

From Where Do We Teach?
Potential Positions in Public Education

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Abstract

This thesis is a conceptual examination of the positions from which we teach in public education. As it is philosophical in nature, it takes no qualitative or quantitative data. It offers a review of selected relevant literature and an analysis of personal and professional experience, with the intent to pose critical questions about teaching and learning.

The framework of this thesis represents the following contentions: First, from its inception, public schooling served capital by preparing skilled labour for emerging industrial markets. This history is the hegemonic shadow that hangs over public education today. Second, movements toward the standardization of funding, curriculum, and evaluation support the further commodification of public schooling. The “accountability” that standardization offers, the “back to basics” that it aims for, is counter to the potential that public education might critically inform citizens and seek social justice. Third, movements toward the privatization of public schooling under the guise of “choice” and “mobility”, brought on by manufactured crisis, serve only to widen socio-economic inequities as capitalist neoliberal interests seek profit in both the product of public schools and in schooling itself.

If we recognize and understand the power of public education to inform vast numbers of citizens who will, in turn, either maintain or reform society, we must ask: What do we want public education to be? What are the effects of continuing down historically conventional and increasingly standardized paths? What do progressive pedagogies offer? How might teachers destandardize their pedagogy and pursue equitable opportunities for marginalized students? How might students name themselves and their world, that they might play a part in its reimagining? For whom do we teach, and under what conditions? From where do we teach, and why?

For educators to ask these questions, and to employ what they discover, will necessitate taking substantial risks. It will necessitate taking a stand and cannot be done alone. Teachers must seek out the collaboration of their students. They must offer students the time and the space to find their own voices, to create their own selves, and to envision previously uncharted paths on which we might walk together.

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Preamble

Under career aspirations in my Grade Eight Yearbook, I wrote teacher. My friends wrote things like race car driver, astronaut, and snake wrangler. I knew it wouldn't be popular, but it was true; I wanted to be a teacher. In my High School Yearbook, having learned little, I wrote the same thing: teacher.

My first undergraduate degree was in Philosophy and English, my second in Psychology. After a couple of years teaching overseas, and a few more employed as a Child and Youth Worker and as a Psychiatric Crisis Counsellor, I was thrilled when I was accepted into a Bachelor of Education program.

My first week was as expected. I was shown around. I met professors. I met fellow students. I was handed reading lists and course outlines and assessment schedules. Everything was as I expected, until I met the professor of EDUC 3400: Models of Education.

He walked into our first class and said, "Everyone in this room has a university degree and, considering how difficult it is to get into this program, I think we can assume that everyone is academically proficient. So, I would like you to get into small groups and put together a reading list, a draft schedule, some ideas around how you want to be assessed, etc. When everyone is ready we will share our ideas and see if there are some common threads. Okay, go ahead." He then opened a newspaper, put his feet up on his desk, and started reading.

Most of us looked blankly at each other. We then, somewhat uncomfortably, got into groups and started talking. I should note, at the cost of dating myself, that this happened at a time when personal devices were not common and the university was not equipped with Wi-Fi.

No one in my group could think of one book about education that they wanted to read. I had wanted to be a teacher since I was 12 and I could not think of one educational theorist to add to our non-existent reading list. Nothing really got done in that first class. Everyone was very frustrated.

Nearing the end of the class our professor said, “Looks like we need some more time. We will start where we left off when we meet next.”

We met again, later that week. A few of the students in the class had done some research and brought in what seemed like random names and titles. No one knew how to create a course outline or how to assess their own learning. We did not know what to do.

Our professor had his newspaper and he told us to get back into groups. Quite quickly, during that second class, a group went up to the front led by one particularly frustrated student. She said, “I paid over 10,000 dollars for this program. It is not my job to make a reading list and a course outline. It is not my job to figure out how I will be assessed. That is your job.”

And that is where my learning to teach began.

The newspaper was calmly folded and placed on the desk. The room went quiet. Our professor stood up and said, “The hardest way to teach to is to teach from a stance of genuine democracy. Asking students what they want to learn, how they want to learn, how they learn best, and how they would like to show what they have learned, is always very difficult. The easiest way to teach, the most convenient, is to tell students what to do. The easiest thing I could have done is to come in the first day, give you all a list of books and articles that I have read, ask you to read them, tell you to tell me what I already know about them, and congratulate you for regurgitating predetermined knowledge.”

“Sitting here, behind my newspaper, listening to my students genuinely struggle, not paving an easier path for you, is really hard.” He paused. “As often happens, we seem a bit stuck. That is okay. This should be hard. I have reserved copies of one book for you. Go to the bookstore. Read what you can of it. We will talk next week.”

And that is when I met Paulo Freire. The book reserved for us was *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I read most of it sitting on the university lawn that day. I read the rest the next day. In many ways, what I learned in that course framed not only my career as a teacher but also my life as a learner.

Freire’s notions of banked knowledge and the possibilities of emancipation led me to Giroux and resistance. They led me to hooks and McLaren, who led me to Professor Lewis and talk of neoliberalism and silencing, but also to talk of voice, the power of questions, and of possibilities. Professor Lewis led me to Ellsworth’s “teaching positions” and Simon’s “provision of a contravision,” all of which have led to this thesis.

My hope is that the questions I have asked and the teaching positions I have discussed through this thesis might have the same effect on one teacher that my professor’s teaching position had on me; if that happens, there can be an exponential ripple through the citizenry as hundreds of students are offered opportunities to create their own learning experiences, to name themselves and their world, to recognize and seek alternatives to systemic inequity and marginalization, and to be active in transforming their society in socially just directions.

Actively offering these opportunities to students is essential because, in its present form, they are lacking in education. Critical thinking and questioning in education are increasingly

subordinate to proficiency in regurgitation as standardized assessments become entrenched as the criterion by which the performance of both students and teachers are assessed and evaluated.

Yet, neither students nor teachers are standardized, thus learning and teaching is not standardizable.

I believe that we must seek out an approach that is as complex and textured as the diverse student populations we teach. Ontario classrooms, like others everywhere, are wonderful mosaics of background, ability, world-views, mitigating circumstances, and desire. Where our students are coming from and where they are hoping to go is always a process of collaborative discovery. This is why I contend that the standardization of funding, curriculum, and assessment is incompatible with a pedagogy that is constituted as a form of moral practice. It leaves little room for individual and collaborative positioning.

Any talk of standardization is talk of equalization and conventional norms which is counter to talk of equity and personal choice. To move toward equity in education and, in turn, society, we must destandardize our teaching and learning positions. Of course an argument can be made that, with accommodations and modifications, extra funding for “turn-around” schools, universal design, etc., our school system addresses diversity.

You may have seen the picture of the three children watching a concert. They are all standing behind a barrier looking toward the stage, their backs to us. The children are of varying heights. The tallest can easily see the stage. The middle child is on tippy toes looking over the barrier. The shortest child cannot see the stage at all. This is a model of equal. In a second frame of the same picture the children are standing on different sized boxes. The first needs no box, the second a small box, and the shortest child a large box. Everyone can see. We have accommodated and modified for the diverse heights of the children.

I believe this is where we are in public education today. The problem is that the shortest child needs the box at all. Did she have to wait and ask for it? How does he feel knowing that everyone else can see without a box, that he cannot participate without additional assistance?

Picture a third frame of the three children in which the barrier is removed, in which all are welcome and all can take part. That which each individual brings to the experience is sufficient for their full participation. All can see from where they are standing. All voices are heard. No accommodation or modification is necessary. This is a form of genuine social justice. This is a vision of equity. This is the vision that I have of public education.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Education has fundamental connections with the idea of human emancipation, though it is constantly in danger of being captured for other interests. In a society disfigured by class exploitation, sexual and racial oppression, and in chronic danger of war and environmental destruction, the only education worth the name is one that forms people capable of taking part in their own liberation. The business of the school is not propaganda. It is equipping people with the knowledge and skills and concepts relevant to remaking a dangerous and disordered world. In the most basic sense, the process of education and the process of liberation are the same.

--Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, *Making the Difference*, 1982

Background

Giroux (1983/2001) used the preceding quote from Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, and Dowsett (1982) as the introduction to his chapter, *Resistance & Critical Pedagogy*, in his seminal work, *Theory and Resistance in Education: Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition*. In Giroux's introduction he takes the quote further, finishing with Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, and Dowsett's call to action: "Teachers too have to decide whose side they are on" (p. 208). The notion that there may be "sides" in educational theory and practice, one, theoretically, working to oppress and another, theoretically, working to emancipate, is not new to Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, and Dowsett or to Giroux. It is not new to any political endeavour, of which public schooling surely is.

The notion of sides in public schooling may have first been articulated by Dewey (1938) in his ground breaking work, *Experience and Education*, in which he offers an alternative to what he terms "traditional" education. Rather than traditional models, which I would characterize

as “historically conventional” models, Dewey proposes a “progressive” education which takes into account students’ experience in considering what to teach, in the hopes of further engaging them in their own education. The concept of opposing sides also lies at the heart of Freire’s (1979/2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he introduces the “banking” model of education in which an authority, rather than educate to free its people, dehumanizes them through an education of oppression. Like Dewey, Freire offers a progressive alternative, one that could potentially “free” students from said oppression. The view that schooling might be oppressive may be an uncomfortable encounter for educators who enter the teaching profession with notions of helping students learn and grow, that they might be successful, that they might be, in the Freirian sense, free. Thus, the submission that there are opposing sides in education may present a problematic for educators who encounter the debate.

To say there are sides in education, however, is not to say that there is a group of teachers who come into education with the underlying goal of oppressing students. Neither is there an opposing group of teachers, lined up on the other side, fighting to free students from oppression. This dichotomy would unfairly simplify a very complicated reality. Just as in politics, we would not suggest that every Ontarian who votes Conservative cares only for their own welfare, that every Ontarian who votes Liberal hates private enterprise, and that every Ontarian who votes for the New Democratic Party wants to unionize every industry. These are stereotypical simplifications which do not sufficiently address the complexity of human endeavour.

So, too, in education. Should we suggest that teachers who believe in the potential academic and behavioural benefits of historically conventional methods want an oppressive form of education? Should we assume that those who promote democracy and student voice in their classroom want unchecked chaos in schools? Surely not. Human nature, action, and

understanding are infinitely more complex and textured than this. Citizens make decisions about how to vote for a myriad of reasons. Government officials make policy decisions, in all fields, for a myriad of reasons. Teachers enter into, and practice education, for a myriad of reasons as well; none, I would argue, do so with the overt intention of worsening the lives of students. The end goal of public education, for the vast majority of teachers, educational assistants, principals, board and ministry officials, is the success of students.

For both teachers and students, though, what success is, remains as problematic and controversial as the potential means by which it might be achieved. In referring to Dewey (1938), Freire (2000), Giroux (2001), and Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, and Dowsett (1982) the question of what a successful education is, and how to achieve it, can become an exercise in polarity. Historically conventional models, or banking models, are set in opposition to progressive or transformational models. In a modern context, one might envision teachers who believe that doing what is best for their students means preparing them, through standardized curriculum, for standardized assessments, in opposition to teachers who believe that doing what is best for their students means working to eliminate standardized tests because they see them as a hindrance to effective teaching, valuable learning, and successful education. Although both want their students to be successful, the means by which they hope to achieve success and the very nature of the success they are aiming toward, may be polarizing.

It is convenient to see all things political through the simple lens of opposition. Currently, in the United States (US), in particular, this polarity may seem the status quo; a majority of debates, no matter the sensitivity of the subject or the urgency of the situation, seem to come down to Republican vs. Democrat. In sociological terms, many have simplified the debate over how society would be best organized into a structural functionalism vs. conflict theory binary.

In its most basic sense the theory of structural functionalism (Durkheim, 1933) sees the organization and function of society as a complex interworking of parts, which, when taken together, serve to stabilize and solidify society. From this point of view, everyone has a role to play and we must all play our role appropriately in order to sustain the viable function of our society. Conflict theorists (Marx, 1848/1992), on the other hand, see society as a premeditated construction which works to sustain power imbalance. Everyone has a role to play but roles, both past and present, work to maintain and perpetuate social norms and social inequities.

When this binary lens is turned toward education, one might see teachers on one of two sides. There may be teachers who see both past and present manifestations of schooling as working well for students. Perhaps the education system worked well for them. They achieved good grades, went on to university, and landed a good job. There are others though, and here in- lies the potential polarity, who see schooling as requiring a complete reimagining. These educators may see a system that oppresses many of its citizens, possibly by design and through hegemonic processes, practices, and ideologies.

