Darwinism by positing that "the primary aim of education was the preparation of individuals to participate in social change" (p. 104). This view of education will be familiar to contemporary critical pedagogues, particularly "those who regard curriculum as political text" (Pinar et al, 1995, p. 105).

*Naming traditional/conservative:*

This nominal category gains its name from a combination of two elements. The "traditional" aspect refers to the historical grounding of perceptions of the purpose of public education as entailing the preparation of students to attain the job skills necessary to take up adult positions of employment in the working world. The designation "conservative" addresses the ways in which both the history of public schooling and contemporary ideas/practices associated with this "skills attainment" process operate to conserve, produce, and reproduce the existing status quo. From within this kind of perspective, the focus tends to be on working within the existing social structure; the key designator for this nominal category is the emphasis on schooling as a means to achieve the very pragmatic end of re/producing "productive" members of society.

*Naming individualist/humanistic:*

Throughout the time spent in writing this chapter, this particular category underwent several name changes as I struggled to find a coherent way of articulating what I observed and read. At various times I called it liberal pedagogy, progressive pedagogy, and

liberal/humanist or progressive/liberal pedagogy. These were, for different reasons, ultimately deemed unsuitable. Some of these previous names were already in use; liberal pedagogy and progressive pedagogy already have particular meanings, and large bodies of literature, attached to them<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, in the manner which is often the case in disciplines with a long and complex history, some of these use-names are used in very different contexts; Freire, for instance, particularly in his earlier writing, used both the phrase “progressive” and “liberal” to refer to a more radical pedagogy than either of these words now evokes. Similarly, by 1998 he was using the phrase “humanistic education” in reference to a radical vision of transformation. All of the use-names listed above were, in the final analysis, not evocative of the particular conception which I sought to describe.

I constructed this category in order to try to explore a little more deeply the effects of what I perceived to be happening in some classrooms: an ethos of the equal treatment of each person as synonymous with equitable treatment appeared to guide some classroom practices, as well as strategies for addressing inequities which I found in some multiculturalist literature. Over time, as I read and thought and worked through some of this with students in the equity courses, I came to believe that an “individualist” position, that is, seeing each student solely as one person outside of her or his social context, actually reified the marginalization of students who were already marginalized.

The “humanistic” aspect of this designation refers to a commonsense assumption which is commonly attached to an individualist position. This is the notion that if we are

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For an overview of the history of the Progressive Movement, see Cremin’s (1961) The transformation of the school.

each individuals (as a means of recognizing that we are each different from one another in some way) we are nevertheless all still humans and should therefore be able to resolve the conflicts which emerge from (individual) differences through a focus on our shared “humanity.”

Taken together, then, the individualist/humanistic nominal category is named to mark the sentiments that while differences do exist, difference does not matter; that we are all human beings together, and that each person ought to be treated simply as an individual. This perspective tends to be fundamentally conservative in outlook, as the focus on the individual tends to draw attention away from the systemic operations of power relations which shape the operations of difference in any given context. The reality for students and teachers in our schools is that differences do matter; we might all be human beings together, but we are not all treated equally, and to fail to take into account the operations of difference(s) in the social context may incline us to discount and/or deny lived experiences.

#### *Naming critical/ “post-”*

In naming this third nominal category, I wanted a means to designate the alternate perspective(s) which fall outside of the categories of traditional/conservative and/or individualist/humanistic. I do not mean to imply that this category is a “catch-all” for anything that is left over/out of the other two. This would be inaccurate in two ways: first, the idea of creating a category for the “pieces” which are left over would suggest that there are bounded parameters for each of these three nominal categories, and it is not my suggestion that these categories are static. They are, rather, fluid and intersecting. Second, the critical/ “post-” is a specific way of understanding the purposes of schooling, different

in this understanding from each of the other two, as they are somewhat different from one another. The “critical” in this designation refers to conceptions/frameworks that engage with rather than assume the shape of the social structure/social institutions. Thus, this category is “critical” in the sense that this perspective emerges out of a critique of the structure and effects of the socio-cultural context.

Further to wanting a name/designator which spoke to a structural critique, I also wanted this conception to point toward some of the influences I have had from readings of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and the like. However, as I said earlier, while I have found much to admire in these bodies of thought, I am not “a poststructuralist,” etc. I read William Doll’s (1993) Curriculum possibilities in a “post”-future, and was struck by his discussion therein, where he comments:

we are currently immersed in a ‘post’ era: post-Communist, post-national, post-industrial, post-patriarchal, post-structural. To cover all these ‘posts,’ I choose the overarching term ‘post-modern’ and use the hyphen to indicate that the new era, while breaking with the past, does not negate that past” (p. 279).

Rather than choosing a phrase such as postmodern or poststructuralist (with or without a hyphen), where the addition of a word after the ‘post’ would serve to flag the ‘post’ as being specifically grounded in and breaking with that form, for this nominal category I use simply “post-”.

The signifier critical/ “post-” then, is a joining together of the influences of critical pedagogies and of the varying bodies of thought which are, as Doll (1993a) has pointed out, ruptured by the prefix “post” itself.

*Exploring the distinctions/touring the effects:*

In this section, I offer some comparisons between these three nominal categories across several broad themes: purposes of schooling; conceptions of teachers/teachers' roles; conceptions of students; and the constitution of subjects/objects of knowledge. My purpose here is to provide the reader with a sense of the process through which I came to perceive and distinguish between these categories, their distinctions and their effects. I have chosen to weave conversations about these nominal categories throughout each of these themes in an attempt to illustrate both the distinctions between these categories as well as the points of overlap. In this way, I hope to avoid the temptation to either treat these as discrete, mutually exclusive distinctions or to present them as reified, enduring entities.

Here again, it is necessary to interrupt myself to point to the fluidity between the nominal categories employed in this work. Reading and practices are always produced within a social context; regardless of what name is applied to the works of John Dewey or Paulo Freire or a teacher in rural Saskatchewan, the impact of reading in another time or through a different lens always underlines the text being read. It is popular, for instance, amongst many at this point in time to read constructivism<sup>7</sup> as if it properly lies within critical pedagogy. But, constructivist classroom practices have been a part of schooling practices for

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Constructivism is defined by Stainback and Stainback (1996) as emphasizing that "learning is the process of creating new meanings from experience. ... In constructivism, the teacher is to develop experiences for students in the classroom that will spark their interest, connect to previous knowledge, and thus stimulate students to become actively involved in constructing new meanings for themselves" (p. 156). While these activities certainly could take place within a critical pedagogy, they could also be a non-critical set of classroom practices.

longer than we have had that particular word and set of meanings attached to it, and since before the phrase “critical pedagogy” came to be connected with constructivism. The point I am emphasizing here is that any particular way of talking about something does not make it so. While constructivism may be currently generally understood to be contained within critical pedagogy, one of the tasks of critical pedagogy is to disrupt the static and isolating boundaries of a category which are imposed through the naming. While constructivist approaches to classroom practice may well be included in a critical pedagogy, so can constructivism be subsumed by individualist/humanistic practices. As Applefield, Huber, and Moallem (2001) define constructivism, it

...proposes that learner conceptions of knowledge are derived from a meaning-making search in which learners engage in a process of constructing individual interpretations of their experiences (p. 37).

Further to this, Applefield et al (2001) distinguish between individual constructivism and social constructivism. Within individual constructivism:

...children as well as older learners must negotiate the meaning of experiences and phenomena that are discrepant from their existing schema. Students may be said to author their own knowledge, advancing their cognitive structures by revising and creating new understandings out of existing ones. This is accomplished through individual or socially mediated discovery-oriented learning activities (p. 37).

Social constructivism views:

the origin of knowledge construction as being the social intersection of people, interactions that involve sharing, comparing and debating among learners and mentors. Through a highly interactive process, the social milieu of learning is accorded center stage and learners both refine their own meanings and help others find meanings. In this way knowledge is mutually built (p. 38).

In reading the above distinctions between individual and social constructivism, it

seems that either or both could easily be a part of a critical pedagogy. Individual constructivism is contained mostly within progressive/individualistic pedagogies, as the focus on individual experience would seem to imply. Social constructivism has tended to emerge from a more sociological perspective and hence focuses on the relation between individuals and their social context. This latter form is more likely to be taken up and used critically than is the former. However, it is certainly not a requirement that they be taken up and used critically. It is possible to imagine that teachers and students could be working in classrooms in either an individual or a social constructivist framework and still have the status quo of social inequities be rendered invisible, not interrogated at all. The “knowledge/s” arrived at or mutually agreed to could quite easily be mere reifiers of the pre-existent social knowledge which children bring to school in their bodies every day.

I offer here an incident from my own teaching experience, to suggest the ways in which varying notions or understandings of “constructivism” may be taken up inside of either transformative pedagogies or within a pedagogy which leaves the social operations of schooling processes unnoticed. In the fall of 1980, I was asked to substitute in a Kindergarten to Grade Two classroom in the small northern community where I was then living. This was somewhat startling to me, since I was twenty-one years old, had not formally finished high school, and had at that time no notion of ever being or becoming a teacher. However, the teacher whose classroom it was that I was being asked to substitute in was going to be absent from the community for a period of several weeks, and since I “was there and not doing anything,” perhaps I could just go and do something with the kids. Since I was in fact not “doing anything” except awaiting the birth of my first child some months



hence, and since it appeared that having me act as a substitute teacher was the only option except closing that classroom for several weeks, I agreed. However, I had absolutely no idea what I was doing; my entire experience with being present in a classroom until that point in time had been my own rather miserable experiences as a student. I had no idea what to teach, or how to teach. So, I asked the kids what they knew, and they told me. Given the context in which I was working, what they knew was quite eclectic, and the diversity in the room was staggering. The youngest child in the room was four and a half years old; the oldest child was twelve. Some of the children read print text quite well; some did not know the alphabet, and several did not have a grasp of the concept that letters contain meaning.

I - and the children - accepted without question what our task together was; I was to somehow teach them the information contained in the curriculum guides, and they were to somehow learn it. Together we made bread, read stories, printed letters, counted objects; always we began with what the children already knew and worked out from that foundation. The children taught one another more than I taught them; schooling was actually more familiar to them than it was to me. We did some good work together in the time that I was their teacher; most of the children made some measurable progress in at least one area of the academic content which was schooling. But never, not at that time nor for some years after, did it occur to me to question what we were doing, or why. Going to school was what children did; teaching children the basics of reading and counting was what teachers did. Beginning from the foundation of what the children already knew was an intuitive, desperate tactic on my part. The work I did in that classroom for the two months or so I was “the teacher” was in some (very limited) ways “constructivist.” I did “develop experiences for

students in the classroom that [sparked] their interest,” and I did, with the students, find ways to have their activities and lessons “connect to previous knowledge”, although I cannot say that the students were stimulated to “become actively involved in constructing new meanings for themselves” (Stainback and Stainback, 1996, p. 156), but while our experiences may have been constructivist, they were certainly not critical pedagogy.

An additional point needs to be raised here. It was some years after the time I spent in this classroom before I began to question and interrogate some of the meanings attached to/inherent within what the students and I did together in that classroom. In a similar manner, it was not until I was reflecting on this time while writing this dissertation that I became aware of another, and deeply troubling, aspect of this incident. I was not the only available person to teach this class; I was the only available White person. This class had a classroom assistant; a First Nations woman who had worked in this room for several years, and who was definitely much more competent than I to take over the room for the time needed. As I reflect upon this incident now, I am coming to a recognition of the racism and classism which governed the request that I “teach” in this classroom as the only available option to closing the class for a lengthy period of time.

*The purposes of schooling:*

The rationale, that is to say, the understanding of the purpose of schooling, of a contemporary traditional/conservative curriculum is to provide both the means and the mechanism to ensure the production of citizens with the necessary skills and knowledge to be ready to take up jobs and positions within our existent capitalist social structure. Within this framework “the curriculum” is most often understood as a particular document (or set

of documents, guides, etc.). This document is understood as both non-personal and outside of the purview of individual teachers, leaving teachers with little sense of agency in relation to curriculum (Cross, 1998).

The aims of a traditional/conservative curriculum have been articulated for decades, if not earliest then perhaps most notably in Franklin Bobbitt's The Curriculum (1918). As summarized in Pinar et al (1995):

Bobbitt insists that effectiveness, efficiency, and economy are crucial concepts for the curriculum maker. His central tenet was that curriculum must directly and specifically prepare students for tasks in the adult world. The work of the curriculum maker became studying the adult world to determine the major tasks or activities comprising it. These tasks would then comprise the curriculum (p. 97).

A traditional/conservative curriculum operates through a management based model, with a focus on the structural "needs" of the social context. These needs are articulated and addressed as particular kinds of skills, especially saleable ones.

Within this model the focus is on ensuring that curriculum development, curriculum delivery (and I use the word "delivery" deliberately), assessment tools, and outcomes of schooling work together to attempt, as their end product, the production of citizens who will be able to meet the needs of a bureaucratic-centred, capitalist society, which is driven by the need for workers and consumers<sup>8</sup>. Coupled with an articulation of society's needs for workers is the non-recognition of the "...fact that capitalism requires the existence of a mass underclass of surplus labor" (hooks, 1994, p. 29). From within this ideological framework, a critical interrogation of which students are most easily able to access schooling and its

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See, for instance, Foster, (1986).

“knowledge/s” is rendered not only unnecessary, but meaningless.

The influences of a social-efficiency understanding of curriculum are still visible in educational debates of the 1990s: “[s]triving to produce economically useful citizens remains the major political rationale for education funding...” (Pinar et al, 1995, p. 102). This social-efficiency approach to schooling has also led to a resurgence in the involvement of business in schools and schooling. Although an analysis of this growing and disturbing trend is beyond the scope and purpose of this chapter, there are now several excellent resources which discuss and document business’ interactions with Canadian schools (in particular, see Barlow and Robertson (1994), Class warfare: The assault on Canadian schools; Robertson (1998), No more teachers, no more books; and Alison Taylor (2001), Education, business, and the ‘knowledge economy’).

An individualist/humanistic conception shares a foundational understanding of the purposes of schooling with the traditional/conservative conception of curriculum, that the purpose of schooling is to ready students for the world of work and adulthood with the requisite skills and knowledge to be employed and employable. In the individualist/humanistic approach, predicated on a notion that to treat all students the same is somehow to contribute to a more equitable set of practices, students’ everyday lived experiences with difference, operationalized in their everyday lives as either privilege or marginalization, give rise to what Linda Briskin (1994) names the “bootstrap message.” In this pedagogy of equality, children are imbued with the message that “...hard work leads to riches, fame, success, and happiness. ... [I]t is possible, through one’s own efforts, to lift oneself off the ground - out of one’s life - by the looped straps hidden inside old-style riding

boots” (Briskin, 1994, p. 446). Students who are marginalized because they are not members of the dominant (and therefore the rule-setting) group are told that their own hard work can grant them access to the material conditions of privileged existence, those things which are constituted as desirable for all. However, when this message is passed on to students without any acknowledgment of the systemic operations of power relations, failure to achieve “success” as it is understood within this framework becomes the fault of the individual. In this way, it is rendered unnecessary to explicitly recognize the operations of privilege; failure to achieve what one sets out to achieve is understood as an individual failure, not the result of encountering systemic discrimination. Within this individualist framework, as but one example, individual poor people are poor because they don’t work hard enough; the grinding realities of poverty are left unexamined because poverty as a social phenomenon, and an element of social structure, is rendered unrecognized.

A critical/ “post-” conception of curriculum reflects an epistemological foundation which is quite different from either the traditional/conservative or individualist/humanistic conceptions. Critical/ “post-” pedagogies assume that knowledge is socially constructed, an understanding that knowledge is neither objective nor neutral, but rather that knowledge is situated, produced within a network of power relations which operate to produce and maintain the dominant categories as dominant. As Cornbleth (1990) argues: “In order for curriculum to further critical purposes, it must be seen and treated as value laden and contextualized” (p. 3). From this perspective, curricula are understood to be social constructs produced in and through existing power relations. With this awareness centrally situated, the task of developing transformative curricula is not accomplished through the

production of new documents. Rather, everything and everyone present or encountered in and out of the classroom becomes “the curriculum:” this actively challenges the notion that students are the passive recipients of “knowledge,” arguing that students and teachers are engaged in an interactive process which produces both knowers and knowledge.

*conceptions of teachers/teachers' roles*

Working within a traditional/conservative framework, the teacher's role in schooling is to act as a disseminator of pre-existent knowledge, the deliverer of the curriculum. Rarely is there an interrogation of the knowledge which is being delivered, nor is there an explicit acknowledgment of the diversity of the audience to whom this knowledge is presented. Characteristic of this approach to schooling is a view of knowledge which is a legacy of modernism<sup>9</sup>; knowledge is “...defined around highly rarefied ideals of objectivity and value-neutrality” (Code, 1995, p.15). Further, Code continues, “...knowers are substitutable for one another...” (p.16). Knowledge itself is taken-for-granted as concrete, real, available as a product or tangible reality, to be handed out or on to knowers (in this case, students in schools) who are understood to be readily interchangeable one with another.

Michael Apple and Susan Jungck (1992) argue that a long American history of “rationalizing and standardizing” (p. 21) has resulted in the “separation of conception from

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Modernism refers to a specific time frame and its concomitant beliefs, ethos, and epistemologies, grounded in a “grand narrative” of human beings as “...placed in history [and]...having a definite past and a predictable future”. The specific time frame of modernity is generally accepted as referring to “...modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence” (Giddens, 1990, pp. 1-2). See also Kincheloe, (1993). Chapter One (pp. 1-16) provides an excellent summary of the legacy of modernism on education.

execution” (p. 22). There are several dangers associated with these processes. As jobs are broken down into ever more isolated and isolating fragments, skills which teachers once had may atrophy. With this fragmentation, skills which teachers may have started out with gradually disappear from the daily repertoire; here I reference particularly the ability to develop curriculum or even to think of curriculum as other than textbooks or guides. Both the traditional/conservative and the individualist/humanistic perspectives tend to produce a separation between curriculum developers and teachers (who are the curriculum implementors<sup>10</sup>). While this separation can be justified epistemologically, it may result in the alienation of teachers from what they are to teach: “[i]nstead of professional teachers who care greatly about what they do and why they do it, we may have alienated executors of someone else’s plans” (Apple & Jungck, 1992, p.24). Within this framework, teaching often becomes understood as simply a job to be done. This framework may be particularly commonplace in the popular imagination as some parents, politicians, and others assume that the “work” that teachers do only takes place inside the classroom, or that the quality of that “work” can be assessed by measuring such things as the students’ performance on standardized tests or by how many of the students in a given school are subsequently accepted into post-secondary schools.

Within a traditional/conservative or an individualist/humanistic conception of curriculum, teachers may experience dissonance between their understanding of curriculum

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For further reading on the importance of recognizing that teacher-implementors are also curriculum-developers, see Marsh and Willis’ (1999) excellent text, Curriculum: Alternative approaches, ongoing issues (2nd edition).

and their pedagogic practices. Cross (1998) states that "...it is not uncommon to hear teachers speak of 'the' curriculum from the central district office while they speak of 'their' personal teaching style" (p. 44). This has also been my experience through observations of and conversations with teachers, many of whom have come to terms, if somewhat uneasily, with either altering or abandoning "the curriculum" when they felt their students needed something not contained within the curriculum guides. In this curriculum-as-document conception of curriculum, the formal curriculum is understood to be something outside of a teacher's ability to influence, and must be given recognition even if the contents do not harmonize with the teacher's own pedagogy/philosophy. According to Apple & Jungck (1992):

...with the growth of interventionist styles of management and a focus on reductive accountability schemes...more and more curricula and the act of teaching itself are dominated by prespecified sequential lists of behaviourally defined competencies and objectives, pre-tests and post-tests to measure 'readiness' and skill levels, and a dominance of pre-packaged textual and often worksheet material (p. 25).

Of course, while the circumstances outlined above by Apple & Jungck can certainly hinder the act of teaching, teachers can also choose to quietly defy and/or subvert some handed-down requirements. In a recent graduate class for which I was the course instructor, several Nova Scotia teachers were discussing the new outcomes-based learning guides which they are currently required to use<sup>11</sup>. One relatively new teacher commented that she was having trouble "making her curriculum fit with the outcomes." Another teacher, with twenty

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For a comprehensive overview of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation Program, see MacKinnon, (2001). The outcomes-based learning guides which were under discussion are a component of the APEF Program.



years of experience, responded that she was “going at it backwards - those outcomes are so broad that you teach whatever you want and then pick the outcomes that work for what you’ve already done.” Teachers are not simply passive objects within a machinery of schooling; teachers are active agents who can, and frequently do, subvert schooling processes through their own resistance to bureaucratic requirements which they may perceive as somehow oppositional to or in discord with their own possibilities for teaching.

Critical/ “post-” curriculum discourses articulate education as a means of affecting socially just change. Various referred to as a “pedagogy of hope” (Freire, 1985); “education as a practice of freedom” (hooks, 1994; Cross, 1998); or “curriculum as contextualized social process” (Cornbleth, 1990), the critical/ “post-” conception of curriculum recognizes individual diversity and provides analytic links between individuals and their social contexts. Critical/ “post-” treats schooling/education as a site for socially just change, rather than a site for individual empowerment (Beyer, 1998; Sirotnik, 1998; Wood, 1998). There is an explicit space for teacher-directed inquiry and a teacher “authority” within a critical pedagogy (Goodman, 1992); the romantic notions of the natural or inviolate child which are a component of the individualist/humanistic pedagogy do not hold within this conception. A critical/ “post-” conception of curriculum is fluid, shifting, changing, working with an ethic or a vision without a pre-formed or pre-determined end product. Simon (1992) discusses the differences between a mainstream view of teaching and what he calls “a horizon of possibility:”

In staff rooms and classrooms, teaching manuals and curriculum guidelines, teaching is most commonly referred to as the strategies and techniques used in order to meet a set of predefined (often given) set of objectives. Not

unsurprisingly, talk and writing about teaching are primarily carried out in the language of method...

...[I]n my view, something is often missing from such discussions of teaching. ..[E]ducational practice is a power relation that participates in both enabling and constraining what is understood as knowledge and truth. When we teach, we are always implicated in the construction of a horizon of possibility for ourselves, our students, and our communities (p. 56)

*Conceptions of students:*

The traditional/conservative conception of curriculum is grounded in an unquestioning acceptance of middle class, white (Eurocentric), heterosexual, able-bodied norms as constituting the (assumed, if not actual) standpoint of all who interact with schooling (see, for instance, Dei, 1994; Briskin, 1994; Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; and Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1998). This conception assumes that the dominant categories of privilege both represent and include all who encounter schooling. Further to this valuing of the unspoken normative centre is an acceptance (frequently articulated as a need) that the primary purpose of schooling is to outfit students with the knowledge and skills that they will need to be able to get good jobs and be contributing members of society; what this society looks like is accepted uncritically.

The relationship between students and the education process within the traditional/conservative approach to understanding curriculum is relatively passive, at least in its ideal formulation. Although the rationale/function of education may be understood to be the production of a population of skilled workers/subjects, within this approach the learner is clearly the/an object of the education process. Just as it is the teacher's task to disseminate knowledge, so is it the task of the student to acquire/contain this knowledge. The student's ability to "learn" is assessed primarily on their capacity to produce the appropriate "fact/s"

on tests: students are the blank slates upon which teachers write the culturally relevant information.

In conceptualizing students (that is, who they are) within the individualist/humanistic conception of curriculum, there is an assumption of a naturalness in childrens' development which results in a reading of child-centred pedagogy as being an admonition to "...leave the child alone and ability, like a sunflower, will burst forth" (Doll, 1993a, p. 277). A further area of concern with this carry-over from Deweyan pedagogy is the emphasis placed on individualism, incorporating an ideology of rights, freedoms, and democratic process, all of which presume that students are fundamentally equal. The rhetoric of the individualist/humanistic conception makes equality synonymous to sameness<sup>12</sup>. The assumption of fundamental equality implicit in this approach masks the operations of difference which produce situations in which "all students are equal," but some are more equal than others (with apologies to George Orwell). Categories of difference such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, are not "unpacked" as socially constructed, but are understood (or assumed) to be individual limitations rather than structural impediments. An individualist/humanistic approach attempts to attend to the social inequities which are produced in and through of these categories, but does so by presuming that naming the categories is sufficient to erase the effects of the operations of power (Ghosh, 1996). While naming categories of privilege or oppression as such is a necessary condition to challenging

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I refer here to the perception within individualist/humanistic classroom practices that to treat all students the same is to treat them all equally. This notion is expanded upon, and critiqued, throughout this writing.

the effects of these categories, this naming is not a sufficient condition to erasing their effects. This “non” approach to education leaves unexamined and therefore unchallenged the reasons for the creation and continued existence of the categories.

The focus on the individual without an explicit analysis of the social conditions in which individuals act, produces a default conservatism (Goodman, 1992): the individualist/humanistic curriculum is mostly performed and justified through the needs of the dominant holders of privilege to maintain their position. Thus one of the aims of an individualist/humanistic curriculum is to provide the kinds of knowledge that Bourdieu (1973) calls cultural capital, to ensure that children have the capacity to distinguish between “good” and “bad” taste. It assumes that all share or have access to dominant values and expectations.

A critical/ “post-” conception of curriculum focuses on the development of critical thinking skills, the “production” of self-reflexive, analytic thinkers, encourages a critical disposition, and fosters an inquisitive curiosity; there is also an active and action component contained within this conception<sup>13</sup>. In tandem with an epistemological shift, working within a critical/ “post-” framework includes a

...shift in the definition from curriculum as exclusively school materials to curriculum as symbolic representation. Curriculum understood as a symbolic representation refers to those institutional and discursive practices, structures, images, and experiences that can be identified and analyzed in various ways, i.e. politically, racially, autobiographically, phenomenologically, theologically, internationally, and in terms of gender and deconstruction (Pinar et al, 1995, p.16)

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See, for instance, James Banks (1998) Level Four, “The decision making and social action approach.”

Thus, within the critical/ “post-” approach to schooling, a fundamental understanding is developed; that, properly speaking, there is nothing which can be said to belong “outside” of school. All that each of us is, all that we experience, as well as the operations of power, of privilege and marginalization, the “relations of ruling” (Smith, 1987) which inform our everyday lives are not just brought into a critical/ “post-” understanding of the purpose of schooling, they form the centre around which what we do in schools is situated. As Combleth (1990) tells us:

...how we see, think and talk about, study, and act on curriculum matters both reflects and shapes the education made available to students. Discourse matters. Further, curriculum conceptions, modes of reasoning, and practice are not value-free. Implicitly or explicitly, they carry assumptions about valued knowledge, appropriate schooling, the desirable society and relations between individuals and societal institutions. These concerns are not ‘merely theoretical’; they emerge from and enter into school practice and its consequences (p. 8).

*subjects/objects of knowledge*

The traditional/conservative curriculum operates inside a positivist epistemological framework, which is characterized by an assumption that there exists an independent, objective reality, and that facts about this reality can be discovered through the application of the scientific method, which is itself predicated on the existence of an objective (i.e. value-free) knower. These facts themselves then become the knowledge that is disseminated through traditional/conservative curriculum (McLaren, 1994). Within this framework, “curriculum” translates into textbooks or guides, and external “authorities” of all sorts. As Berry (1998) points out: “A major source of knowledge in schools is the textbook. In it is found prepackaged, preordered, legitimized, objective knowledge...knowledge [which is]

selected, ordered, and produced by authorities in the disciplines, to be consumed by the reader” (p. 49). Within this perspective, knowledge is a “cultural artifact” and young adult learners are “consumers of knowledge instead of creators of knowledge” (Berry, 1998, p. 43). The traditional/conservative curriculum treats knowledge as objective, a value-free product of rational inquiry. Within this framework, knowledge, or the “facts” which constitute knowledge, exist independently of the “knower.” A fact comes into the knowledge-base through a rational process of inquiry such as the scientific method.

In an individualist/humanistic approach, “difference” is treated as an aberration, an individual issue; the “problem” of difference lies in the ways that the difference operates as a barrier for the individual student. The discourse of equality systematically draws the eye/attention away from the operations of privilege and puts the onus on the “differents” to overcome the barrier, rather than understanding/ exploring the operations of privilege. Students become individuals with individual needs and/or capacities; curriculum delivery is modified in response to these needs, but the curriculum itself is largely driven by (perceived or real) bureaucratic needs (McNeil, 1988). The individualist/humanistic conception of curriculum remains largely oblivious to the foundations of systemic inequities and the relations of power informing these inequities. As a result, it remains a fundamentally conservative approach to schooling.

While in the traditional/conservative approach knowledge is viewed and treated as objective, value-free, and transmissible from teacher to student, in the individualist/humanistic approach, with its emphasis on individuality, students may be encouraged to interact with a produced text; differing readings are encouraged and allowed for. Questions

may be asked, such as “What do YOU think?” or “How does this book make you feel?” Within the framework of individualist/humanistic practices, different readings are produced and understood through a context of individualism. Without looking explicitly at how readings are socially produced or constructed, there is nevertheless a suggestion (sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit) that boundaries exist for understanding the text. Asking questions which require the students to develop answers but does not require “that they create their own knowledge of or from the text” is, says Berry (1998), still “a control of student knowledge...the text holds a large part of the authority/authorship of the knowledge” (p. 48). The text, not the reader, is the site for the production of knowledge, the “facts” are contained in the materials, and the students glean these “facts” in order to acquire knowledge. Responses to the text are a product of the individual’s experience in encountering the text; differences in response are understood merely as individual differences of experience, rather than as a socially/politically produced response.

In a critical/ “post-” approach, while individual readings are also encouraged, there is an understanding that neither texts nor readers are developed in a socially neutral atmosphere. As Stainback and Stainback (1996) point out:

From the perspective of literacy as social practice every reading and writing practice, including school literacy, entails a set of culturally determined conventions embodying certain attitudes, values, norms, and beliefs (Gee, 1990) particular to the sociocultural context (p. 133).

A critical/ “post-” conception of curriculum positions all of the “players” in the education process (teachers, students, parents, policy makers) as agents in an interactive process of knowledge production. Berry (1998) offers a suggestion that rather than asking “what do we

know,” we ask: “Whose knowledge do we learn in school?” (p. 45). Through the second question, we can see the shift from the “knowledge as objective product” of value-free, rational, scientific inquiry, to an understanding of knowledge-production as social and political processes.

In addition to identifying/recognizing categories of privilege and/or marginalization, critical/ “post-” pedagogues pursue the explicit recognition of the systemic operations of categories of privilege, and ask critical questions of the power relations which inform what knowledge/whose knowledge is present. Most notably, critical/ “post-” conceptions of curriculum explicitly incorporate recognition of the always present politics in/of education, and interrogate the systemic operations of power and privilege. As Cornbleth (1990) suggests that:

...curriculum be conceived as what actually occurs in school classrooms, that is, an ongoing social process comprised of the interactions of students, teachers, knowledge, and milieu. This conception of curriculum stands in contrast and opposition to the prevailing product conception of curriculum as a document or plan (p. 5).

Curriculum as a contextualized social process requires having and retaining at the forefront of thinking about curriculum and schooling practices an understanding of the intricate interweavings of the systemic and cultural impact of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, and how they come to rest on the/a body. Curriculum-as-social-process also includes having a social and political awareness of one’s self in relation to the world, and bringing that to the classroom and to curriculum.

In part, to “understand curriculum as poststructuralist, deconstructed, and postmodern text is to...challenge and subvert...the central themes, organizing metaphors, and discursive



strategies constituting Western thought...” (Pinar et al, 1995, p. 450). From/through this perspective, the analytic emphasis shifts from product to process. Knowledge, power, and practice/s can thus be understood as intricately interconnected processes. Resistance and social change are also understood as processes, but the strategies for resistance tend to be subversive rather than combative. Categories of difference are understood to be social constructs, rather than natural imperatives.

In moving toward the final section of this chapter, an interrogation of some of the effects of these three nominal categories of curriculum through the site of multiculturalism, I return to Foucault’s analysis of power relations. If we take from Foucault (1978) the notion that power is a process which becomes visible only in its effects, coupled with the idea that power is most effective when it masks its own operations, then we are necessarily called to question the very assumptions we make as a part of our everyday thinking.

In the context of categories of difference we can begin by noticing how difference operates as a power relation. We may begin by interrogating the foundations of difference and the social, political, and even pragmatic implications of those differences. Foucault’s (1978) exploration of the processes and implications of the operations of bio-power may be used to track the ways in which difference is first implanted in the body and then “discovered” as emerging from the body. This is not to suggest that gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and so forth do not have material implications in the lived experiences of students and teachers, or that these social and material elements do not themselves constitute complex interconnecting networks of power relations. Using Foucault’s notion of bio-power, it is possible to view the construction of difference as a part of the problem of/with

multiculturalism, and we can further understand that erasing the difference cannot “solve the problem” when the difference in question is integrally interconnected with the constitution of the subject.

*Multiculturalism as a site for analysis:*

In this section, I offer an exploration of some various practices and processes associated with multiculturalism as a site for analysis of the operations and effects of the three conceptions of curriculum outlined earlier in this chapter. By critiquing some of the common assumptions and practices of multiculturalism, I explicate some of the ways in which conceptions of curriculum, the operations of power and privilege, and potentially transformative ideas come together in and through classrooms. I will note here that it is not my intention to do in-depth discourse analysis of multiculturalism; I point to some of the problematic aspects of this approach solely to illustrate some of the interconnections between theories, practices, and the operations of foundational assumptions about the nature and purposes of schooling, teachers, and students.

In this exploration I will endeavour to demonstrate that while the intent of multiculturalism may be to address inequities, this intent may not be realized in the context of some curricular and pedagogic processes. This grounded example also represents a moment in theorizing a social justice pedagogy as both necessary and possible. Critically thinking about taken-for-granted ways of “doing schooling” which are reified through their own production allows a space for transformative-minded educators to further an analytic process, as well as offering possibilities for “doing things differently” in our daily classroom practices.