Through this lens, educators and educational theorists who impassionedly argue their perspective often appear on one side or another. However, if we take a closer look and immerse ourselves in teaching and schooling for longer than a moment, we may see a much more complicated, a much more textured and complex interworking of philosophies, methodologies, and pedagogies. Perhaps it is true that when we pull the furthest ends of the thread that binds schooling and teaching together we find polarities. But it is equally true that the vast majority of teachers, and all others who work in education, lie somewhere between the furthest left and right of the binary.

Conceptualizing the Problematic

Although it is my intention, through this thesis, to avoid the convenience of presenting a polarity but rather to articulate the possible positions in schooling and education in a more subtle and textured analysis, I do believe that great harm can, and has, been done in schools through the implementation of policies that are not in the best interest of students. Further, if the achievement of socially just society is the aim of one's teaching and pedagogy, teachers who have not, and are not, actively questioning the methodologies that they are implementing in their classrooms may also, however inadvertently, cause harm. Once one has decided that a successful education is one that is directed at facilitating the creation of citizens committed to social justice rather than credentialism and personal advancement, some pedagogical methods may aid in realizing success and others may hinder it. To complicate matters further, understanding how some pedagogical methods have become the status quo in teaching, how these methods are implemented, and how they affect students, may be just as problematic as characterizing what success in education is.

Ellsworth (1997) in her exploration into the importance of how we see each other and address each other, *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy, and the power of address*, elucidates both the subtlety of teacher discourse in schools and the dramatic ways in which it affects students. She begins her exploration of the many ways in which we address each other by reflecting on her own experiences as a student in a small, middle-class town in the US. She suggests that subtle “operative markers” made the difference in “who was ‘in,’ who was ‘out,’ who was expected to be ‘bright,’ and who was expected to be ‘slow’” (p. 2). She explains the elusive nature of these textured operative markers:

The ways in which they were taken up by teachers and students as bases for sorting and

grading, rewarding and ignoring, celebrating and marginalizing, disciplining and stylizing were not all that blatant or nameable. The workings of power in [her] school were elusive, traditional, taken for granted, well intentioned, commonsensical, even unconscious. They include the power to suggest subtly yet clearly, that some knowledges and aspirations are for boys while others are for girls. (p. 2)

It is not only divisions and expectations of gender which are reinforced through operative markers, but also those of race, social/cultural background, and sexual orientation. From my personal experiences in classrooms, I would suggest that socio-economic and class divisions, along with student exceptionalities, should also be added to Ellsworth's list.

I recall, as a teacher candidate in a large urban centre, sitting in the back of my "mentor" teacher's Grade 8 classroom the day before a big school trip. She came in that morning, threw her scarf over her shoulder and said, "Alright, tomorrow we are going skiing. It will be great. We will be swooshing down the slopes. It will be so much fun." She then paused, perhaps noticing, as I did, that some students were not smiling. Some were clearly not going. This group of ethnically diverse kids, presumably kids whose families struggled financially, were already "out." The teacher then said, "Oh, right, except for those of you who couldn't afford to go. There will be a day of really fun games in Mrs. Smith's class." She then went on to describe, in detail, the plans for those who were "in."

The same teacher, months later, was introducing figure drawing to the class. She set up an overhead and modeled for the class her drawing of her own hand. She spoke of the detail and intricacy of the human hand. She spoke of its many lines and shadows. She was quite an accomplished artist. She said that each student must divide their paper into four sections and draw four different positions of their hand. I sat in awe. I knew, as well as she did, that there was

a boy in her class who did not have a left hand. He sat through her lesson, seemingly listening along. I did not know what to do.

I then noticed that he was moving the stump where his left hand once was, back and forth, creating four distinct positions. He, with bravery I cannot articulate, went to the front of the class and showed his teacher the four different positions he had created. She listened, paused, looked at him and said, “No, that would be far too easy; you will have to draw someone else’s hand.” The boy went back to his chair, crumpled his paper, and sat staring at her. Ellsworth (1997) goes on to suggest the workings of power “also include the power to invite passions for learning out to play or to squash budding curiosity and ideas; to delicately discipline and stylize who [she] was as a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ student” (p. 2). Although everything that teacher did appeared to “squash [the] budding curiosity” and bravery of a visibly exceptional student, although everything she did appeared unethical, and not particularly subtle, no one, including myself, did anything about it.

Throughout the coming weeks and months I tried to quietly inquire as to how my mentor teacher was perceived by the rest of the staff and no one had anything overtly negative to say about her. I didn’t get the impression that the majority of students disliked her. It seems that, what I found as deplorable actions and statements on her part, went, for the most part, unnoticed. Perhaps she did not even know what she was saying. Perhaps this was her intentional “teaching position” (Ellsworth, 1997), or perhaps she felt that the boy needed to overcome his exceptionality and challenge himself further. About 15 minutes into the lesson, he approached her again and convinced her to let him draw his own foot in four different positions.

The world of public education is a world of jargon. Ontario’s Ministry of Education,

along with every board of education in the province, fill document after document with the stated overt goals of education: “reach every student” (Government of Ontario, 2008), “realizing the promise of diversity,” “equity and excellence” (Government of Ontario, 2009), “close the achievement gap,” “support every child” (Government of Ontario, 2013), and on and on. Again, I would argue that everyone working in education wants students to be successful. Student success is *the* goal that educators are committed to at all levels; what success is, and the process by which it might be achieved, however, has become a complex web of incarnations and capacities. And, as we work toward equity and diversity and success for everyone, the question remains, have we come to fully understand and qualify what success is?

What success is and what it looks like is being asked in schools on an ongoing basis. However, I would argue that it is not being asked very well. Rather, educators and educational theorists seem too often to supplant notions of success with notions of “achievement”. But are they interchangeable? Further, they seem to spend more time focused on how we measure achievement and how we bridge achievement gaps than defining what either is. Perhaps measuring achievement is simpler than asking what students are achieving. Perhaps showing what a student has achieved is simpler than showing that a student is successful. The underlying problem, though, of not clearly defining success in modern contexts, prior to attempting to measure it or assist those who are not achieving it, is that we may perpetuate what is already there. And, what is already there may not work for everyone. In the view of many critical educators, Freire being one of the most well-known, what is already there may have been intentionally designed not to work for everyone.

Perhaps educators, who would perpetuate the existing system of education, without questioning its underlying purpose and methodology, inadvertently repeat versions of their own

historically conventional or banking model of education, an education which Freire (2000) suggested, “anesthetizes and inhibits creative power,” rather than one which “strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (p. 81). It may be that the hegemonic nature of historical and institutionalized practices, the status quo in education, makes not only choosing a position difficult, it may make merely seeing opposing sides and potential positions difficult. Historically conventional forms of education, and those who uncritically practice them, may sustain their perpetuation. Yet, if education is to move forward in a progressive way, if our aim is to bring into being a critical citizenry committed to social justice, critical analysis of what we are teaching, of the position from which we are teaching, of who we are teaching to, and of what success means to us and them, is essential. For Simon (1992), the foremost question for educators who wish to better understand their responsibilities as a teacher, if we are to consider education “a moral and political enterprise,” is to ask, “what the moral basis of one’s practice should be; what are the desired versions of a future human community implied in the pedagogy in which one is implicated?” (p. 15)

Purpose

Throughout this thesis, I hope to further articulate the ongoing problematic of the positions from which we teach. Historically conventional notions of what schooling is and of what success in schooling is, have long been set up in opposition to progressive notions. Like all things political, the discussion often deteriorates into the simplicity of polarity. It is, however, much more complex and much more textured. Alternative teaching positions exist and it is critical that we better understand where they come from, where they have been, where they are going, and where we, as teachers, are situated regarding potential positions.

Due to the effects of the historically hegemonic practices of power, it may be difficult for those working in education to see alternative positions. But we must strive to see them so that we might better understand them. In better understanding the potential positions from which we teach we might, more thoughtfully, choose one, or more likely, choose an interwoven personalized version of many, from which to form our own pedagogical methodology and practice. Although I believe that it is essential that educators work to see, understand, and evaluate pedagogical alternatives, and that they should, eventually, make a stand and choose a position, I also recognize that this process is not easy, that it necessitates some risk and potential isolation. That said, I also believe that it cannot be done alone. Simon (1992) agrees. He suggests that the second question that educators who choose to take on the task of exploring the possible positions in education must ask is, “given our own moral commitments, how should we relate to other people who also have a stake and a claim in articulating future communal possibilities?” (p. 15)

Should educators consider and evaluate both the “versions of a future community” (p. 15) implied in their schooling, and the potential “versions of a future community” implied in their teaching, we might better understand from where we were taught and from where we teach. I believe that doing so will entail: gaining a more informed understanding of both the overt and covert, intended and unintended goals of publically funded schooling; considering the means by which said goals were hoped to have been achieved; questioning who is successful in both past and present incarnations of public schooling; asking what success in schooling is; and attempting to conceptualize how educators might teach to better understand the possibilities of education and their potential positions in it.

Building on Ellsworth’s (1997) insights, I hope to shift the language of sides to the more

textured language of positions, outline the potential fall-out of continuing with the status-quo, and reflect on the potential of educators to see, understand, choose, and enact a model of education which might be transformative for their students, themselves, and their society.

Rationale

To better understand the underlying intentions of publically funded schooling, one might simply look at its historical organization. Colloquial notions of school as a place where children are educated to be enlightened citizens are, I would argue, largely inaccurate. Public schooling was designed and organized on an industrial model. School starts and finishes on a similar clock to factory work. Bells ring to signal movement from one task, or class, to another. If a student is late, they must provide a sufficient reason. Periodically, student performance is tested and feedback is given, in increasingly standardized ways. Promotions are available for those who follow the rules, do not question authority, and finish their work on time. School looks a lot like work because the main objective of those who designed publically funded schooling was that children were there to be prepared for work.

For the children of the wealthy classes, school was much different. Prior to the development of publically funded schooling, private schools were already a social fixture for those who could afford them. Wealthy children attended private institutions which offered a more “liberal” education (Wilson, 1909). Through a liberal education, one would not learn the skills necessary for industrial work but, rather, one might learn how to manage industry.

As detailed in Bowles and Gintis’ (1976) frank and articulate *Schooling in Capitalist America*, newly urban, often desperately impoverished children, who were left idle in the streets

as their parents toiled in the factories of newly industrialized cities, were not welcome in the classrooms of private schools. They would attend public schools and “would be taught discipline, respect for private property, the virtues of manners, and morality” (Axelrod, 1999, p. 29). The children of the vast majority of the population would be given the “opportunity” to develop industrial skills and a mind-set to support the interests of industry. Public schooling would get them off the streets and into some form of structured work. It would give them the impression of social class mobility, thus entrenching the notion of school as provider of opportunity. What these industrialized ideologies of systemic public schooling lacked was the intention of generating in children, and in turn the larger population, an impulse to create and participate in a socially just society.

Across much of the western world, and Ontario is certainly no exception, there has been a shift in economy. What Ontarians work at today is much different than what they worked at in the past. Public schooling in Ontario was developed in the mid-1800s, largely to train skilled workers for factories. Today most of the factories are gone. Nevertheless, though there have been successive waves of large-scale reforms in schooling and curriculum development, public schooling in Ontario, and across North America, looks a lot and sounds a lot today like the public schooling of our past. This begs some questions. For what type of work does public schooling prepare children today? What skills are needed in the new world of work? Are we still in the business of training workers at all? Might schools turn their focus from training and preparing to innovating and imagining, both in terms of future employment and regarding the social fabric students are, inherently, a part of? Who is successful in school now?

Although there has been a great deal of research into growing achievement gaps in education, which has led to a good deal of policy initiative and reform, the gaps remain (Levin,

2010). Achievement gaps are, to put it simply, the space between the high achievers and the low achievers, those who get excellent grades and those who do not. This gap is not, nor has it ever been, arbitrary. Students who are recent immigrants, students who live in poverty, and students who have learning exceptionalities (even with accommodations and modifications in place) repeatedly underperform academically in comparison to students who are not marginalized in these complex ways. “There are still large inequalities in outcomes in every country, too often related to students’ family backgrounds or irrelevant characteristics such as skin colour” (Levin, p. 740). Though talk persists about attempting to assist marginalized students, “One of the striking aspects of education reform, however, has been the lack of attention to the most important single determinant of educational outcomes - socio-economic status of families” (Levin & Riffel, 2000, p. 184). How are we to rationalize repeated education reforms, and the great cost they entail, if they do not address what is potentially the most important predictive factor of student success? Are wealthy students, as they were in the past, receiving a different form of education? Does the education of the majority still aim to produce a citizenry compliant with the interests of the ruling minority?

Should the purpose of schooling be informed by the needs of its students, teachers and educational theorists must ask: What do our students, in this context, need and how do we help them achieve it? This is an extremely complex question. Asking it entails risk. Asking it entails questioning everything, including our own education. Considering a new possibility in education may “require the situated refusal of the present as definitive of that which is possible” (Simon, 1992, p. 30). However, taking on the question begins the process of seeing the potential positions from which to move forward.

In his introduction to Freire’s (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Shull writes, “There is

no such thing as a *neutral* educational process” (p. 34). To better understand, then, what the possibilities of education might be, we must better understand, with what outcomes in mind is schooling organized? Who is and who is not successful in its past and present manifestations? How do teachers envision education working? And, what can a teacher do to facilitate a potentially improved understanding of the design and delivery of education?

It is not my goal or intention to fully answer these questions. Rather, I intend to systematically develop and articulate the questions themselves. I believe teaching could be improved if only through questioning what teaching is trying to achieve, and for whom? Here I agree with Simon (1992), who argues, “Without taking up the question of how pedagogy is constituted as a form of moral practice, any talk of teaching as a responsible and intellectual practice becomes an empty and abstract form” (p. 14). It is, then, the questions that this thesis attempts to articulate rather than locking into answers that are better off left fluid and responsive to historical, geographical, social, and cultural positioning. Like Ellsworth (1997), “I am not searching for final absolute answers or fixes for these questions and dilemmas” (p. 12). It is, however, through the process of questioning that I hope I can articulate a vision of how my research and, in turn, my teaching “might relate to a vision for the future” (Simon, 1992, p.14).

To reiterate, I also hope to soften the polarization of the potential sides in education. As with many of the theorists whose work I reference, and whose work is at the core of my understanding of the potential positions in education, the polemic may, at times, appear binary. I do not, however, intend to soften the political positions of such critical educational theorists as Freire (2000) and Giroux (2001), who write impassionedly against one form of teaching and in favour of another. Rather, I include these potentially polarizing voices, as I believe they are integral in legitimating the necessity of change in education. Utilizing a more textured analysis,

such as that of Ellsworth (1997) and Greene (2009), along with my own experiences in teaching, I aim to articulate possible positions in education rather than opposing sides. I hope to encourage educators to look more closely at their own teaching positions and ask: From where am I teaching? And, in what direction do I teach? This work is important because I believe that present forms of public schooling may remain mired in the potentially oppressive and marginalizing hegemonic practices of its past constructions.

Methodology

This thesis is philosophical in nature and design. It collects neither qualitative nor quantitative data in the conventional sense; rather, it attempts to articulate questions regarding the purpose, structure, and goals of public education in past and present contexts. It is a conceptualization of a problematic derived from the notion that there are potential positions in education and that they must be revealed, deliberated, and better understood by educators. I hope, through this thesis, to articulate these positions in a manner that will be accessible for educators at all levels and in such a way that it might inform their own practice. I will also articulate the position from which I see myself teaching, and outline the ways in which this choice informs my understanding of education and my teaching practice.

Foucault (1985), in *The History of Sexuality*, suggested that, “There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all” (p. 8). Ellsworth (1997) brings this notion back to education by proposing that:

Maybe [the active re-visioning of teaching] means we might just be coming upon one of

those times in a field of study when the question of knowing if we, as educators, can think differently from how we've been thinking and perceive differently from how we've been seeing is absolutely necessary if we are to go on looking and thinking at all." (p. 195)

I believe that, in 2016, we are, once again, at an important juncture in education. I believe educators, both individually and collectively, must reconsider the positions from which we have been taught and are asked to teach. "In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from conformism that is about to overcome it" (Benjamin, 1973, p. 255). If the attempt is not made, "the danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling class" (p. 255). Educators must ask themselves, and each other: are public schools to remain places where future workers are trained in both skill and compliance or are they to become places where "education can proceed as a critical practice for the purpose of developing a critically informed citizenry whose critical capacities can be turned to achieving a true democracy as the foundation for collective self-governance?" (Lewis, 2016) I believe that it is only through asking these difficult and complex, self-reflective, and systemically critical questions, all of which are inextricably tied-up in historical notions of what teaching and schooling is, that we can fully understand from where we teach. I believe that we must actively question our teaching positions if we are to go on teaching at all.

Organization of Thesis

The following five chapters comprise the Conceptual Framework of the thesis. The Literature Review, which is infused throughout the Conceptual Framework, is an examination

and analysis of the authors and their respective theories, which informed my thesis. These perspectives, along with my personal experiences as an educator, provide the conceptual tools with which I intend to articulate and explore the questions I have posed.

The thesis is presented in five chapters: Chapter 2 questions the goals and methods of public education, both in its past and present incarnations; Chapter 3 questions how the stated goals of public education affect students, and considers the effectiveness of public education in addressing issues faced by marginalized students; Chapter 4 questions how educators' schooling affects their teaching and their choices in addressing the issues they encounter in their classrooms; Chapter 5 reflects on some of the strengths of public education, and potential areas of improvement, it also questions how educators might consider and evaluate potential teaching positions; Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by consolidating previous chapters and questioning how educators might move forward more consciously and actively, developing and delivering an education which "forms people capable of taking part in their own liberation" (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982, p. 208).

Chapter 2: Schools

...the character of the discourse on schooling has been considerably transformed. In the face of financial cutbacks, economic recession, and a shrinking job market, progressive and radical critiques of schooling have been reduced to a whisper, being replaced by the rhetoric of cost-efficiency experts. Administrators and teachers now spend long hours developing curriculum models based on the rather narrow principles of control, prediction, and measurement. The pedagogy of critical inquiry and ethical understanding has given way to the logic of instrumental reason, with its directed focus on the learning of discrete competencies and basic skills.

A radical pedagogy points to the connections between conception and practice and it honors students' diverse experiences by connecting what goes on in classrooms to their everyday lives.

--Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education: Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition*, 2001

Introduction

In this chapter I hope to build a historical foundation and framework for the subsequent chapters by: first, examining the desired outcomes for public schooling as stated by its early proponents and architects; second, articulating the challenges to historically conventional schooling models beginning in the 1930s and the significant hurdles “progressive” and “critical” educators and educational theorists have faced; third, exploring more recent developments in public schooling as a result of hyper-capitalist and neoliberal ideological movements; and, lastly, critically questioning what I perceive to be the potentially threatening movements toward accountability, standardization, and privatization in public schooling.

Get off the Street and Get to Work:

With what outcomes in mind was public schooling conceptualized?

Publically funded and governed schooling in North America arose out of three major cultural shifts in the late 1800s and early 1900s: the industrial revolution, the migration of families from rural to urban settings, and increased immigration. As families moved to urban centers in search of work, there was an ever-increasing number of children roaming the streets as their parents toiled in factories. Axelrod, in *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800-1914* (1999), summarizes the motives behind the creation of publically funded schools in Canada. He suggests that the proponents of public schooling in Canada envisioned a custodial domain for underclass children in which they could be instructed in matters of nationality, morality, and religion. Central to the early goals of public schooling was tackling the “problem” of the poor:

Social reformers implored the sceptical to appreciate the logic of educating the poor.

If poverty was caused by idleness, idleness by ignorance, and ignorance by the lack of schooling, then surely the community as a whole would benefit from investing in the education of the underclasses. (Axelrod, 1999, p. 28)

Though this is not a particularly sensitive articulation of the plight of those struggling in poverty, one can see an underlying attempt to provide some form of possibility through public schooling. But, possibility for whom? And, possibility of what sort; in the interest of whom?

Not unlike the early designers of public schooling in Canada, those in the US had to address the obvious central question: why would the wealthy pay to educate the poor? Those of means may have been witness to the problems of idleness and poverty play out in their streets. They may have believed that those without education or work often succumbed to immoral

activities such as thievery and drink. But why should they be asked to pay for a potential solution to these problems? Mann (1891), a politician and education reformer from Massachusetts, provided the answer.

Mann suggested that the two main anxieties of the wealthy, when asked to pay for the schooling of the poor were: first, they were already paying for their own children's education in private schools, and second, an education might provide those with less with the drive to attain more. To these concerns, Mann responded by pointing out, "Just as education produced more compliant workers, so too would it produce more compliant citizens" (Marsh, 2012, p. 105). Mann appealed to wealthy "upper-class" citizens of the early 1900s, who were concerned with the problems of "lower-class" vice and idleness. He asked the wealthy, "Could there be any police so vigilant and effective as a system of common schools?" (Mann, 1891, p.100). While Mann's response might have been a stroke of political genius, it was not quite enough to convince the barons of industry that their hard earned money be squandered on the riffraff in the streets. Mann then promised the owners of the great business houses of the industrial age that they would "obtain more work and better work, with less waste, from those who have received what, in Massachusetts, we call a good common-school education"(Mann, 1891, p.99). In other words, he argued that the rich could profit from providing schooling for the poor. This last point was very convincing indeed.

In Mann's (1891) annual report to the Secretary of the Board of Education of Massachusetts, he set out to persuade those in the upper tiers of society that their money would be well spent schooling the poor:

In the great establishments, and among large bodies of labouring men, there it is found as an almost invariable fact, other things being equal, that those who have been blessed with

a good common-school education rise to a higher and higher point in the kinds of labour performed, and also in the rate of wages paid, while the ignorant sink like dregs, and are always found at the bottom. (p.97)

Mann was by no means alone in his aspiration to see publically funded schooling address both the social ills of his day and the desire of the wealthy to create more profit from better trained and compliant workers. That said, Mann was also acutely aware that the public schooling he was endorsing was meant to elevate the poor from the streets to the factories, from pauperism to working class. Public schooling was neither conceptualized nor designed as an opportunity for social mobility beyond the factory floor. The poor would have opportunities, through public schooling, to “rise to higher points of labour” (p. 97), but surely no higher than the manual labour needed to elevate the profits of the rich.

In 1909 Woodrow Wilson, who was then president of Princeton University and who would soon become the president of the United States, in an address to the New York City School Teachers Association, reminded teachers in public schools that public schooling had a very specific place in American society:

We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class, of necessity, in every society, to forgo the privileges of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks.

(Wilson, 1909, p. 25)

The goal of public schooling was to get the poor, the “much larger class, of necessity,” off the streets and to make them better workers to make more money for the rich. Schooling would not provide them opportunities for elevating their social or economic class beyond labourers. Wilson further instructed the teachers of the early 1900s:

We should not confuse ourselves with regard to what we are trying to make of the pupils under our instruction. We are either trying to make liberally-educated persons out of them [the much smaller class by necessity], or we are trying to make skillful servants of society. (Wilson, 1909, p.25)

Very quickly, in both the US and Canada, public schooling shifted from a potential social and economic solution, being sold to the upper class, to a mandatory sentencing of skillful servitude for the poor. In fact, Katz (1995) found in his research into “the welfare state” in the US that it was not uncommon in the early 1900s for volunteers from wealthy families to practice “friendly visiting” in which groups of wealthy women “visited” poor families in their homes and offered advice as to how they might improve their situations. In many cases children were taken from families and forced into public schools where they could unlearn what were considered to be the offensive practices of poverty and, in the hopes of moving beyond their present conditions, learn the characteristics necessary for modest success, namely, staying sober and working hard.

This practice of friendly visits to the poor in the US, though certainly less brutal and invasive, centered around socio-economic prejudice rather than cultural and racial discrimination, is reminiscent of Canada’s history of residential schooling in which young First Nations children were taken from their homes by Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other government agents. Some 150,000 children, between 1876 and 1996, were removed from their homes and families so that they might be taught, often viciously, how to unlearn their traditional languages and customs and become more “productive” members of Canadian society.

In 1871, Ontario became the first province to legislate compulsory schooling, which entrenched its custodial role in “helping” the poor and racially marginalized to move off urban streets and to provide them with the skills necessary to toil in the factories of the wealthy.