Multiculturalism has been proposed (by some) as a means to address an inequitable school system (Wells, 1990; Barr & Parrett, 1995). This strategy hinges on the effects of difference in and for the lived realities of various people. However, while a recognition of the operations of difference(s) is an integral component of multiculturalism, that recognition alone does not provide a clear foundation for addressing the inequities that result from the operations of difference. Strategies for incorporating multiculturalism are neither necessarily transformative nor even necessarily effective. I argue here that in fact all too frequently they serve to reify the very inequitable social system(s) which they purport to be transforming (see, for instance, Barr and Parrett, 1995; Rimm, 1997; Bucher, 2000; Powell, McLaughlin, Savage, and Zehm, 2001).

On the whole, multicultural theory is fueled by some of the foundational principles of equality which inform an individualist/humanistic conception of curriculum (discussed in detail earlier). While multiculturalism claims and aims to both recognize and value difference, enshrining notions of “different-but-equal” in various kinds of equal rights legislation and policies, it does so without examining the operations of difference as a power relation. As a result, *descriptions* of difference serve to reify those they describe/define as *differents*, and in so doing reinforce the dominant category as such and systematically ignore the ways in which the very articulation and description of categories of “difference” simultaneously articulate or mark the boundaries of the normative categories. The processes of marginalization are necessarily attached to the production and maintenance of the dominant category as such. When the focus is on the “differents,” the necessary balance to that difference remains unexamined, and remains therefore the taken-for-granted “normal”

way of being (Isoki, 1994, p. 69). This has often been the focus of multiculturalism. When the focus of multicultural practices is on the “different/other,” then people, customs, traditions, cultures which are not a part of the privileged taken-for-granted segment of our society become highlighted, examined (frequently for “our” edification or pleasure), are exoticized and made to stand out in reference to “our” own way of being, looking, doing (Ghosh, 1996; Banks, 2001).

The critique contained herein is largely confined to the prevailing understanding of multiculturalism as it was defined in the 1980s. This critique is not simply one of history, however; it is a critique of some contemporary prevailing thought, influence, and practices of multiculturalism which are informed by and understood through earlier notions of multiculturalism.

According to Roxana Ng, Pat Staton, and Joyce Scane (1995), multiculturalism in Canada began: “...as state policy in Canada in the 1970s and [was enshrined] as law in 1988...” (p. xiii). Since the mid-1970s, “...multicultural education has been an integral part of the educational agenda...in rhetoric if not in reality” (p. xiii). In its earliest forms “...multicultural education...tended to focus narrowly on the celebration of visible ‘ethnic’ and ‘cultural’ differences, with the implicit goal of promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance” (Ng, Staton, and Scane, 1995, p. xiii). I have been in schools which celebrate such events as Respect For Differences Day. It is customary on these days to highlight food, clothing customs, traditions, and beliefs which stand out in sharp relief from a largely European-centred way of being (which is why some of my colleagues and I refer to events such as these as the “dine, dress, and dance approach”). bell hooks (1994) addresses

precisely this problem of separation and difference-focus:

All too often we found a will to include those considered 'marginal' without a willingness to accord their work the same respect and consideration given other work. In Women's Studies, for example, individuals will often focus on women of color at the very end of the semester or lump everything about race and difference together in one section (p. 38).

The same problem shows up in public schools in such moments as African Heritage Month (February) and, in Nova Scotia, Mi K'Maq Heritage Month (October), and Women's History Month (March). A fully integrated curriculum which operates across an interrogation of all groups, not simply marginalized groups, is a long and arduous task to accomplish. To bring our students to an awareness of both the unspoken "us" and the always-spoken "other" is a challenging task, one faced by transformation-committed educators at every level of schooling (see Rethinking Our Classrooms, 1994; Johnston and Nicholls, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Ghosh, 1996; Christensen, 2000; Rethinking Our Classrooms, Volume 2, 2001).

When the purpose of schooling is understood (or assumed) to include the production of a "well-rounded" citizen, an integrated, self-fulfilled individual, this understanding might frame the definition of "necessary" or significant skills in such a way as to include the arts and "soft" sciences, and students' cultural heritage, in addition to the more technical "skills" associated with the three "R"s. The theme of multiculturalism then appears in curriculum development and implementation as a means through which to foster tolerance by introducing students to a variety of cultures (Harper, 1997). Along with tolerance for difference, multiculturalist curricula also aim to promote an ethos of fairness and equality. Building on an ideology of equality as achievable through education, the

individualist/humanistic curriculum emphasizes ideas and ideals of non-racist, non-sexist, non-classist, non-homophobic teaching. These “non” approaches to social inequities often result in the barest of recognition being given to the everyday lived experiences of children who are non-White, non-heterosexual, not middle-class, or who are disabled (Beyer & Apple, 1998).

There is, however, a critical flaw in the notion that equality is achievable through a non-critical education: implicit in many of the practices of teaching “tolerance” is that this is accomplished by showing how much “like us” the “other” (person, culture, body, and so forth) is. Although the logic is one of connecting the student to the “different” being discussed, this strategy operates to sidestep the social processes which produce difference as a power relation. In so doing, it erases (or systematically ignores) the effects of the operations of difference in order to produce (presumed) equality. The dominant culture still operates as a baseline against which all other cultural practices and processes are measured. The irony of multiculturalism as practiced within this framework is that in order to produce truly equal individuals we must inevitably, through a complex, ideological sleight-of-hand, erase the very differences that multiculturalism highlights in its attempt to promote tolerance. Rather than fostering some kind of notion that it is possible to be “different but equal,” this approach first marks the different/difference, then systematically disenfranchises the very differences it highlights - all inside the rubric of “tolerance.” Also operating from within this frame, the notion that as a teacher one may be fair, objective, neutral - as one teacher put it, “colour-blind toward my children” - results in children who already experience marginalization in their everyday lives also experiencing the erasure of their experiences in

classroom.

Banks (1998) has outlined four levels of curriculum reform. The first two levels Banks identifies are the most familiar approaches to multiculturalist practices.

*The “contributions approach”*

Banks names the first level “The Contributions Approach.” It is summarized as follows:

This approach is characterized by the addition of ethnic heroes into the curriculum that are selected using criteria similar to those used to select mainstream heroes for inclusion into the curriculum. The mainstream curriculum remains unchanged in terms of its basic structure, goals, and salient characteristics... When this approach is used, the class studies little or nothing about the ethnic groups before or after the special event or occasion (Banks, 1998, p. 74).

Contained as a variation within the Contributions Approach is the “Heroes and Holidays” (Banks, 1998, p. 74) approach. In the “Heroes and Holidays” approach/variation, “ethnic content is limited primarily to special days, weeks and months related to ethnic events and celebrations” (Banks, 1998, p. 74). African Heritage Month and similar “events,” recounted above, fall within this conception of multiculturalism.

*The “ethnic additive approach”*

The second level Banks identifies is “The Ethnic Additive Approach.” This level is characterized by:

...[T]he addition of content, concepts, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its basic structure, purposes, and characteristics. ...Its most important shortcoming is that it usually results in the viewing of ethnic content from the perspective of mainstream historians, writers, artists, and scientists because it does not involve a restructuring of the curriculum. The events, concepts, issues, and problems selected for study are selected using Mainstream-Centric and Euro-Centric criteria and perspectives (Banks,

1998, pp. 74-75, emphasis added).

Banks describes the shortcomings of this approach by providing an example. He suggests:

When teaching a unit such as ‘The Westward Movement’ in a fifth-grade U.S. History class, the teacher may integrate her unit by adding content about the Lakota (Sioux) Indians [sic]. However, the unit remains Mainstream-Centric and focused because of its perspective and point of view. A unit called ‘The Westward Movement’ is Mainstream and Euro-Centric because it focuses on the movement of European Americans from the eastern to the western part of the United States. The Lakota Indians [sic] were already in the West and consequently were not moving west. The unit might be called, ‘The Invasion from the East,’ from the point of view of the Lakota. An objective title for the unit might be, ‘Two Cultures Meet in the Americas’ (Banks, 1998, p. 75).

Several times in the equity course, elementary teachers have suggested a similar Additive Approach when grappling with the “difficulty of December.” Suggestions of ways to overcome Christian-dominant views and traditions of schooling have resulted in the suggestion that they might do a transformative unit called “Christmas Around the World.” We then use the opportunity presented to discuss the Christian-centric position of “Christmas” and how Ramadan, Chanukkah, and Kwanza are not Christmas; this discussion usually results in a change of name - and perspective - to something like “Winter Celebrations Around the World” or “December Around the World,” neither of which suggests that non-Christian celebrations are somehow synonymous with Christmas.

Banks does not suggest that The Contributions Approach and/or the Ethnic Additive Approach are to be avoided completely; on the contrary, he suggests that the Additive Approach “can be the first phase in a more radical curriculum reform effort designed to restructure the total curriculum and to integrate it...” (Banks, 1998, pp. 74-75). This has certainly been my experience in working with teachers and using these levels. The “trouble”



is not with the first two levels in and of themselves; the trouble arises when the process stops at either level one or level two, and remains there. As Banks says at the end of this article:

The four approaches to the integration of ethnic content into the curriculum that I have described are often mixed and blended in actual teaching situations. ...It is not realistic to expect a teacher to move directly from a Mainstream-Centric curriculum to one that focuses on decision making and social action. Rather, the move from the first to the higher levels of ethnic content integration into the curriculum is likely to be gradual and cumulative (Banks, 1998, p. 75).

*Challenging "Two cultures meet in the Americas"*

I have used Banks' four levels of transformation in classes since I first read it<sup>14</sup>, and it is an extremely useful tool for developing a foundation with mostly-privileged teachers. There is one point which I clarify, however, both with students and in this writing. That is Banks' (1998) statement that: "An objective title for the unit might be, 'Two Cultures Meet in the Americas'" (p. 75). Accepting that the analytic process of critical thinking develops over time and with practice, I nevertheless try wherever I can to "push the envelope" both for myself and with teachers, to consider the importance of always looking into anything we read and/or choose to do. The assumed objectivity of the title "Two Cultures Meet in America" is not objective; nor is it as neutral as some might think (and wish) it to be. There has been a whitewashing of history in United States and Canadian school texts<sup>15</sup>, one which

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This article was originally published in 1988, and reprinted in 1998. I have referenced the latter printing.

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See, for instance, Kohl (1991) *The politics of children's literature: The story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott*; Loewen (1998) *Lies my textbook told me: Racism and anti-racism in U.S. history*; and Bigelow and Peterson (Eds.) (1998) *Rethinking Columbus:*

could easily lead readers to believe that the “meeting of two cultures” was one of mutual strength and desire, rather than a colonization of First Nations; peoples lands and lives by the Europeans moving from the East to the West, with the accompanying decimation of First Nations people’s lives. In reality, Banks’ proposed, then rejected, title of “The Invasion from the East” is a much more accurate one. It would not sit comfortably, however, with those who prefer to continue to believe that history is “what was,” that there is no legacy of racism, and the disparity which directly links to that racism, which still informs all of our lives today. These unpalatable realities are “sugarcoated,” charges Loewen (1998):

Although textbook authors no longer sugarcoat how slavery affected African Americans, they minimize White complicity in it. They present slavery virtually as uncaused, a tragedy, rather than a wrong perpetuated by some people on others. ...The emotion generated by textbook descriptions of slavery is one of sadness, not anger. For there’s no one to be angry at. Somehow we ended up with four million slaves in America but no owners! This is part of a pattern in our textbooks: anything bad in American history happened anonymously (p. 120).

*New clothes for an old concept, or a difference in interpretation?*

Ghosh (1996) contends that “...multicultural education must be inclusive and attempt to develop a society in which ‘difference’ is not a negative concept. ...Multicultural education must deal with cultural difference (which is created in relation to a cultural norm) rather than mere ethnocultural diversity” (p. vii). In order to accomplish this, she states that we must recognize that even

more radical programs such as anti-racist education and feminist pedagogy focus on particular groups and emphasize equity issues, racism, and sexism in school content and structure. However, they remain within the traditional framework that directs attention to diversity rather than involves a new vision

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The next 500 years.

where the norm is redefined to include all groups of students (Ghosh, 1996, p. vii).

While I appreciate and agree with her admonition that we must recognize the non-radical nature of many practices which do not recognize a need to redefine the “norm,” I take issue with her statement that anti-racism and feminist pedagogy do not undertake this project and reconceptualization. Many writers in these fields do quite explicitly take up this work<sup>16</sup>; it is when the need for reconceptualization does not enter into the discussion that practices associated with these pedagogies can become conservative reinforcers of dominant structures. That is to say, both anti-racism and many (particularly contemporary) feminist pedagogues work explicitly inside the recognition of “norm redefining” as an integral component of their work. When more conservative-minded educators use pieces of this work outside of this context, it can no longer accurately be called anti-racist or feminist pedagogy.

There are some who might argue that I am too impatient, not understanding of the time that change takes; the former is quite true, the latter not at all true. I am wildly impatient, but I do understand that change takes time; this is why I am so impatient. The current social climate seems to me to be one of intolerance, fear, and impassioned rhetoric, emanating not only from the neoconservatism of the “far Right,” but increasingly from the neoliberalism, individualism, and soft liberalism of the “soft Left.” Henry Giroux (1995) writes:

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See, for instance, Weis, (1988); Gaskell, McLaren, and Novogrodsky, (1989); Ng, Staton, and Scane, (1995); Roman and Eyre, (1997); Banks, (2001).

Within the last decade...the New Right has waged a cultural war against schools as part of a wider attempt to contest the emergence of new public cultures and social movements that have begun to demand that schools take seriously the imperatives of living in a multiracial and multicultural democracy. ...[T]he notion of a common culture serves as a referent to denounce any attempt by subordinate [sic] groups to challenge the narrow ideological and political parameters by which such a culture both defines and expresses itself. It is not too surprising that the theoretical and political distance between defining schools around a common culture and denouncing cultural difference as the enemy of democratic life is relatively short indeed (Introduction to Ng, Staton, and Scane, pp. vii-viii).

As frightening as I find the stance of the “New Right,” the rhetoric of the “soft Left” is even more frightening to me. Couched as it often is in notions of tolerance, acceptance, “all being human together,” erasing difference in attempts to find the commonality (which translates into finding how much like “us” “they” are), it is insidious and pervasive. It is also harder to counter; when someone starts to speak in my hearing from the Far Right position, I can hear them, and I can counter their “evidence” with my own “evidence.” But neoliberalism and “soft liberalism” are often presented in reasonable-sounding, sometimes even persuasive statements.

This combination of soft liberalism and individualism at work is one that I have encountered several times over the past few years. In addition to the unit on heterosexism and homophobia which was a part of the equity course, I have over the years done a number of workshops dealing with this issue with school staff and school board committees. In both workshops and the Equity course, a number of times the statement has been made (I am paraphrasing here, but it is the same statement): “I don’t *care* if someone is gay or lesbian. I don’t get it why they have to tell me. It just doesn’t make a difference to me.” Because critical pedagogy is a process, it took me several years to find a response to this one. In the

beginning, I would return to a discussion of the suicide and drop-out statistics for gay and lesbian youth, talk about the need to recognize their lives in schools, and so on. With this response I was able to ground the persuasiveness of my argument inside the “authority” of statistics, of “facts.” Although it served the purpose, I always felt that I was sidestepping a key critical element of this process.

I have since come to understand that the critical point in the above example is the way that this kind of moment revolves around the operations of heterosexual privilege. As the dominant category, unless one “marks” oneself as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, one is assumed to be heterosexual. But the way things are right now, while a heterosexual can refer to their fiancé with absolute safety, if a lesbian woman wants to talk about her relationship, first she has to decide whether or not she is willing to run the risk of outing herself and potentially losing a friendship (or a job, or a promotion, or a parent). Because that is the risk a gay man or lesbian has to face every time they decide to come out.

It is this unconscious taking-for-granted of one’s privilege which leads me to agree with Macedo’s (1998) characterization of “...liberals as tourists...” (p. xxviii). When someone is a tourist in the life of another, they may choose how they will interact in and with that life; if it makes them uncomfortable, they can take their camera and go home. Frankly, there are days when I would rather meet the speaker from the Far Right than another liberal tourist; at least when you can see and recognize who is coming, you can prepare yourself for the encounter.

### *The “transformative approach”*

Having spent quite some time discussing the extreme difficulty I have with

multiculturalism when it is practiced in and through an ideologically conservative framework, I want here to change directions. I want to address what multiculturalism can look like when it is grounded in a more critical framework; Banks' (1998) Level Three, "The Transformative Approach" offers one such strategy:

This approach changes the basic assumptions of the curriculum and enables students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several ethnic perspectives and points of view. The key curriculum issue involved in the Transformative Approach is not the addition of a long list of ethnic groups, heroes, and contributions, but the infusion of various perspectives, frames of reference, and content from various groups that will extend students' understandings of the nature, development, and complexity of...society. ...the emphasis should not be on the ways in which various ethnic and cultural groups have 'contributed' to mainstream...society and culture (p. 75, emphasis added).

A critical/ "post-" conception of curriculum offers the possibility of operating across boundaries, of understanding that in some instances a given set of classroom practices can be part of very different modes of curriculum. It is the vantage point of the critical/ "post-" conception that draws attention to the intersections between boundaries, between definitions. Instead of being stymied by contradiction, contradiction serves to illuminate the effects of these categories and the categorical boundaries.

Here I will share one story out of many such stories, of what can happen when someone takes on the challenge of this assignment and transforms the curriculum, themselves as educators, and their students. A preservice teacher whose assigned task during practicum was to teach her upper-elementary students about the growth cycle of plants from seed on up, covered the science curriculum required of her - and much, much more. She collected two large tubs of dirt; one from the rich farmlands of the Annapolis Valley, and one from the

rocky, thin, poor soil of East Preston. Her students followed a standard format - planted their seeds in styrofoam cups of dirt, watered them, nurtured them, etc., and kept diaries of their plants' growth. As it became apparent to them that some of the seeds were flourishing and some struggling, she added soil-testing to the science class - and they discovered that some of the seeds were planted in dirt that required the addition of fertilizers, special minerals, etc. They even took a trip to the Agricultural Research Station to have their "poor" dirt analyzed so they would know what to do to help their plants to grow. Necessary supplements were bought and the prices recorded.

Toward the end of the growth period for their seedlings, this teacher asked the students to reflect on what they had learned thus far; their responses included comments about the price of the additions to the "poor" dirt, and how even then those plants had not done as well as the others. Then she had them look at the codes on the cups (I believe she simply marked the cups #1 and #2). The Annapolis Valley cups contained the seedlings which had flourished with no additions; the East Preston cups were the seedlings that had needed intervention, and had done less well. Her students were asked to research and reflect on who lives in each of these two communities; how financially well off or not are people generally in each community? Together, this teacher and her students explored the interconnections of race and poverty. The farmers in the Annapolis Valley were (and are) almost all White; this area was settled by European immigrants/colonizers who recognized - and took - the valuable agricultural lands of the Annapolis Valley. The East Preston area is a predominantly Black community; the people who "settled" there were actually located there. The farm land is poor, requiring many dollars of supplements to raise a crop that costs

more and is less bountiful than those raised in the Valley.

The class then discussed the cyclic nature of farming and poverty; how not having the money to buy fertilizer would mean that your crops would not sell well, meaning that next year you had no money for fertilizer, and so forth. By the end of a science unit on how plants grow, these students left with a completely different outlook on the intersections between race, class, and poverty - as well as how colonization and privilege operate.

Finally, I want to say here that both the theory and some of the practices associated with multiculturalism are changing. The last decade has seen tremendous changes in this area; the integration of multiculturalism with critical pedagogy, the explicit analyses of feminist theories and pedagogies, the increasing development of anti-racist/sexist/heterosexist/classist theories, has changed both how we can think about issues of inequity and how we can address them in classroom practices (see, for instance, Dei, 1994; hooks, 1994).

*Concluding remarks:*

There is a growing call for a transformation of schooling as we “know” it. Unlike many earlier conservative (as well as contemporary conservative) calls for change, this call is contained within a critical analysis of the operations of power and privilege. The requirement for transformation comes not out of an idealized notion of individual rights, nor from a conservative demand for workers with particular skills. Rather, this transformation is deeply grounded in a critical recognition of the need for schools to alter their stance in regard to educational practices in order to effect a societal transformation. Harold Reynolds, Jr., a former Commissioner of Education for the State of Massachusetts, said:



The crisis in schooling is urgent and becoming greater every day. The widening gulf between the haves and the have-nots compels us to seek a transformation of society in which education must play a role. For education to play that role each student must become 'unquietly critical, challenged to understand that the world which is being presented as given is, in fact, a world being made, and for this very reason it can be changed, transformed, and reinvented.' Knowledge, like human society, is not static and unchanging (in Freire, 1993, p. 10).

It seems to me that the risks and dangers of stepping onto the terrain of socially just transformative possibilities become lessened when held up to the reflecting mirror of more traditional methods of viewing and doing schooling. Nothing connected to or contained within schooling is a neutral, values-free enterprise. Although it may be frightening to "take apart" the world as we know it, to try to envision the world as it might be, to not take risks must mean staying with what we already have. This option carries within it harm for ourselves and for the students in our classrooms. In the following chapter, I turn to a reconceptualization of student engagement as another piece of this theorizing, to connect the relational processes of curriculum which are discussed in this chapter with the relational process which is student engagement.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RECONCEPTUALIZING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

While I came to this writing with an understanding that student engagement was a significant element in the processes I wanted to address (and indeed is a significant process in its own right, as I argue in this chapter), I was operating at the level of an intuitive understanding of the necessity for addressing the concept of engagement within this work. I resolved the dilemma of how to talk about student engagement by taking a processual approach to the concept itself. Thus the foundational argument in this chapter is that student engagement can best be understood as a relation. In order to address this understanding of student engagement, I needed to locate student engagement as an intricately interconnected aspect of a network of power relations. Thus, this chapter begins with an articulation of the relational understanding of power for which Michel Foucault was a chief proponent.

#### *A relational view of power:*

Commonsense understandings of power tend to treat power as if it were a tangible thing, a commodity to be obtained, or a capacity imbued in a specific position or attached to a particular agent. As a result, conversations about the uses, abuses, and implications of power tend to follow patterns which either implicitly or explicitly assume that power is something that is held, withheld, shared, resisted, or controlled by some individual or collectivity, and to see this as an element of a structure that is imposed on given contexts from outside those contexts themselves. Within this framework, power is understood as invested in particular positions (like president or prime minister or teacher) or as emerging from the rules or laws attached to a given social context; thus, power appears to operate

from outside of particular individuals, to shape lives by (ultimately) limiting possibilities. While I am not suggesting that the operations of power do not have these particular effects, I am suggesting that this kind of commodified or materialist understanding of power is too concrete and limiting.

This is the approach to understanding power that Foucault (1978) refers to as a juridico-discursive model. In this approach to understanding power, power is treated as an entity or a force whose primary ability is the ability to say no, which it does through rule of law and the operation of taboos (i.e. “thou shalt not”). “All the modes of domination, submission, and subjugation are ultimately reduced to an effect of obedience” (Foucault, 1978, p. 85). Thus power always resides outside the individual and imposes limits on the individual by setting out what they cannot/should not, do, say, want, need. While this kind of “nay-saying” certainly does appear in some aspects of the operations of power relations (we do have authorities, rules, regulations, policies, laws, and a number of similar social processes), Foucault suggests that this is not all that is going on with respect to power; to see power in these limited terms means that we miss many of the other ways in which power operates. As an alternative Foucault argues for an analytics of power, a strategy for understanding power which permits us to appreciate the multiplicitous connections between ideas, relations, and social processes that constitute and/or reflect power relations. Foucault’s approach draws our attention to the operations of power relations as a productive (rather than a repressive) force<sup>1</sup>.

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In History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction Foucault (1978) sets out to explore how power relations produce the sexualized subject in general and the homosexual subject in

In discourses on education, power has traditionally been understood through a juridico-discursive model. In the sociology of education, for example, it is not at all unusual for the relationships between teachers and students to be constructed as a social relationship in which power plays an integral role (Dickinson, 1991). In these conversations, teachers are usually understood to be agents of socialization or bearers of authority whose task it is to act upon, to educate, to train, to shape the lives, minds, and/or bodies of their students. Within this framework, power is understood to be hierarchical, positional, and largely external to the relationship between teachers and students; teachers are constructed as the acting subjects, students tend to be understood as the objects of the teacher's activities or pursuits. In this context power appears, at least in part, as authority or the ability to influence, but that authority emerges from the teacher's position within the bureaucratic structure of schooling and/or as a function of the teacher's position as an "expert knower" in relation to the student. In some instances, the conversations around power focus on the various kinds of strategies and tactics that teachers can or should employ in order to confer power to their students, to "empower" students within the classroom and/or the world at large. However, even this project of "empowerment," while posited as a solution to the problems of difference and marginalization, still operates within a framework that assumes that the ultimate authority and/or agency rests with the teacher (or administrator or policy-maker) and treats students as if they are the mostly-objectified recipients of this empowerment process.

The trouble with juridico-discursive approaches to understanding and articulating

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particular. The productive aspects of power relations become most visible when we explore the processes of subject constitution, especially the constitution of the self-regulating subject.

power is that what they highlight are the effects of power relations rather than the operations of power relations. In the context of schooling, these approaches to understanding power frame the relationship between teachers and students (implicitly or explicitly) as if the teachers are the only real agents in this relationship. An analytics of power relations incorporates the notion that these are necessarily unequal force relations (which is why teachers appear to have “more” power), but also explores power as produced in and through these complex networks of relations between teachers, students, schooling (as a social, cultural, bureaucratic, and political process), and the socio-historical context. An analysis of power which focuses on the effects of the operations of power relations tends to limit the ways in which we look at and for these operations. These kinds of analyses tend to explore the social relations that make up schooling as a series of hierarchical binary relations (eg. administrators/teachers; teachers/students etc.) in which the “power” or authority flows from the top down or is imposed from outside the immediate context through such things as policy and/or curriculum documents. Strategies for change tend to be developed and/or implemented from the top down as well. Within this kind of understanding, resistance tends to be understood primarily as an oppositional practice and may be presumed futile or go unnoticed. In the analytics of power Foucault articulates, power is everywhere; it operates as a series of force relations rather than as a binary between the person who has the power and the person(s) who are subject to that power. In addition, Foucault argues that resistance is an integral aspect of power relations so that wherever power relations operate you will find the possibilities (and often practices) of resistance. Further in this chapter I discuss in more depth the notion of resistance-as-engagement. However, all resistance is not the same, and

employment of the word resistance ought not to be read as a statement that any/all resistance is also engagement. Some resistance is just resistance.

Operating from within this structural model of power, conversations about student engagement offer an intriguing set of contradictions. On the one hand, the very notion of “engagement” suggests some kind of independent activity or even agency for the “engaged” student. On the other hand, this concept is itself employed in such a way as if to suggest that engagement is some sort of product attached to a particular set of activities or ideas. In this sense, we lose the “student” (as an actor or agent) in a focus or emphasis on the “engagement.”

Using Foucault’s approach then, we can begin to understand power as a productive process, to speak of power relations or relationships of power, rather than implying that power is an independent entity which exists outside the boundaries of social relations, operating to constrain, limit, or otherwise determine the shape or pattern of those relationships. From this kind of analytic perspective we can understand that:

Although relationships of power are imminent to institutions, power and institutions are not identical. But neither are their relationships merely pasted-on, superstructural detail. For example, the school cannot be reduced to its disciplinary function. The content of Euclid’s geometry is not changed by the architecture of the school building. However, many aspects of school life are changed by the introduction of disciplinary technology (rigid scheduling, separation of pupils, surveillance of sexuality, ranking, individuation and so on) (Foucault, 1986, pp. 185-186).

For Foucault (1978), “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (p. 93). Relationships of power are produced in and through all forms of human interaction; they are “changeable, reversible and unstable. .... in the relations

of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance ... there would be no relations of power” (Foucault, 1988, pp. 11-12).

Within this framework, what Foucault (1978; 1986) refers to as an analytics of power, we can reconstruct our understanding of student engagement as one of the network of relations that operate in and through teaching and learning as social processes. In this sense, then, we can come to understand student engagement as a relation that is itself informed by a variety of other social processes, including the concept of curriculum, pedagogy, pedagogic strategies, class, race, ability, gender, and so forth. Working within a relational framework, we can also understand student engagement to constitute a power relation in and of itself.

*The “flavour” of engagement:*

Student engagement is a complex phenomenon. While the fact that students seem to be “busy and enjoying themselves” may be a necessary component for many conceptions of student engagement, it is certainly not sufficient, in and of itself, to grasp the concept of student engagement in all its complexities (Smith, Donahue, & Vibert, 1998, p.7). Although the discourse on student engagement contains a myriad of various and/or competing “strategies” for engaging students, “engagement” is not simply something we do to or with students. Formulating engagement as a set of strategies may produce a mechanistic approach, understanding “engagement” as constituted in a particular product (busy, happy/entertained students), which is itself constituted as the result of particular strategies. These approaches do not take into account the fact that “...student engagement does not take place within a vacuum. Issues of how and why particular practices do or do not work, in the sense of engaging or failing to engage students...are deeply related to context” (Smith et al, 1998,

p. 9). I will carry this argument one step further and suggest that student engagement is contextually defined and discursively produced. The conception of curriculum in play operates as an element in the meaning-making system in and through which definitions of what constitutes student engagement are produced. Thus, conceptions of curriculum inform and influence conceptions of student engagement:

...any examination of the nature of student engagement needs to be grounded in a discussion of the schools' philosophies of education as they pertain to questions of educational purpose. In the end, what it means to engage students, as well as the forms engagement takes within particular schools, is determined by a given school's notions of the larger purposes of schooling (Smith et al, 1998, p. 67).

Even with the plethora of possibilities available through reading literature which attempts to address and/or define student engagement, it is still difficult to state that student engagement is "this" or is "not that" - although it is easier sometimes to see and say what it is not than what it is. On-going dialogue about the presence, absence, and possibilities of student engagement is the only way to ensure that this concept retains practical and analytic salience.

When we operationalize a concept, particularly one as elusive as "student engagement," we set into place boundaries which then operate as the only recognizable aspects of engagement. We run the risk of missing actual instances of an engaged student; we do not recognize this moment because it takes place outside of our definition. By adopting a set of broad-ranging parameters or characteristics of student engagement, we have a better chance of reading each occurrence through a critical reflection on that moment's possibilities. Let me state here that I am certainly not advocating an "anything goes"



approach to understanding or conceptualizing student engagement. Defining student engagement is a struggle for me, and yet I recognize that there is a need to have at the very least an understanding of student engagement that informs my research project and my own teaching. I do not want to risk overlooking/looking past/failing to recognize diverse forms of engagement by developing a rigid definitional statement of what constitutes student engagement.

On the one hand, I do not want to set up categorical boundaries of definition that are limiting; on the other hand I do believe that engagement as a process is very real, and I do not want to dismiss it with a statement that makes discussion meaningless. Therefore, I build an understanding of student engagement that incorporates such aspects as: a sense of belonging; school and schooling as community; passion; learning that is meaningful to the everyday lives of students and teachers (and this necessarily calls for students and teachers to be co-creators of knowledge); and, following from the last, a critical inquiry into the dominant ways of knowing, that seeks to understand how the operations of power relations “work.” These elements or threads outline the terrain that I see as constituting student engagement. I remind the reader here that these conditions are neither exhaustive nor exclusive.

While I can talk about aspects of student engagement, to identify necessary and/or sufficient conditions creates a totalizing category, which limits what can be seen. The “necessary and/or sufficient” approach constitutes the concept “student engagement” as a totalizing category. Setting the limits of the category a priori may then have the effect of limiting what we are able to perceive as student engagement. The point here is not to

determine the essence or definition of “what is student engagement,” but to find ways to articulate the flavour of student engagement.

The context in which we apply the concept “student engagement” is itself multifaceted. This context includes the school culture, the community in which the school is located, the philosophy of the school administration, the philosophy of each individual teacher, and what both administration and each teacher believe and practice with regard to curriculum - what it is and what it does. In other words, student engagement is perhaps best understood as a process that operates in a network of influential relations. While we may talk about strategies for engaging students, it is inaccurate to represent engagement as a set of practices which we can “pass on” to another educator. We cannot say to preservice teachers, for instance, “If you do the following set of classroom exercises, your students will be engaged.” Because student engagement is a context-relevant form of social action, changing any element of the context will necessarily interact with any strategy or practice employed. At the very least, different teachers have different personal styles; what works well for one may be disastrous for another. Thus, rather than “creating” student engagement - a Sisyphean task if ever there was one - we might better put our efforts into creating/building engaging spaces - inviting spaces of possibility for all who enter (hooks, 1994).

Shifting to a conversation about “engaging spaces” offers a multiplicitous approach to re/conceptualizing student engagement. Speaking of engaging spaces rather than engaging students emphasizes that education needs to be engaging for all who interact with it. Speaking of engaging spaces offers the possibility to respond to critiques of accessibility, be it physical, emotional, spiritual, or intellectual accessibility. This opens up the concept while

at the same time offering the means to articulate the “terrain” this concept encompasses.

Whether or not a student is perceived as being engaged is directly connected to how a/any teacher in contact with that student understands student engagement. Further to this, a/any conception of student engagement is, in its own turn, directly connected to how a teacher conceptualizes curriculum and the purposes of schooling. But, in viewing engagement as a relationship - student to teacher, student to formal curriculum, student to hidden curriculum or culture of school, and so forth - it is difficult to have a conversation that is solely about whether or not any student is actually “engaged.” Nevertheless, there are some important things to be said about the “nature” of student engagement; I offer a reminder here that this discussion is but one loop in the cat’s cradle.

Leaving aside for the moment considerations of any particular conception of curriculum, it can be said that all curriculum - formal and informal - is developed and practiced within a context of the understanding (explicit or unexamined) of the purpose of schooling students. An understanding of the face of engagement is then attached to that purpose. When we operate within a particular set of expectations of what, precisely, constitutes student engagement, we might be tempted to treat strategies for engagement and what then happens in a given classroom setting as if there was a direct causal relation between these two. The very notion of a strategy for engagement suggests such a causal relation. However, treating student engagement as one relation in a dense network of relations that interpenetrate one another and that collectively shape reality in a given context, helps us to move away from expectations of a causal link between strategies for engagement and classroom outcomes.

*Conceptions of student engagement:*

There are several notions of student engagement discussed in contemporary literature in this area. These include (but are not limited to): activity; safety; academic achievement; a sense of belonging; commitment; involvement with/of community. In examining contemporary literature on the subject of student engagement, conceptualizations range from specific activities or achievements (Jones & Jones, 2001), to ideas or idealizations of democracy (Shor, 1992; Goodman, 1992; McLaren, 1994; Levin, 1994; Armstrong & McMahon, 2002), belonging (Roland Martin, 1992; Lee, 1998a), or safety (hooks, 1994). In the following pages, I examine several definitions or ideas of student engagement in order to highlight both the immensity and the complexity of this concept. I point to some of the areas of difficulty with each, sometimes relying on the authors' own critiques of their attempts to define and operationalize the always complex and ultimately intangible notion of student engagement.

Student engagement is a social process that is most clearly visible in its effects; it is an interactive process that defines and shapes relationships between students and teachers. Student engagement is essentially an interactive concept; students are engaged with someone or something: other students, a teacher, a concept, a project, or resistance/rebellion. Thus engagement is about relationship(s). While there are apparent themes or ideas that cut across notions of student engagement, a review of some of the pertinent literature in this area offers a multitude of suggestions and possibilities. Smith et al (1998) point out: "There is no generally accepted definition of student engagement but from the work of various authors, we gleaned two principal strands of engagement: individual investment and collaboration

with others” (p. 2). These two “strands” of engagement are reflected in some of the common themes in discussions of student engagement: commitment to one’s work, and/or academic and/or school life; activity; a sense of belonging; learning that is meaningful or relevant. Some researchers choose to define their understanding of engagement in concrete terms and using measurable items (Wells, 1990; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Cothran & Ennis, 2000), while others offer instances or ways people have of being engaged as an operating definition (Fried, 1995; Cross, 1998; Berry, 1998). Still other researchers and writers acknowledge the complexities of “engagement” (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992). I concur with Fred Newmann’s (1986) position that “engagement is difficult to define operationally, but we know it when we see it, and we know it when it is missing” (quoted in Smith et al, 1998, p. 7). Thus, my approach to understanding student engagement looks less like a definition and more like a thumbnail sketch of the terrain in which the “definition” might be located, a category that has elastic edges rather than rigid boundaries. Student engagement is an interactive process, one that relies on meaning-making; my understanding of student engagement includes students as active participants in the meaning-making process. Engagement cannot be limited to some quantifiable or performable element(s), such as good grades or good behaviour. Rather, engagement, like critical thinking, is a quality of mind, an interactive process visible in its effects rather than in and of itself.

Fred Newmann, Gary Wehlage, and Susie Lamborn (1992) suggest that: “Engagement stands for active involvement, commitment, and concentrated attention” (p. 11). Further to this, these authors develop a working definition of student engagement in academic work as “the student’s psychological investment in and effort directed toward

learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote” (p. 12). Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn note that their definition is not without difficulty, and go on to articulate several problems. They state that “[s]tudents may complete academic work and perform well without being engaged in the mastery of a topic, skill, or craft” (p.12). Clearly they are not satisfied that completion of academic work and performing well are enough to constitute engagement, which suggests a tension not only with their own developing definition, but possibly also a struggle with how to understand curriculum; within a traditional/conservative approach to understanding curriculum, engaged students are frequently understood to be precisely those students who perform well and complete their academic work. Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn(1992) suggest that students’ investment in mastery “should be viewed on a continuum from less to more, not as a dichotomous state of being either engaged or unengaged” (p.13). They further suggest that using indices such as “amount of participation in academic work...intensity of student concentration... enthusiasm and interest expressed, and...degree of care shown in completing the work” may be misleading (p.13). By attempting to measure the amount of engagement that is present by measuring a student’s involvement with academic work, we may not be measuring “engagement” at all, but simply a “student’s willingness to comply with school routines...” (p.13). Clearly, compliance alone is not enough to confirm student engagement.

There are many useful aspects of a continuum approach to understanding, or attempting to define, student engagement; viewing the phenomena along a continuum avoids the limitations of a binary “there/not there” understanding. A continuum offers space for exploring differing degrees of engagement; i.e., between students, for a given student, in

different contexts, and so forth. In the larger view, however, a continuum is flexible but two-dimensional; it is still a line with presumably beginning and end points. This renders it fundamentally static and does not offer the kind of diversity that a more fluid conceptualization might offer.

Cross (1998) views education as “preparing students to continue the struggle for freedom for all people” (p.33), and addresses engagement issues with teachers-as-students by encouraging them to engage with curriculum in order to “gain a sense of agency in rethinking curriculum to change this [oppressive] state” (p. 43). For Cross, engagement involves a necessary interaction between “learners” and the social and political context of curriculum. Present within Cross’ approach are: an attempt to change the social systems which construct and maintain inequities; alter learner interaction - teachers and students creating new knowledge together; and, a recognition of the social and political contexts of curriculum.

Berry (1998) adds “authentic questioning” to a developing list of characteristics of (or definitions of) student engagement (p. 45). Authentic questioning, says Berry (1998), are questions that have “no predetermined knowledge or answers” (p. 45). She sees asking questions as a “reclaiming of unknown territory, of knowledge” and thus, questions allow the asker to “cocreate knowledge” (p. 45). A necessary aspect of engagement for Berry, then, is the possibility that connecting with/to dominant and alternative curricula can aid in effecting social change by developing a healthy, critical resistance to established dominant “knowledge.”

Finn and Voelkl (1993) define engagement as “having both a behavioral component,

termed *participation*, and an emotional component, termed *identification*” (Finn, 1993, p. 249, emphases in original). In this article, the approach to understanding student engagement begins with the development of a concrete set of observable practices, which remain largely uncritically analyzed or challenged; this set of characteristics is then quantifiably measured. Finn and Voelkl (1993) identify some characteristics of “at-risk” learners (the focus of their article) as “being at risk for educational problems” by meeting one or more of three identified criteria. These criteria are “(a) being minority [sic] and attending an urban school, (b) living in a family in the lower third of the national distribution of socioeconomic status (SES) and with 5 [sic] or more family members, or (c) coming from a home where the language spoken was not English” (Finn and Voelkl, 1993, p. 251). While the authors note these criteria as being characteristic of “at-risk” learners, they do not critically analyze the systemic marginalization which may contribute to the non-engagement of these students in traditional school life and learning. Rather, the indices they use to measure engagement include “attendance, classroom participation, and negative in-class behaviors” (p. 251).

Teachers were asked to rate students in accordance with these “engagement measures,” indicating compliance with or resistance to each measure. While Finn and Voelkl may have contributed some statistical knowledge to an understanding of non-engagement with traditional forms of schooling, studies such as this one produce the very conditions that they claim to describe. The definitions of “engagement” and “at-risk” seem to dance around a tautological circle. In this study, the authors clearly link “at-risk” students with poor academic performance and “negative in-class behaviours” and further suggest that “at-risk” students are non-engaged students. The one concludes the other, in either direction: these



students are “at-risk” because they are unengaged, and they are unengaged because they are “at-risk” according to the criteria used to measure them. In the above example, the authors suggest that they are measuring the effects of race, ethnicity, and class; however, what they offer is a measure of the intersection of a variety of sets of effects. They operationalize race, ethnicity, and class through the social effects of these categories of marginalization. The operational categories for engagement used in this work suggest that their idea of what constitutes “engagement,” the ways in which these social constructs impact on students’ lives, is informed through a very narrow view of curriculum and the purposes of schooling.

In The schoolhome: Rethinking schools for changing families, Jane Roland Martin (1992) says that when she hears about “young people retreating into their groups and themselves” she can “readily understand why they have dropped out of school figuratively, if not literally” (p. 54). Roland Martin’s (1992) understanding of these students’ leave-taking is rooted in a critical grasp of how they come to “feel like...outsiders in their own land” (p. 55). She advocates for a “schoolhome,” a place where curriculum interacts with the lives of all of the people involved. Her vision of a schoolhome is of a space where “all of us might begin to feel more at home” (p.70), where students and teachers can come to believe that their school is a community, a space where needs and life experiences are not only “folded in,” but are central to the daily rhythm of schooling.

In discussing her vision of a schoolhome, Roland Martin raises the central importance of curriculum to schooling. For me, Roland Martin’s connection to a discussion of “what is student engagement” lies in her statement of the importance of school as community, and, further to this community, school as a place where no-one is left out. Much of the literature

on student engagement speaks to the need for a sense of belonging. People who are physically present in a space where they are required to be, but do not feel that they belong, will find alternate ways to absent themselves (Contenta, 1993; Solomon, 1994; Dei et al, 2000). Absent people are not engaged with what is going on around them - because they are not there. Schools which operate around a central and informing sense of community will lessen the possibility of absence of some of its members. If each member's life experiences are taken into account and are used to build a curriculum of community, then each member of the community has more possibility of belonging.

A sense of belonging is particularly important to discuss when trying to identify components of student engagement. Much of the literature on student engagement suggests that in order to be engaged in school, students need to feel that they belong (see, for instance, Finn and Voelkl, 1993; Roland Martin, 1992). Many "at risk" students are members of "minority" groups or are poor, these students actually do not belong to the school. Students who are racially visible and/or students who are poor feel alienated from schools because, for the most part, schools have no material connection to their lives (Stein, 1971; Kozol, 1991; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997; Nieto, 2000). Understandings of the effects of poverty and race are not the only material elements missing in the construction of most school communities. There is an extensive list of students whose lives are excluded, from school communities and from both formal and informal curriculum: gay, lesbian or bisexual students; students with a disability; children with learning or behavioural "problems" (Heron, 1983; Wells, 1990; Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992; Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). So it is not only a sense of belonging that is unavailable; making school meaningful to their everyday

lives also does not happen. In some cases, “engaging in school can represent an active danger” for students for whom “engagement entails a form of cultural colonization” which could well endanger “their ability to negotiate their immediate lives in the world” (McLaren, cited in Smith et al, 1998, p. 11).

When “school-life” and “out-of-school life” are disconnected from one another, students whose lives are marginalized or absent from school must find ways of negotiating school-life safely. With the default conservatism of both traditional/conservative and individualist/humanistic foundations of schooling, students whose lives are outside of the taken-for-granted normative centre are absent from formal curriculum and are absent from community development. Within both of these approaches, the taken-for-granted normative centre is the White, male, middle-class, non-disabled, heterosexual position of privilege (Gaskell, McLaren, & Novogrodsky, 1989; Connell, 1993; Isoki, 1994; Ghosh, 1996; Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Apple, 1998; McIntosh, 1998; Dei et al, 2000; Banks, 2001). As I argued in Chapter Two, these positions of privilege form the foundational understanding of who and what school is for; students whose lives do not fall into these categories are either overlooked, or they are treated within a deficit model. Smith et al (1998) discuss the connections (or lack thereof) between student engagement and a deficit model:

We have seen that when educators believe that children and youth have both social capital (Coleman, 1990) and the ability to use it wisely and productively, student engagement is facilitated. Conversely, when educators believe that students, for any number of reasons, are neither capable of making good decisions for themselves nor of achieving high standards of academic excellence, then student engagement is more superficial and sporadic. In this model, engagement tends to be equated, in the minds of responsible adults, with student compliance with adult rules and norms, and participation in adult-designed and led activities. Where the deficits

attributed to students are also considered to stem from, and to reside in their home situations, then parents are also reduced to being recipients of school-based helping programs, rather than empowered to become full partners in their children's education. ...The deficit mentality on the part of educators is one of the most debilitating factors we have found in terms of constraining student achievement and engagement (pp. 132-133)<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, the absence of socially privileged positions becomes the "problem," and raising the student to a state of belonging becomes the solution. The dangers of a deficit approach to schooling are immediately apparent: non-White kids will never become White (as but one example). In a system that is set up to take Whiteness for granted, non-White kids will never "make this particular grade," and so will always be marginalized. Attempting to negotiate school-life as if they were in fact White would entail a danger for these students, would erase the effects of their skin colour and the impact which that has for them every day.

Smith et al (1998) identify the involvement of parents and communities as a key component to developing a school climate which allows the possibility of engaging students in their learning. Not restricted to, but critically important in this process, is making an effort to "invite into the educational process those very communities that have historically felt excluded" (Smith et al, 1998, p.10). It is incumbent upon educators that, in order to identify and then include people who have "historically felt excluded," we recognize that these groups feel excluded because they have been excluded: feeling excluded is not an inaccurate perception on their part. Enid Lee (a prominent anti-racist educator) says that when we encounter a group who state that they are left out of the educative process, it is not sufficient

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See also Kos (1993b). Her case study of Karen, a "really nice girl" who cannot read in the Seventh Grade but is passed on by her teachers every year, is a compelling example of a child schooled within a deficit model.

for us to say “but we are not deliberately leaving them out.” We must instead ask ourselves “what specifically have we done to invite this group in?” (Lee, 1998a). If the answer to the question is “nothing,” then we have participated in the continued exclusion of this group. It is also not enough to simply say to a historically marginalized group: “Look, we’re standing here, why don’t you come join us?” The inclusion of groups who have been excluded from the schooling process necessarily involves a critical stance, a self-reflexivity which recognizes how and why some groups belong, or feel welcome, and some do not. Following this recognition of the exclusion of some is a requirement to change the structure of the uninviting spaces. It is not enough to move over and say “We’ve made room for you now.” When people who occupy privileged categories shift inside privileged spaces, it does not change the fact that access to those spaces is predicated on privilege. Invitation is not a sufficient condition for inclusion; invitation does not equal access. For example, putting a wheelchair ramp to the front door of a previously inaccessible building does not constitute accessibility if the only bathroom is located at the top of a flight of stairs. Accessibility requires a recognition and deconstruction of the ways in which privilege, and not just space, is the barrier. Teaching for social justice requires that we critically reflect on the historical aspects of exclusion (Lee, 1998a), a process which is grounded in and perpetuated by systemic operations of power and privilege. Having reflected on the historical reasons for exclusion, we must then take concrete, observable action to deliberately circumvent the continuation of this exclusion.

The literature in the area of student engagement suggests that there is a close connection between engagement and commitment. At an individual level, this commitment

might be seen to be commitment to one's own work. However, commitment in the context of student engagement is larger than this; it is a commitment to the classroom, to the wider school, and to the community outside of the school itself. It is a commitment to a way of being in the world, a form of citizenship (Smith et al, 1998).

Robert Fried (1995) approaches a discussion of student engagement with passion - not just that he feels passionately about talking about student engagement, although he does, but also from a position that students need teachers with passion. He states: "As adults working with young people, our passions are key to their engagement" (p. 1). He continues: "nothing much of lasting value happens in a classroom unless students' minds are engaged in ways that connect with their experiences" (p. 2). Again, we see the articulation that learning needs to be meaningful to students' lives. If it is not, we run the risk of having learning be simply rote memorization, and this can happen within any curricular context. Fried (1995) employs a metaphor of a car engine to discuss engagement - the motor may be running but until we engage the clutch, "...nothing moves... it's all sound and smoke, and nobody gets anywhere" (p. 2). He suggests that student engagement works the same way; if students are not engaged with what is going on in the classroom in some way that is meaningful for them, we see only the sound and smoke of "doing school." The result is "creativity and excitement for the few, compliance and endurance for most, rebellion and failure for some, but not very much work of high quality is being produced, and not much intense engagement of the mind and spirit takes place" (Fried, 1995, pp. 2-3, emphasis added).

Fried's emphasis on passion strikes another note of resonance for me as I frame my

own conceptualization of student engagement. His suggestion that both “the mind and spirit” be engaged I find exciting; one of the more disconcerting experiences of my own formal schooling experience was the separation of mind from body and spirit. While some students may achieve academic “success” by having only their mind engaged, this “success” is necessarily limited (to the grades received) and limiting (to the entirety of the person). Passion is an ineffable quality that manifests itself differently in different bodies. Folding passion in as an element of student engagement produces engagement as a category that has fluid components as well as boundaries. In addition, the concept “passion” implies interactivity, or at least a spark passing between two or more people, or a person and an object, or an idea.

When Roland Martin (1992) speaks of students who have “dropped out of school figuratively, if not literally” (p. 54), she highlights an issue often missed in more mechanistic approaches to student engagement. There are students who, for whatever reason, attend school physically, but that is all of them that is there. It is as if their “earth suits” came to school, but the rest of them is simply “elsewhere.” As Smith et al (1998) state: “We all know students who are physically present in school but not really engaged in any meaningful sense of the word, hence the association of engagement with more proactive terms such as “active involvement” and “commitment” (p. 5). Both Dei et al (1997) and Solomon (1994) have discussed this “physical presence only” as it relates to Black youth; Solomon (1994) provides a compelling analysis of the ways in which the sport culture of schooling works to, on the one hand, keep Black youth coming to school while at the same time, their involvement in the sport culture of their schools denies them an academic education.

I am aware that my “talk” and another’s “listening” may be at odds with one another, or at the very least, that there may be (perceived or actual) tensions and/or contradictions between my words and another’s understanding/interpretation. While I delight in opportunities to discuss philosophically and theoretically the tangible and the nebulous conceptions of student engagement, often when I am talking with teachers I am reminded that I live in a teaching world that is, in some respects, privileged - at least, much more privileged than theirs<sup>3</sup>. They remind me (often quite passionately) that they have to work in what they term “the real world,” one that is border-patrolled by structures, policies, and bureaucratization that inform and restrict what they as teachers can do. I am also reminded that, for the most part, I work with willing students, while many teachers work with “captive and sometimes hostile”<sup>4</sup> students. So what, I am sometimes asked, does this reconceptualization of student engagement look like in a world where teaching is a practice with bureaucratic, political, and practical constraints in which teachers are held accountable by a variety of intersecting and competing interests?

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This notion of my teaching space as privileged is offered only in relation to the space of public school classroom teachers. It is the graduate students with whom I work who point out to me that my work space vis-a-vis theirs appears to be much more privileged. While I am aware, and have articulated previously, that there are risks which I and others take as educators in university settings, here I point to the ways in which some classroom teachers perceive that they are much more restricted in what they are able to/allowed to do than am I.

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Again, I am not suggesting that public school students are captive and/or hostile. These are words offered by graduate students who are themselves classroom teachers. While we do then have conversations in an attempt to “open up” their statements, it is frequently the perspective of these graduate students/teachers that their public school students are too often “captive and hostile,” at least in comparison to adult learners who have chosen to return to graduate studies.



In order to open/maintain a dialogue on the above question/concern, I turn to an example of a grounded classroom practice and what it might look like within this reconceptualization of student engagement. If we accept that engaged students demonstrate active listening (as an example), we must have some way of ascertaining that active listening has occurred. It is problematic to state that active listening is only demonstrated through participation in class discussion (for example), but if we include in our understanding of engagement a component of active listening, then we need to be able to see that active listening has occurred. If a student is not an active participant in class discussions, perhaps their active listening will be reflected in journal writing, or papers/presentations done for the class. So, if we accept that active listening is a component of student engagement, then we can look for some kinds of evidence that the student heard what was said and has folded that into their thought process. One of the delights of conceptualizing student engagement through the operations of power is that it offers the possibility of seeing things that might otherwise be missed; because boundaries and vantage points are all fluid, what constitutes evidence of active listening is context relevant. From this perspective, active listening need not be defined only as agreement, compliance, or silence; students who resist what has been said can still be included inside “engagement.” If we accept multiplicitous demonstrations of active listening as constituting a moment of engagement, then we are able to see/hear resistance as one moment where the resisting student has connected with/to what has been said.

*Resistance as engagement:*

Following through on the notion of seeing resistance as a form of engagement, there

are several things I want to say here. Resistance is one of the main reasons that I wanted to find some way of reconceptualizing student engagement. The resistance I want to speak of here is not the overarching “theories of resistance” of which Henry Giroux (1981) writes so eloquently in “Hegemony, resistance, and educational reform.” Rather, the resistance I want to discuss here is the more vernacular notion of resistance, the one to which teachers refer when they are constituting students as “good kids” or (more particularly when the discussion is about a moment of resistance) “bad kids.” Inside a conservative conception of the purpose of schooling, which then informs an also conservative understanding of what constitutes student engagement, resistance is invariably marked as dis-engagement. By approaching student engagement as a relation of power, moments (or a lifetime) of resistance hold open a possibility of being understood as engagement.

In order to offer resistance to something, that thing being resisted has been seen/heard/recognized, has been weighed, and in the moment of resisting it, has been found in some way lacking or problematic. Inside this reconceptualization of student engagement, then, we are offered a place in which to see the moments when students resist what we say as possibly constituting a form of engagement, for we can know that they must have been listening to us in the first place. As I mentioned previously, this statement is not meant to imply that any and all resistance is also/always constitutive of engagement. Sometimes people resist for a variety of reasons, some of which may have nothing at all to do with engagement, or even with what is going on in the classroom. Reconceptualizing student engagement in the manner I suggest, however, allows us to at least think about the possibility of whether any given moment of resistance may be engagement; we need not automatically

read resistance as something to be shut down or dealt with. This offers us the possibility of bringing the context of the moment and the context of the student together, rather than responding solely from a place of “that’s a bad kid - they resisted me.” My conception of resistance resonates with that of Freire (1998), who conceptualizes a need for and his meaning of resistance:

It’s necessary...for us to have the kind of resistance that keeps us alive. It is also necessary that we know how to resist so as to remain alive, that our comprehension of the future is not static but dynamic, and that we are convinced that our vocation for greatness and not mediocrity is an essential expression of the process of humanization in which we are inserted. These are the bases for our nonconformity, for our refusal of that destructive resignation in the face of oppression. It is not by resignation but by a capacity for indignation in the face of injustice that we are affirmed (p. 74).

Resistance, then, may be a refusal of racially and/or culturally visible/distinct students to be assimilated into dominant discourses. Resistance may be, as McLaren suggests, a refusal to accept “a form of cultural colonization” which represents “an active danger” (in Smith et al, p. 11) for students whose lives are systematically refused or erased within common practices of schooling. Resistance, when offered against dominant ways of knowing, may actually be read as a healthy, life-sustaining response to inequity and injustice. I read once, years ago, (and I must own here that I have no idea just where it was that I read this - it could have been a poem somewhere, a poster, or scrawled on a public restroom wall - wherever it was, it has stayed with me) a statement that said: “It is not a sign of wellness to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick world.” Resistance may be read as a refusal to adjust well to an unwell world<sup>5</sup>.

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5

Oddly enough, given that when I was growing up as a student in school I occupied every

According to Smith et al (1998), setting the stage for engagement is a complex and intricate task. They state that “engagement is not an aspect of the student psyche alone” (p. 10). In order for the possibility to exist for students to become engaged in their learning and in school, Smith et al (1998) suggest that “...teachers and administrators must be engaged as well” (p.10). This engagement of teachers and administrators is key to the required “connectedness” which is a “feature of the engaging school climate” (Smith et al, 1998, p. 10). This connectedness cuts across all constituencies: students, parents, teachers, community, curriculum developers, and policy makers, all are necessary and integral to creating engaging spaces. In speaking of creating mutually engaging spaces, bell hooks (1994) says:

I could never say that I have no idea of the way students respond to my pedagogy; they give me constant feedback. When I teach, I encourage them to critique, evaluate, make suggestions and interventions as we go along. Evaluations at the end of a course rarely help us improve the learning experience we share together. When students see themselves as mutually responsible for the development of a learning community, they offer constructive input (pp. 205-206; emphasis added).

In “Stuck in the middle?,” Paul Carr (1997) “analyzes the ways in which principals of a large, diverse, urban school board, the Toronto Board of Education (TBE), have responded to equity-based, anti-racist education” (p. 42). He found that

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position of social privilege there is, I was always “in trouble.” In Grade Twelve at a private Catholic high school where I had been sent by desperate parents as a last resort, I spent so much time in the principal’s office that she allowed me to keep a book there. In some classes, my classmates started keeping track to see how long I would last before being sent once more from the room. I flatly refused to “live up to my potential,” as more than one report card stated. As I reflect back on high school some twenty-five years later, and from this vantage point, I am aware that the main “problem” was that I was a passionate and inquiring teenager and in the context of my schooling as it seemed to be understood by my teachers, passion and inquiry were not why I was there.

principals unwilling to openly discuss equity matters...often created a feeling of ambivalence among staff, and even forced those active in the area to undertake much of their work in an isolated, non-mainstream, informal manner (p. 43).

Vibert and Portelli (2000) point to the importance of parental involvement in and with schooling. At NS1, a Nova Scotia public elementary school there was a:

strong and active parent-teacher co-op, which in addition to fund-raising and organizing programs, also consulted on many aspects of school policy and curriculum as these affected the community...teachers and staff made a conscious effort to include in the school a wider and more representative membership from the community (p. 25).

And, Smith et al (1998) point out:

If students are to become the centre of the school and schools the centre of the educational system, then the roles of policy makers and administrators have to be reconceptualized as support services to front-line employees, especially teachers, who in turn need to be recast as support providers to students (p. 20).

Put together, the above statements mark some of the key elements in developing strategies for restructuring schools in order to offer the possibility of engagement for all students, not just those who occupy the positions most privileged in and through a traditional/conservative management approach to schooling.

In the same way in which it is not possible to state that “engagement” is a concrete, tangible action or set of actions which are placed upon students by a teacher, it is not possible to state that there is ever an end to engagement, because it is process, not product, driven; engagement is a journey without a final destination. There is no point at which we may say of the process of engaging students that we are “done now.” This approach to conceptualizing student engagement is inextricably connected with and to my theorizing of

a social justice pedagogy.

I would suggest that whenever/wherever we perceive/conceive of curriculum as a formal delivery system, there will also be disengaged students and teachers. There will always be students who do not fit into the working conception of engaged, in part because the refusal of these “disengaged” students to accept the status quo as either just or desirable will be read as individualized presentations of self. By shifting our perspective/pedagogy/philosophy to a radical-transformative conceptualization of student engagement as one relation within a network of power relations, we centre an interrogation of the operations of power and privilege. We legitimate critical inquiry.

In general terms, schooling has traditionally appeared thus: a set of informational facts/skills, etc. is put together into a formal delivery package; then, teachers are taught how to deliver this package to students; and finally, students’ ability to absorb/retain this package is assessed in some formal manner. Students (and teachers) have generally been regarded as belonging inside this formal curriculum system as set players, and their task is the deliverance/absorption of a set and finite curriculum. All that they are and all that they experience outside of this set curriculum has generally been regarded as “not belonging to school,” or at the very least, has often been seen as extraneous to the real work of school, and therefore is frequently viewed as disruptive, or somehow outside of the purview of the classroom. When we shift our thinking to encompass a school wide curriculum of life<sup>6</sup>, what

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Portelli & Vibert (2001) define a curriculum of life as: “A curriculum that is grounded in the immediate daily world of students as well as in the larger social, political contexts of their lives” (p. 63, emphasis added).

happens outside of the classroom becomes an integral aspect/component of what belongs inside the classroom; the various experiences of someone's day/life are no longer required to be shut down/away as they become a disembodied actor on the classroom stage. As Jackson (1992) states:

...all experience is necessarily situational and contextualized...there is no privileged position outside of experience from which to achieve a free and independent (i.e. noncontextualized) perspective, and...the power of rhetoric is crucial in determining the superiority of one view over another (p.10).

When we use closed categories to understand student engagement, (which is, in the final analysis, a process and not a product) we run a double jeopardy risk. We risk believing that students are "engaged" when they are really just busy, and we risk missing out on seeing engagement where we are not looking for it. Using a concept of student engagement as fluid, critical, and inquiring, we have (to paraphrase Newmann) the possibility both of recognizing engagement when we see it, and recognizing when it is absent.

Engagement and community are intricately interconnected, insofar as that it is almost impossible to engage with a context/process that systematically (and systemically) ignores or erases (some of) its members' life experiences. Developing a critical understanding of the links between engagement and community/belonging is also a way to build links between engagement and "at-risk" discourses. Implicit in discourses on "at-risk" students is the notion that these students would be less "at-risk" if they could be engaged in and/or by their schooling. As articulated above, however, if the understanding of "at-risk" students is built upon a deficit foundation, and if the systemic inequities in and out of school of these students' lives are not opened to a critical reflection, the student, rather than the issue,

becomes the “problem.” One of the ways to address the “problem” of systemically disadvantaged and/or disenfranchised students is to teach with an ethic of care (Noddings, 1996), to recognize the ways in which some students’ lives are erased and or/disenfranchised in and through the practices of schooling. I take up this ethic of care in more detail in Chapter Four.

*Connecting student engagement and “at-risk” students:*

In this final section, I explore the constitution of the category “at-risk” children. As I have been engaged in the process of theorizing a/my social justice pedagogy, one of the processes of schooling to which I have been drawn is the constitution of children/students who are (understood to be) “at-risk.” Perhaps this is because I spent several years myself being constituted in and through such a definition, which even as a teenager I did not understand, because I did not see myself as being in any sort of danger for or “at-risk” of anything. I have long had a sneaking admiration for the “bad kids,” the rebels, and in reflecting on my thirty-some years of involvement with schooling, including my own years as a student in public schools, it seems to me that the students who were/are more often constituted as “at-risk” were/are non-conforming or not “belonging” in some way or another. As I theorize further about this categorization, I have concluded that there exists a relationship between social marginalization and the constitution of some students as being “at-risk.” Perhaps this is a part of why I have been pulled toward wanting to understand some of the processes involved in this particular constitution of students. I am particularly interested in questions such as “how is it that these/some students are “at-risk”?” “who put/s them “at-risk”?” and “what are they “at-risk” of/for?”



Both the categories “at-risk” students and “engaged” students are productive and at the same time regulatory. Both categories reflect an implicit taken-for-granted of privilege; both are processes which operate with social privilege as their baseline, although “privilege” manifests differently within each of these categories. Both “at-risk” and “engagement” rely on particular notions or definitions of schooling processes and practices, in which the taken-for-granted operations of social privilege define or delineate understandings of what it means to be “engaged.” With these particularized notions of what an “engaged” student looks like operating as the baseline against which all students are measured or understood, students who are members of socially marginalized groups are more frequently understood to be “at-risk” of being non-engaged or unengaged from schooling. There is an interactive relationship between “at-risk” and “engagement;” students who are socially marginalized are often not “doing school” in the ways which are recognized as engagement, because engagement is so often predicated on particular notions both of “who students are,” and what engagement looks like based on this particular “idealized” child/student.

Understandings of “engagement” and “at-riskedness” may at times seem oppositional to one another. That is, when engagement is understood through the effects of social privilege, and non-engagement is understood through the effects of social marginalization, the production of an understanding of engagement may (and frequently does) appear to be an oppositional positioning of an “engaged” student against an understanding of an “at-risk” student. When we use a relational perspective to explore the operations of power within each of these constitutions of students, we are able to open up both of these productive processes to see how they are actually involved in similar processes of student and subject constitution.

Implicit in these constitutive processes, of understandings of (some) students as engaged (or not), and some students as “at-risk” (and conversely, not “at-risk”) are the operations of power relations of privilege and marginalization.

In thinking about the interconnected processes of schooling, and querying the category of “at-risk” students through the above questions, I turn once more to Foucault (1978), who said that “A normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life” (p. 144). It is through the normalizing practices, including the definitions of “the norm” and the cataloguing of deviations, that the technologies of power operate from within the individual, through the constitution of the “good” or “normal” self. This is not to suggest that I think that “at-risk” students put themselves “at-risk” by constituting themselves as “not-good” or “not-normal.” Rather, I suggest that through the operations of power relations and the operations of privilege and marginalization, a processual relationship operates between the notions of the “normalized” child detailed in Chapter Two and the “at-risk” child/student.

The critique of the category of “at-risk” children which follows is not an in-depth review of the extremely large body of literature in this area. My aim in this section is to suggest the ways in which I see these frequently well-intentioned intervention strategies reproducing the inequities they seek to address. In other words, I view the category of “at-risk” as not only failing to provide reliable strategies of/for a solution of this problem, it is itself part of the problem. Like the concept student engagement, the very notion that students are somehow “at-risk” is itself a complex relation; the “at-risk” student is also contextually defined and discursively produced.

In Chapter Two, I pointed out some of the ways in which schooling is inequitable. That is, common conservative practices and understandings of schooling mean that some children find their lives at the centre of the taken-for-granted assumptions about how children live; other children, whose lives do not match the taken-for-granted positions of social privilege, find that their lives are either absent from schooling practices, or are under- or mis-represented within schooling practices. In Chapter Two, I outlined the circular process at work in the representation (or lack of representation) of (some) lives in schooling practices and formal curriculum documents. This circular process produces both the “normative” or “normalized” student<sup>7</sup> and the students whose lives are not-, under-, or mis-represented in schooling<sup>8</sup>.

This process is circular; this process is also what Foucault (1986) refers to as a “productive power relation.” This operation of power relations appears most commonly in discourses such as “at-risk” students, and operates by producing as a problem that which it seeks to describe as problematic. In other words, when/if educators assume that particular

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In Chapter Two I describe this “step” of the process as: the children whose lives are such that they may access schooling and the “stuff” of schooling more easily, accepting that theirs are the lives being spoken to and of, often are more “successful” in school, are more likely to graduate, go on to post-secondary education, and in their own turn are more likely to become writers of curriculum documents, teachers, administrators, and other people positioned in places where they may influence schooling and what is done and offered there.