Present day notions of utilizing education to climb social and economic ladders were not a part of the mandate of early public schools. Instead, legislators saw schooling as the mechanism by which the poor would utilize an education for the purpose of learning enough to better perform in the workplace. The children of the wealthy would continue with their private liberal educations and learn how to manage both their wealth and their workers. No one in the US more exemplified this notion than the billionaire steel baron and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. In Marsh's (2011) *Class Dismissed: Why We Cannot Teach or Learn Our Way Out of Inequality*, he summarizes Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth," "The wealthy, that is, having demonstrated their ability to accumulate such fortunes, thereby established their greater ability, and thus their *right*, to take charge of its redistribution" (p. 95, emphasis added). It was the duty of the rich to accumulate as much wealth as possible and to decide how it should be redistributed among the less fortunate as, surely, "workers or the state, would merely have wasted it" (Marsh, 2011, p. 95). Carnegie further stated:

Even the poorest can be made to see this, and to agree that the great sums gathered by some of their fellow citizens and spent for public purposes, from which the masses reap the principal benefit, are more valuable to them than if scattered among them through the course of many years of trifling amounts. (1901, p. 13)

In this view is embedded the notion that there was no need for the working classes to worry about fair wages, as their bosses were better suited to mete out to them portions of their immense fortunes as they saw fit. Marsh (2011) follows this logic through to the conclusion that, "the poor and the working poor must remain poor so that the rich could help them. The rich had to impoverish the poor in order to save them" (p. 96) and, what better place to ensure that the poor remained poor than in mandatory, publically funded schools? For in these early schools, in both

the US and Canada, children were taught two distinct lessons: skills and ideology. They would become literate enough to learn the skills necessary to be able to labour in their rapidly changing world, namely to perform the menial tasks of assembly line work, as they were offered the “precise quantity of reading, arithmetic, geography, and science in exactly the right order” (Axelrod, 1999, p. 57). They would also learn the ideological lessons of their times: that women were “by ‘law of nature and revelation’” subordinate (p. 48), that ethnic pluralism was something to be repressed at all costs (p. 87), that “natives” would be better served in residential schools (p. 77), and that those with wealth would dole out what they deemed necessary when they deemed necessary (Carnegie, 1901, p. 13).

In short, the “possibility” that was provided through early public schooling may have been of more benefit to those who designed it than those who received it.

Traditional vs. Progressive:

In what ways have the original goals of public schooling been challenged?

Soon after its inception, notions of what publically funded schooling should or could be were challenged. Axelrod (1999) suggests that, in the early 1900s, theorists began challenging the “preoccupation with abstract knowledge, and the drudgery of rote learning” (p.105). He goes on to quote Swiss theorist Pestalozzi, a student of Rousseau, who argued, “Students would gain far more from learning ‘how to learn’ than by accumulating facts; rather than requiring ‘blind obedience,’ the school should prepare the pupil for ‘independent action’” (p. 105). Sadly, for the most part, progressive visions of what public schools might achieve for their inhabitants remained side-lined to the perceived necessity of the rote memorization of “facts” presented through textbooks and teachers, maintenance of the goals of schooling laid out by Mann to create

more productive workers and compliant citizens.

In the 1930s new challenges to both the design and delivery of public schooling emerged, most notably through the writing and lectures of education reformer John Dewey. In his seminal 1938 publication, *Experience and Education*, Dewey argued, “the educator cannot start with knowledge already organized and proceed to ladle it out in doses” (p. 82). He challenged the notion that students should sit quietly in rows and receive the information an instructor deemed necessary, without discussion or remark. He developed more “progressive” notions of education, in which a student’s experience with what they were learning was central to the success of their education. Noting that, “traditional education tended to ignore the importance of personal impulse and desire as moving springs” (p. 70), Dewey suggested, given the goals of the architects of public schooling, it was not intended that students “think,” have “impulses,” or “challenge” the information being passed down to them. He observed that what he termed as traditional teaching saw the “personal impulse” of the poor as something to be feared and fixed.

Dewey saw advantage in providing students with a voice. He suggested that “progressive education should identify impulse and desire with purpose... if students are to share in the formation of the purposes which activate them” (p. 70). In fact, he went so far as to suggest that education should be “a co-operative enterprise, not a dictation” (p. 72). Should any of the wealthy industrialists who had been promised more profitable and compliant workers through their investments in public schooling have come into contact with Dewey’s progressive, potentially revolutionary ideas, they may have found them quite unsettling.

Dewey’s work played a key role in the progression of the conventional means and ends of public schooling, from the rote dictation of information perceived as necessary to function in the world of work to the development of a notion of schools and schooling in which student voice

was allowed, fostered, and taken into consideration in the development of curriculum. However, for the majority of North American youth, public schooling rolled on in the historically conventional vein. It was particularly difficult for those born into poverty and/or ethnic minorities to find possibility in a schooling system which, by design, informed them of their place in the system. Perhaps the class system, taught and maintained through public schooling, was too difficult to overcome as it became a hegemonic process where even those who least benefited from it nevertheless supported it.

Horton, an educational reformer from the southern US, suggested, in the 1930s that “it doesn’t make a great deal of difference what the people are; if they’re in the system they’re going to function like the system dictates they function...” (Knopp, 2012, p. 33). hooks (1994), when reflecting on her own experiences of living in poverty in the US, would realize that “class was more than just a question of money, that it shaped values, attitudes, social relations, and the biases that informed the way knowledge would be given and received” (p.178). Both Horton and hooks, some 60 years apart, suggest that those who struggle under the weight of poverty may struggle to shrug off the expectations and biases of a system that sees them as the class which, “of necessity... [must] forgo the privileges of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks” (Wilson, 1909, p. 25).

In his work, *Weapons of Mass Instruction: A Schoolteacher's Journey through the Dark World of Compulsory Schooling*, Gatto (2010) states, “In post-World War II America, institutions with immense capital such as the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations began to stream more money into public education than all levels of government combined”. This served to bolster the perception that children of “lesser means” needed to be schooled and controlled and that their parents were incapable of doing either and reinforced the paternal notions of the rich caring for

the poor. It was seen as a public responsibility to repair the problem of the poor through mass public schooling, a schooling that, nevertheless, continued to be designed by and for the interests of the wealthy.

To Benefit the Few and Silence the Many:

Can we unlearn our schooling?

Generations of Canadian and American children and parents may have been told by generations of politicians and teachers that providing schooling for everyone is the most noble of public efforts. On the one hand, the rhetoric of schooling may claim that public schools are where all students are equal and opportunity abounds. Public schools may seem to be the places that provide knowledge and skills for everyone; places that can make dreams come true. How, then, can it be that the design of public schooling was so openly, so overtly constructed to serve the financial objectives of the wealthy? How can it be possible that one of the most entrenched and esteemed of public institutions was actually created and funded to serve and preserve private interests? Although schooling has come a long way, in many ways, from the one room schoolhouse and the 3 Rs of its past, it is also clear, perhaps inevitably, that “the discursive space of schooling, as the conflicting constructions of its past and present suggest, is rife with tensions” (Yon, 2000, p. 44), and that the truth is less in the text or the teacher than in the walls of schools themselves. As Foucault (1980) said:

truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power; contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating

themselves. Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth. (p. 131)

The “truth” of public schooling is well documented. It is “a thing of this world”. And it is within the “regime” of mandatory public schooling that truths can be written and rewritten, spoken and misspoken. In his work, *Chomsky on MisEducation*, Chomsky (2000) states that:

Because they don’t teach the truth about the world, schools have to rely on beating students over the head with propaganda about democracy. If schools were, in reality, democratic, there would be no need to bombard students with platitudes about democracy. They would simply act and behave democratically, and we know that does not happen. (p.16)

Chomsky goes on to say that, rather than teach the truth, “Far from creating independent thinkers, schools have always, throughout history, played an institutional role in a system of control and coercion” (p. 16). The early visions of Mann, Wilson, and Carnegie, that public schools would be places to house and prepare the less fortunate masses for a lifetime of toiling for the benefit of the few, that schools would be places where the less fortunate would be offered enough schooling to be more profitable workers but not so much that they might question the “system” which provided their schooling, may be so entrenched in western society that we rarely question it. Indeed, the point might be that, thanks to our publically funded, privately constructed schooling, we do not have enough “education” to question the means or the ends of public schools. Chomsky (2000) points out that, “The Trilateral Commission [an international non-governmental, non-partisan discussion group founded in 1973] referred to schools as ‘institutions’ responsible for the ‘indoctrination’ of the young” (p. 17). Given the mission

statements of its most influential designers, it is clear that the “indoctrination” that public schooling in Canada and the US offers was and is meant to benefit the few and silence the many.

In 1976 Bowles and Gintis published the controversial *Schooling in Capitalist America*, in which they argue that there was a “macro-level correspondence principle” between education and capitalism. Capitalism, they suggested, needs class-based differences to function. These class-based differences fulfill the design of capitalism in that some win and some lose. For the rich to get richer, the poor must get poorer. For Carnegie to amass untold fortunes and then paternally dole them out as he saw fit, there needed to be a large working-class who laboured for almost nothing and waited, patiently, for a hand out. Most significantly, Bowles and Gintis argued that public schools produce and maintain these economic class-based differences. If schools were designed after, and in the hope of maintaining, a society in which very few hold the power to make decisions, then the curriculum of public schooling must teach the necessity of socio-economic class. Of the many contradictions in public schooling, Apple and Weis (1983) argue that schools aiding in the process of capitalist accumulation by contributing to the stratification of students, is clearly paradoxical.

Conveniently, as public schools were designed for private interests, the private notions of the “worth” of individuals based on socio-economics, race, gender, etc., could be “taught” to its students. All of the “isms” of society could be taught and reinforced by schooling itself. Learning the “proper order” of things could garner one both social and academic standing. And, in returning to the “discursive space of schooling” (Yon, 2000, p. 44), Marsh (2011) suggests that, “All too often, those who promote education as a solution to entrenched economic (or racial) inequalities do so, whether consciously or not, as a way to absolve themselves of the policies that created those inequalities in the first place” (p. 116). Even in today’s public schools where

notions of social justice are integral parts of every school's stated mandate, it can be argued that, "the school functions *simultaneously* as a means of empowering students around issues of social justice and as a means of sustaining, legitimizing, and reproducing dominant class interests directed at creating obedient, docile, and low-paid future workers" (McLaren, 2009, p. 62).

In Knopp's (2012) article, *Schools, Marxism, and Liberation*, she pulls no punches. She argues:

the predominant function that schools historically have served is to control the behavior of students to assimilate them –whether forcibly or more subtly- into the dominant ideology, behaviours, culture, and ways of speaking and interacting desired by the U.S. ruling class. (p.20)

It is not only the skills of menial labour that students must learn to serve the privileged few, they must also learn their ideals and their ideology, a learned ideology which can be witnessed in the phenomenon of the frustratingly conservative political positions of the economically disadvantaged, people literally voting against their own self-interests (Lewis, 2015).

It is not only production that schooling serves but the "reproduction of social relations of production" (Knopp, 2012, p. 20). To keep the lower class, whom Wilson (1909) referred to "as a much larger class, of necessity" (p. 25), as the working class, schooling must remind them that they deserve to be at work and should aspire to nothing more. Public schools are the preeminent structure in which the consent of the many is manufactured by the few (Chomsky, 2000). As Knopp claims, "The education system is set up to deliver obedient workers with the right skills and behaviours to the capitalists" (p. 25). Moreover, if the would-be obedient workers cannot find corporate legitimated work, which capitalism ensures that some will not find, they are blamed, held accountable for their failure, branded lazy, and returned to poverty (Lewis, 2015).

Gatto (1992) suggests that schooling as we know it follows a model he refers to as “factory education” or “network” schooling, terms more recently used by Robinson (2006) in his celebrated Tedtalk videos. Both theorists argue that the framework of factory education was born out of a desire to create conformity, lessen creativity, and “dumb” the population “down.” The founders of public schooling would not only produce compliant factory, and, more recently, service sector workers, they would produce a population molded for work, much like the textiles, woods, and metals they themselves would mold for the profit of factory owners. The public would be taught that they were worthy only of their allotted place in society, not at the bottom of the ladder where “the ignorant sink like dregs” (Mann, 1891, p. 97), but one rung above them, able to work for their money, and, thanks to the introduction of minimum wages, able to buy some of the things they were producing in their bosses’ factories. Gatto goes so far as to say:

Networks, like schools, are not communities, just as school training is not education. By pre-empting fifty percent of the total time of the young, by locking young people up with other young people exactly their own age, by ringing bells to start and stop work, by asking people to think about the same thing at the same time in the same way, by grading people the way we grade vegetables – and in a dozen other vile and stupid ways – network schools steal the vitality of communities and replace it with an ugly mechanism. (1992, p. 33)

Since the inception of universal public schooling, a compulsory system in which the overtly stated humanitarian goals of developing morally thoughtful, educated citizens masked the covertly private capitalist goals of containing and training a population of workers who could increase the profits of the wealthy, schools would be factories in which human

resources would be developed. Those who passed through the doors of schools would not be encouraged to seek the education to imagine, let alone question, their own potential for emancipation.