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I stated: the corollary of “step” #4 [see footnote # 7, above] is that children who find school unfamiliar, inaccessible, or hostile, are much more likely to leave school, often at the earliest possible opportunity. They, in their turn, will be less likely to become educators, administrators, or writers of curriculum; thus, they will not be able to bring the experience and knowledge of their lives to the writing of new possibilities for how to do school, and what goes on in schools.

interaction styles constitute “engagement” with schooling, those students who do not operate inside this framework become understood to be “at-risk” for dis-engagement. In so doing, this understanding fails to acknowledge the many ways in which the very strategies and processes of schooling implicitly and explicitly speak to/of the lives of members of the dominant or non-marginalized groups. As a power relation, these processes produce a set of taken-for-granted assumptions about what “the student” looks like, as well as opening the space and/or the necessity to describe and/or identify the “at-risk” student.

*Who is “at-risk”?*

For a clearer picture of this operation, we can return to Figure 1 (Chapter Two, p. 69). If we look away from, rather than toward, the normative child who occupies the focus spot of schooling, then we find the “at-risk” children. Children who are poor, who are not-White, whose first spoken language is not English (or, in some instances, French), who are physically disabled, who are mentally challenged, who are not heterosexual, are identified as being “at-risk” (Heron, 1983; Oakes, 1988; Wells, 1990; Kozol, 1991; Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992; Uribe & Harbeck, 1992; Contenta, 1993; McLaren, 1994; Ghosh, 1996; Banks, 2001; Powell, McLaughlin, Savage, and Zehm, 2001). Also included as “at-risk” are children who are identified as intellectually gifted, who are at risk of dropping out of school because they are bored, unchallenged, or overlooked (see, for instance, Foster, 1993; Yennie-Donmoyer, 1993; Gallagher, 1995; Banks, 2001). Although in general these “intellectually gifted” children do occupy positions of social privilege<sup>9</sup>, they also fall outside

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There is an important point to make note of here: most (although not all) children who are identified as intellectually gifted are members of most or all socially privileged categories.

of the normative framework of conservative understandings and practices of schooling.

Some children who occupy one or more socially non-privileged positions do manage to maneuver through school quite “successfully;” likewise, some children who occupy every (or most) social positions of privilege do not make it through school either well, or at all. But I am not talking about individual children here; as with the category of “at-risk” children itself, I am talking about groups of children. When we examine closely who is identified as being “at-risk,” the discussions centre not on individual children, but on identified groups of children. As Donmoyer and Kos (1993) point out:

Educational research (and social science research in general)...does not even attempt to accommodate the idiosyncrasy of at-risk students because social science research...is about groups and categories of people, not individuals. It is about at-risk *students* not *an* at-risk student (p. 25, emphases in original).

And what is it that these children are at risk of or for? They are at risk of: dropping out of school (Wells, 1990; Dei et al, 1997), staying in school but dis-engaging from the academic curriculum (Solomon, 1994; Dei et al, 1997), underachieving academically (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Rimm, 1997), or being identified as “troubled” socially, behaviourally, or emotionally (McIntyre, 1992; Cambone, 1994; Ellis, 1997). The discourse of “at-risk” children produces categories of “problem” children (i.e. constituted subjects) and locates the problem in or through the social category (e.g. race, sex, class, gender, ability, including both mental and physical abilities, sexuality, and so forth) as attached to particular subjects, rather than locating the problem in the power relations that produce these categories of

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This is due not to any inherent biological supremacy of any one category over another, but due solely to the privileging of some ways of living, some kinds of knowledge, and some forms of cultural interaction over others.

marginalization. This analytic framework systematically deflects attention away from conservative understandings and practices of schooling, thereby allowing schooling to be seen and treated as a neutral process, and not as a problem in and of itself.

The category of “at-risk” children operates by producing difference as the problem. This fundamentally conservative ideology can only replicate the very relations of power attached to the production of categories of difference: the only reason these children are “at-risk” is because accepted understandings of the purpose of schooling place some children “at-risk.” They are not “at-risk” for any reason other than because they are placed in jeopardy through the simple act of coming to school. These are the children who are not “round pegs;” they do not fit into the prepared holes which constitute many contemporary conservative-based notions of schooling, and all the hammering we do to make them fit does irreparable harm to them.

When the categorization of children “at-risk” is taken up non-critically, is accepted inside a liberal (Macedo, 1998) understanding that “at-risk” children actually exist, the result is that

...many liberals are able to safely display their presumed benevolence toward a particular subordinate cultural group that they have labeled ‘at risk’ without having to accept that, because of their privileged position, they are part of a social order that created the very reality of oppression they want to study (p. xxviii).

Now, this is a fine point, a moment of tension which needs explication. I know that there are children who are poor, who come to school hungry every day. There are children whose material existence ensures that they will never be able to meet conservative-based ways of “doing school well.” There are children whose lives are not represented, or are mis-

represented, in their textbooks and other formal curriculum documents. There are children whose sexuality is erased, ignored, or actively held up to ridicule or hatred. These children exist; they come to our schools every day. I am not suggesting that they do not exist. However, as Donmoyer and Kos (1993) point out when discussing research into “at-risk” children: “We now know that no research is totally objective and that research ‘findings’ frequently tell us as much about who did the studying as they do about what was being studied” (pp. 8-9). The children are not “the problem;” their material conditions of existence are not “the problem” (although they are obviously problematic); the “problem” is that discourses and schooling practices which accept the conservative notion that these children do not fit ensure that these children will, in fact, not fit.

When children come to school without the material conditions which make school more easily attainable to them, when they come to school hungry, or beaten, or resentful, and the unwritten assumption which they then encounter at school is that they are none of these things, or that they should not be these things, their lived experience and their schooling collide with one another. The impact of schooling is such that some children come to believe that school, at least as they encounter it, is not about them and their lives. When they encounter texts, illustrations, classroom conversations, and activities in which they are not included (and occasionally are blatantly excluded or grossly misrepresented), it must become clear to them quite quickly that their lives are not the lives that school is intended for (Weis, 1990; Kozol, 1992; Kelly, 1993; Dei, 1996; Swope & Miner, 2000).

*Who put these children “at-risk”?*

Macedo (1998) contends, and I agree, that “...by locking children in material

conditions that are oppressive and dehumanizing we are invariably guaranteeing that they will be academically underachievers” (p. xxiv). One example which I use with preservice and practicing teachers to talk about the taken-for-granted assumptions of schooling, and the harm that is enacted for some children when they are locked into the material conditions that then guarantee that they will be academically underachievers, is to talk about homework. The teachers with whom I work are all quite familiar with homework; most of them have had a form of schooling which included copious amounts of homework over the years. Many of them, in their own teaching, have assigned homework. I ask them to think about and brainstorm together what assumptions are embedded within the assigning of homework. When teachers assign homework, there are often accompanying assumptions that:

1) *all children have a home.*

The reality is that some children who come to school do not have a home - they may be living in someone’s living room, or at a shelter. (For a comprehensive article on the needs of homeless children, see Rafferty, 1997-1998; see also Michaud, 1988.)

2) *the home children (are assumed to) have provides a safe environment in which to do the assigned homework.*

Some children spend their time at home hiding from an abusive parent, or spend after-school hours working for pay or providing child care for younger siblings in order that a parent may go to work.

3) *children have access to the material conditions and resources with which to do the homework.*

In the province of Nova Scotia, nearly 24% of children live at or below the official poverty



line (Centre for International Statistics, Canadian Council on Social Development website, February, 2002). This means that almost one-quarter of children live in a household where the basic needs for living - food, shelter, clothing - are insufficiently or barely met. This leaves little money available for colouring pencils, construction paper, magazines with pictures, and the like, which are often a component of homework projects.

*4) children have in their home access to literate, educated parents who have both the ability and the time available to assist children with their homework.*

More and more children live in households where there may be parents without the requisite educational skills themselves to be able to assist children, or homes where there is one parent working two jobs to financially provide for the needs of the family (see, for instance, Frieman, April, 1997).

The above listing is far from comprehensive; it is offered as an illustration of the kinds of responses teachers have come up with when asked to think about the taken-for-granted assumptions upon which the idea of homework rests. I share these responses and the critiques of them not to blame teachers for “assigning homework thoughtlessly,” but to point to the ways in which taken-for-granted assumptions may operate to further marginalize students who are already marginalized. I have caught myself standing inside of these taken-for-granted assumptions in my teaching practices; one day I made a comment in class about Education students being financially middle-class and privileged, this privilege being manifest (to me, at least) in their ability to attend university to obtain a second degree. One woman came to me later to tell me that she was a single parent of four children, living on social assistance while she obtained a degree that might enable her to gain paid employment

in order to support herself and her family. While my comment that day in class had not been disparaging of people whose income is limited to social assistance, she wanted me to know that in fact not all university students are financially middle-class, nor did she view obtaining an education degree as a social privilege, but rather as one of a limited number of strategies available to her to eventually be able to seek paid employment which would support her family.

When teachers and I have outlined the taken-for-granted assumptions which foundationally inform the assigning of homework, and then critiqued those assumptions together, the responses are quite varied, typically ranging from vows to never assign homework to discussions about how to more respectfully manage the problem of homework. What has been common over the several years in which I have used this example has been the articulation of surprise over the hidden meanings connected to such a seemingly simple and common undertaking. This is the task of becoming critically self-reflexive and aware; to leave a conversation thinking differently/consciously about something which one has previously assumed as a given. Some teachers still assign homework after this conversation - the intent is never to stop teachers from assigning homework. Rather, the point is for each of us to be/come conscious of every action, gesture, intervention, assignment which we utilize, to scrutinize it to see if it is embedded in the unconscious taken-for-granted of privilege.

When taken-for-granted assumptions go unnoticed or unchallenged, harm is done. When stereotypes are supported and perpetuated by “scientific studies” or empirical data which purports to show X or Y, with no accompanying acknowledgment of or analysis of the

underlying social conditions and factors which have or may have had an influence, visible or hidden, on the results obtained<sup>10</sup>, children and teachers are harmed. Children are harmed when teachers carry stereotypes and misconceptions into their classroom practices. Teachers are harmed when they are supported by “evidence” to believe these stereotypes and misconceptions about their students. Macedo (1998) states that “[o]nce...underachievement is guaranteed by...oppressive conditions, it is then very easy ...to conclude that [for example] blacks are genetically wired to be intellectually inferior to whites” (p. xxiv). Or to conclude that children who live in families of poverty have parents who do not care enough to send them to school clean, fed, and materially equipped for the day ahead. Or that all social assistance recipients are teenage girls who had babies on purpose so that they could live an easy life on welfare and never have to work. Or that children with mental and/or physical challenges, particularly when those challenges are severe, are taking away from the education of non-challenged children in classrooms through the requirement that teachers devote most of their time to one or two children. Unfortunately, I must say here that every one of the preceding comments has been articulated by one or more teachers whom I have encountered in classrooms in the past seven years. This is why I believe so passionately, vehemently, that there is an ethical requirement that teachers be engaged in the process not just of critical thinking, but of critical self-reflection, founded upon an understanding of the operations of power, privilege, and marginalization.

Again, here, it is important to me to note that the above is not offered as a bashing

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Macedo (1998) refers to this process as “scientism” (p. xx).

of or blaming of teachers, individually or as a group. While the above statements have been made in classes where I was the course instructor, frequently they are made in a context and a spirit of teachers genuinely wanting to be the best teachers they can be, and trying to sort through an incredibly complex set of relationships and requirements which take place within their classrooms. When these statements are made in class, we take them up together, and try to follow the statement and the sentiment through the operations of power relations, with a view to understanding some of the processes which help to inform where the sentiment is situated in the social context of the classroom.

I will offer here one such occurrence, offered here as a means to clarify what I am saying above. A few years ago, I made an off-hand comment in an equity class one day to the effect that “of course, you all know the typical signs of child abuse.” I thought they did know; they were second year Education students, and this was in my first year teaching with this faculty. As a therapist, and just in general, I assumed that they would have had a course which dealt with these issues. Forty-five minutes later, I realized I was wrong, and a colleague and I offered a series of workshops over the next several years on recognizing and reporting child abuse. One night, a woman offered a scenario out of her own experience of working in a child-care facility. This facility was open seven days a week, from seven in the morning until midnight, and the fees were nominal (one dollar a day per child). The woman described a young mother of three children, all pre-schoolers, who lived on social assistance, who brought her children to the child-care facility every morning when it opened, and picked them up at bed time each night. The woman who was speaking was certain that this young mother ought to have been charged with child-neglect. My co-facilitator and I, along with

several of the students in the room, opened up this assertion/assumption, and together we explored what it might look like to be a very young mother of three small children, living on social assistance, and how, rather than seeing this mother as neglectful, we might be able to “read” her practices as providing the very best possible care for her children within her limited circumstances. She was ensuring that they spent every day in a warm, welcoming, environment, where they were fed, stimulated, and cared for. It is this kind of critical rereading of lives (both the lives of others and of our own) which I believe is an integral component both of the ethos and the “doing” of a social justice pedagogy.

*Meeting the children who are “at-risk”*

Frequently, discussions of “at-risk” students articulate and explore the symptoms of difference as if these symptoms were the cause of “the problem.” Theorizing a social justice pedagogy would suggest that we think beyond the symptoms. We must open the space to ask: “Who is at risk?” and “Who put these students at risk?” (Macedo, 1998, p. xxvii, emphasis added). Failure to interrogate the foundational assumptions of the category of “at-risk”

leads to an educational process of credentialing ‘experts’ in risk prevention via a quick-fix intervention that leaves the inherent ideology that informs the oppressive conditions of students at risk unproblematized and unchanged. These so-called experts...who are mostly white, middle-class individuals, are not encouraged to engage in analysis of the ‘at risk’ reality and the ideology that informs it, which prevents them from developing a critical understanding of the interdependence between the ‘at risk’ reality and the socio-economic and socio-cultural context that gives rise to the ‘at risk’ reality in the first place (Macedo, 1998, p. xxvii).

Gary Ferraro (2001) cites an example of a study done with children who were defined as “at-risk” for underachievement in their schooling. In the Ferraro example, he discusses

the work of educational anthropologist Cathie Jordan and the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) in Hawaii. Ferraro provides a discussion of the work of Jordan to illustrate what can happen for “at-risk” children when their home environment is accepted as the central and informing focus of their schooling experiences, with the practices of schooling adjusted to meet the students’ home culture. As Ferraro (2001) describes the situation:

children of Hawaiian ancestry, particularly those from low income families, have [for decades] been chronic underachievers in the public school system. Classroom teachers often describe Hawaiian children as lazy, uncooperative, uninvolved, and disinterested in school” (p. 198).

When Jordan undertook to research the home lives of these children, she found that at home the children received “minimal supervision from parents...[they worked] together in cooperative sibling groups ...to organize their own household work routines...young children learn to perform their household tasks by observing their older siblings and adults” (Ferraro, 2001, p. 198). In contrast to the home culture and work ethic learned there, these same children encountered in their schooling a “classroom...almost totally teacher dominated. The teacher makes the assignments, sets the rules, and manages the resources of the classroom. Children are controlled by the classroom rather than being responsible for it” (Ferraro, 2001, p. 199). When teachers of Hawaiian children altered their classroom practices by

minimiz[ing] verbal instruction, withdraw[ing] from direct supervision, and allow[ing] students to take responsibility for organizing and assigning specific tasks...Hawaiian students became more actively involved in their own education, and consequently their achievement levels improved (Ferraro, 2001, p. 199).

The above example illustrates two key elements in the discourse on “at-risk” students. The first is a process in and through which the Hawaiian students are defined as “at-risk” to not succeed in school. The second is the process through which cultural difference is identified as the central problem. In this instance, the solution is to match school-culture to their home-culture, recognizing that the rote-learning and hyper-direction that characterized their schooling processes inclined the students to disconnect or disengage. While this strategy seems to solve the “problem,” it neatly sidesteps the issue of how these students came to be defined as “at-risk” in the first place. Additionally, this strategy fails to interrogate what constitutes “success.” The particular outcomes of schooling are never called into question as desirable; the already accepted outcomes determine what constitutes success, and therefore also determine who is “at-risk.”

In their book At-risk students: Portraits, policies, programs, and practices, Donmoyer and Kos (1993), through the work of several authors, introduce their readers to several children, some of whom would be immediately recognizable under prevailing definitions of “at-risk,” and a few who are not. In an effort to individualize what is so often an alienating discourse, wherein children become lumped into homogenous groups, I share here a short synopsis of some of the children we meet through these case studies. Along with the accompanying insightful responses of the articles’ authors, each story shared offers different ways to conceptualize and understand both the children and the ways in which the conservative discourse of “at-risk” operates in and through these children’s lives.

Kos (1993a) offers us the story of Ben, a fifteen year old reading disabled adolescent; Ben is described by the author as being “...in many respects the classic at-risk student: He is

poor, black, male, a bit hyperactive, the victim of a troubled home life, a problem reader” (p. 49). As Kos developed a relationship over time with Ben, she came to see “...the witty, sassy young man...usually kept hidden under a bored exterior” (p. 53). Ultimately puzzled by what she observed to be an enormous discrepancy between the young man she had come to know and teacher reports from his various classes, Kos finally asked for and received permission to look at Ben’s school records from the time he entered school. There, she found that he had been placed in a special education class within weeks of entering the first grade; the teacher who referred him for the testing which resulted in the special education placement reported that:

He is disruptive, hyperactive, and craves attention...He stays in trouble constantly...and is always picking fights with peers. His school work is poor due to his inability to sit still and to follow directions (cited in Kos, 1993a, p. 62).

Ben was moved first into a

...classroom for the educable mentally retarded [sic] for ‘therapeutic’ reasons...eight months later Ben was retested and found...[to be] ineligible for EMR...Ben was placed in a learning disability classroom...[where he] remained until fifth grade, when ‘severe problems with peer interaction’ led to his placement in [a severe behavior handicaps classroom]. He stayed there for one year, was reported to do very well, and then was placed back in LD [sic] where he...remained (p. 62).

What Kos also discovered upon reading Ben’s records was that during the first grade, at the time the classroom teacher referred him for testing because he was “disruptive, hyperactive, and craves attention,” Ben was living in one of a series of foster homes (p. 62). Kos recounts her shock after reading Ben’s reports, and asks “Hadn’t anyone considered the emotional stress Ben must have been under in first grade, not having a real family, craving



attention?...[H]e got a label instead of understanding” (p. 63). Kos also offers a self-reflective moment which I find both deeply moving and critically important. In describing her expectations prior to meeting Ben, Kos (1993a) shares that:

I thought that I would find that this student was hindering his own learning through his own behaviours. In my classroom experience, it had frequently occurred to me that such students [in a learning-disabilities classroom] did not understand the importance of reading in their lives. Understanding, of course, assumed that the students should accept my view of why reading was important. ...[M]y expectations were overwhelmed by the barrage of information and emotion uncovered in this study, and I ended up studying myself as well as my student, Ben. This became, in a sense, not just the story of a struggling young man, but also the story of a struggling teacher...(p. 50).

Kos concludes that

...when I thought about [it], it slowly began to occur to me, that this wasn't just Ben's story, because I had been wrong from the start. He didn't do much of anything to become reading disabled, a failure in school. Most of it had been done to him by an impersonal, ineffective system (p. 71).

Ben's story is unable to be distilled into a few succinct sentences without missing completely the essence that is Ben and his life. Indeed, it would appear that turning Ben into a few dry sentences may well have contributed significantly to the years-long travesty that is the story of Ben's travel through the education system. At the end of her article, Kos (1993a) tells us that Ben has moved from middle school to high school, where he is still struggling in a learning-disabilities class (p. 74). I find myself adding up the years and realize that Ben is an adult now; I wonder if he finished school, where he is, and how he is. I fear that there are far too many “Bens” in - and not in - our schools, “at-risk” because the system they encounter/ed is not able to see these children as anything but a categorized “problem.”

Thomas Barone (1993) introduces us to Billy Charles Barnett, “...a fifteen year old

nominated by the vice-principal as the student least likely to remain in Dusty Hollow [Tennessee] Middle School” (p. 79). In contrast, Barone (1993) describes himself as “...a middle-aged urban academic who, secure in a tenured university position, will *never* leave school” (p. 79, emphasis in original). Billy Charles is “at-risk” because his out-of-school life and his in-school experiences collide violently with one another. As Barone shares with us the story of his meeting with Billy Charles, once again we are forced to ask “just who is it that is ‘at-risk’ and why?” Billy Charles is extremely intelligent, quick-witted, and knowledgeable about his rural, woods-dominated life; as Barone shares the story of their meeting, it becomes clear that Billy Charles is indeed “at-risk” of dropping out of school as soon as he can. Barone (1993) leaves me wondering whether this is actually the horrible end result that educators are trained to believe it to be. Billy Charles is more than adequately equipped with all he needs to be able to live the life he has envisioned and is actively shaping for himself, living in the woods of Tennessee, hunting, trapping, and fishing. Formal schooling has nothing to offer him to supplement what he already needs and has; as Barone (1993) says: “For the most part...school and the world of Billy Charles do not overlap. On weekdays, he is locked in his school’s embrace, but he is often dreaming of another time, another place, imagining that he is free...” (p. 84). Barone (1993) ends up asking himself and his readers to consider

Could it be that Billy Charles’s economic well-being is jeopardized only by our persistent attempts to inculcate values and behaviours that are, in fact, counterproductive to the successful conduct of his line of work? What use after all, are passivity and punctuality to denizens of the forest? (p. 86)

Not all students who are struggling to leave, or find ways to remain safely in, school

are Billy Charles with his adult ability to support himself in the hills and woods of Tennessee, obviously. But the words of Barone (1993) may/could serve as a reminder that our adult and learned experiences and expectations of and for children may not be of much use for some of the children we teach. When students are “locked in school’s embrace, imagining that they are free,” I would suggest we need to re-envision just what we believe we are doing for these children? What, in the final analysis, are they learning from such an experience?

Karin L. Dahl (1993) shares the story of Ellen, a “deferring learner,” who in kindergarten was a top-level pre-reader and by the end of Grade One, having encountered a learn-to-read program that in no way matched her learning style, had dropped to the bottom of her class. Ellen’s quiet determination and skill at “doing school” resulted in an overworked teacher not noticing that Ellen was not comprehending, but copying by rote and coping as best she could (p. 99). By the end of Grade One, Ellen “appeared to have decided...that she was just not a reader, that reading was for someone else” (Dahl, 1993, p. 101). Dahl (1993) concludes that due to Ellen’s encountering a skills-based beginning reading program which she could not comprehend, the possibility exists that “...the quiet decline will continue and Ellen will be among the many learners that could have become readers but didn’t” (p. 101). Ellen was placed on the road to identification as an “at-risk” learner within two short years of beginning school, and largely through meeting a learn-to-read program that not only did not enable her to read, it discouraged her from even believing that she could learn to read.

Karen L. Ford (1993) introduces us to Andy and Libby, each of whom have very

different but highly developed reading and writing strategies for doing school. She ends by asking us to consider whether traditional “at-risk” factors are really the problem, or “is the problem really with schools that ask both too little and too much and that, in the process, put all students, in one way or another, at risk?” (Ford, 1993, p. 110). Kos (1993b) tells Karen’s story, describing how gender stereotyping can put students “at-risk.” In this instance, the reader is directed to an area of “at-risk” that is simply unnoticeable without the analysis provided by Kos. Karen is fourteen, in Grade Seven, and reads at a preprimary level (Kos, 1993b, pp. 113-114). Karen is also extremely “feminine, in the traditional sense” (p. 113). Kos (1993) notes that “Karen [is described as] affectionate, cheerful, childlike, gentle, sensitive, cooperative, soft spoken, warm - all traits listed on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (BEM 1974) as denoting perceptions of desirable feminine traits” (p. 116). One of her teachers, upon being asked what she thought would happen to Karen, responded that she would “...probably graduate from high school because she is such a nice person. She will get married and have a family. She will never be able to hold any kind of job besides very minimal jobs...” (Kos, 1993b, p. 116). Karen is indeed “at-risk,” although few would recognize that her riskedness is that of never being an independent, fully functioning adult. Her unassuming passage through school with her teachers’ collusion means that Karen will be a nice, dependent person until, and after, she “...finds a man who will take care of her” (Kos, 1993b, p. 116).

We are also introduced to Victoria, a pregnant teenager (Herr, 1993); Andrew, a gifted and “at-risk” student (Yennie-Donmoyer, 1993); and Alston and Everetta, respectively a gay man and a lesbian woman (Sears, 1993). In each of these instances, as with the others

described in more detail above, the students we meet and the authors' recountings of their "at-riskedness" challenge us to re-think our conceptions of categories of "at-risk" children.

Finally, we meet Paul. Paul is the only case study offered who is not a child. Paul is 22 years old, severely mentally challenged, and has resided in a "...ward in a state school for persons with mental retardation [sic]...since he was three and one half years old" (Gleason, 1993, pp. 173 & 176). Gleason (1993) recounts in detail an interaction which takes place one day over the course of more than two hours, and which involves Paul and eight different staff. The encounter begins seemingly quite simply, with Paul trying to walk on a wet floor, and being restrained by the janitor (p. 177). When Paul resists, more and more staff become involved. What no one ever seems to notice, according to Gleason, is that there might be a reason for Paul's initial resistance to the janitor, and then his increasing distress, which manifested in pinching, spitting, and pulling away from others who tried to intervene. Paul's "foster grandmother" (a volunteer who came to visit Paul) had arrived; typically, she took Paul for walks, which he enjoyed. Upon hearing her voice, Paul rose to go and meet her, and in so doing, walked on the wet floor. When the janitor tried to restrain him, Paul resisted. As Gleason (1993) explains:

For the custodian, the context is clear: Paul needs to stay off the wet floor. For Paul, the context is unclear. ...Paul does not understand that the floor is wet, or that there is a rule. The custodian does not know what is essential for Paul; Paul needs to be calmly introduced to what is expected of him. Quick or sudden moves which define limits that he does not understand escalate counter measures by Paul. ...The event puts the participants at cross purposes (p. 184).

I have included the stories of Ben, Billy Charles, Ellen, Andy, Libby, Karen, Victoria, Andrew, Alston, Everetta, and Paul, some at length, some more quickly, for two reasons.

First, each of their stories gives us a “real child” to see, instead of a category. To understand “at-risk” children within a context is imperative to changing how we understand “at-riskedness.” Second, each of the authors who provide us with these case studies also provide an analysis of the “at-risk” discourse which ruptures current conservative understandings of this discourse and subsequent identification of children. To break with these accepted understandings, to critically interrogate who is “at-risk,” and why they are “at-risk,” and what role educators and the education system play in this designation, is an integral component of this theorizing of a/my social justice pedagogy.

As I have illustrated through the above discussion, particularly with the inclusion of the several case studies from Kos & Donmeyer’s (1993) text, the categorization of children as being “at-risk” frequently is based on the non-conformity of these “at-risk” students with the categories of social privilege. In and through mainstream-centred schooling practices which are predicated on the “normalized” child, children who are outside of one or more of these privileged categories are constituted as “at-risk” in large part because they do not fit inside of these particularized notions of the child/student who comes to school.

To sum up, then: although there are numerous children who for a variety of reasons do not “do well” in school, one of the primary reasons some children do not do well in school is because they are placed inside an already constructed category and are then treated as if they belong inside that category. The box that is the “identified at-risk category” is built; then, children who fit the defining characteristics of that category are placed inside the box. From that point on, they are read as if they are indeed “at-risk,” which does indeed then place them “at-risk.” Their individual and idiosyncratic ways of reading, writing, speaking,

playing, daydreaming, dressing, eating, or behaving are not understood through the lens of “this child;” rather, they are understood through the lens of “this at-risk child.” Perhaps, in the environment that constitutes schooling and its practices, we would do well to heed the question asked by Spindler:

The question should not be, “Do they deviate?” or even “How do they deviate?”, but rather, “Are they adapting well (functionally) to their respective environments?” (cited in Donmoyer & Kos, 1993, p. 30).

When the answer to the last question posed by Spindler is “No, they are not adapting well to their environment” perhaps it is the environment that requires examination and intervention, not the child. Developing an understanding of the ways in which the discourse of “at-risk” children produces and maintains these children as “at-risk,” in fact constitutes and guarantees that they will be “at-risk,” will go a long way toward offering the possibility of shaping an environment that meets children where they live, rather than expecting that children will learn to live in an unwelcoming and hostile environment. Perhaps, in reconceptualizing “student engagement” through the operations of power relations, in opening up and interrogating notions of “engagement” such that we are able to make spaces in schooling practices and processes which are more inclusive of marginalized students and their lives, we may also be able to find the spaces to interrogate and evaluate the notions of “at-riskedness.”

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **SOME ELEMENTS IN THEORIZING A/MY SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY**

To many people, questions about education and questions about social justice belong in separate baskets. Education concerns schools, colleges and universities, whose business is to pass knowledge on to the next generation. Social justice is about income, employment, pensions or physical assets like housing. Governments have separate departments for them, and so should our minds. The schools have no business getting mixed up with welfare; their job is to teach.

It is easier to believe in this separation if you are yourself well-paid and well-educated (Connell, 1993, p. 11).

I begin this chapter by returning, for a moment, to the “cat’s cradle” metaphor articulated in the introductory chapter. In “cat’s cradle,” the players use the pattern from one set of manoeuvres in order to construct a different, and often more complex, pattern. I am using a similar process in this work. In the second chapter, I proposed three nominal categories as a strategy for thinking about the relations between conceptions of curriculum and the purposes and practices of schooling. In understanding student engagement as a process and as a power relation, the work of chapter three, the network of cross-connections in the “cat’s cradle” that this text produces becomes necessarily more complex. In order to theorize a social justice pedagogy, it is important that these conversations not be held in isolation from one another. When aspects of schooling are discussed in isolation from one another, the interconnectedness of the various aspects which inform and structure schooling are either overlooked entirely or are rendered invisible. The discussions in the previous two chapters, while important in their own right, should also be read as elements in a process of theorizing a/my social justice pedagogy. In this context, a critical/ “post-” framework provides the analytic lever to explore and to understand power as relational and as



processual. Following from this analytic frame, other schooling processes (like student engagement) can then be understood as relations in and of themselves.

My own process of theorizing a social justice pedagogy has been developed over time, through reading, living, teaching, reflecting critically on my life. Although there are a number of writers and/or educators working in the area of social justice teaching, the very endeavour of critical, socially just teaching is, at best, an inexact “recipe” (McLaren, 1994). The particular “practices” which result from this kind of pedagogy may look different for each pedagogue who undertakes this endeavour. Social justice pedagogy is contextual, and must therefore take into account the operations of privilege and marginalization at work in and through the lived realities of particular teachers and students. In short, there is no one, concrete, absolute “definition” of social justice teaching; my own theorizing has been grounded in some of the principles of critical thinking and critical pedagogy, and informed by Freire’s (1998) articulation of a humanistic ethic. Pedagogy can be both deeply personal and intensely political. Everything I am, everything I have experienced, everything I “know” contributes to how I “do” this work; theorizing a social justice pedagogy is an ongoing, cumulative, context-relevant, analytic process. There are, however, some key elements which have been integral to my theorizing process.

Each of the segments in this chapter provides a brief glimpse into a substantive body of literature, in some cases into a sub-discipline. My intent is to provide the reader with a sense of what these conversations look like and how they inform a/my theorizing of a social justice pedagogy. A comprehensive critical review of each of these discourses is beyond the scope of this chapter and of this project. My aim here is to provide the reader with a place

to follow my journey through these ideas. It is my hope that this text will operate as a springboard to further exploration and theorizing.

I begin this chapter by locating the roots of social justice pedagogy historically; I do so in order to provide a sense of the context in and through which this concept has developed. I then discuss four elements which have been central in the theorizing/development of a/my social justice pedagogy: a rejection of the notion of neutrality, followed by an articulation of an ethic of care; critical thinking and critical pedagogy; self-reflectivity and self-reflexivity; and, a utopian vision and political action. I end this chapter with a discussion which demonstrates some of the intersections and interconnections between these elements. This brief concluding section demonstrates the ways in which the “whole” of a social justice pedagogy is greater than the sum of its parts.

*“Historical snapshots”*

In this section I offer some historical snapshots to demonstrate that while the term “social justice pedagogy” may be new, the ideas that inform and sustain it have been around for a very long time. A genealogy of this concept is far beyond the scope and purpose of this dissertation; however, education is a political and historicized process, and to write as if social justice pedagogy has sprung forth only in the last decades of the twentieth century would be inaccurate and misleading. I offer the following as a quick flip through the “photo album” of ideas and draw your attention to a few significant moments/thinkers.

While the phrase “social justice pedagogy” may be a late-twentieth century invention (Simon, 1992), the ideas and ideals that inform and influence this concept are certainly not. As Connell (1993) points out: “Questions about ‘education and justice’ are certainly not new.

In the Western philosophical tradition the first great treatise on education, Plato's *Republic*, was also the first great treatise on justice"<sup>1</sup> (p. 15). In the mid-nineteenth century, Bronson Alcott, a Transcendentalist (and a contemporary of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau), was both living and publishing ideas and ideals of social justice. Alcott believed that:

...all knowledge and moral guidance springs from inner sources and it is the teacher's role to help these unfold in a beneficial way. ...[Further, as a Transcendentalist, Alcott] believed that people are born good...[and] possess a power called intuition. ...He introduced art, music, nature study, and physical education to his classes at a time where these subjects weren't taught (<http://www.louisamayalcott.org/bronsontext.html>).

Alcott's influences and ideals concerning education are most popularly available through reading the works of his daughter, Louisa May Alcott. In Little men: Life at Plumfield with Jo's boys (1871) in particular, L.M. Alcott's representation of Plumfield, her fictional visionary and radical school where boys and girls are educated together, with an emphasis not only on "book knowledge" but also physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being, was inspired by and based on her family's experience of living on the "...Utopian...community of Fruitlands...at Harvard, Massachusetts" (<http://www.colonial.net/alcottweb/neighborhood/NER/alcottba.html>).

In 1883, Lester Frank Ward published his Dynamic sociology. Arguing against the "inexorable operation of natural selection throughout the universe," Ward argued that the evolutionary process of humans is fundamentally distinct from that of plants and animals:

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I include this quote from Connell's (1993) work to point only toward the long history of the connections between education and social justice. While Plato's *Republic* may have been a treatise on justice, it was justice only for some, the elite and privileged classes.

the “...emergence of mind...supplants the relatively static phase of genetic evolution with a new dynamic phase. ...[The] mind at work...[is] telic, purposeful, and consciously directed toward worthy social ends” (cited in Cremin, 1964, pp. 96-97). More than one hundred years later, Freire (1998) argues a similar notion of the distinctness of humans from other life based on the ability of the human mind to think and to choose. Aronowitz (1998) confirms that “for Freire, humans alone have critical capacities” (p. 11). It is this critical capacity distinct to humans that Freire (1998) argues allows us to recognize “...the unfinishedness of our being...[which is] essential to our human condition” (p. 52).

John Dewey’s ideas had (and continue to have) a profound influence on how teachers teach and how we think about teaching. In 1897, in responding to a request from the editor of The School Journal for his pedagogic creed, Dewey replied that “education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform...the teacher is engaged not simply in the training of individuals but in the formation of the proper social life...” (cited in Cremin, 1964, p. 100). Although Dewey was not the first to recognize that schools are a significant social institution, the popularity of his works marks the emergence into popular thinking of this idea as foundational to how we think about schools. Dewey contended that the traditional role of society was to educate. In the shift from agrarian society “where every youngster shared in meaningful work and where the entire industrial process stood revealed to any observant child” (Cremin, 1964, p. 117) to an industrial society, schools had become isolated from reality. To overcome this isolation of schools and their curriculum, Dewey advocated a transformation of schooling. His image of these “new schools” was to “make each one of our schools an embryonic community life;” these embryonic communities would “*reflect* the

life of the larger society...[in order] to *improve* the larger society by making it more ‘worthy, lovely, and harmonious’” (Cremin, 1964, p. 118, emphases in original).

I believe that many of Dewey’s ideas were misread; most particularly, the notion of child-centred pedagogy as advocating a hands-off approach to the “nature of the child” has resulted in the “soft-liberalism” (Portelli, 1994-1995) which has shaped the face of schooling practices and beliefs for many decades. John Dewey’s (1900) The school and society struck a chord for me when first I encountered it several years ago. Here I found what C. Wright Mills (1959) refers to as “the sociological imagination” (a quality of mind which enables its possessor to make analytic connections between the private world of individuals with their social contexts) was at work as I read this text. I found many moments of resonance; Dewey spoke of the need to “consider the relationship of the school to the life and development of the children in the school” (pp. 30-31). He points out that attempts to treat children passively and as a mass of coherent bodies becomes disrupted at the very moment that we introduce actual children into the classroom: “[t]he moment children act they individualize themselves; they cease to be a mass and become...intensely distinctive beings...” (p. 33). He conjectures an “ideal family” and then takes the characteristics which would make up this ideal family and applies them to “the ideal school” (p. 35). In this ideal school, “all the media necessary to further the growth of the child [are centered there]. [The child is] ...learning...certainly, but living primarily, and learning through and in relation to this living” (p. 36). Finally, he identifies four impulses through which, he believes, children learn: the social (conversation and communication) (p. 43); the constructive (making things) (p. 44); an impulse to inquire (finding things out) (p. 44) and; the expressive (artistic) (p. 44). Working with and through

these four impulses ought, he posits, to be the ways in which schools teach: to take advantage of and use these impulses seems a logical way in which to build schooling practices. These are the moments which resonated for me as I read this work.

Before I move into a critique of two aspects of Dewey's work which are troubling to me, I offer a comment regarding Dewey and the ways in which his work has often been taken up. It is my impression that Dewey was mis-read and/or misinterpreted, and that this misinterpretation then resulted in particular understandings of how to be a teacher which are still common in contemporary classrooms. For instance, Dewey (1900), in discussing the "old education," sums up schooling as "...the center of gravity is outside the child. It is in the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere you please except in the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself [sic]" (p. 34). In advocating for a shift, Dewey (1900) continues:

On that basis there is not much to be said about the *life* of the child. A good deal might be said about the studying of the child, but the school is not the place where the child *lives*. Now the change which is coming into our education is the shifting of the center of gravity. ...In this case the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he [sic] is the center about which they are organized (p. 34, emphases in original).

In classrooms, this shift of the child to the centre has resulted in a ubiquitous discourse of child-centredness, which interpret the child and their behaviours as being somehow inviolate. But I do not read this as Dewey's intent; rather, I read the above as a statement from Dewey that consideration of the child ought to be at the centre of all that is thought about, and practiced in, schools. Shunah Chung and Daniel Walsh (2000) suggest that misreadings of Dewey's work may be attributed to:

Dewey's habit of describing at length the position he was critiquing has resulted in his being quoted out of context. In The Child and the Curriculum he wrote: 'The child is the starting-point, the centre, and the end. His development, his growth, is the ideal. It alone furnishes the standard. To the growth of the child all studies are subservient...' This was *not* Dewey's position, but his description of the developmentalist position which he criticized. (p. 230, emphasis in original).

There is a tenacious clinging to a particular interpretation of Dewey even one hundred years after he wrote this text. I believe that there is a strong conservative foundation which informs this tenacity of a child-as-centre conception; if one can justify ways to treat each child "as an individual," then there is no requirement to do more than shepherd any child through the daily life of school at their own pace. When this practice is folded into conversations about the nature and/or purposes of schooling, this focus on the "being" of the child as being somehow sacred or untouchable, deflects attention from a critical analysis of the child within larger social contexts. This has resulted in the erasure of the impact on children of their race, sex, gender, class, sexuality, and ability. Portelli and Vibert (2001) emphasize this tendency when they suggest that:

...one could argue that in the West we actually encourage individualism rather than genuine diversity; that is, while individual differences are accepted, that is not the case with social differences such as race and gender. One has to be careful not to conflate a sort of apolitical individualism with democracy (p. 79)

My own thoughts on the misinterpretation of Dewey's work aside, however, I find that I do react with dismay to some of Dewey's ideas and statements, most particularly some of his language usages, and the generalized ways in which he speaks of children as if they come from a homogenized social class. Now, in fairness, two of my chief concerns with Dewey's writing may simply be a result of the accepted way of speaking in 1900 then being

read a century later through a different lens. Dewey speaks of the “instincts” of children; I have an immense amount of difficulty with the employment of this word, and it is not simply a difficulty of semantics. An instinct is defined as: “behaviours that occur in all like members of a species, even when there seems to have been no opportunity for them to have been learned” (Pinel, 1990, p. 21). Further to this, a second definition of instinct states that it is “an innate tendency or response of a given species to act in ways that are essential to its existence, development, and preservation” (The Reader’s Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1977, p. 700). Using the concept “instinct” in reference to human behaviour implicitly grounds that behaviour in the body, making that behaviour somehow “essential” for all humans. When Dewey speaks of the instincts of children, then, I react with dismay and find myself beginning a refutation of what he writes. I need often to remind myself that the employment of this word in 1900 may well have been simply a product of that social context.

However, even taking the socio-historical context into account, I am still troubled by the ways in which the concept instinct is invoked. Foucault (1978) suggests that the operations of bio-power regulate sexuality by regulating desire, and that they do so by first embedding desire in the body. Since desire is understood to emerge from within, the operations of bio-power police sexuality by policing desire, and they do so through the constitution of subjects who regulate their own desires. A similar thing happens when human behaviours that are largely the result of social/cultural learning and/or practice get talked about as if these behaviours were somehow “natural” or embedded in the body via instincts. The phrase “boys will be boys,” I suggest, is absolutely rooted in an ideology that



gendered behaviour emerges from the “nature” of sex<sup>2</sup>.

As Butler (1990) so eloquently argues, the “trouble” with gender is that it does not, in fact, follow from particularly sexed bodies. Rather, gender precedes the processes through which we distinguish, delineate, and/or articulate the differences between differently sexed bodies. Ultimately, the trouble with assumptions about the “nature” of children (or women, or men, or race, etc.) is that the social processes - like language and/or systems of meaning and knowledge production - always already inform or shape what we understand. In this way, “human nature” is inevitably formed/informed in and through social processes.

The issue for me is not a question about whether or not boys will be boys, but rather one of how that expectation operates as part of a power relation that ultimately results in a binary framework which requires that persons of the male persuasion behave like boys and persons of the female persuasion behave like girls, however that expectation is defined in a given social/cultural/historical context.

The reason I raise this concern here and elaborate at length upon it is that John Dewey has had a profound impact on schooling processes and practices. He was a noted and prolific writer, and his works and ideas have been an integral component of schooling practices, and thinking about schooling, for over a century. The degree to which his work has directly influenced how we understand schooling is immense; more than one hundred years after he

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A comprehensive critique of the nature of sex is beyond the scope of this work. There is an existent substantial body of literature which addresses this concept. See, for instance: Benedict, 1935/1971, Patterns of culture; Mead, 1950/1960, Sex and temperament in three primitive societies; Fausto-Sterling, 1985, Myths of gender: Biological theories about women and men.

began publishing, his works are quoted as being pertinent yet. To not then raise concerns about an innocent-seeming word which has such a tremendous impact on how his work might be used in thinking about schooling would be antithetical to my work.

My second concern with Dewey's work is with his generalized statements about children. Although he writes as if he is talking about children generally, thus including all children within his work, the social context in which he wrote did most certainly not include all children as a homogenized group. In 1900, schools were still racially segregated by law. Many children of poor or working class parents did not attend school at that time, but went to work for wages. Children who were mentally and/or physically challenged rarely attended school. So when Dewey talks about the education of children, he is talking about the education of some children, not all children. The generous read would be, once again, to say that we must remember to read Dewey within the context of his time; if it were possible to read outside of the context of influence and impact, I would not be so concerned that "some children" are read as "all children". However, this process is one of the ways that the realities of people who are marginalized are systematically overlooked.

In 1922, L.T. Hobhouse published The elements of social justice, wherein he states that:

Acts and institutions are good not because they suit a majority, but because they make the nearest possible approach to a good shared by every single person whom they affect (quoted in Connell, 1993, p. 16).

Hobhouse identifies another strand of what would become known as social justice pedagogy - a good shared by all. Seventy years later, Lewis and Karin (1994) have a similar vision:

...the first step toward education that is truly democratic is honouring - in

practice, not through rhetoric - a commitment to creating possibilities for *all* of our students (pp. 204-205, emphasis added).

Through time, we see the emergence of notions of democratic schooling coming through the lives and conversations of some educators. By the middle of the twentieth century, some of the most profound social justice pedagogies were being practiced in racially segregated Black schools. Several contemporary writers/educators have discussed their intensely political schooling. Cross (1998) and hooks (1994) both discuss the political atmosphere which pervaded their schooling experiences while they attended all-Black schools in the United States. hooks (1994) reflects that "...my all-black grade schools became the location where I experienced learning as revolution. ...For black folks teaching - educating - was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle" (p. 2). Cross (1998), in situating herself and her teaching practices, relates her experiences of school as a child. She recounts:

...[T]he foremost mission of the teachers who taught me in segregated schools in Alabama...[was the] preparation of the black boys and girls in their classrooms to continue the struggle for freedom for all people. That was the overarching purpose driving their work. ...They did not wave a banner of liberalism or shout a mantra of teaching for social transformation. Their work seemed to be simple and unpretentious. Yet it was very powerful. ...They communicated in their own way that what we were engaged in was not just a struggle for our own freedom but for the freedom of all people (pp. 32-33).

I remind the reader of my argument articulated in Chapter Two, that curriculum development does not follow a neat and ordered time line of evolution. Rather, as demonstrated both there and in the above "historical snapshots," key elements in the eventual explicit naming of social justice as a pedagogical endeavour have been a part of

conversations about both the practices and assumptions of the purposes of schooling, for a very long time. Through the above brief illustrative moments, we can see some of these key elements as they were posited by the people associated with them: Plato connects education with justice; Alcott introduces to his schooling practices the aesthetics of art, music, sport in order to school the whole child, rather than only the mind; Ward posits that the human mind is purposeful, and argues against popular Social Darwinism; Dewey explicitly connects education with social progress and reform; and teachers in racially segregated Black schools transmit powerful messages of freedom for all people.

In the contemporary context, not all of the writers whose works are included herein refer to themselves or the work that they do specifically as social justice pedagogy. Freire refers to his vision as “liberatory and/or humanistic education” (1985), “a pedagogy of hope” (1985), a “pedagogy of freedom” and “critical (or progressive) educative practice” (1998); hooks sees “education as a practice of freedom” (1994); Renate Nummela Caine and Geoffrey Caine speak of “education on the edge of possibility” (1997); Nieto speaks to the need to “affirm diversity” (2000); Simon calls for educators to “teach against the grain” (1992). It is not my intent to twist the work or words of another to make it fit my own picture; but I do not believe that I have taken their work or their words out of context. I expect that each of these authors would concur that their arguments/visions for teaching and for teachers are consistent with the vision of social justice pedagogy outlined in this chapter.

It is also important to note here that the task of trying to sort through an articulation of the integral elements of theorizing a/my social justice pedagogy may result in a representation that seems rational and linear. Aside from the need to present a reasonably

coherent text, I have tried to resist the temptation to impose (and or justify) a particular order onto this complex network of interconnections. The process of theorizing is a sense-making endeavour; the appeal of “grand theory” lies primarily in its usefulness to make sense of everything using a single template. However, my project here is not to provide a single answer for all situations, but rather to engage with a variety of ideas and contexts, which is how I have come to characterize this project as eclectic.

*Rejecting the myth of neutrality; Adopting an ethic of care*

While some may argue that rejecting the myth of neutrality and adopting an ethic of care should count as two elements, I position them together and address them first for three reasons. First, rejecting the notion that the classroom is, was, or can be a “neutral space” is a necessary precondition for inhabiting an ethic of care. Second, the myth of neutrality and ideals of “scientific objectivity” are hegemonic in our culture. As a result, many people cling tenaciously (and often fiercely) to these notions, so that our first task in the Equity course was always the journey through the critique of objectivity. Finally, the hegemonic operations of objectivity and neutrality require that their critic offer some viable (and equally “valuable”) alternative in order to convince her or his audience. In this way, an ethic of particularity provides a means to free oneself from the ideological constraints of “objectivity” and “neutrality.”

*Neutrality and the legacy of modernism*

One of the legacies of modernism has been an (often-unspoken) agreement that knowledge is objective and value-free. Since schooling is generally understood to be about the transmission of knowledge, both the knowledge and the transmission itself are often

understood to be objective and value-free. Code (1995) states that:

The dominant epistemologies of modernity...are defined around highly rarified ideals of objectivity and value-neutrality. Objectivity is conceived as a perfectly detached, neutral, distanced, and disinterested approach to a subject matter that exists in a publicly observable space, separate from knowers/observers and making no personal claims on them (p. 15).

Joe Kincheloe (1993) points out the ways in which the legacy of modernism and its “one-truth epistemology” still informs conceptions and practices of education (p. 4). The “quest for the ‘higher ground’ of unbiased truth” has resulted in an idealized conception of “the educator” as “the detached practitioner, an independent operator who rises above the values of ‘special interests’” (p. 4). These idealized “detached practitioners” understand through “the context of adult logic” that “knowledge is acquired in a linear skill or subskill process” (p. 3). Children are then taught through this linear process, which “focuses teacher/parent attention away from the child’s construction of reality” (p. 3). This acquisition of preformed knowledge through a linear process as constructed and understood by adults can (and often does) result in children’s answers or logic being “...‘wrong,’ when actually...the wrong answer may indicate ingenuity (Brooks, 1984, p. 24)” (Kincheloe, 1993, p. 4). I recall a story told in class by one of my students<sup>3</sup>: one day a teacher asked a young child how many legs a chicken has, to which the child responded “four.” The teacher was very upset, but rather than asking the child where her answer had come from, the teacher

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I am not certain if this was a retelling of something which had happened to a relative of the student who told the story, or if it is an “urban myth.” I do know that when the story was told, it was related as having happened in the early years of the twentieth century, in Montreal, and that the teacher’s complaint was because the child had been “skipped” into Grade Two after only a few weeks in Grade One.

complained to the principal that the child had been advanced through the early grades too quickly and ought to be moved back a year. The principal then asked the child the same question and received the same answer; but the principal then asked the child how she knew a chicken has four legs. The child answered that every Friday, her mother sent her to the butcher's on their street to buy a quarter chicken for soup-making. Since a quarter chicken has one leg, the child concluded that a whole chicken must have four legs. Her answer was indeed "wrong" but her logic was not only infallible, it was remarkable for a child of six years.

The "detached practitioner" of the modernist legacy results in more than "simply" children's answers being judged as wrong, however, and those implications have far-reaching consequences. Kincheloe (1993) continues:

The detached practitioner occupies a secure position immune from critique - he or she has, after all, employed the correct methodology in reaching his or her position. If pursued "correctly," there is no questioning the authority of the scientific method. Thus, the educational status quo is protected from critics, such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, or Maxine Greene, with their "agenda" and value judgements. Their critiques are not scientific; they are "mere opinions" (Codd 1984, 10; Harris 1984, 43) (p. 4).

Further to this, Code (1995) critiques epistemologies that are presumed to be objective:

Theories of knowledge...are distilled out of a generic, abstracted conception of the experiences of [a] small group of privileged men. Ideal objectivity and value-neutrality take for granted a homogeneous "human nature," individually and separately realized in each discrete, self-contained person. On such an assumption, knowers are substitutable for one another...who can put themselves in anyone else's place and know exactly what he or she would know. These ideals erase connections between knowledge and power; hence they lend support to a ...conviction that knowledge properly so called is as neutral - as politically innocent - as the processes thought to produce it (p.16).

Thus, the presumption of neutrality renders invisible the always-present politics inherent in

the foundations and practices of schooling. The legacy of the “one-truth epistemology of modernity” (Kincheloe, 1993, p. 4) means that proponents of both the conservative Far Right and the liberal soft Left are able to take refuge in this presumption of neutrality when charged with the discriminatory and oppressive practices and assumptions of traditional schooling.

I point to this assumed objectivity and value-free or value-neutral stance in order to mark one of the basic foundations of this chapter and of this theorizing. Teaching is not a neutral endeavour; the always-present politics of any notion of education inform both what is taught and what is not. Traditional perceptions of education have taken refuge in the presumption of neutrality and thus leave uninterrogated the ways in which education as a social institution is based on the privilege of dominant ways of knowing and being in the world.

In theorizing a social justice pedagogy I suggest that we are called to recognize and name the always-political stance of teaching and schooling, regardless of the practices and understandings which inform what any one individual does. Freire (1985) contends that:

Dehumanization and humanistic education cannot occur outside the history of men and women, outside the very social structures that we have created and to which we are conditioned.

Dehumanization is a concrete expression of alienation and domination; humanistic education is a utopian project of the dominated and oppressed. ...[B]oth imply action by people in a social reality - the first, in the sense of preserving the status quo, the second in a radical transformation of the oppressor's world (p. 113).

There is no neutrality possible in either teaching practices or in the “knowledge(s)” which we as educators transmit to/construct with our students. Whether we are aware of the operations of power and privilege, or are completely unconscious of them, we still transmit



influential messages in and through our teaching, and none of those messages are neutral. Even, or rather especially, silences can be meaningful. In a situation in which racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-Semitic or other such harmful comments are uttered, silence may operate as tacit support for the beliefs and attitudes associated with such comments.

*An ethic of care versus an ethic of duty:*

This chapter, this dissertation, my teaching, emerge out of a foundation of ethics as articulated by Freire (1998):

...educational praxis, while avoiding the trap of puritanical moralism, cannot avoid the task of becoming a clear witness to decency and purity. ...[I]t cannot avoid the task of being a permanent critique of the easy solutions that tempt us away from the true path that we need to construct and follow...thereby constituting ourselves as ethical beings. ...[T]o transform the experience of educating into a matter of simple technique is to impoverish what is fundamentally human in this experience; namely, its capacity to form the human person (pp. 38-39).

The myth of neutrality, with all of its attendant assumptions about the nature of truth, knowledge, and the role of education in the production and dissemination of same, operates as a path of least resistance. The kind of ethic that Freire (1998) articulates, and that I endeavour to incorporate into this theorizing, calls us to consistently and continually “muddy up” this path of least resistance. This ethic calls for a praxis which draws attention toward the taken-for-granted processes and practices of everyday life which produce and maintain the power relations which fuel the operations of privilege and marginalization. In order to accomplish this, we can attend to the “particular,” through an ethic of care, rather than taking refuge in assumptions attached to the “universal” in any given context, by relying on an ethic of duty.

Karl Hostetler (1997) summarizes the distinction between an ethic of care (or particularity) and an ethic of duty (or universality):

An ethic of care focuses on the particular, concrete relationships...an ethic of caring emphasizes particularity...[has] concern for the consequences of...actions... The appeal is to feelings and experiences of concrete individuals - enactors and victims of the policy.

An ethic of duty emphasizes universality. ...Thus this view stresses a sort of impartiality. ...[has a] nonconsequentialist concern for principles. ...Part of [the] concern about principles is that they are unresponsive to the particulars of people's situations (pp. 66-67).

The distinction between an ethic of care and an ethic of duty is not simply a matter of choosing one over another. Each of these ethics grounds an ideology for the treatment of students. An ethic of duty or universality is most compatible with a conception of schooling based on a conservative foundation, whether operating within a traditional/conservative or an individualist/humanistic conceptual framework. It is possible to understand and argue for an ethic of universality within an ideology of neutrality. In such a context, the rhetoric of "treating everyone fairly" may be translated to "treating everyone in the same way." There is no requirement within the ethic of universality of treatment to understand that everyone is not equal before they come to school, or as they encounter school. An ideal of neutrality leaves the operations of power masked; the taken-for-granted assumptions and conditions of the dominant social groups are enabled to operate as if they stand for everyone equally. This then allows for the inequitable treatment of individual students as well as entire groups of students, while still operating under the rubric of equality.

For instance, current policies of "zero tolerance for violence" are frequently enacted through this ethic of universality, with attendant results for individuals and marginalized

groups that are anything but equitable. This kind of application of an ethic of universality recently resulted in a student being suspended from school for four months for possession of a knife; what was discarded in the choice to suspend this student was the fact that he had possession of a knife solely because he had taken it from another student who was contemplating suicide. His caring action was commended by school officials, but he was suspended nevertheless because having a knife in his possession was an infraction of the zero tolerance for violence policy of his school (Fisher, February 7, 2002, [The Washington Post Online](#)). In this example, the decision to suspend the student could be justified by the “equal/universal” application of the rule prohibiting weapons. Indeed, zero tolerance policies like this tend to operate in a universalizing and context irrelevant fashion. An ethic of care or particularity would, I suggest, have a much different result; an ethic of particularity would have allowed the ruling body to take into account the reason why this student was in possession of a knife.

The ethic of universality, which operates in and through the ideology of neutrality, and gains a voice through the rhetoric of “equal treatment for all,” also operates to mask the privilege of dominant power relations and their concomitant ability to define and shape the “rules of behaviour” for all. The result of this appears when members of privileged groups insist on their right to define ways of speaking and representation for all, without recognizing that this is not a right, but a privilege of the dominant category. This insistence is supported by the rhetoric of “one set of rules” (i.e. the ethic of universality); this rhetoric operates along the lines of “if it’s wrong for us to say X, it’s wrong for everyone to say X.” Two examples follow here; each of these incidents have occurred several times in classes I have taught.

Each provides an illustrative moment of the masking of privilege, of heterosexuality in one example, and race in the other.

I frequently employ the phrase “queer” when speaking of the communities of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. Heterosexual members of my classes often protest my usage of this term, and when I ask why they are protesting, I am told that the protesters find this term distasteful or uncomfortable. A discussion then follows, of the ways in which members of marginalized groups reclaim language by attaching new meanings to terms which have been used against them by members of the dominant group. This conversation often results in a grudging acceptance by the protestors (and I note here that not all of the students in any class situation have protested) to understand, at least as an abstraction, the significance of meaning-making as a political tool. However, even after this discussion has been held, and even after I have told my classes that I am a member of this “sub-culture” or community and therefore I claim the right to define myself using the word queer if I so choose, I have still had students ask me not to say that, solely because it makes them uncomfortable to hear it. They seem to find nothing problematic in asking (and occasionally insisting) that their “right” to not be made uncomfortable should supersede my “right” to self-definition.

However, I cannot reduce the issue of talking about “we the Queer community” to simply a “contest of rights.” Indeed, there are many lesbians, gays, and bisexuals who prefer not to identify themselves as “Queer” at all. One of the tensions I encounter when I engage in the conversation outlined above comes from the risk involved in identifying myself as a member of the “queer” community. Although I do not make a practice of “policing” my

pronouns when referring to my partner, all of these “outings” carry some risk for me. While this “risk” is mediated by the operations of race and class privilege, as well as by the authority/privilege associated with my position as the course director in relation to the students in my classes, this latter position was itself further mediated by the fact that my position at the university was neither tenured nor full-time.

As I reflect on these conversations I realize that there is no easy or simple place to stand with respect to the complex networks of power relations at work here. On the one hand, how often are straight, white, middle-class, students in the position of feeling “uncomfortable” in the classroom? On the other hand, should my own political choice to use the word “queer” as a referent supercede my students’ comfort in the classroom? It is a tough call. While I do not actively mask the fact that I am a lesbian (by using only gender neutral pronouns or omitting pronouns when talking about my partner), I also do not make “public service announcements” about my sexual orientation as part of my introductory remarks. As a result, I have had some students who never realized that I *am* a lesbian. I have also had lesbian, gay, and bisexual students tell me about how much it means to them to have an openly “queer” professor. At this juncture I do the best I can to balance the effects of these competing and contradictory issues. I temper the temptation to engage in an “in your face” queer politics with an ethic of care which includes considering the needs of particular students in a given context.

The other example which has cropped up several times in my classes is on the issue of race and language. In a reclaiming process similar to the one outlined above, words which have traditionally been employed as racial epithets have also, in some contexts, been

reclaimed as in-culture referents, particularly within Black communities. While my description may seem to the reader to sidestep the particular language in question, I refuse to stand, even for a moment, in the place of someone who can reclaim these particular terms. This refusal makes this particular conversation, both written and when it is spoken in my classes, somewhat awkward and constrained; it is, however, the place where I stand, and the awkwardness is therefore a part of the entire difficult conversation. In this instance, I am both employing and modeling an ethic of care, rather than an ethic of universality. Being a member of the privileged category with respect to race means that I cannot be assured that my usage of those in-culture referents will not cause harm, even in the context of a classroom conversation wherein I am attempting to convey the differences ascribed to various groups' usage of these same terms.

When this discussion of the particular use of language has come up in my classes, the conversation has often been prompted by a discussion of "zero tolerance for violence" policies. When these policies include language clauses, the discussion tends to converge on a position that all students ought to be treated in the same ways when the policy is breached. Here, I suggest that an ethic of universality implicitly grounds arguments that Black students who employ in-culture referents must be suspended from school if White students who use these same terms are to be suspended. The most frequently (and passionately) invoked argument holds that "it is not fair" to suspend some (White) students for doing something that some other (Black) students are allowed to do. In these moments, the focus on "fairness" produces a context-ignorant discussion of the policies that necessarily steps around an awareness of the operations of power, privilege, and meaning-making as a strategy

for resistance.

Hostetler (1997) reminds us that “ethical action is not just about dealing with problems reactively, but also about preventing problems” (p. 71). The kind of ethic Freire (1998) outlines provides a framework which can be used to accomplish both of these goals. Folding this ethical framework into theorizing a social justice pedagogy incorporates the notion that all teaching is always political. This then opens a space for taking up an analytics of power relations which calls into question the myriad taken-for-granted assumptions about the relation between knowledge and truth that shape our everyday lives.

*Critical thinking and critical pedagogy:*

Many of the intellectual tools needed to engage in the kind of theorizing I am undertaking are articulated here as “characteristics of a critical thinker.” Since one of the key aspects of an analysis of power relations is a recognition of the existence as well as the operations of categories of privilege and marginalization, this section on critical thinking and critical pedagogy could logically be positioned before the preceding conversation about power and privilege. However, in this section I distinguish between critical thinking and critical pedagogy, and that distinction is best understood with a foundational analytics of the operations of power relations already in place. Critical thinking provides the basic tools for exploring links between the ideas, understandings, and the construction of knowledge through a series of truth claims. Critical pedagogy shapes the tool user so that this process is not just a reflective process but also a self-reflective process. There are differences between critical thinking and critical pedagogy. There are traditions of rationalism in critical thinking which are a necessary requirement of clear thinking. However, to read critical

thinking as if it were synonymous with critical pedagogy is to limit the understanding of critical pedagogy, of which critical thinking is a necessary condition, but not in and of itself a sufficient condition.

In everyday conversation, when a/any word is employed, it seems that everyone understands exactly what they are talking about. Further to this, it seems that those involved in the discussion assume that the others involved also have the same understanding<sup>4</sup>. The phrases “critical thinking,” “critical inquiry,” “critical literacy,” “critical pedagogy” seem often to be used interchangeably as if they all mean the same thing. This may be due to the fact that they all use the same word (“critical”) to flag them as specific ways of thinking about or employing literacies, thinking, inquiry, into classroom practices. It may also be due to the fact that in some ways they are interconnected and to some degree even somewhat interdependent upon one another. They are, however, distinct from one another in some important ways.

Critical pedagogy incorporates the development of critical thinking skills/abilities, the “production” of self-reflexive analytic thinkers, encourages a critical disposition, and fosters an inquisitive curiosity. Richard Paul (1990) has identified six characteristics of a

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In some of the graduate classes I teach, I write the following word on the chalkboard: cat. I then ask the members of the class if anyone knows what that word means. Of course, someone replies, it’s a small furry animal, a pet. Everyone nods, and I write the meaning offered on the board. Then, someone else always (this has happened every time I have done this) says “Oh, but it also means this other thing.” The record for meanings for this one word, which we all know and agree we understand, is nine different meanings. I have done this several times and never had less than four definitions: a furry animal, usually a pet; a piece of heavy machinery used for construction; a particular kind of boat or ship; a medical test are the usual.



critical thinker. He suggests that they are:

1. Independence of mind: the disposition and commitment to autonomous thinking, thinking for oneself.
2. Intellectual curiosity: the disposition to wonder about the world.
3. Intellectual courage: the willingness to evaluate all ideas, beliefs, or viewpoints fairly.
4. Intellectual humility: awareness of the limits of one's own knowledge.
5. Intellectual empathy: consciousness of the need to put oneself in the place of others in order to understand them.
6. Intellectual perseverance: the willingness to pursue intellectual insights and truths in spite of difficulties, frustrations, and obstacles (cited in Anderson, 1996, pp. 28-30)

As can be seen by pondering Paul's characteristics of a critical thinker, these are attributes of the mind which can be developed and learned through example, modelling, and use. They are not a set of practices, although they can certainly be put into practice in a classroom - or anywhere, for that matter. They are also insufficient in and of themselves to constitute critical pedagogy, although learning to think clearly is an integral component of a critical pedagogy. This statement will, I believe, become more clear throughout this section.

Sirotnik (1998) outlines six useful generic questions which he and his colleagues have developed in examining the process of critical inquiry. They are:

1. What is going on in the name of X? (X is a place-holder for things like educational goals and schooling functions; instructional practices like the use of time, tracking students, and achievement testing; organizational practices like leadership, decision making, and communication; etc.)
2. How did it come to be that way?
3. Whose interests are being (and are not being) served by the way things are?
4. What information and knowledge do we have - and need to get - that bear upon the issues? (Get it and continue the dialogue.)
5. Is this the way we want it?
6. What are we going to *do* about all this? (Get on with it.) (pp. 66-67).

Critical inquiry, then, incorporates critical thinking and uses those skills to move forward,

asking questions beyond the rationalistic nature of “simply” thinking critically. A note of caution is warranted here, however: just as the six characteristics offered by Paul (1996) above could but need not be a critical inquiry, the six generic questions posed by Sirotnik (1998) above could, but are not in and of themselves, automatically constitutive elements of critical pedagogy. For instance, with Sirotnik’s (1998) question number five (“Is this the way we want it?”) we must at least consider the possibility that someone might answer “Yes - it suits me just fine this way.” Critical thinking in this instance has been followed, not by critical pedagogy, but by an acceptance of the status quo.

As critical thinking has become more common, so of course have questions about critical thinking arisen, contributing both to an inquiry into the very nature of what it means to be a critical thinker, as well as moving forward the project of thinking critically, even (perhaps particularly) about critical thinking. Portelli (1996) reminds us that as critical thinking has gained a more common stance in teaching practices, questions and tensions about the very nature of critical thinking have arisen:

Since the 1960s, interest in critical thinking has developed into a world-wide movement. And hence: (i) differences of interpretation of the ideal became more explicit and controversial;...(iii) critiques and limitations of the ideal based solely on rationality have emerged... And, of course, the questions have increased and have moved beyond those related to the meaning of the term. ... Is critical thinking to be analyzed in terms of various skills and abilities? Can critical thinking be taught? ... What practical issues emerge when critical thinking is incorporated into one’s own teaching? (p. 57).

Further to Portelli’s discussion above, Mark Selman (1993) cautions us to be careful in thinking about critical thinking as being only a set of characteristics, such as those offered above by Paul (1996). Selman (1993) notes that when we think of critical thinking as being

solely characterized by “some set of abilities and dispositions” then the temptation may become to somehow quantify/identify these abilities:

the best way to understand what it is is to list off these abilities and dispositions - that is, to identify and describe its parts. But consider what inferences are warranted according to an ordinary attribution of an ability. ...Any number of ...approaches might yield adequate performance...and different approaches require different sub-abilities, different knowledge, and so forth. In what sense, then, can we say that the ability...in general consists of some set of sub-abilities? (p. 59).