Corporate economy has always been deeply involved in the machinations of public schooling. As Mann (1891) pointed out, it was necessary to illuminate the early barons of the industrial age to the advantages of promoting and paying for public education so as to produce a more productive worker and, in turn, a more profitable business. The “motives of professional pedagogy worked in tandem with government to commit the institution [of public education] to the service of corporate economy” (Gatto, 2010, p. 22). More recently, under neoliberal ideologies and political mandates, corporate interests would turn to see not only the potential profit in training workers but the potential profit in schooling itself.

Neoliberalism:

Forward or back, or right where we started?

For a liberal minded person (like myself), neoliberalism sounds promising the first time one hears of it. It sounds like new liberal, and many of us like new ideas and “liberal” ideas. When I first encountered the term, I imagined that it described an ideology aimed at improving historical liberal ideas like providing medical care through our collective taxes. Wikipedia, which I am referencing not as an academic source but as a popular source to which many turn, defines neoliberalism as:

the resurgence of ideas associated with laissez-faire economic liberalism beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, whose advocates support extensive economic liberalization, free trade,

and reductions in government spending in order to enhance the role of the private sector in the economy. (2015)

McCarthy, Pitton, Kim, and Monje (2009) refer to neoliberalism as, “the universalization of the enterprise ethic” (p. 39). Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009) suggest that, “Neoliberals are generally guided by a vision of a weak state, students as human capital, and the world as a supermarket ripe for consumer (and producer) competition” (p.10). Brown (2003) has suggested that our collective submission to neoliberalism’s “market mentality” in the west has resulted in rendering democratic institutions extraneous. Finally, Lewis (2014) has suggested that a significant component of neoliberal ideology is the notion of “hyper-individualization,” in which individuals are made responsible for what, under classic liberalism, was understood to be the responsibility of citizens as a collective. None of these definitions make me think of new or of liberal ideas. As with my initial understandings of public schooling, I am reminded of my naiveté.

It seems that neoliberal ideologues have attempted to convince the public that we need more freedom from the controls of government. We must be emancipated from its tyranny. We must, once again, believe ourselves to be individually responsible for our own, and perhaps our immediate family’s, wellbeing; we must displace notions of “public good” with notions of “private value.” Essentially neoliberalism is in the business of privatizing the “public” and the “citizen” (Lewis, 2008). But the real motive behind the supposed freeing of the many may be the profit of the few. Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009) suggest that neoliberals, along with neoconservatives, authoritarian populist religious conservatives, and the professional and managerial class, have formed an “alliance [which] currently hold hegemonic power by creating connections between people’s ‘good sense’ and using such connections to disarticulate social groups and individuals from their previous ideological and social commitments and rearticulate

them to new ideological and social commitments” (p. 9). It could be argued that many of the social and public gains we have made since the inception and progressive reforms of public schooling are being undone for private interests. And the public, which suffers from this undoing, seems to be leading the charge.

The paradoxical nature of hegemony is articulated well by McLaren (2009), when he states that, “Hegemony is a struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression” (p. 67).

Chomsky (2000), in comparing dictatorships and democracies suggests:

In totalitarian states... you keep the ‘bewildered herd’ in place by holding a hammer over their heads, and if they get out of line you just smash them over the head. In a democratic society you can’t rely on naked force to control the population. Therefore, you need a greater reliance on propaganda as a form of controlling the public mind. The educated class becomes indispensable in the mind-control endeavour, and schools play an important role in this process. (p.24)

Again, schooling can be seen not only as an instrument to make workers of the masses but to control them. Peraskeva (2007) suggests that the hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism have become so powerful that those who are working within its systems cannot imagine an alternative to it. This is, in a sense, a contradiction not unlike the contradiction of socially and economically oppressed individuals actively voting for conservative policies which are against their own self interests.

Are we to believe that we can be so easily duped to participate in our own ‘oppression’? How do we not see this? Is it our schooling that is failing us? Knopp (2012) suggests:

This contradiction is only apparent when people can zoom out their internal cameras far enough to look at how decisions are made about big-ticket items: what to produce, how much to pay people, how to organize transportation, whether to go to war. (p. 32)

I would argue that we should add to our “big-ticket items” questions of how public schools are designed and financed, what the goals for public school students are and how they are to be achieved, along with a cost benefit analysis of standardizing funding, curriculum, and assessment.

What do neoliberals have in mind for public education? Simply put, education is “a product to be evaluated for its economic utility and as a commodity to be bought and sold like anything else in the ‘free market’” (Apple, 2000, p. 111). But, of course, it is more complicated than that. McCarthy, Pitton, Kim, and Monje (2009) clarify the contradiction:

This is the story of movement and stasis – the vigorous turn in education toward neoliberalism and its false promises of greater individual freedom and choice (movement) while consolidating and exacerbating the problems of access and inequality for the minority and working-class disadvantaged (stasis). (p. 37)

As Yon (2000) so eloquently put it, the “conflicting constructions” of education remain “rife with tensions” (p. 44). Robertson (2007) suggests that neoliberalism “has altered the conditions for knowledge production and the circumstances under which we might demand a socially just education system along with the spaces and sites for claims making around education” (p. 37). Not only is public schooling in North America, and increasingly in the international market place, a new commodity to be bought, sold, and, perhaps most importantly, shaped by private interests, it also seems evident that, for the public at large, the majority of whom attend and graduate from public schools, the ability to make any demands of public schooling in regard to

social justice is significantly diminished. As a society, our education may not be sufficient for us to critically assess the quality of our schooling or to demand effective reforms to it. “Our education falls short of enabling the critical capacity needed to critique its hegemonic processes” (Lewis, 2015).

As the public’s capacity to critically and/or effectively challenge the design and delivery of public schooling is hindered by the very schooling they received, private interests are moving forward without pause, ever on the look-out for new potential for profit. Robertson (2007) goes on to say, “Education, once untrammelled virgin territory, is also being initiated into the world of property rights, markets, trade, and rating agencies” (p. 37). The neoliberal agenda is clearly paving the way for the few to profit in new ways, in more direct ways, from the buying and selling of public schooling. That said, public schools are hardly “virgin territory” for profit making. It is just that the profit to be derived from schools is changing in kind. Rather than solely profiting from the product of schools, namely skilled workers, private neoliberal interests seek profit in the design and the delivery of schooling itself.

In returning to the notion of an ideological alliance regarding the future of public schooling, Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009) suggest that neoliberals envision closer, more profitable links between schools and businesses, unencumbered by government intervention. The movement toward the implementation and use of school vouchers, a programme being implemented in select US states and Canadian provinces, allows parents to use the public school tax allotment for their child – approximately \$10,000 per child in Ontario - to send them to any public or private school of their choice, seriously draining the resources that support public education. This is a significant example of the movement toward the infusion of neoliberal ideology and privatization into previously public sectors.

Along with school vouchers, many states and some provinces are experimenting with charter school systems. Unlike private schools, which are owned and operated by private interests and are paid for through private tuition fees and endowments, charter schools are often owned by private interests but funded publically. Like the voucher systems, charter schools allow parents to transfer tax dollars allocated on a per child basis and utilize these publically accumulated funds to, in a sense, pay the tuition of independent charter schools. Through voucher and charter systems, for-profit interests seek to use public tax dollars to fund their investments. Not only is profit made available through these semi-privatizations of public education, individual and corporate agendas are easily incorporated into the curriculum. In one example, Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009) argue that authoritarian populists utilize interpretations of sacred texts to legitimize their notions of what knowledge is. One result of this powerful pressure group's interventions in schooling policy and curriculum in the US has been the ongoing attempts to keep talk of evolution out of schools and textbooks and replace it with creationism.

How can something as institutionalized as publically funded schooling be defunded, semi-privatized, or slip, fully, into private hands so easily? The short answer is, "crisis creation."

I offer two case studies, both taken from Klein's (2007) *The Shock Doctrine*, which exemplify how publically funded schooling can, very quickly and dramatically, be altered and monetized. The first took place following one of the most tragic natural disasters in US history, Hurricane Katrina. In August of 2005 Katrina, a Category 5 hurricane, crossed the Gulf of Mexico and slammed into New Orleans. It remains the costliest natural disaster in US history, and one of its top five deadliest. In the aftermath of the hurricane, billions of dollars were

relegated to the cleanup and the rebuilding of New Orleans; this included, of course, its schools. But they were not rebuilt in their original form:

In sharp contrast to the glacial pace with which the levees were repaired and the electricity grid was brought back online, the auctioning-off of New Orleans' school system took place with military speed and precision. Within nineteen months, with most of the city's poor residents still in exile, New Orleans' public school system had been almost completely replaced by privately run charter schools. Before Hurricane Katrina, the school board had run 123 schools; now it ran just 4. (Klein, 2007, p. 6)

Not only were schools rebuilt with public money and handed over to private governance, public school teachers in New Orleans, who were previously represented by a strong union, were found redundant. In less than a year, "the union's contract had been shredded, and its forty-seven hundred members had all been fired" (p. 6).

The original, and all too real crisis, was the hurricane. Klein suggests that those who were impatiently waiting to privatize schooling in Louisiana used the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, and the massive amount of public money that poured into the rebuild, to create a secondary crisis in public education. Only three months after the catastrophic natural disaster, Friedman, Nobel winning economist and author of *Public schools: Make them private*, wrote "This is a tragedy. It is also an opportunity to radically reform the educational system" (2005, p. 1). As of 2015, "more than 90% of New Orleans public school students attend a charter school" (Ashton, 2015, p. 1). One can look to New Orleans, and the demolition of the public school system in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, replaced with new privately operated charter schools, as an example of the neoliberal influenced privatization of public institutions.

Another example of crisis creation in public education happened right here in Ontario. In the 1990s the “common-sense” revolution of the provincial Progressive Conservatives and Premier Mike Harris required a lot of public money in order to keep campaign promises of corporate taxes cuts under the guise of the “back to basics” mantra. To secure these funds, the Ontario government looked to public social services, particularly public education. But how does a provincial government cut billions of dollars from public education?

In September 1995, a video was leaked to the Canadian press revealing the Ontario Minister of Education, John Snobelen, telling a closed-door meeting of civil servants that before cuts to education and other unpopular reforms could be announced, a climate of panic needed to be created by leaking information that painted a more dire picture than he ‘would be inclined to talk about’. He called it ‘creating a useful crisis’. (Klein, 2007, p. 311)

To dramatically cut spending in public education the conservative government needed a reason the public would buy, and so they, very simply, invented one. And people bought it.

The Harris government stripped public education funding in Ontario. I recall board employees coming into the secondary school I was working in and installing locks on the thermostats in the gymnasium so that teachers would not waste money on heating. On the cold days of winter, the children would stand in the gym, looking at their breath, waiting for their teachers to give the daily instructions and allow them to get moving and warm up. I recall photocopying the play we were reading so that students could bring copies home; and, for the majority of high school students, particularly reluctant readers, I can attest that a tattered photocopy does not lead to engagement in reading. We used to joke that Mike Harris himself would come in and demand all the air from the basketballs.

The Ontario Alternative Budget Working Group (1998) estimated that the Harris government implemented \$525 million in provincial education budget cuts, over \$670 million in ongoing funding reductions, and reductions of over \$920 million in teacher pensions. A Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives article, by Mackenzie (2001), stated that, in 2001 alone, the “real per student funding for elementary and secondary education [was] \$2.4 billion below its level in 1995”. It is important to note, that in the same time frame, the Harris government significantly cut corporate capital gains, and that provincially financed corporate tax cuts were costing Ontarians more than \$2 billion per year (Mackenzie, p. 1). All the while, the same government spent a great deal of money smearing teachers in the media to perpetuate the notion that public education was in crisis.