Thus, when reduced to simply a set of constitutive elements, even radical pedagogies and practices can become subsumed into conservative rubrics of understanding and doing schooling. The temptation that Selman warns us to be aware of is that of turning critical thinking into simply another rote application of something one does to students.

Nicholas Burbules and Rupert Berk (1999) point out that “To critical thinking, the critical person is something like a critical consumer of information; he or she is driven to seek reasons and evidence” (p. 48). Seeking reasons and evidence is certainly a component of critical thinking. However, more than critical consumption of skills and content is incorporated within this concept: “critical thinking means that the critical person has not only the capacity (the skills) to seek reason, truth, and evidence, but also that he or she has the drive (disposition) to seek them” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 48). This disposition, they argue, points to the difference between “weak-sense” and “strong-sense” critical thinking (Paul, cited in Burbules and Berk, 1999, p. 49). But even the disposition to “strong-sense” critical thinking is still “focused on the individual person” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p.49). They continue:

[I]t is only in the context of social relations that these dispositions or

character traits can be formed or expressed, and for this reason the practices of critical thinking *inherently* involve bringing about certain social conditions. Part of what it is to be a critical thinker is to be engaged in certain kinds of conversations and relations with others; and the kinds of social circumstances that promote or inhibit that must therefore be part of the examination of what critical thinking is trying to achieve (Burbules and Berk, 1999, p. 49, emphasis in original).

The practices and processes attached to critical thinking can provide the springboard from which to theorize a critical pedagogy. The intricate interconnections between these two concepts render critical thinking a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the emergence of critical pedagogy. Acquiring and developing the skill set described above as the “characteristics of a critical thinker” can operate as a first step in the journey toward a critical pedagogy. However, these skills do not themselves constitute critical pedagogy.

Burbules and Berk (1999) make salient the distinction between critical thinking and critical pedagogy:

At a broad level, critical thinking and critical pedagogy share some common concerns. ... Yet...differences appear. The critical thinking tradition concerns itself primarily with criteria of epistemic adequacy: To be ‘critical’ basically means to be more discerning in recognizing faulty arguments, hasty generalizations, assertions lacking evidence, truth claims based on unreliable authority, ambiguous or obscure concepts...

The critical pedagogy tradition begins from a very different starting point. It regards specific truth claims, not primarily as propositions to be assessed for their truth content, but as parts of systems of belief and action that have aggregate effects within the power structure of society. It asks first about these systems of belief and action, *who benefits?* (pp. 46-47, underlined emphases added).

Critical thinking, then, is understood as a way to think clearly. It is possible to be a critical thinker, at least working with the definitions offered by Burbules and Berk, without being a critical pedagogue. Using the definition offered above, however, it would be difficult to

make a convincing argument that one could be a critical pedagogue without employing the skills of critical thinking. Critical pedagogy necessarily folds the context into the scope of the critical process. In so doing, developing a critical pedagogy as part of theorizing a social justice pedagogy suggests that we also consider the implications of language as a meaning-making system; I accomplish this by adding critical literacy as a component in the “mix.”

*Critical literacy:*

Critical literacy is both deeply connected to and in some respects emerges from both critical thinking and critical pedagogy. Like critical pedagogy, critical literacy springs from a foundation of the kinds of inquiry that accompany critical thinking. Like critical pedagogy, critical literacy includes an explicit recognition and analysis of the operations of power relations. However, critical literacy also explores the practices and processes of meaning-making as its principle analytic device. The conversations about critical literacy focus particularly on the significance of meaning-making processes and practices with respect to the construction, maintenance, and resistance of categories of privilege and marginalization. Critical literacy brings together the ability to think clearly and logically about ideas, concepts, and assumptions (i.e. critical thinking) and links this within a critical pedagogy to provide students with the capacity to “read the world and read the word” (Freire, 1996).

What Freire alludes to in this notion of reading the world and reading the word, has to do with the ways in which language and meaning-making practices operate. We “read” all manner of “texts” in our everyday lives. If we assume that language is part of a symbol system and that this symbol system includes more than simply the spoken or written language, but also includes the concepts we employ and the ways in which meanings are

interconnected, then everything about our world becomes a “text” that we interact with on a daily basis. We also learn to “read the world” before we learn to understand print text, in that we have learned many of the basic categories and symbols in our social cultural context before we encounter formal language instruction. Meaning-making is a social and a context-relevant process; when Freire (1996) argues that people need to learn to “read the world and read the word” he is calling us to become aware of the meaning-making processes that we are already practicing.

...reading has to do with knowing. The act of reading cannot be explained as merely reading words since every act of reading words implies a previous reading of the world and a subsequent rereading of the world. There is a permanent movement back and forth between ‘reading’ reality and reading words... [T]his dynamic movement is central to literacy. ...[I]t is impossible to read texts without reading the context of the text, without establishing the relationship between the discourse and the reality which shapes the discourse (Freire, 1996, p. 189).

Kelly (1997), in an in-depth interrogation of the notions and understandings of “literacy” and the ways in which literacies (any and all literacies) “manufacture, that is, form, shape, and regulate human desire” (p. 10) tells us that “[t]he discourses that inform each of these literacies [discussed earlier] position students and teachers in ways that define - and, therefore, confine - sense and sensibility” (p. 10). She continues:

...language is constitutive of subjectivity, that is, the meanings we make of ourselves are derived from those available to us in language...inextricable links among language, desire, and subjectivity form the political fabric of all literacies. A crucial question becomes, then, how it is that these connections are written into...forms of literacy (Kelly, 1997, pp. 10-11).

To further a discussion of, and a situating of, a critical literacy as both distinct from other forms of literacies as well as a constitutive element of a critical pedagogy, we may take up

the summary Kelly (1997) offers of critical literacy as presented by Ball, Kenny, & Gardiner (1990):

...a literacy of social transformation in which the ideological foundations of knowledge, culture, schooling, and identity-making are recognized as unavoidably political, marked by vested interests and hidden agendas. Its curriculum is the everyday world as text and the analytic frameworks necessary to deconstruct it; its pedagogy is situated, interrogative, and counter-hegemonic (p.10)

If we adopt this as our operating definition for critical literacy, the significance of this element to theorizing a social justice pedagogy becomes clear. Critical literacy grounds this process in the lived realities of the persons involved. The world that we read necessarily includes, and makes relevant, the operations of privilege and marginalization in every context. These operations are always already present, even when we fail to read “for” them.

Stanley Aronowitz (1981) points to the ways in which meaning-making processes are embedded in power relations in a/any given context. Aronowitz suggests::

The quest for literacy is paramount in any democratic society, not so much for vocational reasons (it’s only during growth periods that genuine skills become in short supply), but for more important reasons. ...The issues in a society wishing to widen participation in its key decisions is whether these can be grasped by ordinary people, and reading and writing are essential elements of this process (p. 462).

Aronowitz is not speaking here of literacy only in its basic sense of being able to decode print; he is rather referring to literacy in the broader sense of teaching students how to read the world in which they live. He goes on to say:

The military model [of which he wrote earlier] cannot insure democratic participation. On the contrary, it encourages subordination of a *conceptually* illiterate population whose skills extend to the technical plane. ...Our problem is - who can think through what’s going on in the world, the changes in our lives under way as a result of decisions made at the political level?

(Aronowitz, 1981, pp. 462-463).

Unpacking both the meaning-making processes and the power relations that re/produce these practices and processes is a complex task which requires the capacity for critical analytic processes. Berry (1998) suggests that in a critical reading of text, we encourage/facilitate students' resistance to the "authority/knowledge of a text" (p. 48). I provide her list of possible questions here as a model for developing and applying these analytic processes; she offers as possible questions to pose:

In what ways are the characters in power or oppressed by a dominant gender, race, class, age, and so forth? What racial knowledge is present in this text? In what ways? How has the author constructed men/women in this text that is consistent with or contradictory to mainstream knowledge of men and women? In what ways has the author constructed power/knowledge/relationships/representations/values based on gender, race, class, and so forth? In what ways would you challenge the exclusions of certain cultures (race, sexuality, etc.) in this text? Who do you think created the representations and knowledge in this text? And what do you oppose or resist about the representations/relationships based on age, class, history, dominance, privilege, marginalization, and so forth, in this text? In what ways has the author used mainstream knowledge to create a state of consent in the reader? (Berry, 1998, p. 48).

At this juncture, I must emphasize that these are not the only possible questions. The rote application of a particular set of questions, and a concomitant suggestion that there are particular "right" answers, turns critical inquiry into simply a different form of traditional/conservative practice. As we fold critical literacy into the "mix" that provides a base for this theorizing, we move further away from the kind of clearly articulated "characteristics" offered for critical thinking and toward the more nebulous framework of a quality of mind or a form of consciousness.

Shor (1992) outlines Freire's (1973) "three-step model of development leading to



critical consciousness” (p. 126). As Shor (1992) outlines these three steps, it becomes more evident how all of the preceding conversations in this chapter culminate in (or, more properly, may culminate in) a critical consciousness. Shor (1992) describes the first step, intransitive consciousness, as:

[denying] the power of human beings to change their lives or society. It is a static condition of fatalism which rejects human agency, denying that people can transform their conditions. ...The intransitive individual accepts or celebrates the status quo, has the most closed mind, and lives in political disempowerment, even though he or she may be hardworking, satisfied, and rich in personal relationships (p. 126).

This process, this framework for approaching the world, resists challenges to the status quo and as a result tends to re/produce existing patterns and social relations.

The second step in the three-step model is semi-transitive consciousness, in which persons believe “...in cause and effect and in the human power to learn and to change things (Shor, 1992, p. 126). This semi-transitive consciousness, however, is marked by a limited ability to visualize the interconnections between “pieces of reality;” a person in this unintegrated place does not “...perceive how separate parts of society condition each other or how a whole social system is implicated in producing single effects in any one part” (Shor, 1992, p. 127). Shor (1992) elaborates on the partial empowerment of a person in this step; he states that this kind of thinking can take many concrete steps that lead to partial or even contradictory changes. For example:

Unruly students can be forced out of school to make halls and classroom safer, only to make streets and playgrounds less safe. ...Philanthropic groups may set up soup kitchens for the hungry without asking why so many people are hungry in the first place, in a wealthy country with an agricultural surplus each year (p. 127).

Shor concludes that a semi-transitive consciousness is “one-dimensional, short-term thinking” (p. 127). This isolation or failure to recognize/interrogate and to connect single acts or effects into a wholeness of a social system results in “acting on an isolated problem, ignoring root causes and long-term solutions, and often creating other problems because the social system underlying a problem is not addressed” (Shor, 1992, p. 127). In this, the semi-transitive consciousness reflects the operations of an individualist/humanistic conception of curriculum. This framework incorporates a recognition of the effects of inequality, but in such a way that the structures/processes of inequality appear as discrete, disconnected barriers to individual success or achievement. This approach constructs categories of privilege/marginalization as if they are a set of “boxes” that individuals find themselves consigned to or constrained by. Any analysis of sex, race, class, ability (etc.) undertaken within this framework necessarily treats these as relatively independent, binary processes which then categorize individuals as either privileged or marginalized

The third step is critical consciousness. As Shor (1992) explains, critical consciousness (or critical transitivity):

...allows people to make broad connections between individual experience and social issues, between single problems and the larger social system. The critically conscious individual connects personal and social domains when studying or acting on any problem or subject matter. ...With critical consciousness, students are better able to see any subject as a thing in itself whose parts influence each other, as something related to and conditioned by other dimensions in the curriculum and society, as something with a historical context, and as something related to the students’ personal context. ...To a critically conscious person, society is a human creation, which we can know and transform, not a mysterious whirl of events beyond understanding or intervention (pp. 127-128).

This articulation of a “critical consciousness” echoes what Mills (1959) called “the

sociological imagination.” For Mills, the sociological imagination was a quality of mind that enabled its possessor to grasp the relationship between individual experience and the social context: “the interplay of men [sic] and society, of biography and history, of self and world ...” (1959, p. 5). Each of these articulations offers an important element in the analytic processes of theorizing a/my social justice pedagogy. The term consciousness implies an inner awareness of the operations of power relations, the kind of awareness derived from a process of self-reflection. The term imagination evokes a sense of action or active process. In this context, the imagination includes a capacity to use self-reflection as a springboard to the kinds of action that use this awareness as a place to begin (i.e. self-reflexivity).

Developing a critical consciousness opens the space for moving beyond categorical limitations and binary oppositional frameworks. I end this section with an offering from Bronwyn Davies (1989) of the possibilities for understanding which fuel my own theorizing processes:

Poststructuralist theory, with its roots in Freud, Marx and Foucault, provides a radical framework for understanding the relations between persons and their social world and for conceptualising social change. The structures and processes of the social world are recognised as having a material force, a capacity to constrain, to shape, to coerce, as well as to potentiate individual action. The processes whereby individuals take themselves up as persons are understood as ongoing processes. The individual is not so much a social construction which results in some relatively fixed end product, but one who is constituted and reconstituted through a variety of discursive practices. It is the recognition of the ongoing nature of the constitution of self and the recognition of the nonunitary nature of self that makes poststructuralist theory different from social construction theory (p. xi).

Taken together, then, the preceding conversations take us to a space of asking “Now what?” And it is an important question; as I discuss in a subsequent section, developing an

awareness of the operations of privilege and marginalization, developing a critical consciousness, necessarily requires that we learn to reflect upon our own lives and social location(s) and then do something with that reflection.

*Opposition and challenges:*

There have been, of course, voices raised in opposition to ideas and ideals of teaching for social justice. As might be expected, some of the most strident of these voices have come from the conservative Far Right<sup>5</sup>. What is more surprising to me has been my developing recognition of the ways in which the “liberal-minded” soft Left have, in softer voices and using different language, been as adamant in their refusal to relinquish their own privileged positions<sup>6</sup>. This results in “an uneasy alliance,” one which is able to remain largely invisible until the two seemingly opposite discourses are critiqued through the operations of power relations. The strident voices of the Far Right operate as established gate-keepers of privilege circling around the exterior of the boundaries defining the limits of the categories, while the soft Left maintains a posture of an open door policy which they use to contrast their position against the conservative Far Right; this oppositional positioning allows members of the soft Left to adopt a stance of “Oh look, they’re busy keeping people out while we’ve got the doors wide open.” This “open door” posturing means that there is no requirement to recognize that the rhetoric of rights and freedoms, and the operations of this rhetoric, effectively police these same categories from within by establishing greater and

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See, for instance, Nikiforuk, (1994).

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See, for instance, Freire, (1998), wherein he denounces in the most scathing of terms “the scourge of neoliberalism” (p. 22). See also Macedo, (1998), introduction to Freire, (1998).

lesser degrees of “belonging.”

It is this positioning which allows members of the soft Left to take up conservative notions of multiculturalism; they are enabled to maintain their own fiction of “equality for all” without having to recognize that the very strategies in use to attain this “equality” actually produce and maintain the inequality. This uneasy alliance of the Left and the Right rests on a bedrock of individual comforts and access to privilege, and this shared complicity results not so much in compromise that gives everyone at least some benefits, but instead retains (unearned) benefits for those who have them at the continued expense of those who have not. Both of these standpoints produce and maintain the “normative order.” The conservative Far Right fiercely defends the boundaries of normative concepts, like “the family” or “the student,” producing as normative the expectations and assumptions of privilege as part of the definition of said categories. In so doing, they prevent marginalized groups from gaining access to the normative definition of that category. For example, the conservative far right responds to attempts to include multiple or competing understandings of “the family” within the normative framework as an “attack on the foundation of the family.” The “liberal-minded” soft Left relies on the rhetoric of individual rights and freedoms to prevent these same categories from being denuded from within through a fragmentation or focus on multiplicity and particularity. In each case, a universal definition produces a totalizing category.

*A reverse discourse*

In order to clearly see the ways in which the Far Right and soft Left are not opposites

to/of one another<sup>7</sup>, but rather are different aspects of the same strategy in the relations of power, it is necessary to return once more to the work of Foucault (1978). In developing the notion of a “reverse discourse,” Foucault (1978) argues:

Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. ...There is no question that the appearance in 19th century psychiatry, jurisprudence and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality...made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of “perversity”; but it also made possible the formation of a “reverse” discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand legitimacy...often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. There is not on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can...circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy (pp. 101-102, emphasis added).

A reverse discourse, then, relies on the construction of a category in order to use that same construction, and the language of that construction, to argue against it. With a reverse discourse, the category itself cannot be dismissed, for then there would be nothing against which to argue. The category must be acknowledged and the language used to justify the arguing against; in this way, a reverse discourse actually relies on the existence of the very category which it then argues against. It is through an analysis of the operations of this category that I have come to perceive that the seemingly oppositional positions of the Far Right and the soft Left are not only not opposite one to another, they actually serve the same

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For a comprehensive review of education reform in England in the 1990s, see Whitty (1993). In this article, he explicitly links the views and needs of neo-conservatives and neo-liberals as enmeshed in the same overall thinking and aim to influence (in this case, to influence teacher education).

ultimate purpose: the retention of privilege for those who have it already. For the Far Right, the inequities that result seem to be non-problematic. For the soft Left, who must make their peace with their own privilege in order to justify retaining it, taking refuge in the “open door” position allows this possibility.

By employing this analytic framework to examine the arguments/positions of the Far Right and the soft Left, exposing them as operations of the same strategy of power relations, we are able to see that both of them are foundationally conservative. Through a recognition of the entrenched positions of social privilege, and by applying a standard of an ethic of care which I argue is the only ethical position to adopt, I can say that, for me, neither the position of the Far Right nor the soft Left are ethically acceptable positions. In the humanitarian effort that is the very foundation of Freire’s (1998) argument for a pedagogy of freedom, the privilege-retaining discourses of both of these conservative positions must be exposed for what they are: an attempt by each, albeit through different voices, to ensure that their positions of social privilege are not threatened.

*Self-reflectivity and self-reflexivity:*

Although self-reflection and self-reflexivity appear in this text as the penultimate elements in the development of a social justice pedagogy, they may well operate as the first steps in a given individual’s journey toward a social justice pedagogy. These two concepts are deeply intertwined with one another and intricately interconnected to the processes of critical thinking, critical pedagogy, and critical literacy as articulated in the preceding section; the interconnection between these elements is a bit of a “which came first - the chicken or the egg?” question. In answer, I suggest that either may come first, with the other

following, as a social justice pedagogy develops within any individual.

In this section, I outline some of the ways these concepts have been constructed/applied, indicating the significance of both reflection and reflexivity to the theorizing/development of a/my social justice pedagogy. I also provide some examples which illustrate how these processes might be put into practice.

Peter Gilroy (1993), in a broad-ranging discussion of the meanings of reflection, includes a number of different definitions of this concept. As with the discussion earlier wherein people in conversation often assume not only their meaning of a word, but also assume that those with whom they speak have the same meaning/understanding of the word employed, so it is, Gilroy (1993) suggests, with the term reflection: "...the use made of the concept, and therefore its perceived meaning, is in no sense a unitary and straightforward one" (p. 125). He continues:

Calderhead...has identified three different conceptions of the term...The first is Dewey's, which emphasises the consciously rational search for solutions to problems; the second Schon's, which concentrates on the notion of 'reflection-in-action', 'viewed as the exercise of interactive, interpretative skills, in the analysis and solution of complex and ambiguous problems'; and the third is the Frankfurt School's approach to reflection as a process of 'self-determination' (Calderhead, 1989, p. 44, cited in Gilroy, 1993, pp. 125-126).

The above are not the only definitions in use, however; they are simply three identified by Calderhead. Gilroy (1993) continues:

Adler also identifies a three-part distinction in terms of the use of the concept of reflection. The first is Cruickshank's, who 'takes as the primary problematic a teacher's choice of teaching strategies' (Adler, 1991, pp. 145-146); the second is Schon's, who 'takes as problematic the teaching context as well as practice' (p. 146); and the third is that of Zeichner [1991] who includes as problematic, and thus worthy of reflection, the broader contexts provided by the curriculum, the school and the society (p. 147) (cited in



Gilroy, p. 126).

Gilroy continues, but the above are sufficient for my purposes here, which is to point to the contested terrain of the term, and therefore also the practices, of “reflection.” Although the notion that one should endeavour to be a “reflective practitioner” may be a common ideal in teacher education programmes, in many instances those who employ this phrase do so at an intuitive level. While the ideal may seem straightforward, the processes it invokes often operate as both intuitive and counter-intuitive. David Hubely (1993) describes a self-reflective practice as:

...reflective pedagogy...prompts the teacher to render explicit that which is implicit. ...[T]he difficulty with a reflective pedagogy informed by constructivism...is that these ‘constructions’ of reality - these ‘stories’ or ‘personal narratives’ - are all very interesting at the *descriptive* level, but they amount to little more than making us aware of our commonsense assumptions and constructs about teaching. ...But the ‘everyday situations’ [which they describe] - the teacher, the child, the school, the classroom, the curriculum - are themselves constructions. They are not ‘givens’ in any natural sense; they only appear so. The theoretical vacuity of some forms of reflective pedagogy...can lapse easily into an almost narcissistic, self-reflective mode (p. 85).

To be “self-reflective,” then, requires much more than simply thinking about what we are doing in our classroom, lest we become the narcissistic and non-critical practitioners Hartley suggests as a possibility. The concepts of self-reflectivity and self-reflexivity can also be described as: “think - then do - then think again - then do again.” While all of this “thinking and doing” may seem too time-consuming, I circle back to a discussion of meaning-making processes as a reminder that we are each always “thinking and doing.” The quality and meaning of the “thinking and doing” is what is under interrogation, not whether or not we can choose to “not think.”

Part of the conundrum attached to the issue of engaging in critical reflection emerges from the very processes in and through which this capacity is, or can be, “taught”/conveyed. Since part of the point of this process is to find new or different ways of perceiving the world, to make meanings that emerge from outside the path of taken-for-granted assumptions, the kinds of assignments and/or projects designed to foster these kinds of thinking practices tend to provide deliberately open-ended instruction. While this strategy opens the space for a variety of possibilities and resists the possibility that the meanings available to be made will be specified through the assignment guidelines, or directions about “what to see” or “what to look for”, it can also be frustrating for all concerned. Too little discussion about what one “might” see, or how one might reflect on what one sees, in order to avoid “telling students what to think” may also leave them without sufficient information and/or ideas about how to engage in a process that begins, but does not end with description.

As I consider the meaning I have of the term, and the practice, “reflection,” I realize that my understanding and usage of the term in everyday practice is most closely aligned with that of Schon, as further discussed in Gilroy (1993). To sum up, my argument for a self-reflective position on the part of teachers is to acknowledge a

...form of knowledge [Schon] terms ‘knowing-in-action’ ...This knowledge is tacit...but we can come to recognise such knowledge through reflection-in-action, where practitioners: surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness (Schon, 1983, p. 54) (cited in Gilroy, 1993, p. 127).

For me, this knowing-in-action comes closer to the manner in which I understand and utilize self-reflection; that is, in any context, not only classrooms, we may learn to recognize “the

characteristic mode of ordinary practical knowledge...which we are usually unable to describe” but which is revealed through our actions (Schon, 1983, p. 54, cited in Gilroy, 1993, p. 127). The knowing-in-action, which bears a strong resemblance to the “think - do - think again - do again” process described above, weakens the possibility that we will take up only one facet of this double-faceted process. To think without doing may mean we become narcissistic. To do without thinking means we run the risk of interacting with others from the standpoint of our own privileged position, and in that, we run the risk of putting our students in the way of harm.

I would like to take a moment here to address one aspect of this process. One of the strategies for resistance which is emerging in this theorizing of a/my social justice pedagogy involves disrupting the taken-for-granted assumptions which ground and/or re/produce the operations of privilege and marginalization. In so doing, we also disrupt or “muddy up” the path of least resistance by calling into question notions of objectivity, universal truths, the possibility of a “neutral classroom,” and the “normative” categories etc. The very process of calling these into question is one means to illuminate how and when these are taken-for-granted assumptions. Exploring the operations of these taken-for-granted assumptions disrupts their effectiveness as power relations by making those operations visible.

The interconnected processes of self-reflection and self-reflexivity carry with them the dual responsibilities that emerge from engaging in these processes: recognizing the existence of the operations of power relations and responding to the effects of these operations. Freire (1985) outlines these processes as follows:

The political makeup of education is independent of the educator’s

subjectivity...if the educator is conscious of this political makeup, which is never neutral. When an educator finally understands this, she or he can never again escape the political ramifications. An educator has to question himself or herself about options that are inherently political, though often disguised as pedagogical to make them acceptable within the existing structure. Thus, making choices is most important. Educators must ask themselves for whom and on whose behalf they are working (pp. 179-180, emphasis added).

Developing and “doing” a social justice pedagogy carries with it the dual responsibility of self-reflection and self-reflexivity. Landon Beyer (1998) tells us that: “making connections among students, knowledge, and the larger social contexts in which schools function is a central responsibility of teachers” (p. 258). Stanley Aronowitz (1981) argues that “the first responsibility of the educator is to validate the experience of the student...and then to be willing to learn from students” (p. 464).

The interconnections of the four elements I have described thus far produce an ethical requirement to undertake a critical and self-reflective analysis of the operations of the power relations that result in processes of privilege and marginalization. In addition, practicing a social justice pedagogy requires that individuals do more than simply recognize that these operations afford them privilege in some aspects while (possibly) producing them as marginalized in others. Just as self-reflectivity precedes self-reflexivity, so this awareness of the operations of privilege and marginalization carries an ethical requirement to critically engage with the categories of privilege we occupy.

The “tricky bit” is to engage in the processes of resistance from within one’s own social location vis-a-vis privilege. As Macedo (1998) warns us:

The real issue is to understand one’s privileged position in the process of helping so as not to, on the one hand, turn help into a type of missionary paternalism and, on the other hand, limit the possibilities for the creation of

structures that lead to real empowerment ( p. xxix).

In the early 1990s, I was involved with organizing a Take Back the Night March. At one of the organizing meetings, a small group of men came to the meeting; they wanted, they explained, to support this important event, and would we consider lifting the ban on men marching in order that they might show that they were opposed to violence against women. This particular issue, men being banned from the march, had been a hotly debated issue for the past two or three years, with both men and women arguing both sides. This particular year, at this meeting, one of the women present and also helping to organize the march, articulated her feelings about the request. I will paraphrase her position here, but I believe that I am remembering accurately her salient points.

She said: "The reason men aren't welcome to march with us is that the presence of men defeats the entire point of the march. The march is intended to visibly demonstrate that women are not safe to walk alone on the streets after dark. That point is made when a group of women is required in order for us to be safe as we walk. If men join in, and are visible, then it looks as if we require the physical company of men in order to walk safely. Our point is lost to the casual observer." The group pondered her words - many of the people in the room, myself included, were carefully thinking through what she had said. Then one of the men said "But we want to be supportive. We think this is really important. What can we do?" And the same woman responded: "Great - if what you want is to be seen and applauded, then you're doing this for you and not for us, but if what you want is to be supportive, then maybe you could organize a group to provide child care during the march." Two of the men left shortly after this, having wanted to march or not be involved, and five

of the men stayed, formed their own group in another part of the room, and organized three hours of child care for the evening of the march.

The point of this telling, taken in conjunction with Macedo's statement (quoted above) and in the context of this discussion on power relations, is to illustrate the subtle distinctions between doing "for" and doing "with." To do for someone, particularly when the person doing occupies a position of privilege and the person being done for is marginalized (at least in that moment), often carries with it a colonialist or paternalistic/maternalistic benevolence which is disrespectful at the least and often downright insulting. It is a fine line to tread on some occasions, because it is true that there are some things which some people cannot do for themselves, and with which they require assistance. But each act of helping needs to be thought through on the part of the "helper" to ensure that the assistance being offered is required, is offered in an ethos of caring about (not for) the other person, and that the benefit of the action is felt by the recipient, not the do-er.

This last is not meant to imply that if we do something for someone else we should not or cannot feel good about what we have done. Developing a critically self-reflective analytics may mean that feeling good about ourselves and how "generous, benevolent, and caring to those less fortunate" we are is not the motivator for our action. Or, if that is our motivator, developing a critically self-reflective analysis may mean that we do not continue this colonialist and paternalistic/maternalistic benevolence.

Macedo (1998) points out to us that harm results when "liberal educators...who proselytize about empowering minorities" (p. xxx) at the same time refuse "to divest from their class-and-whiteness privilege - a privilege that is often left unexamined and

unproblematized and that is often accepted as a divine right” (p. xxx). This refusal to divest ourselves of privilege (those of us who have privilege/when we have privilege) can be argued to manifest itself both globally and at the level of individuals. At the global level, we are confronted with the deforestation of entire countries in order that their resources might be consumed by the financially privileged; this deforestation is justified by rhetoric that suggests to the people being asked to sell their resources that “if you sell us your trees, (or whatever resource is in question) you will have the money to live as we do.” The reality is that this is never going to happen; people who live in the countries whose resources are being sold are never going to live the same lives as do the financially privileged of the countries where these same resources are being consumed; nor, I believe, do the speakers of those offers have any desire to make it happen.

It is not that I believe those speakers to be somehow inherently malicious or evil-minded, but the provision of the material conditions to “bring everyone else to where we live” will mean that those of us who are already accessing the material goods which our financial privilege allows us, will have to give up some of our material goods. The equation is quite simple, really: there is a finite amount of resources available for consumption. Supplying the means for those who have-not to acquire the same goods the haves already have will mean that the resources will quickly be gone for everyone, regardless of their financial privilege (see Mies, 1986, for an excellent in-depth discussion on this topic.)

At the individual level, the effects of liberal-minded educators who refuse to divest themselves of their privilege (or who are completely unaware of their privilege) can have devastating effects for children in their classrooms. I remember here a story told by a student

(now adult) who as a child lived in a home of extreme poverty. One day, having once again told his teacher that he had “forgotten his lunch,” this boy’s teacher said to the class at large “Attention, everyone - so-and-so has no lunch again today. Does anyone have some bit of food they don’t want that they are willing to give to him?” Enough food for three lunches was quickly offered, but the damage was done. Humiliated and furious that the teacher had shamed him in front of his classmates, the boy threw the food into the garbage can, whereupon he was sent by the teacher to the principal’s office for rudeness. As an adult, he recounted his younger self’s misery as the principal lectured him on the importance of gratitude, and made him go back to the classroom and apologize to the entire class for his inappropriate behaviour.

For me, this last example provides a graphic illustration of what can happen when we forget to examine our own taken-for-granted assumptions and act without care for the particulars of the context in which we are operating. In this example, there are three “moments” in which a critical, self-reflective, self-reflexive process grounded in an ethic of care might have inspired different actions on the part of the teacher. In the first “moment,” the point at which the “problem” is articulated by the student, the teacher’s response might have been mediated by a consideration of the effect a “public announcement” might have for the particular student in question, in the context of this particular classroom, and to then use that consideration to choose a course of action that would not place the student in the way of harm. In the second “moment,” having chosen a course of action, the teacher would also be called to consider the implications of that action as meaningful to the student and to the class, as well as to the teacher. Finally, in the third “moment,” the teacher could recognize



ruptures between their own definition of the situation and the meanings made by the student, and to value the student's definition of the situation. In other words, the teacher is responsible for applying the kind of process that enables her/him to recognize when and if her/his (possibly) well intentioned actions have placed a student in the way of harm or been harmful for a student. This third "moment" would include owning that harm had been done and taking steps to choose a different path in a subsequent, similar situation.

While I discuss the operations of privilege and marginalization as a network of complex, interconnecting power relations, I am deeply aware of the fact that these operations are necessarily masked and systematically obscured from view. Acquiring the knack for reading these operations as they appear in our everyday lives takes patience and practice. In addition, this process requires that each of us always recognize the positions of privilege in which we stand and actively resist the masking processes attached to that privilege.

*We, the privileged ...*

In order to resist the operations of privilege, we must first recognize the ways in which privilege shares our own lived reality. We must learn to recognize and to name the standpoint from which we interact in the world. In order to accomplish this as part of a social justice pedagogy, we must both reject the notion that the classroom is, or can be, a neutral space and repudiate the idea that the classroom is or can be a "safe" or "conflict-free" space. Thus, developing a social justice pedagogy requires that we risk "disrupting" the comfort of the classroom to illuminate the construction and maintenance of that "comfort" as an operation of power relations. In other words, we, the privileged, must abandon our own comfort in order to engage in meaningful conversations/analyses about the operations of

privilege/marginalization. hooks (1994) offers a moment of understanding how and why this disruption may be difficult to take up:

The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained (p.39).

This understanding is not a suggestion that we ought to accept and remain in this fear, however. It is offered only as a space to stand, from which to recognize why it is difficult to take that leap out of our own fear into the unknown. Too often, in order to avoid conflict, we stifle passion. In a desire to create “safe spaces” we fail to interrogate who the space is safe for, or what it is that constitutes safety; quietness, lack of passion, non-involvement in discussion are too frequently read as safety, because it appears that no-one is being harmed when all are quiet. Yet, as hooks (1994) points out: “...many students, especially students of color, may not feel at all “safe” in what appears to be a neutral setting. It is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement” (p. 39, emphasis added). In stepping out into the unknown, we as educators are engaged in a risky undertaking; we do not know what is out there, and we are not always certain that we will be able to cope with (often interpreted as “contain”) the results of our venture. As Christensen (2000) says about developing community through risking the lived realities of students’ lives, having this become an integral component of our everyday curriculum:

...classroom community isn’t always synonymous with warmth and harmony. Politeness is often a veneer mistaken for understanding, when in reality it masks uncovered territory, the unspeakable pit that we turn from because we know the anger and pain that dwell there. ...Topics like racism and homophobia are avoided in most classrooms, but they seethe like festering wounds. When there is an opening for discussion, years of anger and pain

surface (p. 2).