While standing outside the school I was working in one morning, handing out flyers to parents that outlined the cuts the Harris government was making to public schools, one parent spit on me. He yelled, “If you don’t like it, go get a real job. I haven’t missed a day of work in my life and have never complained about it.” Although the moment was humiliating, and certainly not a reflection of the perspective of all parents, many of whom were very supportive throughout this difficult time, it was a very real reminder of the notion that our past and present public school system may not do enough to critically educate. Even though middle and working class children were the victims of massive cuts in public schooling, cuts that their parents benefited from in no way, even though it had been publically leaked that the crisis was internally created for the sole purpose of clawing back billions in funding, it remained for many, perhaps due to provincially manufactured and dispersed propaganda, the fault of teachers.

At the time, it was hard for me to understand how so many Ontarians could be convinced, by TV and newspaper ads, that their government should move huge amounts of money from

public education into private corporate hands. I wonder now if this is not another paradox of public schooling. Does public schooling educate citizens to question the decisions that are made for them? Are we educated enough to save our education system?

Privatization and Standardization:

The tools of accountability.

Basic accountability in any profession is critical; this is indisputable. People need to show up on time, complete assigned tasks to the best of their ability, follow protocol, treat coworkers with respect, etc. Anyone who has ever held a job knows that if you are not accountable for your time at work you will probably not be working there for long. But what does accountability in education mean? Certainly all of the above and then some. Teachers who do not show up on time, complete assigned tasks to the best of their ability, follow protocol, treat others with respect, and a whole host of other expectations, are reprimanded. Teacher appraisals, which are by no means perfect measures of an educator's performance, are periodically mandated throughout every teacher's career. Should a teacher perform unsatisfactorily, further appraisals take place and termination of employment is a potential outcome.

How teachers are held accountable for what their students are learning, is another matter. The most obvious measure of teaching accountability is the question of whether or not students are prepared for the following academic year. I would argue that every teacher who has been in the profession for some time has come across a group of students who, for no reason other than the work they did, or did not do, in their previous school year, are unprepared. I would argue that every parent has had a year in which not a lot seems to be going on in their child's classroom. I

have had whole cohorts of students enter my classroom in September and I know, within a couple of weeks, that they did not get a lot done the previous year. On a personal level, I have had a parent teacher interview in which it was very clear that my son's teacher did not know his strengths and needs, who had little evidence of the work he and his peers had done. In fact, his teacher did not seem to know him at all. I have also had students enter my classroom over-prepared, raring to go, clearly having had an exciting and engaging past year. I have also entered my son's and daughter's classrooms to find voluminous evidence of their learning, both in their desks and on their classroom walls. This "measure" of teaching accountability may work for those parents who have enough pedagogical proficiency to see and understand what is happening in their child's classroom and for those who have the social capital to challenge it. It may work for administrators who spend time in every classroom in their building. It is not, however, "standardizable."

The reality of teaching is that it does not happen in a fixed and predictable environment. What one student or another needs, what one class or another needs, what one community or another needs, is always different. What one teacher's background brings to their teaching style is different than that of their colleagues. The expectations of what teaching "looks like" varies from administrator to administrator, board to board, year to year. It is a profession based on people, and people are not standardized.

That said, attempts have been made to standardize teaching and learning. This most commonly happens through the standardization of curriculum and assessment. In Ontario curriculum is standardized. Grade by grade, subject by subject, curriculum documents outline the expectations that students should meet to be "successful." Expectations in curriculum documents are the boxes teachers tick to make sure that students are ready for the following year. In Ontario

there are also standardized assessments in the form of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests. EQAO assessments of Math and Literacy take place every year in Ontario public schools, testing students in grades 3 and 6, and in secondary school. For elementary students in Grades 3 and 6, EQAO Math and Language assessments are three day ordeals in which students are forced to sit in rows and silently work away on Math and Language questions without any guidance or assistance from their teachers. In secondary school, Math and Language are assessed in Grades 9 and 10. Presumably, if students do not do well on these assessments, they have not learned what they should have in previous years. Is that, then, the standardized measure of teaching accountability?

It is important to pause here for a moment and take a deeper look at what accountability means in the socio-political context of public schooling, prior to looking at EQAO in more detail. EQAO has clearly, and extremely successfully, been sold as the source of accountability for public education in Ontario. It is, after all, the Education Quality and *Accountability* Office. But what, exactly, does accountability in this context mean? How have the ideologies of capitalism, neoliberalism, and “hyper-individuality” shifted our notions of accountability? Lewis (2015) suggests that:

Neoliberalism is an ideological position that creates economic, political, and social conditions for individuals over which they have no control but for the outcomes of which they are held responsible. Individuals are, in fact, held accountable for the outcomes in their lives they did not create. Accountability, in this context, becomes a diversion from where real accountability should be placed.

Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009) argue that movements toward increasingly high stakes assessments and accountability are taking place under the neoliberal guise of “a return to a

romantic past where ‘real knowledge,’ morality, and a supposedly stable social order existed” (p. 10). They further suggest that the professional managerial class “supports and benefits from, for instance, systems of high-stakes, standardized testing and educational policies built upon reductive forms of accountability” (p. 10). Lipman (2009), goes so far as to say, “*Business metaphors* of quality control, accountability, and standards replace any notion of democratic participation in education as a public good in a democratic society” (p. 366).

EQAO testing, which was originally designed as a guide for curriculum development, not as a measure of the ability of students to learn or teachers to teach, has become a major source of “data” that is used to drive curriculum reform in Ontario schools. For instance, over the past few years, Grade 6 EQAO Math results have been lower than expected. As an elementary school teacher I can say, without hesitation, that the vast majority of mandatory professional development has been around Math instruction. In these professional development sessions, EQAO results are discussed and EQAO style questions are suggested for classrooms. Teachers whose classes did particularly poorly on EQAO assessments are known as the data is shared in staff meetings. In secondary schools students must take the EQAO Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) in Grade 10. If they do not pass, they cannot graduate. Students who are not successful after two attempts can take the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC), which counts as a pass but cannot be used as a senior English credit. Although the stakes are not as high as they are in some US states, where teachers can be dismissed should their standardized assessments be chronically low, for many Ontario teachers and students, EQAO has become a high stakes assessment.

Thinking back to Klein’s notion of crisis creation and the blatant crisis creation in Ontario, I find myself sceptical of EQAO results. What would happen if everything was fine, if,

on average, Ontario students were doing well? Would EQAO need to continue to exist? To exist there needs to be a problem, gaps in achievement, areas in which teachers are not accountable for their teaching. If proponents of standardization need evidence that public schools are not effectively and accountably teaching Math to Grade 6 students, they have the capacity to make more difficult Grade 6 Math assessments and then publish the results which would show that students cannot successfully answer the questions. In turn, it can be shown that teachers are not teaching effectively and public schooling is not functioning. It is “crisis-creation” made easy. If it is deemed that the public effort to educate children is unaccountable, the road is paved for the commodification and privatization of public schooling. Of course this is conjecture, yet it is conjecture based on the history of public schooling and the present neoliberal ideology which pervades our capitalist society, a society which seems based on, indeed bent on, allowing private interests to gain increasing capacities to profit from public investment.

Unfortunately, in Ontario, standardized testing seems here to stay. I recall the introduction of the OSSLT. Huge numbers of recently immigrated, racialized, and poor students, who made up the majority of the population of the school in which I taught at the time, routinely failed it. The Ontario Progressive Conservative government of the day, aided by their invented crisis of accountability in education, mandated that students could not graduate secondary school without passing this new standardized test. They quickly realized that far too many students would not be graduating, as so many failed, and just as quickly instituted the OSSLC, through which students could pass the test at their teacher’s discretion, which was, and remains, not standardized at all.

Nonetheless, the results of standardized EQAO testing continue to be used as data to drive much of school board and individual school improvement plans across the province. Due to the high profile element of these tests, many elementary teachers choose to spend a great deal of the school year focused on EQAO-like problems in the hope that their students do well because the results are published and used to judge their accountability as teachers. In secondary schools Grade 9 and 10 students take EQAO Math and Language tests. Not only are the results of these tests published, students who fail the OSSLT must suffer the humiliation of having to sit through a semester of the OSSLC. Being forced to take OSSLC in Grade 11 or 12 is an embarrassment. The only students who take it are those students who failed the OSSLT; they know this and so do their friends. For Math and English teachers, and increasingly teachers in other subject areas, these tests have become much more than one day assessments; they have become mandatory aspects of their curriculum. Teachers may feel compelled to spend increasingly large blocks of time teaching to these tests at the expense of other important curriculum areas because of the manner in which the results are analyzed, manipulated, and communicated.

Rather than the year-long assessments and evaluations designed, delivered, and evaluated by their teachers, these externally developed, moment in time, standardized assessments, are sent home to parents and sold as the true measure of their child's success in school. They are also, increasingly, seen as the true measure of teachers' capacities and capabilities. In Ontario, EQAO results are the primary data used by the Fraser Institute to rate the quality of schools on a provincial level. Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the Senior Fellows of this conservative "think-tank" is former premier Mike Harris whose government was responsible for the mass defunding and standardization of public education in the 1990s. Fraser Institute ratings are published yearly in major newspapers across the province and lead to the inevitable judgment of "good schools"

and “bad schools,” “good teachers” and “bad teachers.” I have heard, many times, students suggesting that EQAO results really judge the teacher. I have heard students say that their parents have told them that EQAO assesses their teacher not them. The assumption is, if a teacher is doing a good job, their students should do well on standardized testing.

In fact, the results of standardized testing in Ontario are well known. The Fraser Institute publishes the EQAO results of students, school by school, city by city, across the province, and the ranking of schools rarely changes. On average, schools in higher socio-economic areas, in established, primarily white, upper or middle class neighbourhoods, rank higher. Conversely, on average, schools in lower socio-economic areas, where there is more diversity, in which there are higher numbers of recent immigrants, where many parents are undereducated and working class, schools rank lower, year after year after year. From the outset of EQAO testing, educators could predict and, in fact accurately did predict, the results of standardized testing: students who are living in poverty and/or are recent immigrants, along with students who have learning exceptionalities, generally do not do well. Although teachers are mandated to implement these tests, year after year, although accommodations and support are in place for many who might need them, little has changed in the results. Similar students, in similar situations, do poorly.

However, standardization continues to be sold to parents and teachers and students as the new accountability in education. Russom (2012) disagrees:

We are told that restoring competitiveness requires standardized testing, closing ‘failing’ schools, expanding charters, and making teachers work harder... In fact, that isn’t really the point. Instead, the neoliberal approach further stratifies the education system to meet the needs of economic and political elites, because they hope to increase the skill levels

of a *minority* of the population while investing as little as possible in the education of everyone else. (p. 114)

Of course, there is another layer. Not only does standardized testing serve to continue and further solidify class stratification and marginalization, as the originators of public schools hoped over 100 years ago, it serves to further “control.” Students are forced to sit through an “ever-increasing amount of school time spent on testing and test preparation, which serves to further emphasize obedience over critical thinking” (Russom, 2012, p. 115). “Accountability works as a panoptic system of surveillance that teaches people to comply and to press others into compliance” (Lipman, 2009, p. 369). Wilson’s “skillful servants of society”. Chomsky’s “bewildered herd”.

There is resistance. Some in education see the present mandated methods of standardization and accountability as a sham. Some see it as a form of accountability for would be profiteers rather than for schools, teachers, or students. Some would say that standardized assessments provide no real benefit to student learning or teacher accountability at all. Perhaps the assumption that all educators and every parent would blindly go along with another external imposition on public education, for “the good” of education was presumptuous. In fact, “Neoliberalism’s presumption that education can be treated in the same way as an industrial process and that children should be seen as products of that process whose added value can be measured by standardized tests is opposed by most teachers’ unions” (Compton & Weiner, 2009, p. 400).

That said, it is here, and it feels like it is here to stay. It seems embedded in every facet of today’s public education. Standardized assessments might even be seen as a new layer of hegemony in the public education discourse which may make it difficult to critically diagnose,

let alone dispute. And, although some may see the possibility of a more progressive form of public education, as Dewey did in the 1930's, collectively we seem unable to fully realize these possibilities, perhaps due to the systemic hegemony under which we have been schooled ourselves.

In Ontario today the vast majority of students in Bachelor of Education programs across the province, our next generation of teachers, may not recall a time when EQAO was not a part of schooling. They may consider EQAO as a normal a part of schooling. It may be an aspect of their ideological understanding of what education is. Will they turn and critically oppose something that they have fully bought into or may not even see?