Two years ago, in a teacher education course I was teaching, there were two racially visible students in a class of about thirty-five. While the students were generally willing to discuss most topics (although their comfort level was most apparent when speaking at an abstract or theoretical level), I noticed very quickly that whenever the topic of race and/or racism came up, the entire class became absolutely silent. Try what I might, whenever this topic was raised, I was the only one in the room who would talk. If we were discussing heterosexism and homophobia, they would talk; disabilities in the classroom, they were eager to contribute; poverty and classism and its effects on students in public schools, they had much to say and were eager to discuss. Raise race and racism, and they shut down.

Since racism was one of the six major issue areas of the class, this was clearly a problem. After three classes (each once a week for three hours) one of the two racially visible students came to speak with me in my office. She was very upset with what was happening in the class, and needed to know what I was planning to do about it. Actually, what she first needed to know was whether or not I had noticed what was happening; when I assured her that I had noticed and was also quite concerned, and outlined to her some of the strategies I had employed thus far to try to circumvent this dilemma, she expressed some surprise that I was aware of this particular dynamic. She told me that she meant no insult, but her experiences through schooling had taught her that many white teachers remained oblivious to the kind of harm that is done to non-white students through silence.

After speaking with her at length, I decided that my previous tactic of persuasion was ineffective; more, it was causing harm to at least one student in the room. My own

pedagogical integrity required that I do something about this. The next week, I abandoned our initial topic of the day, and raised with the class what was going on. They were extremely reluctant to have this conversation, and a few students visibly squirmed as I spoke. Two became quite vocal in expressing their anger that I was raising the issue at all; one asked me point blank if I was not aware that I was “making people uncomfortable.” I responded that I was acutely aware of the discomfort in the room at that moment, and went on to say that the momentary discomfort of some struck me as a small price to pay in order to try to avert the active harm that was being done to others in the room (although I remind the reader here of my earlier discussion of the tensions inherent in this mediating of comfort/discomfort).

After some time, one brave soul finally blurted out that, while she could not speak for anyone else in the room, she herself had refused to discuss racism in previous classes because she “did not want to hurt [racially visible student’s] feelings by talking about harmful or hurtful things.” At that point, the student who had spoken with me the previous week joined into a conversation in which she had, until then, been quite silent. She spoke directly to the student who did not want to hurt her feelings, and said “You know, I know I’m Black. I know that every day - I’ve known that every day of my life since I can remember. What hurts me is not to talk about racism - what hurts me is when you refuse to talk about racism, pretend it isn’t there. You’re going to be a teacher, and you might end up teaching one of my children some day, and you know what - they’re going to be Black, too. So if you don’t learn about racism, what it looks like, what it does to kids, then you might be a teacher who hurts kids - my kids, other people’s kids. And that’s not good enough - to say that you

didn't mean to."<sup>8</sup> As Christensen (2000) points out:

...real community is forged out of struggle. Students won't always agree on issues, and the fights, arguments, tears, and anger are the crucible from which a real community grows. ... To become a community, students must learn to live in someone else's skin, understand the parallels of hurt, struggle, and joy across class and culture lines, and work for change. For that to happen, students need more than an upbeat, supportive teacher; they need a curriculum that encourages them to empathize with others (p. 2).

It was this final vision of curriculum which my students and I engaged with in our Equity courses; I was not always "good" at it, and I learn more as each day/month/term passes. I accept each new lesson with as much good grace as I have (this is a flexible commodity), reflect upon it, and attempt to learn from it for the next day (week/term). With the incident recounted above, where the students refused to discuss race, I did challenge them directly, and we at least had a conversation about what was going on in the room. As I think back to that experience, I realize that I would not wait again until almost one third of the course was over, and until a marginalized and silenced student was harmed to the point of coming to speak with me, before I intervened.

In order to be able to see beyond our privilege and to sidestep the hegemonic operations of occupying the/a taken-for-granted category, we must engage in a critique of that category similar to the critique of neutrality offered above. This project takes courage and the strength of character to withstand an interrogation of the categories of privilege that help make us who we are, without taking that critique as an attack on our persons. It is

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While this conversation is in quotes, it is a paraphrase of what this particular student had to say. I did not record her words, but the sum of her response had a powerful impact on me, as well as her classmates, and I am confident that I have not misconstrued her words or intent. The quotes are offered as an offset to mark her speaking.

imperative that the privileged take up this work; White people need to do transformative work on race and racism; heterosexuals need to do transformative work on heterosexism and homophobia; able-bodied people need to do transformative work on disability, and so on. To have an understanding “in our bones” (Scherer, 1997, p. 11) necessarily requires self-reflection; the capacity to think about our lives, our privilege.

Issues of marginalization are not “special” to the person/people who are marginalized, although they are often rendered so. There is an imperative for each of us to recognize where and how we are privileged and to deliberately rupture that privilege. Further to this rupturing or interruption of our own privilege, we must recognize that working to change situations where people are marginalized from within our privilege is actually safer for us in many moments than for the person who is marginalized. I am not intending to suggest a colonization of the lives of others, nor a paternalistic/maternalistic benevolence in our actions. What I am pointing to here are the ways in which frequently it is assumed that only members of “special interest” groups will take up the challenge of interrogating and rupturing the marginalization experienced by that/a group. This can place people in the path of harm, retribution, or ridicule. Standing up for ourselves and others from within our privilege requires that we recognize not only our privilege, but the immense safety which that privilege affords us.

I offer here an illustrative moment as a means of unpacking the above. When my children were younger, it was a very common practice for people to talk “to them” through me: “What would she like to eat?” or “How does he want his hair cut?” wait staff or barbers would ask me. I would respond with “I don’t actually know. You’ll have to ask her/him.”

I was always pleasant about this, but I was also clear that I expected such questions to be posed directly to the child so that they could respond for themselves. The ageism which is prevalent in our society around perceiving that small children are not somehow able to make choices, or do not deserve to be spoken to/heard, was a small way for me to stand in my adult age-privilege and do something to disrupt this process. It also modelled directly to my children that I believed they deserved to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their age and size. I knew my older child had “heard” this the day she organized a formal protest at a local coffee shop which had a practice of charging young adolescents fifteen cents for a glass of water if they were unaccompanied by an adult, but gave out the water for no charge if an adult requested it. My thirteen year old daughter asked to speak to the manager and explained that this was a discriminatory practice, and that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms explicitly stated that no one could be discriminated against on the basis of age. The practice ceased.

*Utopian vision and political action:*

Although there are necessarily many strands that contribute to a social justice “practice,” I believe that the absolute centre, however one approaches the everyday doing, is a commitment to a (particular) vision of a world that is not but could be (Simon, 1987). The “practices” associated with this way of teaching/being in the world become social justice pedagogy only when they are themselves interrogated by all of the participants. The necessary tension is to be constantly aware, self-reflective and self-reflexive, to walk the tightrope between the transformative possibilities of teaching for social justice and conservative conceptions of teaching which reify an inequitable status quo.

Perhaps the most important component of a vision of teaching for social justice is its emphasis on a “utopian vision” of a world that is not but might be. The links between/among aspects of a social justice pedagogy are not easily nor clearly demarcated; this is as it ought to be, I think. Often when we see only the surface of a process, or a point in time of a process, we may think that that is all there is. Yet even something as simple as the act or process of walking involves many unseen portions: the messages from brain to parts of the body, muscles responding to the brain’s command, the step itself, the message to the brain that the step has been achieved, and then it starts again in order to move the other foot forward. So it is with social justice teaching. Goodman (1992) says:

...the notion of critical thinking could not be separated from the social and moral consequences of one’s contemplations. ...the notion of critical thinking implied establishing links between one’s individual actions and thoughts and the social, historical, and cultural contexts within which one lives... (p.159).

Connell (1993), in a discussion of social justice, has this to say:

There is [a] common usage of ‘justice’ that refers to getting what one deserves... [I]t is difficult to see how a whole social group can *deserve* either more or less education than another social group (p. 16, emphasis in original)

When we take up the various elements articulated thus far in this writing, we can see how an awareness of the systemic operations of power and privilege, when coupled with a system of schooling which is predicated upon the “normalized student” outlined earlier in this chapter, place students in jeopardy in both large and small ways. Christensen (2000) states: “The continued ‘achievement gap’ between white students and students of color is further testimony to how education - especially reading and writing - continues to be a barrier to equality” (p. vi). The skills of literacy - reading and writing - need to not be limited simply



to the mechanics of these processes. It is only through making the critical turn of linking literacy with political awareness and action that literacy becomes connected with social justice and emancipation. To do less than this can place semi-articulate, semi-literate students in jeopardy. Christensen (2000) points out that “without the basic tools of [critical] literacy, ‘rising up’ can be limited to the ‘mute rebellion’ that lands too many in prison” (p. vi). Within a social justice approach to educating, when educators make it their task to bring to their teaching - and their students - an awareness of inequitable systems, there is an onus placed on those educators to ensure that they do not leave the task half-finished. To bring students - both marginalized and privileged - to an awareness of how power relations operate, to bring a person to a personal awareness and/or acknowledgement that inequity exists, and that they are but players in a much larger system, and to then not teach students the skills required to make changes in that system, can lead to frustration, rage, or despair.

To this end, it becomes an imperative for social justice educators to not deliver “the bootstrap message” (Briskin, 1994) to students. Hard work, plain and simple, will not in and of itself right injustice; neither will it, on its own, necessarily deliver to an individual that which they desire and work toward. The interrelations of power and privilege mean that, simply put, some students will more easily access the “stuff” of cultural capital than will others; not due to native intelligence, nor harder work, nor a more deserving life - due merely to the fortunes of birth within socially privileged positions. Thus, a social justice pedagogy depends on a utopian vision as a foundational element to provide the impetus that sustains some of the arduous tasks that developing a social justice pedagogy entails. We need not design the specifics of this vision as a particular goal; indeed, trying to produce and construct

a particular end through social justice pedagogy would only limit the transformative possibilities, and risk producing a new set of systemic constraints. We do need to treat schooling as a site for socially just change; we need to treat schooling as a productive process, and not simply a passive reflection of structures that operate from outside it. Thus a part of the utopian vision that sustains social justice pedagogy is this notion that changing schooling can transform the social structures which interact with schooling processes, rather than seeing schooling simply as a site for individual empowerment.

Aronowitz (1981) illustrates the processes and effects of the kind of utopian project that a social justice pedagogy can include:

Thus the antinomy between critical education and neoconservatism<sup>9</sup> does not engage at the level of the struggle for literacy. Critical education agrees that the problem exists; but it is less a question of *functional* illiteracy than historical and critical/conceptual illiteracy. The trend of current education policy seeks to persuade us that the basics movement can solve the economic crisis for students since it assumes that the problem of dead-end jobs, low income, and insecurity resides with the individual. The critical movement (still incipient but possessing some critical mass) reverses the causal relation. Functional illiteracy is produced by the constitution of the job market, by economic and social inequality, and by political powerlessness. To combat this inequality, students require knowledge (of which skills are derivative) and, most of all, hope in their collective powers to change the world so that democratic power replaces corporate control (pp.464-465).

In addition to offering students the capacity to hope for change, a social justice pedagogy must also open a space for action. Each of the elements I have discussed thus far

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I would add neoliberalism to this, twenty years after Aronowitz wrote a still timely critique of the struggles over illiteracy. Where neoconservatism has been held up to criticism for its calls for a return to a common history that never was, neoliberalism is much more insidious, allowing for a passive/aggressive resistance to reform without ever naming itself as such.

incorporates some sort of action on the part of the social justice pedagogue. As Christensen (2000) explains: "I couldn't ignore the toll the outside world was exacting on my students. Rather than pretending that I could close my door in the face of their mounting fears, I needed to use that information to reach them" (p. 4). Discussing the title of her book (Reading, writing, and rising up: Teaching about social justice and the power of the written word) as well as her philosophy/pedagogy, Christensen (2000) says:

I use the term 'rising up' because reading and writing should be emancipatory acts...teaching students just to read is not enough. We must teach students how to 'read' not only novels and science texts, but cartoons, politicians, schools, workplaces, welfare offices, and Jenny Craig ads. We need to get students to 'read' where and how public money is spent. We need to get students to 'read' the inequitable distribution of funds for schools. This is 'rising up' reading - reading that challenges, that organizes for a better world (p. viii).

Although Christensen refers particularly to literacy, there is no doubt in my mind that these words and ideas are readily - and necessarily - transferable to conversations about curriculum - and schooling processes - revisioning overall. Indeed, once one begins approaching classroom education from the vantage of critical literacy education, making a critical literacy education central to the learning process, there is no other way to go except altering one's understanding of what curriculum is. By the same token, once one operates from the vision that schooling can and should be a site for socially just change, social justice becomes central to the learning process. As Short, Harste, with Burke, (1996) observe:

Curriculum begins in voice. Learners not only have the right but also the responsibility to name and theorize their world. There is no place for learning to begin other than by making connections between the known and unknown. Personal and social knowing is the heart of the curriculum. Education in our society means education for a democracy. If some sign systems and ways-of-knowing are valued over others or if some forms of

inquiry are privileged over others the whole model is changed. In this way both multiple ways-of-knowing and inquiry become tied to issues of access, equity, and justice (pp. 50-51).

*Some concluding comments:*

Too often understandings of critical pedagogy are turned into a set of classroom practices or activities, thus rendering them not critical at all, but merely another way of maintaining the status quo. Goodman (1992), commenting on observations in Harmony school, says:

It is important to emphasize that the usefulness of any curricular content, practice, or idea actually lies in the ideological foundation of those who are teaching and learning. A particular activity (such as small-group work) within a school may look the same in two classrooms, but the impact of this activity will vary significantly between teachers and students with a connectionist perspective and teachers and students with a social conformist or libertarian perspective (p.125).

Teaching for social justice involves a politicized approach to teaching which includes teaching our students not just “what to know” but also “how to know:”

For me, education is simultaneously an act of knowing, a political act, and an artistic event. ...I say, education *is* politics, art, and knowing. Education is a certain theory of knowledge put into practice every day, but it is clothed in a certain aesthetic dress. ...[T]o the extent that we are responsible [teachers], we must become prepared, competent, capable. We should not frustrate those students who come to us hoping for answers to their expectations, to their doubts, to their desire to know. We must have some knowledge, of course, about our subject, but we must also know how to help them to know (Freire, 1996, p. 187).

It is my contention that only when a teacher is passionately committed to some sort of social action are we truly able to incorporate critical thinking into our classrooms, with an aim to developing/enhancing with our students the ability to critically examine their lives and their social world. It may be a point of argument for some, this previous statement of

mine. There may be those who will say that one can possess the skills to think and see critically, may be able to teach those skills to others, without any attached desire to change the social world. I ask in response: what then are we actually teaching others to do, when we teach them to question the foundational assumptions of the social world, if we are not in some way also teaching them that they can change the world? Shall we teach children that race is a social construct, with flexible boundaries dependent entirely upon the social mores of the moment, and that inherent within the construction of race as a social category is a built-in requirement for racism (else why create boundaries of race at all?); teach them to recognize the operations of power and privilege which are attendant upon race; teach them further that race is a powerful roadblock for some and a stepping stone for others, and then not teach them ways in which they may alter the landscape of their world? This, I would argue, is reprehensible and unethical; further, for many of our children, it is the road to despair. To teach them to critically examine and recognize the inequities of the world - their world - and then leave them without a social justice vision leaves them aware but helpless.

In his four levels of integration, Banks (1998) names the fourth level “The Decision Making and Social Action Approach.” The significance of the combination of making decisions and taking social action is not lost on me; it is my hope that the reader too has an appreciation at this point of the need to combine these two aspects into a social justice pedagogy. I summarize Banks’ (2000) fourth level:

This approach includes all of the elements of the Transformative Approach but adds components that require students to make decisions and to take action related to the concept, issue, or problem they have studied...Major goals of [this]...approach are to teach students thinking and decision making skills, to empower [sic] them, and to help them acquire a sense of political

efficacy (p. 75).

My daughter standing up for her right to not be treated in an ageist manner in the coffee shop was a moment of taking social action. Students in schools can take social action in large and small ways, but they require an environment where such action is supported and encouraged. Further to this, since so many children come to school completely unequipped with the “tools” they require to even recognize the operations of systemic inequities, in order to be able to take social action, they need first to encounter a schooling curriculum and process which has as its central and organizing theme the interrogation and explication of these relations at work.

The salient point of critical thinking, for me, is to examine each piece of “knowledge” with which we come into contact; to ask where it came from, why did it come into being, who has benefitted from our knowing this and not that, and who has lost, and then, finally, to decide what we will do from here, having re-created this knowledge. If we do not utilize this decision making process, we are not teaching or thinking critically, for nothing changes. The normative centre remains the normative centre, the marginalized remain the marginalized, and we have taught all of the students who have encountered our teaching that the way things are is ultimately okay - it must be okay, or we would be talking about how to change it.

We must, as educators, acknowledge the life experiences of each child, help them to acquire the tools that they will require to take up a place in the existent social order, and also, and I believe that this is imperative, we must make explicit the systemic operations of power and privilege as they operate in the existent social order. To do less than this is to send

students out into the social world unprepared to recognize and challenge inequities when they are encountered. If they are people who are privileged, to allow them to remain in a state of non-recognition means that they will not be enabled to work for social change for others in the world; what then have we done but allow the status quo to remain unchallenged and unchanged? If the privileged members of a social group are enabled to remain in an individualistic stance vis-a-vis social inequities, they will believe that they have what they have because they worked hard to get it and they deserve it. While this may to some extent be true (they may indeed have worked hard), the corollary is not true: that those who do not have also deserve their position. It is this type of unitary positioning which allows to pass unanalyzed and unchallenged current calls for “welfare reform,” “back to basics” schooling, and the scathing designation of some groups as “special interest” groups.

I end this chapter with some words from Connell (1993), whose work also introduced this chapter. In a clear analysis of the operations of power and privilege at work in schooling, Connell (1993) provides the following articulation of the salient moments in a social justice pedagogy:

There are...three key reasons why the issue of social justice matters for everyone connected with the school system - teachers, parents, pupils and administrators alike.

(1) The education system is a major public asset. ...schools *are* major social institutions, they have weight in the world. ...Given the scale of this public asset, who gets its benefits is a serious question. ...Educational institutions themselves have a shape that shows an unequal distribution of benefits. Western-style education systems have a pyramid shape. As you get closer to the top of the system, fewer and fewer people are there to get the benefits. ...This immediately means an unequal distribution of the resource represented by formal education. ...Who gets to the upper levels of the pyramid?

(2) ...Information industries, based on the education system and its capacities for research and training, are now key determinants of economic growth or

decline. ...More and more jobs in all kinds of fields have become credentialed. ...The education system becomes more and more important as a gatekeeper. ...The education system, then, not only distributes current social assets. It also shapes the kind of society that is coming into being.

(3) ...Teaching and learning, as social practices, *always* involve questions about purposes and criteria for action (whether those purposes are shared or not) about the application of resources (including authority and knowledge), and about responsibility and the consequences of action. ...The moral quality of education is inevitably affected by the moral character of educational institutions. If the school system is dealing unjustly with some of its pupils, they are not the only ones to suffer. *The quality of education for all the others is degraded.*

...The issue of social justice is not an add-on. It is fundamental to what good education is about (pp. 11-15, emphases in original).

At the beginning of this chapter, I invited the reader to return for a moment to the cat's cradle metaphor. I pointed there to the interconnections between schooling processes and conceptions of curriculum discussed in Chapter Two; the work of Chapter Three interrogates student engagement as a relation and a process. In this chapter, I have articulated and explored four key elements which are integral to the process of developing a social justice pedagogy. Those elements are: a rejection of the notion of neutrality, followed by an articulation of an ethic of care; critical thinking and critical pedagogy; self-reflectivity and self-reflexivity; and, a utopian vision to inform political action. Collectively, Chapters Two, Three, and Four provide a substantive framework for the analyses and critiques which taken together are the interconnected relational processes which have come together at this time to shape/inform my theorizing of a social justice pedagogy. In the final chapter, I turn to the necessary "action" component of this theorizing, asking "What shall I do with all of this now?"



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **A STRATEGY FOR RESISTANCE**

...the overall process of planning and developing the curriculum (including implementation, evaluation, and change) is usually best undertaken cooperatively by those people who have a perceived stake in the outcome - from educational officials, to students and parents, to members of the community - but...the persons...best equipped to do so are the professionals closest to classrooms: the teachers (Marsh and Willis, 1999, p. 6).

In Chapter One I said that there is a pragmatic need and an ethical requirement for people who are socially privileged to recognize their own privilege and to call its operations into question, thereby beginning or enhancing their own development of/theorizing of a social justice pedagogy. This theorizing of a/my social justice pedagogy rests foundationally upon an argument of the need for teachers to teach with/from/through an ethic of humanization (Freire, 1998) and with an ethic of care as outlined in Chapter Four. I have also argued that while the issue of “choice” is not a binary position, I consider it unethical for me to suggest that teachers ought to teach with/in a socially just pedagogy, on the one hand, and then not offer strategies for how that might happen. This is not to suggest that no teachers are already working in this manner; I know many classroom teachers and educators in other venues who do this work. Indeed, I learned from and work with several of them. Nor is it to suggest that I have “the” answer; as is apparent through this writing, I work and live with passion and conviction that our social world is inequitable, and that this is inhumane and must be interrogated and disrupted. To this end, and given that I believe the social institution of schooling, with its interconnected relational processes, is one of the most important spaces available in/through which to effect large-scale socially just change, I turn to that space to find ways to work with others in this project. While I do not have “the

definitive answer” for another, at the same time I believe that “an” answer is possible.

I ended the last chapter with the question “What shall I do with all of this now?” This question is for me not just a way of trying to finish the project of writing; this is a question which has informed my daily activities and thinking processes for several years now. I came to teaching university almost as an accident, eight years ago. At that time, I had no thoughts of becoming an educator as a full-time career/undertaking. But, since I have been teaching, writing, reading, thinking over the past several years, and particularly (although not solely) due to my involvement in teaching the Equity courses, I have increasingly found myself asking the same question: “What shall I do with all of this now?” Theorizing a social justice pedagogy needs to have an action component; otherwise, the work, although doubtless valuable, is simply the development of “a theory” and developing a theory is not theorizing. For me, theorizing requires the duality of thinking and doing. So, the question then became for me: What to do with this theorizing?

Where I can do something is in/with/through teacher education; others may take up/on a theorizing and apply the action component in other venues, but where I work and where I can do something is in teacher education. But this application of a social justice pedagogy is more than simply “what can I do with it?” I also believe that intervening in the everyday processes of how we educate teachers is a vitally important space in which intervention is required. Throughout the preceding four chapters, I have addressed several aspects of a theorizing of a/my social justice pedagogy. I began this theorizing with a chapter on curriculum; I believe that how any individual conceptualizes “the curriculum,” what it is and what it does/is for, then informs everything else they may do, or not do. In this final

chapter, I return, in a manner of speaking, to that initial discussion of curriculum, in suggesting here that teacher education programs be altered/revised/revisioned.

I agree with Marsh and Willis' (1999) contention that classroom teachers ought to be the central curriculum-decision makers. They are the people who every day are faced with not only the formal curriculum documents, but also the informal curriculum practices of their school's climate, as well as the varying and complex bodies and minds of their room full of students. It is not that I in any way wish to dismiss or diminish the importance of involving other community members in this important, indeed, this central aspect of schooling. Parents, community members, students ought also to be involved in the curriculum process. I do admit to some concerns regarding the possibility/ies around this suggestion, however. For instance, while I concur that inviting parents to be involved with the various processes of schooling is important, I wonder which parents will (be able to) accept? Will parents living on a limited income be able to hire a babysitter in order to come out to a curriculum planning evening? Will parents who speak English (or the dominant language where they live) limitedly (if at all) feel that they will be heard if they speak? Will parents who cannot read even know about such a meeting, if the invitation is issued through a school newsletter? Or, will "parental involvement" be largely limited to socially privileged parents, and if so, what implications might this have for the curriculum (formal and informal) of school?

Placing classroom teachers at the centre of planning and developing the curriculum acknowledges the ways in which, as implementors of "the curriculum," teachers occupy that role everyday already. But, to bring the various discussions of this dissertation together here, I maintain that if we are to reasonably expect that teachers will have the various analytic

skills and processes which are necessary components of their own theorizing of a social justice pedagogy, then we must find/make spaces available where they may develop the “tools” which they will need in/for this process. Freire (1987) asserts that

...a teacher must be fully cognizant of the political nature of his/her practice and assume responsibility for this rather than denying it. When the teacher is seen as a political person, then the political nature of education requires that the teacher either serve whoever is in power or present options to those in power... (Freire, in Shor, 1987, p. 21).

In order to have teachers be “fully cognizant” in the ways which Freire suggests, teacher education must open the space for this process to be built and/or maintained.

The dismantling of formal curriculum conceptions, practices, and procedures through this endeavour will certainly change teacher education programs. Introducing, as a central and organizing characteristic of the ways in which we teach teachers, the questioning of recognized signposts of (all kinds of) authority will result in a rupture of familiar antagonistic opposites, such as “teacher/student, objectivity/subjectivity, knower/known, teaching/learning, testing/creating knowledge, authority produced/student produced textbooks” (Berry, 1998, p. 50). As William Doll, Jr. (1993) suggests:

...relations between teachers and students will change drastically. These relations will exemplify less the knowing teacher informing unknowing students, and more a group of individuals interacting together in the mutual exploration of relevant issues....traditional methods of evaluation and assessment become irrelevant; authority shifts from an external beyond to a communal and dialogic here.... curriculum will be viewed not as a set, a priori “course to be run,” but as a passage of personal transformation (pp. 3-4).

This “passage of personal transformation” opens the possibilities for changing the ways we teach teachers, and opens the spaces within these transformed programs for teachers to learn/continue to develop their own strategies for resistance to/of the operations of power

relations which inform a fundamentally inequitable social system, inside and outside our schools (Oakes, 1988; Contenta, 1993; Dei, 1996; LeCompte, 1996; Ghosh, 1996).

In order to affect change, we cannot target only one aspect of a multi-faceted system which has many and disparate players and levels of involvement. The interactions between the various elements of this system are neither linear nor unidirectional. These interactions constitute a dense network of power relations which work most effectively to mask their own operations when we focus on only one element. Therefore, the most effective strategy for intervention, and to facilitate the possibility for socially just change, is to make some of the key players conscious of the power relations operating in and through their work, and in so doing to provide these key players with the means to develop a consciousness of their own role(s) in these relations. Some of these key players, and the focus of this writing, include both classroom teachers and the people who are responsible for them becoming certified as such. It is the responsibility of the people who teach teachers to ensure that they enter their own classrooms with an understanding of how they can and should take care with and for their students. This last statement provides the direction for the work I offer in this final chapter.

*What shall we do next?*

Teachers and schooling are facing a growing demand that schools involve themselves in the lives of students in an ever-expanding circle: not only are schools and teachers to teach students to read, write, and do math, teachers now find themselves faced daily with issues of poverty, disabilities, abuse, racism, sexism, sexual harassment, sexualities (Solomon and Allen, 2001, p. 217), and they are struggling. Within a schooling structure that was never

set up to even acknowledge these experiences, let alone help students learn how to recognize and deal with them, teachers are left to do the best that they can. How can we justify sending them out into the world of teaching unprepared (or ill-prepared) to meet these demands?

Gerard Egan (1998) points out that:

In our society, prevention, like unused opportunities, gets short shrift. ... The economics of prevention are well known. Many studies demonstrate that prevention “works”, even though there is disagreement on how to go about doing it. ...Resources spent on preventing social-emotional, physical, family, workplace, and societal problems provide a “return” that is much greater than the return from resources spent on cure. Despite this, the institutions of society continue to underspend on prevention (p. xvi).

As Egan points out, we underspend on prevention; in this instance, we need to “spend” time, energy, commitment, and passion in educating our educators in order to realize a different kind of “return” on our “investment”<sup>1</sup> - transforming our students in order that they might transform their world.

Schools are one of the most important and present institutions where children learn how to construct an identity and learn how to be in the world. As such, there is an ethical imperative that students - all student, both privileged and marginalized - learn how to recognize and how to intervene with or circumvent social inequities. We have an ethical obligation to provide them with the skills they need to be able to recognize the systemic operations of power relations and to develop strategies for resistance so that they are not left

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Although I echo Egan’s comments regarding the necessity of prevention rather than cure, I am unhappy with the language of banking and capitalism which he uses. In the interests of parallel structure, I retained his language for a brief moment. Ultimately, however, I tend to avoid language which suggests that students are a consumer commodity, and that reasons for changing schooling practices might be based in a business model of realizing a sound return on our investment.

alone and struggling to pull themselves up by the bootstraps (Briskin, 1994, pp. 446-447). In order for schools to do this job, teacher education programs and professional development need to focus a specific type of attention on educating the educators.

Some might ask: Why teacher education programs? Given the multi-faceted and multi-layered context and constituents which inform and interact with schooling, why not change something else? What about parents, students, administrations, governments, even (in fact, quite often most particularly) “the” curriculum? To these other possibilities, I respond: Changing governments, particularly within the Canadian political sphere, changes little about schooling, unless one counts budget cuts, and while these do alter how schooling is done, they do not transform schooling in the sense which I mean. Changing curriculum texts has been tried - and tried - and tried (see, for instance, Cornbleth, 1990; Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995). Even the most radical and transformative curriculum (either as document or as pedagogy) often disappears with little or no visible effect (Cornbleth, 1990; Rogers, 1997). Attempting to change parents without first changing the way we teach teachers strikes me as frustrating and ultimately useless; teachers’ efforts are likely to be subsumed into the conservative understandings of “this is how school is done.” Factoring in to the possibility of changing parents first must be a recognition that “...public discussion about public schools has shifted from criticism to dismissal and despair. It has the effect of shutting down our vision of what is possible” (Scherer, April 1997, p. 8). This “shutting down of our vision” may mean that efforts to first convince parents and the general public that reform is needed will be met with the “dismissal and despair” which Mike Rose points to in his interview with Marge Scherer (April 1997, p. 8).

Finally, suggestions that we start by changing students loops us directly back to those who teach students: how could we change students if we do not first change their teachers? Besides, how do we change an entire nation of parents and students if not through education? Thus, I arrive at my conclusion that one of the fundamental areas for intervention in order to interrupt the inequitable social system in which we currently live, are teachers. And, since teachers do not spring forth fully formed as from the brow of Zeus, but are taught how to be teachers, the logical conclusion seems to me to be to dramatically and radically reform teacher education programs. The change I advocate will not happen one neat step at a time, with a focus on only one aspect of schooling; that effort would be to repeat what the history of attempted school reform tells us is a fruitless and frustrating endeavour (Cornbleth, 1990; Cornbleth and Waugh, 1995; Deever, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997).

*Changing teacher education programs*

The emphasis on changing teachers is a necessary and integral component of changing schools. As Cornbleth (1990) points out in her analysis of curriculum and structural change:

I focus on an intermediate or mid-level of the education system - the school - because that is the immediate layer of the structural context of curriculum, encompassing individual classrooms, teaching teams or departments. While schools can be changed from within...school level structural change usually is a function of further systemic and sociocultural change. In a sense, the school is a pivotal location linking the local, classroom curriculum and the macro, national education system (p. 99).

There are no “methods courses” which teacher education programs offer (or can offer) which would allow someone to say at the end of the course: “Now I am a teacher of and for social justice.” An attempt to so do, to construct a course which in and of itself



would leave its participants with such an understanding, is antithetical to a social justice pedagogy. I am reminded here of an incident which happened several years ago. I was to teach a course called The Sociology of Education, a second year BEd course. On the first day, I had over twenty five students in the room; as is the usual practice on the first day, we went through the course outline, assignments, readings, and so forth. The next week, I had only seven students in the room; the remainder had transferred into a different course. I was puzzled, of course, and more than a little concerned; had they disliked my manner, was there something wrong with the outline, what had happened? Later that same day I ran into a student who was one of the transfers; she stopped me to explain that the mass shift out of my course was not about me, but upon going through the course outline, the students had realized that they had “done critical thinking” the previous year! To say that I was astounded would be an understatement; apparently many of these students had walked right on by the “critical turn,” and were certain that having “done critical thinking,” they now had it under their belt, so to speak, and could opt to “be done” with it.

Single courses, particularly when they are taught without a supporting context of analysis throughout the entire program, do not equip emerging teachers with the ability to critique themselves and their social world in the ways which are required in a social justice pedagogy. In introducing Freire’s (1998) Pedagogy of Freedom, Aronowitz describes this text as:

an invocation to seekers after an alternative to repressive education to renew the struggle for emancipatory education. [Freire, in this book]...advocates a ‘rigorous ethical grounding’ in the teacher’s determination to combat ‘racial, sexual, and class discrimination.’ [Additionally]...it explains the concept that education is open-ended ‘scientific formation’ because people are

conditioned but not determined by their circumstance. ...Freire calls for the learner's 'critical reflection' on the social, economic, and cultural conditions within which education occurs; learning begins with taking the self as the first - but not the last - object of knowledge (p. 12).

Neither a single course nor teacher education programs can "make" someone a social justice pedagogue. What teacher education programs can do/could do is to open spaces wherein this life-long learning process could be begun or enhanced. Instead of a diet of "methods" courses with liberatory pedagogy as an add-on (sometimes), teacher education programs could contain a central and informing focus of critical thinking, critical pedagogy, inquiry, history, philosophy, politics, and liberatory/emancipatory pedagogy<sup>2</sup>. As Aronowitz (1998) describes the processes of education, he points out that:

The accomplishment of critical consciousness consists in the first place in the learner's capacity to situate herself [sic] in her own historicity, for example, to grasp the class, race, and sexual aspects of education and social formation and to understand the complexity of the relations that have produced this situation. ...[T]he active knower, not the mind as a repository of "information," is the goal of education (p. 14).

This change which I suggest as being among the first and most necessary undertakings in order to transform schooling, should itself begin with changing the very foundations of teacher education programs. This will be a challenge, I am certain. How we go about affecting changes to the very foundations of these programs is in itself an enormous task, one which requires convincing university administrations and those who teach in these

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This is not intended to suggest that there are not already educators of teachers, including some methods courses educators, doing this work. There are educators in teacher education programs who quite explicitly teach with/in a social justice pedagogy; I am advocating that teacher education programs take social justice work as a central and informing ethos/ethic/philosophy/approach.

programs of both the desirability and necessity of undertaking this challenge. Here, it would appear, we may enter a “death spiral.” Change teachers - change teachers by changing their university educators - change university educators by somehow convincing decision makers of the need for this change - and the spiral builds its own life force. My concern, as I write this, is that this conversation could, if taken up, result only in more conversations, endless rounds of “But where do we start?” The answer for each of us is to start from where we are.

As I tell students in my courses when they ask similar questions “You know, I don’t know that it matters where you start, just so long as you start. Start by seeing something today that you would have walked past yesterday, and then make a conscious choice to do something about it. Tell your principal that you think it is heterosexist to charge \$10 per single person but \$15 per couple for the school Valentine’s Dance, especially when gay or lesbian students in your school receive absolutely no support if they choose to (dare to) come out. Teach your class a piece of writing by a Black or First Nations author even if it isn’t February or October. Take a risk - but do something.” This “starting,” which is a necessary action component to/of change, is also a necessary component of a developing social justice pedagogy. Starting “somewhere” refuses the possibility of taking refuge in the neoliberalist mind-set of “This is how the world is in these modern times; there’s nothing we can do about it, so why bother trying?” Action is, however, not a sufficient condition of a social justice pedagogy; the complex intertwining of action, analysis, reflection, and learning, leading back then to action, requires the opening of spaces - both physical and metaphorical spaces - where this cycle has room to develop and to grow.

I have stated in this dissertation that the various strands of conversation held herein

need to be held in connection with one another, rather than in isolation one from another. I began this writing by examining conceptions of curriculum; this choice was more than an arbitrary moment of intervening “somewhere” in the circuitous process of all that is schooling. The conception one has of curriculum, “coming from” an attached understanding of the purposes of schooling, are foundational to the entire process of schooling. Notions and understandings about “the curriculum” are fundamental to the process that is schooling; intervening with conservative conceptions of curriculum and the purposes of schooling are integral to developing a social justice pedagogy. One of the more crucial pieces of conversation which new teachers (as well as many already practicing teachers) need an opportunity to have is on the topic of “curriculum.” For several years now, I have taught a graduate course with classroom teachers on theorizing curriculum. Each time, one or more often several of the students, all of whom are already teachers in classrooms, have commented on what they see as both the value and the necessity for this opportunity to reflect, interrogate, and discuss with other professionals the many and varied understandings of “curriculum” which we take up in our class. While a number of students have commented that they wished they could have had this course during their undergraduate education program, we also talk about how one might see this conversation differently before and after some years of classroom experience. While I am quite passionate about the need for interrogations of “curriculum” to happen, I am still of two minds about where it might “best fit.”

Cross (1998) has her students (who are themselves teachers) “reflect on and imagine” their curricular vision, in order to expand their conception of curriculum beyond “an external

written document that tells them what to teach...something others develop and order and they [teachers] follow and implement” (p.44). In this way, she suggests, teachers begin to conceptualize curriculum as “something that starts with and takes life from them and the children they teach” (p.44). This offers to teachers the possibility of shifting from a perspective of curriculum as something over which they have no control and therefore hold no responsibility for, to an understanding of the always partial and political nature of curriculum. Teachers who conceive of “the curriculum” as a developed-by-others document may fail to see the always political nature of curriculum, the continuation of inequitable and oppressive practices as they are re/produced in and through the curriculum (both as document and in conservative practices). And, if they do see it, they may believe that they are removed from doing anything about it, because “the curriculum” is not about them. As Cross (1998) states: “If it [curriculum] reproduces social injustice, oppression, and domination, it is not their [teacher’s] fault, since they did not write or develop it” (p.44).

In addition to changing how we teach new teachers, there is an additional difficulty of how to have this work reach educators who are already teaching in classrooms. Even if we manage the task of change within teacher education programs, the public process of schooling is not going to stand still awaiting a new generation of teachers. Many of the teachers who return to university for Master’s degrees are committed to the endeavour of further learning, but not all educators are able to (or want to) do graduate work. Having this critical work reach already-practicing teachers is therefore an issue which will need to be addressed if schools are to change. I do not in any way wish to suggest that this is an all-encompassing statement about all teachers who are already teaching in schools. There are

many teachers who have been teaching for years who are politically involved and aware, who have committed themselves to further learning, analysis, and critical work in their classrooms. These are not the teachers to whom I am referring here; rather, I am discussing teachers who remain unaware that the work they do is not critical pedagogy, or who believe that they are doing critical pedagogy, with no realization of the conservative foundation from which they are teaching. These are the teachers we will need to find ways of reaching and communicating with in order to further a social justice pedagogy.

*Imagining the unimaginable*

I am reminded here of the ending of one of my favourite novels, Suzette Haden Elgin's (1985) Native Tongue<sup>3</sup>. (My apologies to those who have not read this fine text, and who are about to have the ending revealed.) Nazareth, the central character of Haden Elgin's book, is faced by a group of women, with whom she has been involved for years in the development of a secret "women's" language. Central to the development of this "women's language" has been the worry on the part of the women as to what they will do "when the men find out." Now the men have found out, and the results are something the women never had imagined, and thus, for which they have no contingency plan. Nazareth has been the only member of the group who never participated in developing contingency plans, and now the rest of the group wants to know what she knew that they did not, as they can see no other reason for her having refused to be involved in their planning. Nazareth says:

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This novel is the first in a series of science fiction novels which operate as speculative fictions. Elgin uses the "world" created as sites to explore the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language structures reality; Laadan is a language designed to represent the world from a woman's point of view.

**“Perceive this...there was only one reason for the Encoding Project, really, other than just the joy of it. The hypothesis was that if we put the project into effect it would *change reality*. ... [A]ll your plans were based on the *old* reality. The one *before* the change.”**

**“But Nazareth, how can you plan for a new reality when you don’t have the remotest idea what it would be like?” Aquina demanded indignantly. “That’s not possible!”**

**“Precisely,” said Nazareth. “We have no science for that. We have pseudo-sciences, in which we extrapolate for a reality that would be nothing more than a minor variation on the one we have ... but the science of actual reality change has not yet been even proposed, much less formalized” (Haden Elgin, 1985, p. 296, emphases in original).**

My argument here follows a similar framework. I point to teacher education programs and teachers as the principle sites for transformative intervention primarily because these are the sites of the everyday production and maintenance of the very power relations that I seek to transform. Whether we can imagine the end result before we begin, or as we change how we teach teachers, is, while important so that we do not “spin our wheels” in useless activity, of less importance than recognizing that we must make these changes. Liz Aaronsohn (2001), who was a Freedom School teacher, is emphatic in her view that we must recognize that:

**...all education is political. Traditional education serves the status quo. You risk your job when you encourage students to find their own voices, to engage in dialogue with you and with each other around the issues that affect their lives; but you risk their lives if you do not (p. 132).**

There may be some who think that Aaronsohn is simply alarmist. I do not. Children’s lives are put at risk when the schooling they encounter refuses to recognize that the lives many children lead have no connection to the content and practices of schooling. Some children literally end their lives rather than continue to live in social systems which tell them they are “wrong” for being who they are (Griffin & Harro, 1997). Many more lives are

placed in emotional, spiritual, financial, and physical jeopardy when they encounter a schooling system that renders them invisible, helpless, and leaves them to stagnate within dehumanizing social conditions they believe they cannot change (Kozol, 1991; Contenta, 1993; Yeskel & Leondar-Wright, 1997). It is absolutely imperative that classroom teachers be supported in the transformative practices which ground a social justice pedagogy. Further to this, classroom teachers must be made aware of the ethical choice which they pursue every day. They may be unaware that there is an ethical choice; as I have stated previously, power works most efficiently when it masks its own operations (Foucault, 1978). This means that, based on the process I articulated in Chapter Four which means that most classroom teachers are members of the privileged dominant groups, they have been enabled to encounter their own schooling and their everyday lives in a way that means they have never been made aware of their own privilege.

In the process which Freire (1985) names the “utopian project” of “humanistic education,” I believe that we must offer teachers the possibility of an explicit awareness of the power relations of privilege and marginalization, in order to “overcome idealist illusions and pipe dreams of an eventual humanistic education for mankind [sic] without the necessary transformation of an oppressed and unjust world” (p. 112). We will not wake up one day to a world where overnight everyone has somehow altered themselves and the material conditions of this world in which we live, and now, suddenly, all is well. As Freire (1998) tells us:

it is essential that during the experience of teaching preparation, the prospective teacher must realize that a correct way of thinking is not a gift from heaven, nor is it to be found in teachers’ guide books, put there by



illuminated intellectuals who occupy the center of power (p. 43, emphasis added).

The radical reform of teacher education programs which I advocate as both the most necessary and the only ethical response to social inequities as they are re/produced in and through schooling practices will require not only revisioning the courses (and the foundations of those courses) which students in teacher education programs take. A further necessary step will require finding ways to connect the work done within teacher education programs and the experiences preservice teachers acquire/encounter when they are on field placement.

*Out in the "field"*

Solomon and Allen (2001), commenting on Giroux and McLaren (1986), point out that when teacher candidates "...enter their practicum or fieldwork site, [they] are rudely awakened by the contradictions, ambiguities, and constant struggles for dominance among competing interest groups" (p. 218). The first year I taught in a Bachelor of Education program, the program was eight months long. Halfway through the fall term, preservice teachers went out to schools for several weeks. When they returned, the students in my class appeared overwhelmed. Their first day back in my classroom, we put aside the topic intended for discussion that day; they most desperately needed a space in which to talk about their experiences and how to make sense of what they had learned in their program now that they had tried to put it into practice. There were many stories shared that day; one of the most memorable for me was from a young man who shared that he had left for his practicum determined to show "the dinosaurs"<sup>4</sup> (he was referring to teachers already in the schools) how

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I note here that while this is the language the student used, it did not go unchallenged, by me

teaching “should be done.”

He was determined that he would get to know his students on an individual basis, that he would demonstrate to them that he understood them and that he cared about them. In his high school subject-specific placement, he saw one hundred and eighty students in a six day cycle. Not only did he not get to know each of his students individually, he could hardly remember what grade level he was teaching from one period to the next. During his few weeks in the school, two students attempted suicide, several dropped out of school completely, and one student spent three weeks living in his car because he had been thrown out of his parents’ home. All of these students were in his classes; he cried as he recounted how he had not even noticed the absence of the drop-outs or the two who had attempted suicide, except as marks on his attendance roster. Of the handful of names and faces which he had been able to connect, the boy who lived in his car was one, only because this preservice teacher’s master teacher met the boy early every morning to let him in to shower in the school facilities before classes started.

I have learned to make a space for students to talk about their experiences when they are returning from their field placement; then we use their recountings to link the theories they have learned to the practical experience of schools. Many of them leave for their placements excited, hopeful, and idealistic; too many times, they return tired, discouraged, and sometimes despairing. I have had preservice teachers phone me at home, or come to my office during or immediately following their placements, contemplating dropping out of the program entirely and doing something else with their lives. In my experiences, it is most

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or by others in the room.

often the most sensitive, caring, and passionate of these preservice teachers who contemplate dropping out. Their real, intense desire to make a difference in the lives of their students is shaken - sometimes shattered - when they are faced with the implementation of their ideals in “real classrooms in real schools” (this last is from one of these despairing students, who thought that the world of make-believe would be a better place to put some of the theories she had learned within her program).

Developing an integration between the university classrooms of preservice teachers and their field placement experiences will be a crucial aspect of teaching new teachers from and in a social justice pedagogy. If these integrations are not achieved, preservice teachers will continue to be jarred by the discrepancy between the “theory of their own classes” and the “reality of real classes.” As Solomon and Allen (2001) point out: “Teacher candidates’ engagement with the pedagogy of equity and social justice [depends], to a large extent, on their mentor’s classroom politics and commitment to diversity” (p. 231). Current systems of teacher preparation leave preservice teachers largely dependent on their mentoring or master teacher for evaluations which are a large factor of whether or not that preservice teacher will be deemed to have passed their practicum. Failing a practicum sometimes means being dropped from the teacher education program; minimally, it usually means repeating at least one extra term of university in order to “make up” the failed field placement. This system frequently leaves preservice teachers in a position where they perceive that they must follow the lead of their mentoring teacher, even when the mentoring teacher holds personal/political views and practices which are in direct opposition to those of the preservice teacher (Solomon and Allen, 2001; also many personal conversations with

preservice teachers whom I have supervised during their field placement). On several occasions when I have been supervising preservice teachers who have experienced this clash, I have heard the bitter statement “Well, if I take anything out of this experience, it will be how not to teach once I get my own classroom.” “Making the best” of this type of experience does not leave new teachers with a solid foundation for starting out in what has already been described as a very difficult profession; nor, when the mentoring teacher holds conservative views and values, is there much space for the preservice teacher to teach from a critical position. A number of the social justice minded preservice teachers with whom I have worked have explicitly articulated that they will be putting their social justice work “on hold” until they have some job security.

### *Competing interests*

In an era of dwindling resources, fewer dollars, larger classes, less professional development time, and ever-increasing physical, mental, and emotional demands placed upon schools, and particularly on the teachers who work in schools, the competing interests of individuals and of groups can sometimes seem insurmountable. One teacher who was a class member of a graduate course I was teaching told me one day about a meeting he had recently had with a parent of a child who needed more resources in terms of teacher time and special equipment. The teacher told this parent that there was nothing more he could do, the resources were spread thinly and there were no more available. He finally explained to this parent that in order to meet her child’s needs, resources would have to be taken from another child who was already using them. The anxious and frustrated (this teacher’s description) parent replied that he had better make that happen, then, because her child was not going to

go without the resources needed. This teacher looked at me and asked (rhetorically - he did not really expect me to have an answer, which was just as well, since I did not and do not have an answer) “So, what do I do now? Take resources from a kid who is already using them - because they need them - to give to another kid who also needs them?”

I have worked over the years with public school teachers who routinely arrive at their school by seven in the morning, some of them to meet students who need to shower or use the school’s washing machines and dryers to wash their only clothes. I know teachers who pack several lunches every day, knowing that they will give away most, if not all, of what they have packed to children who have no food. I know teachers who buy classroom supplies with their own money, who have not had a “prep” period in over five years, who do not leave their classroom from eight in the morning until six in the evening, who go without recess or lunch breaks in order to provide extra time for students who need academic help, or sometimes just a place to be. One teacher I know made a practice of leaving a particular student locked<sup>5</sup> in his classroom every day at lunch time in order to ensure that the boy was not beaten on the school grounds; the other junior high students had “decided” this boy was gay, and he had been severely beaten up several times that year. The school in this instance had a policy that no students were to be in classrooms if a teacher was not present; since the teacher had a commitment at lunch time, he literally put his job on the line when it appeared that this was the only option to keep the student safe. This teacher was extremely troubled by what he saw as the only viable option; I was equally troubled when he shared this practice

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The door locked from the outside, so the student could leave simply by turning the handle; no one could enter the room without a key.

with me. To have the “only safe space” for a student to be locked in a teacher’s classroom is an appalling and inhumane response; but for the teacher, to leave this boy as a target for the harassment he was receiving was even more inhumane, as well as unethical and irresponsible (personal conversation, 1998). This was a “no-win” situation for everyone involved; I share it here to point once more to the need for radical and foundational transformation of/for teachers, and the ways in which schooling is “done.”

It is imperative that the conditions under which teachers work be changed. It is estimated that up to half of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Pappano, February 24, 2002, [The Boston Globe Online](#)). Although I have only my own experiences, recounted above, on which to base this statement, I fear that the teachers we lose in those first few years are all too often those we most need to keep in schools; those who began with a keen desire to change classrooms, to meet the needs of their students as well as possible, to make a difference in the lives of their students through helping them to develop a critical awareness. Diana Wyllie Rigden (1996), in detailing the results of a large-scale series of interviews and questionnaires she conducted with classroom teachers (five/sixths of whom had been teaching for more than ten years at the time of the study) notes that: “Too many enthusiastic and idealistic new teachers are eaten alive...during their first year” (p. 26). She goes on to state that “[t]hey need a yearlong intern program where they could really get the feel of the day-to-day routine...” (p. 26). Such an approach would alleviate much of the panic experienced by new graduates of teacher education programs upon entering “their very own classroom” for the first time in September (personal conversations with recent graduates).

Many of the students with whom I have worked in teacher education programs have remained in contact with me after they graduate and start teaching. A number of them have commented on the vast discrepancy between preservice teaching blocks of several weeks, and the experience of that first year, when they are “tossed into the deep end” of a classroom of their own. Two women with whom I have remained in contact have told me that they did almost no “actual teaching” during the month of September. The entire first month of being “real teachers” was spent in learning (often from their students) how to do the day-to-day routine of a bureaucratic organization: attendance, lunch money collection, moving from one room to another, communications with the office and with home, and so forth. One of them described her first month as “surreal” and commented that even though she found her two year education degree program “long at the time,” she wished in retrospect that she could have had a third year spent entirely in a classroom with “the support of a master teacher and profs from the program there to call on and help me” (personal communication).

Some of the most intense, passionate, critically aware teachers for social justice I have met have been teachers who have been working in classrooms for fifteen or twenty years, or longer. Several times I have asked these teachers when they started working in these ways; each time, I have been told it was after about ten years of teaching. When I ask why, they respond with two key pieces of information: first, by that time they had a permanent position, which meant that if they “took risks” in their classrooms, they probably would not be fired. Second, they tell me that after ten years or so of teaching, you can finally relax somewhat in the area of discipline (as narrowly constructed to mean keeping everyone seated and quiet), and this means that they know that the world will not fall apart if they try

something new in their room. Further to this, they have developed an understanding that if they “make a mistake” they can recover - and so will their students. These more experienced teachers have learned what they need to pay attention to, and what they can more safely “ignore.” In the latter category, I am told, fall new directives from administration and Departments of Education that make no sense to the teacher; they know which forms and pieces of “bureaucratic trivia” must be paid attention to, and which can be simply filed away (in a cupboard or a garbage can). Being able to sort allows them to gain precious time which they then spend teaching and responding to students.

A further area of study arising from this dissertation would be a large-scale series of interviews with new teachers to ascertain why they are entering the teaching profession, departing teachers (if they are leaving after only a few years) to discover why they are leaving, and long-term teachers, particularly those who work with a critical pedagogy, to confirm (if possible) the suggestions of long-term teachers who work for social justice that this work is safer once you have a permanent job and once you have learned to “relax” with regard to the multi-directional demands placed on teachers’ time. If these suggestions are found to hold true across large numbers of teachers, it may be possible to use these findings to support reform efforts in schools and in teacher preparation programs. The experiences of these long-term teachers could be invaluable for incoming teachers to the profession, perhaps providing them with a sense of safety and assurance that they too will find their way and need not leave in despair.

I constantly urge students in my classes to join their union, to become politically aware and politically active, and to find ways to ensure that the parents of the students they



teach become familiar with what teachers do in classrooms, and the conditions under which teachers teach. When teachers are deluged from almost every direction with the immense demands of their profession, and then see themselves portrayed in the public media as having an easy life, with short working hours, summers off, and week long vacations twice a year, it must be all too easy to become resigned, cynical, or despairing. One area of much-needed work which this dissertation both points to and could also provide a foundation for, is to increase teachers' political commitment as well as the awareness of members of the general public of teaching conditions<sup>6</sup>.

*Hegemony meets a mockingbird*

In the Equity course I taught, one of the students' assignments was called "The Identity Quilt." There were several aspects to this quilt, but one of the most telling results of doing this assignment was the large number of students who said in their write-up accompanying this assignment that "Until I did this project/took this course, I never knew I had a race." Over the several years I have used this assignment, I have heard this response no less than fifty times; it is always made by people who are White. Non-White people in Canada are very aware, certainly by the time they reach university (if they reach university) that they have a race (Jaffer, 1994; Richardson, Richardson, & Richardson, 1994). It is only the privilege of Whiteness which allows some people to go through some or all of their lives unaware that they too have a race. As Giroux (1981) points out:

hegemony...points to the relationship between the dominant and dominated

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For an important discussion of the conditions of teachers' work, see Hargreaves, (1993); see also the introduction in MacKinnon, (2001).

classes. In other words, hegemony involves the successful attempts of a dominant class to utilize its control over the resources of state and civil society, particularly through the use of the mass media and the educational system, to establish its view of the world as all inclusive and universal. Through the dual use of force and consent, with consent prevailing, the dominant class uses its political, moral, and intellectual leadership to shape and incorporate the “taken-for-granted” views, needs, and concerns of subordinate groups. In doing so, the dominant class not only attempts to influence the interests and needs of such groups, it also contains radical opportunities by placing limits on oppositional discourse and practice (p. 418).

This hegemony allows members of privileged classes to continue taking-for-granted their own world-view at the same time that this world-view is forced onto the lives of those whose world actually looks quite different. It is this hegemonic world-view which has resulted in some of the most bitter battles ever waged in my Equity classes, a battle fought over a book which was, until quite recently, required reading in senior high English classes in Nova Scotia<sup>7</sup>: To kill a mockingbird. One of the documents I have students read is a paper entitled “A proposal regarding the usage of the novel ‘To kill a mockingbird’,” (hereafter referred to as “A Proposal”) written to the attention of the English Program Services Division, Department of Education, and submitted on behalf of The African-Canadian Services Division and The Race Relations Coordinators in N.S. [sic]. “A Proposal” outlines the harm that is done for students who are required to read To kill a mockingbird. In part, “A Proposal” states that:

The results of racist materials do not affect us all in the same way or to the same degree. The White child who is led to believe that he or she is normal

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It is my understanding, based on a personal conversation with two senior high English teachers in the fall of 2001, that this text is no longer required reading. It is, however, still allowable reading, and teachers who choose to use this text in their classes are free to so do.

while everyone else is colourful, exotic, primitive, inferior, or a minority, is being crippled and left out of touch with a marginal view of the real world, while the African-Canadian student is led to believe that he or she is inferior and can never reach their full potential (p. 2).

When we read this document together and then discuss it in class, many of the students are adamant that this novel is an “accurate and sensitive” portrayal of a particular historical context, and that therefore they should be allowed to teach it for the benefit of all of their students. “That’s the way things were,” they say. “A Proposal” responds:

While the White student and White teacher may misconstrue it as language of an earlier era or the way it was, this [stereotypical] language is still widely used today and the book serves as a tool to reinforce its usage even further. ...Are teachers researching the history of African-Canadian or American people and prepared to offer both sides of the picture? ...The terminology used in this novel subjects students to humiliating experiences that rob them of their self-respect and the respect of their peers (pp. 2-3).

One day, when this particular heated exchange was underway yet once again, with my students charging me with “overdone political correctness” and a desire to “censor” both books and “their right to teach what they want,” an African-Nova Scotian man who was a member of the class spoke up. He told his classmates about being required to read this book in Grade Ten; he told them how some of the language in the book made him throw up; and he told them about going to his teacher and first asking, then begging, to be allowed to read some other book. He was willing to do all of the assignments required, he simply wanted to do the work with a text that did not make him suffer in the ways To kill a mockingbird did. His teacher told him that he would read the same book as everyone else, that he was being “overly sensitive,” and that if he did not read the book and do the assignments he would fail Grade Ten English and just have to “go through it all over again next year.”

He wept as he recounted this story to his classmates, and some of them wept with him. But most of them did not change their minds; they were still adamant that they were skilled and competent teachers, they would never put a student through what this man had gone through in high school, they would “do things differently.” Some of these same students were also those who only a few weeks earlier were not even aware that they had a race. I echo the questions asked (and answered) in “A Proposal”:

Has teacher training over the past fifty years, in any way, prepared teachers by sensitizing them to deal with racial issues? Where then do they get the expertise to deal with the revelations in this book in a fair and equitable way? ... Until teachers have been properly trained and sensitized to recognize the substantial impact of racist and sexist materials on learners, the teachers, in effect, have the potential to limit the understanding and ability of students to live and work in a just, pluralistic, and democratic society. ...The novel, “To kill a mockingbird,” is clearly a book that no longer meets these goals and therefore must no longer be used for classroom instruction (pp. 5-6, emphasis added).

A social justice pedagogy incorporates an explicit awareness of the difference between equality and equity, and takes the steps necessary to try to alter the imbalance. This means recognizing that when schools or teachers insist that To kill a mockingbird be a part of the high school English program, harm is done. Some students are harmed more than others, and all students are harmed. In the hands of a skilled, aware, critical pedagogue, it is possible that this text could be used to deconstruct a wide variety of topics, both historical and contemporary. This, however, requires first that teachers using this text be educated in and committed to the principles of ethical teaching. So, we are back to where I began: teacher education programs must be radically transformed in order to achieve social justice within schools. This project/process of teaching for social justice is a daily struggle, and it

cannot continue to be waged only on the backs of those who are marginalized. People who are socially privileged must be made aware of their own (often unknowing) complicity in the power relations which afford them their privilege always and only at the expense of others.

The critical incidents recounted throughout this writing ground the theories of which I speak in the everyday lived experiences of myself and others who endeavour to do social justice teaching. In addition, many of the incidents shared herein provide compelling evidence of the necessity for social justice teaching. When adults sit in my classroom and weep as they share moments of their experiences, either as students or as teachers, recalling the incredible harm that was/is inflicted upon children in our classrooms, I am renewed in my determination that we must do this work.

The call to develop and to implement social justice pedagogy/ies has been a part of discussions in education since at least the nineteenth century. However, much of this work reaches only those (few) who have the time, energy, and inclination to read in the history, philosophy, sociology, theories, and curriculum of education. Added to this, in-depth readings in these areas are not standard elements in the process of teacher education. This has slowed the development and limited the use of critical (social justice, emancipatory, liberatory, humanistic, or in some usages, progressive) pedagogies. The time has come to make some significant changes in these processes, to make the education of education-professionals a context-relevant endeavour.

Contemporary popular, political, and academic discourses on education represent schools and schooling as “failing” or “in crisis.” As with so many contemporary discussions of/in education, there are widely divergent views of just what this “crisis” is. The two main

“camps” seem to be the conservatives and the critical pedagogues. The conservative position is that the current “crisis” is due to a lack of standards, standardization, lowering of academic expectations, poor delivery systems, and/or a lack of morals. Some of these conservative views are most widely disseminated by (among others) Nikiforuk, (1994); almost any policies on education put out by the Conservative governments of Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Alberta in the past four years; the proposed education budget for 2003 of the Bush administration of the United States; and many Right-wing fundamentalist groups. The most popular tactic amongst these conservative groups is to blame teachers for all of the woes of schools which are listed above. For critiques of some of these conservative views, see Portelli & Vibert, (2001); Murphy, (2001); Taylor, (2001); Beyer & Apple, (1998).

Critical pedagogues agree with the conservative view on one point: there is indeed a “crisis” in and with our schools. From that point, however, these two groups part ways, and move rapidly in opposite directions. For critical pedagogues, the crisis in/of schools is not the fault of teachers (at least not teachers as a homogenous group), nor are the problems due to those listed above. For critical pedagogues, it is the institution of schooling which needs to be held up to interrogation, for it is the way we “do” schooling, and what we do to children in our schools, that constitutes the crisis. Their work, views, and responses to the crisis are found throughout this dissertation. I concur with the sentiment that schools are indeed “failing” to meet kids’ needs; the foundation I have built throughout this text supports (and demonstrates) my contention that, unless we employ the analytic approaches and strategic processes associated with social justice pedagogy immediately, the situation will only get worse. Social change takes time: transforming a complex social institution like

education takes time, energy, and strategic intervention at multiple levels simultaneously. I offer the following example to illustrate the urgency of the need for critical/“post-” analysis and social justice work.

In 2001, the Bush administration (the President and government of the United States of America) passed the “No Child Left Behind Act 2001” as a foundation for education reform (Murphey & Langan, February 4, 2002). A recent press release outlines President George W. Bush’s Department of Education budget request for \$56.5 billion, which is geared toward “...continuing to improve student achievement and to leave no child behind” (Murphey & Langan, February 4, 2002). Included in the 2003 Education budget proposal is a proposed “new tuition tax credit program” to be offered to “families of students currently trapped in failing public schools” (Murphey & Langan, February 4, 2002). This “refundable tax credit” will cover “50 percent of the cost of books, computers, transportation, supplies and tuition at a family’s school of choice (including home schools)” (Murphey and Langan, February 4, 2002). In addition to these refundable tax credits, the proposed Education Budget of 2003 includes:

**\$200 million for Charter Schools to stimulate continued growth...to increase choice for students and parents - particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.**

**\$50 million for a new Choice Demonstration Fund to support research projects that develop, implement, and evaluate innovative approaches to providing parents with expanded school options, including both private and public-school choice (Murphey and Langan, February 4, 2002).**

This press release provides a rationale for these proposals which both indicates that the government is aware that schools and children are “failing” (and this document also makes it quite clear that “failing” means “not achieving in the core academic subjects”) and

justifies this particular intervention strategy:

Federal education investments are mostly targeted to programs that support poor and minority [sic] students - students who are most likely to be left behind by our education system.

...turn around low-performing schools, improve teacher quality, and ensure that no child is trapped in a failing school.

...national programs to make sure our students will not be trapped in persistently dangerous schools (Murphey and Langan, February 4, 2002).

A critical analysis of this example illuminates three key elements in the operations of power relations. First, conservative analyses of the “problems” in education systematically (mis)represent the symptoms as if they were the “cause” of these problems. Second, the rhetoric of “no child left behind” opens the space for a flurry of activity apparently geared toward solving “the problem” but which operates to reinforce the status quo, maintaining the operations of class, race, ability, etc., in the normative definition of “the child,” and ultimately ensures that some children will necessarily be “left behind” in “failing schools.” Finally, a critical reading exposes the necessarily masked operations at work in and through the first two elements, namely: the systematic transfer of educational institutions from the public to the private sector. At best, the long-term result of these processes will be a two-tiered education system.

“No child left behind” is nothing more than political rhetoric. Non-White children, and/or children living in families that live in poverty, are already left far behind their privileged peers. It appears these already-marginalized children can count on their federal government to push them even farther behind, by leaving the most marginalized children in school systems that are already struggling. The future of some of these children has been placed in immediate and serious jeopardy through a policy that hides under the rhetoric of



“leaving no child behind.” The flurry of activity that this government is currently pursuing ensures that analytic and public attention is directed away from “the man behind the curtain.”

*Where do we go from here?*

In an article reflecting on the issues raised during and following a National Children, Poverty & Education Conference,<sup>8</sup> Glynis Ross (2001) addresses the question “Where do we go from here?” She asks:

[W]hat are we *all* going to do next to help address this issue? Even more importantly, how are we to decide so that our hard work has a bigger human impact than the limited satisfaction of supporting Christmas Daddies to ease the holiday for *other* people who can’t afford it, or hurriedly donating to the food bank box as we rush out of Superstore or Sobeys with all the packages that will get *us* through another insanely busy week? (Ross, 2001, p.16, emphases in original).

It is important to take action, of course, everyday grounded action as well as political action: it is difficult to imagine that writing letters to Parliament to protest child poverty will do anything this Monday morning for the child whose stomach is cramping from hunger. At the same time, while feeding that child breakfast today is imperative, if the letters of protest and other political action are not also undertaken, that child will be hungry again tomorrow...and the day after that...and the next day. However, Ross (2001) cautions us against believing that action is sufficient:

I would never argue against action, but I want to suggest two things about it: first, action for its own sake runs the risk of being empty, even unconstructive; second, meaningful action isn’t restricted to measurable

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Held in November of 2000 at Mount Saint Vincent University, this conference was attended by more than 350 delegates from across Canada. Concerned partners included: Canadian Council of Inner City Educators, Mount Saint Vincent University, Nova Scotia Department of Education, Nova Scotia School Boards Association, and Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

activity and accomplishment. Indeed, I'd like to take that a step further: learning as much as you can, factually and theoretically, about an issue; changing your practice, ethically and logically, in light of what you've learned; and sharing that evolving understanding with others are all forms of reflective action whose worth we undervalue at our peril. ...

I want to talk about actively teaching ourselves the kind of political understanding we need to internalize if we are serious about taking such action as we can. It's important to point out, I think, that actively engaging ourselves in acquiring political literacy is somewhat less comfortable than an unthinking rush to action. It raises inescapable conflict for us that engagement, in the sense of getting busy doing something, can serve to obscure. If we're serious about advocating for our kids, however, I think we need to make ourselves a little less comfortable (Ross, 2001, p. 16).

What is needed, then, to truly make a difference in the lives of the children we teach? We need to take action in multiple forms: the everyday and practical, and the larger-scale and longer-term political action that reaches out to others who live with privilege and who occupy decision-making spaces. We need to acquire and then build upon a capacity to inquire, to think, to want to know, to see what is around us. We need to become less comfortable; we need to recognize, interrogate, and interrupt our privilege whenever and wherever we can. We need to decide whether our schools, and our practices in those schools, will operate as the springboard to catapult our students and ourselves out of/over restrictive social systems, or whether we will allow our students and ourselves to be boxed in by the traditional, conservative, and neoliberal conceptions and practices of schooling which build and then maintain restrictive walls of oppression and dehumanization.

It is clear from this writing that I am not willing to support the self-indulgent and self-sustaining privilege of the conservative Right; neither am I willing to indulge in a rhetoric of "we all ought to be good to one another" or "we must take care of the poor children, the disabled children, the Black and the Native children... ." Simply and plainly put, it is

inhumane and unethical to continue to refuse to recognize the conditions under which children are schooled. Each of us who lives in this country, who teaches children or who teaches teachers, is positioned within the networks of power relations that operate in and through this social context. Each of us is an active participant in these relations; therefore, we must each choose either to support or to resist the operations of these power relations. The question we must ask ourselves is: Will I support the continued harm and damage done to the children who come to school (or who do not come to school), or will I try to change myself, and therefore change the world?

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