It is difficult to say that the overtly stated mandate of the Education Quality and Accountability Office is anything but encouraging. This governing body of standardized testing in Ontario reminds us, in the first lines of their "About Us" section of their website, that the data they collect through standardized testing in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 is meant to "provide accountability and a gauge of quality in Ontario's publically funded education system. By providing this important evidence about learning, EQAO acts as a catalyst for increasing the success of Ontario students." Everyone invested in education, I would argue, wants to see "evidence of learning" and wants students to have "increasing success." I am a teacher. That is what I want. I think.

However, when I dig a bit deeper, I find myself asking, increased success at what? Evidence of learning what? If I ask these questions will I be charged with not wanting learning and success? If I disagree with the mandated standardized testing of my students, if I disagree with the publication of school results, if I disagree that our professional development and

curriculum reforms arise primarily out of the data collected from standardized assessments, in short, if I don't want EQAO in my classroom and school, should I tread lightly?

For teachers who suggest, as I am here, that EQAO is neither an accurate measure of how teachers are teaching or of how students are learning, but rather a tool to achieve the not so covert intention of the further standardizing and privatizing of public schooling, some would suggest I say it quietly. But treading lightly and staying quiet is no way to facilitate change. I believe that it is inevitable that students and teachers, schools and communities, particularly those in low socio-economic neighbourhoods, where single parenthood, recent immigration, and countless other mitigating factors are extensive, will always perform poorly, on average, if EQAO is used as the measure of their success. I would argue that the reason for this -- last year, this year, and next year -- is not because the kids in these neighbourhoods are not smart, are not working hard every day, thinking and learning every day, but because they are functioning in a climate of greatly increased need coupled with greatly reduced resources, due in large part to standardized funding. Am I less accountable as an educator if I move from a school in a wealthy neighbourhood, where EQAO scores are predominately high, to an economically depressed neighbourhood where they are predominately low? This is not a measure of student effort or teacher accountability. Furthermore, I think a very plausible argument can be made that the ongoing poor performances on standardized assessments, particularly in under-served communities, may be used as "proof" by those who wish to further privatize public schooling that it is incapable of solving issues of under-performance.

That said, I do have to keep my audience in mind. Teachers in Ontario have been "written up" for the crime of making errors in the administration of the EQAO tests in the dreaded Blue Pages of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) periodical, *Professionally Speaking*, alongside

those who have been charged with egregious crimes such as the sexual harassment of students or the theft of public resources. Teachers' fear of having their names publicized beside the names of thieves and pedophiles because they helped a student better understand an EQAO question or offered advice on how to proceed with an EQAO assessment is all too real in Ontario schools. Simply by administering the test incorrectly, I can be admonished. The stakes are real and they are increasingly high.

If I disagree with the institutionalization of standardized assessments, I can lose my credibility. I can be professionally reprimanded if I am found to be misadministering the test by the EQAO officer who randomly visits schools and sits in the back of the class taking notes on tests days. I can lose my job if I do not diligently follow every instruction provided by the Education Quality and Accountability Office, which does sound like something that George Orwell would have invented to oversee government employees in some dystopic future. I am reminded of Chomsky (1988) and the hammer. If we live in a democracy, and the powers that be cannot just smash us with their hammers, as is the practice of dictatorships, capitalists sell us our own hammers. Have parents, teachers, administrators, the Ministry of Education all bought EQAOs' version of standardization and accountability? If they have, are we allowed to freely question it without concern for reprisal? I certainly feel that my freedom to openly challenge and question these policies is curtailed. I often wonder, is it *how* I was schooled, how so many of us were schooled that has led to our fear and our passivity in accepting public conditions that may not serve our best interests or the best interests of our children, but, rather, may serve the interests of private profiteers?

Although I don't remember voting for standardized testing, I do remember voting for candidates and platforms that promised to strengthen and improve our public education system.

Knopp (2012) reminds us, “Political democracy is, in a sense, the perfect illusion of equality and equal participation in decision making” (p. 31). I am, again, reminded of my naiveté. I am reminded of reading hooks (1994) as she relates her experiences in coming to a new understanding of how American classism and racism is so embedded in everything in which she took part. But I am also reminded how hooks “began to understand that power was not itself negative. It depended what one did with it” (p. 187). I am reminded of Foucault’s (1980) notions of truth: a truth that is not “outside power”; a truth that is “produced” by “forms of constraint.” I am reminded that, “Each society has its regime of truth...” (p.131). And, I ask myself, am I, as a teacher, part of the “regime of truth”? Can I “zoom out far enough” (Knopp, 2012) to see? If I could see, what should I do? What will I risk?

Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that the original goals of public schooling were to provide a controlled space for the training of labourers. The poor were to be trained in the skills that they would need to be more productive in the factories of the wealthy. They were also instructed in the ideology the wealthy would need to keep them in line. They were to be less poor but they were not to dream of moving too far beyond their present class.

Although more progressive notions of education surfaced as early as the 1930s, historical conventions and hegemonic practices and ideology kept schools looking, sounding, and operating like the factories their products, their graduates, would eventually work in. More recently, capitalist and neoliberal ideologies have driven public schooling toward an increasingly commodified version of schooling with new methods of accountability, standardization, and privatization. It would seem that profiting from the product of schooling, namely, skilled

workers, is not enough. There is profit to be made in the design, delivery, and assessment of schooling and schools as well.

Given the original goals of public schools, namely the production of skilled and compliant workers, and more recent attempts to commodify schooling itself, new questions arise. How do present manifestations of public schooling work? Are the goals the same? What are the differences between a private and a public education in Ontario? What outcomes should marginalized students, particularly those living in poverty, expect from public schooling? With what outcomes in mind have the recent initiatives of accountability and standardization, along with movements toward privatizing previously public spaces, been implemented and what effect are they having on students?

Chapter 3: Students

It may be that there is no other way of educating people. Possibly, but I don't believe it. In the meantime it would be a help at least to describe things properly, to call things by their right names. Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her school life is something like this:

'You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. We are sorry, but it is the best we can do. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show how impermanent these must be. You are being taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust and individual than others, will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself – educating your own judgement. Those that stay must remember, always and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society.'

--Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 1962/2013

When you wish upon a star it makes a difference who you are.

--Giroux, *When You Wish Upon a Star it Makes a Difference Who You Are: Children's Culture and the Wonderful World of Disney*, 1995

Introduction

In this chapter I utilize secondary sources and personal experience in the hopes of speaking to both the theoretical and substantive issues that students face in public schools. First, I will outline the systemic differences between the mandates, clientele, and desired outcomes of public and private schools. Second, I examine the role that socio-economic background, in particular the marginalizing effects of poverty, in both past and present incarnations of public schooling, have on student success. Third, I take a closer look at present neoliberal attempts to

standardize curriculum and assessments and create a climate of both accountability and commodification in public education in Ontario. Lastly, I address the potential in looking to social reforms to address socio-economic inequities rather than looking to public education, which may serve only to sustain them.

Unequal Means:

Smart, hard-working, or lucky? Private and public schooling.

I am, by no means, the first to suggest that there are two distinct forms of schooling in North America. Anyon (1981) articulated this thoroughly in her article, *Social Class and School Knowledge*. She stated that there is a liberal education, offered almost exclusively through private funding, for children of families with wealth; and there is a more “practical” education, offered through public tax dollars, for everyone else. This division, between a liberal and a practical education, is quite clearly, as I discussed at length in the previous chapter, by design. In cities across Canada and the US, private liberal education is on offer for a price. The tuition fees for a secondary student at a private school, located in a very affluent area of a big city in Ontario, are as follows: \$33,550 for day school (Monday through Friday 9-3), \$57,510 for boarding school, and \$61,010 for international students, who must choose to board. There is also a one-time non-refundable registration fee for all students of \$8,500. This particular private school offers classes from Senior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (SK tuition is \$30,550). The school’s administration suggests to expect another \$3,000 in incidental fees per year such as, text books, school uniforms, and school trips. Should you choose to send your child to this private institution for day school only, his or her school career would cost you over \$400,000. To be fair, the school recognizes that they are expensive; in their own words:

less than two per cent of Canadian families can afford the full costs of attending [the College], and we want to ensure the College remains affordable for best-fit families. To that end, [the college] has committed over \$4.5 million in financial assistance for the 2016-2017 year (www.ucc.on.ca/admission/tuition-fees)

One might wonder what the criteria for “best-fit families” are.

There are clearly two-tiers of education in North America. In schools, like the private school mentioned above, a more liberal education is offered. To clarify the meaning of liberal education, it might be best to look back to the origins of its delineation. Wilson, in his 1909 address to the New York High School Teachers Association, clearly outlined the difference between a liberal education and a training or technical education. He said:

A liberal education consists in putting the mind in such shape that all its powers, like the muscles of the body, will have been called into exercise, will have been given a certain degree of development, a certain uniformity and symmetry of development, so that the mind will not find itself daunted in the midst of the tasks of the world any more than the body itself, and will be able to turn itself in the right direction, even as the athlete, quickly and gracefully, not overwhelmed by the strain, and able to accommodate the several faculties so that they will unite in carrying the strain. (p. 21)

Conversely, there is publically funded training or technical education for those without the means to afford a liberal education. This second form of schooling, Wilson referred to as, “one which condemns all but the extraordinary individual to a minor part in life, to a part not of command or direction but of specific performance” (p. 21), an “education” in which the goal of educators is “to make skillful servants of society” (p. 25).

Since the reforms of Mike Harris' Progressive Conservatives in the 1990s, public schooling in Ontario works under a very simple funding formula. For every child in elementary school, the school board receives approximately \$10,000 of locally collected tax dollars. For secondary students, the amount goes up to approximately \$11,000. Teachers and administrators, particularly in September and October, euphemistically refer to this as the "bums in seats" measure. Schools literally receive their funding by how many students are sitting in chairs at the beginning of the year. Under this funding formula, a child's publically funded schooling will run the community around \$130,000, a savings of close to \$300,000 dollars in comparison to the private school previously mentioned. This education, the one that we pay for collectively, is the one that, as Wilson (1909) put it, "a very much larger class, of necessity, [must endure] to forgo the privileges of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks" (p. 25). Though the manual tasks of the early 1900s, factory and farming for example, are different in kind than the manual tasks of today, service sector and office cubicle for example, a great many Canadians toil away at jobs, the skills for which they learned in public schools. In fact, fewer than 6 percent of Canadians can afford the luxury of a private liberal education (Statistics Canada, 2001).

I cannot say, for sure, that students who graduate from elite private schools go on to be the modern day barons of industry. Only two of my close friends graduated from private secondary schools; both of them came from extremely wealthy families and both of them have created extreme wealth in their professions. Of course there are also many success stories out of public schooling, countless I am sure, but one wonders what the percentages are. Conversely, how many students fail or drop-out of private schools in comparison to publically funded schools?

For one year, prior to achieving my Bachelor of Education, I worked with a Grade 9 student who was diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome, obsessive compulsive disorder, and attention deficit disorder. He was a really smart and thoughtful young man who had immense struggles in getting through the most mundane transitions in his day-to-day life. He used to ask me to flick the light switch so that he didn't have to 27 times, so that his parent didn't die. His parents, who lived in a very wealthy neighbourhood in one of Canada's largest cities, were able to secure his admission to a very expensive private secondary school, under the condition that he had a privately hired and funded full-time Educational Assistant (EA). Enter me. I met him at his house every morning and drove him to school. We would sit through as much class time as he could manage, usually part of every morning, and we were expected to leave if he became a bother to any other student or to any of his teachers. Although he was from a "best-fit family," he was clearly not a "best-fit student."

I graduated from my teacher education programme that year and was hired by a local district school board, thus ending my work as a private EA. I learned later that, after the young man's graduation, his parents funded an extension to the school library. I wonder if that was a part of the initial bargaining in return for his admission to the school. Although I learned a great deal from that young man over our year together, lessons about life that will never leave me, what I learned from a year working in a prestigious private school is that everything is done to prevent a student from failing. My time there was short, but I asked my colleagues about student failures. I was told that, although sometimes students who struggled left and moved to other private schools, no one failed. If a student received less than 65% on any assessment, it was school policy that they were provided with a tutor until the grades improved. It was a part of the

school's motto that all graduates, without exception, would have their choice of Canada's finest universities.

As a public school teacher of almost 20 years, I know that, in public schools, students fail. Last year I had 28 students in my class, 10 of whom had Individual Education Plans (IEP). An IEP mandates that students who have documented behavioural or learning difficulties be provided with accommodations and/or modifications to their school programs. In the same year I received, on average, 1 or 2 hours of educational assistance per week. There were no in-school tutors available. If there were out-of-school tutors, typically, they were the parents. Although it is policy in Ontario that no student fails or is held back a full grade level in elementary school, kids fail assessments, all the time. When I worked in a secondary school in a large urban centre, where the student population was primarily recent immigrants and families living in varying degrees of poverty, lots of kids failed, not only assessments but courses, whole grade years. Lots dropped out and found underground "employment," which most often meant selling drugs. No tutors swooped in to save them. If we got a handful of kids off to university and a bunch into colleges and apprenticeships and not too many went to jail, we had a successful year. Our motto, rather than "everyone gets to go to the university of their choice," might have been, "we will try our best to keep everyone alive." Sadly, there were years when we could not accomplish even that. For the students who attend the elite private school at which I worked as an EA for a year, and the students who attend the public secondary school at which I spent 5 years teaching, they are literally living in different worlds, even though, geographically, they are not very far from each other, maybe a 45 minute drive.

Unequal Ends:

The role poverty plays in student achievement and success.

Not only are there substantial differences in the education being offered in public and private schools, increasingly, there are differences in the success rates of students in publically funded schools in different neighbourhoods of the same cities. This has been noted through analysis of EQAO results. A closer look at the differences in the socio-economic make-up of different neighbourhoods may reveal potential reasons for these disparities. The Early Development Instrument, which measures Kindergarten children's readiness for school across several areas of child development, maps the vulnerabilities for potential lack of school readiness in five domains: communication skills and general knowledge; language and cognitive development; emotional health and maturity; social knowledge and competence; and physical health and well-being (Kingston Community Roundtable on Poverty Reduction (KCRPR) Deprivation Index, 2011). In a neighbourhood known to have a long standing history of poverty in an eastern Ontario city of under 200,000 people, the average family income in 2011 was \$39,022, compared to the city average of \$69,530 (KCRPR Deprivation Index, 2011). How does income disparity translate to school readiness? Thirty-seven percent of students in the socio-economically depressed neighbourhood were below average in one or more of the five stated domains. This translates to double the number of students entering kindergarten who are vulnerable in comparison to the city average which was 19 percent (KCRPR Deprivation Index, 2011).

This is not unique to cities across Canada and the US. Poverty is *the* defining risk factor for lack of school readiness. Children living in poverty typically enter school a full year and a half behind their middle-class peers in language ability alone (Dresser, Dunklee, &

Howard, 2009, p. 7). Due directly to poverty, millions of children start their lives with an educational deficit (Grundel, Oliveira, & Geballe, 2003, p. 5). DeBrouker and Lavallee (1998) conclude that a child's SES is the strongest predictor of future educational attainment.

There is, in fact, overwhelming evidence that children who live in poverty are at risk academically. Unfortunately, rather than addressing the mitigating factors, the barriers that students from low SES backgrounds are up against, educators often, as Gatto (1992) suggested, dumb the expectations down. "When children's experiences don't match [teacher] expectations, too many teachers tend to attribute school problems to 'deficient' environments and lower their expectations for the children's success" (Dresser, Dunklee, & Howard, 2009, p. 11). Giroux refers to Keddie's (1971) *Classroom Knowledge*, in which he found that teachers made the assumption that working class students and middle class students approached learning differently and required a different knowledge base from their learning. This belief led teachers to develop different pedagogical approaches to teaching working class and middle class students:

Working class students were taught how to follow rules, which usually meant learning how not to ask questions or raise issues that challenged teacher-based assumptions.

On the other hand, the middle-class students were offered more complex treatments of class material, and their personal involvement in the class was endorsed rather than discouraged. (2001, p. 51)

In Anyon's ground breaking article, *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum* (1980), she found, by studying the curriculum of students from different schools in neighbourhoods with significantly different socio-economic make-ups, that there were discernible differences in the curriculum delivered in their classrooms. In short, she discovered a "social

stratification of knowledge.” More recent research (Dresser, Dunklee & Howard, 2009; Marsh, 2011; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009) continues to reveal that higher numbers of children from poor families enter school lacking readiness. Their teachers, in addressing this lack of readiness may lower expectations. In some cases this results not only in low academic achievement but in formal diagnosis of learning disabilities.

Children who live in poverty are often found to be less “able” students. In Gelb and Mizokawa's (1986), *Special Education and Social Structure: The Commonality of Exceptionality*, they found that there is a definitive link between the identification of more subjective exceptionalities, such as behavioural disorders, and poverty. Bloom and Tonthat (2006) found, in 2002, that 14 percent of children living below the poverty line were identified with a learning exceptionality compared to seven and half percent of those above the poverty line. Of families who were on public assistance in 2004, 16 percent of children were identified compared to eight percent of children in families not receiving assistance. Gelb and Mizokawa reference a 2009 National Health Survey done by the US Department of Health and Human Services which found that, “In families with an income of less than \$35,000, the percentage of children with a learning disability (12%) was more than twice that of children in families with an income of \$100,000 or more (5%)” (p. 12). In fact, according to Dresser, Dunklee, and Howard (2009), “social and behavioural deficits, instead of classroom performance, may be the major factor influencing low SES students' initial referrals for learning disability placement” (p. 23).

According to Levin and Riffel (2000), students from low SES backgrounds score lower on standardized testing, are more often identified with learning exceptionalities, get suspended and expelled more often, drop-out at earlier ages and in greater numbers, and have overall lower graduate rates. “Almost all educational outcomes, such as initial reading

achievement, referrals to special education, discipline and behaviour problems, years of education completed, and grades achieved are strongly correlated with family income” (p. 184). And this is not a provincial or a national issue; it is international. “One of the biggest problems facing British schools is the gap between rich and poor, and the enormous disparity in the childrens’ home backgrounds and the social and cultural capital they bring to the educational table” (Benn & Miller, 2006, p. 23).

If one looks at Fraser Institute data on EQAO performance by schools across Ontario, which is readily available on their website (www.fraserinstitute.org/report-cards/school-performance/ontario.aspx), there are clear winners and clear losers. Year after year, the three schools in the socioeconomically depressed neighbourhood of the eastern Ontario city discussed earlier, rank the lowest on the Frasier Institute’s school ranking report. Every year the schools in neighbourhoods with above average family income and high parental academic achievement in the same city score the highest. This is not particular to this city; this trend is documented across the province and across the continent. In the preface of Bale and Knopp’s 2012, *Education and Capitalism: Struggles for Learning and Liberation*, they suggest that, in the US, there is a:

general understanding that there is not just *one* public education system in America but rather two. There is widespread acknowledgement that schools vary greatly depending on the economic status of the neighbourhood where they’re located and the degree of racial segregation of their students” (p. 2).

Poverty, racial marginalization, and many other mitigating factors affect not only the schooling outcomes of individual students but the educational opportunities of whole communities.

I am reminded of the conclusions Levitt and Dubner made in their 2005 *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, where, in their chapter “What Makes

a Perfect Parent,” they outline the results of a regression analysis of the US Department of Education’s massive late 90s, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), which tracked the academic progress of over twenty thousand children for over six years. Utilizing this data, they posed for their readers a series of parenting questions, such as: which of the following have the strongest correlation with high test scores: reading to your child every day or having a lot of books in your home. As it turns out, having a lot of books in your home has the strong correlation and reading to your child does not; parents who have a lot of books in their home are generally more educated, have the money to buy the books, and have the space to house them. What Levitt and Dubner conclude from the ECLS data is that, “it isn’t so much a matter of what you *do* as a parent; it’s who you are” (Levitt & Dubner, 2005, p. 175). This is a sad reality for the parents and the children who find themselves living in poverty. Here is their conundrum:

by the time most people pick up a parenting book, it is far too late. Most of the things that matter were decided long ago – who you are, whom you married, what kind of life you lead. If you are smart, hardworking, well educated, well paid, and married to someone equally fortunate, then your children are more likely to succeed. (Levitt & Dubner, 2005, p.175)

What, then, can parents living in poverty do for their children? In Knopp’s 2012 *Schools, Marxism, and Liberation*, she references the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which found that, “in the United States, about half of one’s income as an adult can be predicted by one’s parent’s income” (p. 11).

That said, there are those who enter public schools, even in the most extremely depressed socio-economic neighbourhoods, and thrive. In the earliest stages of the development of publically funded education, there was a recognition that, although the majority of leaders and

success stories would arise out of private schools, there could be a few sparks of light hidden within the darkness of poverty. In 1783, Thomas Jefferson:

imagined that if Virginia adopted his legislation for common schooling, ‘twenty of the best geniuses will be raked from the rubbish annually,’ and the state could then avail itself ‘of those talents which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as the rich, but which perish without use, if not sought for and cultivated’.” (Marsh, 2011, p.101)

Not only might a few “diamonds in the rough” be cultivated out of the poor for the use of the state, and, in turn, the wealthy, the “problems” of an increasingly multi-ethnic, socially and economically diverse society might be curbed. Benjamin Rush stated, in 1786, that schools, “could also homogenize [Rush’s term] an ethnically diverse population, thereby fitting students ‘more easily for uniform and peaceable government’” (p. 1). Today, public schools endure as the chief social instructor, not only in regards to how laws are made and by whom, “but also [of how] to follow those laws” (Marsh, 2011, p.102).

Hunter (1917), in his landmark publication titled simply, *Poverty*, suggested that “the school must be looked to as the one social agency having power to save children from the neglect which the poverty of the parents necessitates” (p. 207). Perhaps, more importantly, he recognized that it was not so simple as to build a school and invite the most impoverished children to attend and they would somehow fall in with those who were more socially and economically stable and get down to their academics. Hunter saw that, for students living in poverty, “learning is difficult because hungry stomachs and languid bodies and thin blood are not able to feed the brain” (p.216). I cannot comment on “thin blood” but I am sure that there are both hungry stomachs and languid bodies in my classroom every day.

It may be of value to revisit the notions of the factory model of schooling here, a model which Gatto (1992 & 2010) and Robinson (2006 & 2010), to name only two of many educational theorists, have adamantly advocated against. How can we effectively educate a classroom of students, some of whom may be silently hungry, some of whom may be marginalized in any number of ways, some of whom are victims, all sitting together with students who are none of these things, students who are well off and are thriving? How do we teach differently in chronically low socio-economic neighbourhoods so that the standardized achievement rates of these students might match those of students in wealthy neighbourhoods? McNeil (2009) points out that “a school that is designed like a factory has a built-in contradiction: running a factory is tightly organized, highly routinized, and geared for the production of uniform products; educating children is complex, inefficient, idiosyncratic, uncertain, and open-ended” (p. 389). Perhaps we will find, year by year, the diamonds in the rough in our present public school system, but they seem way too few and they are increasingly emerging from that middle tier of education, public yes, but a wealthier public.

At the outset of this chapter, I posited that education in North America is a two tiered system. There are private schools for a very small percentage of society and there are public schools for everyone else. This tiering of education has also found its way into the public realm where, increasingly, one’s school ranking may depend more on where it is located than on the efforts of its students and teachers. As prominent as the differences are between privately funded and publically funded schools, there are growing, and increasingly striking, differences between public schools in varying socio-economic and demographic neighbourhoods. Maybe public school isn’t that bad after all – if you can afford to live in a wealthy neighbourhood. Maybe.

It is Their Fault:

Possible perceptions.

That students in public schools are taught not only an overt curriculum: the skills necessary to function in the world of work, but also a covert curriculum: the necessity of social hierarchies, was openly stated not only by the original architects of public schooling, but by educational reformers as early as the 1930s. Students in the earliest public schools learned that women are subordinate to men, First Nations people are incapable of helping themselves, and new immigrants must leave traditional ways behind and live correctly as “westerners” (Axelrod, 1999). Regarding this notion, Horton and Freire (1990) stated, “If they’re in the system they’re going to function like the system dictates they function...” (p. 103). For students who are ethnically or financially marginalized, the system of schooling can be extremely difficult to navigate:

Even though students enter the ‘democratic’ classroom believing they have the right to ‘free speech’, most students are not comfortable exercising this right to ‘free speech’.

Most students are not comfortable exercising this right – especially if it means they must give voice to thoughts, ideas, feelings that go against the grain, that are unpopular. This censoring process is only one way bourgeois values over-determine social behaviour in the classroom and undermine the democratic exchange of ideas. (hooks, 1994, p. 179)

Sanchez (2012) goes so far as to suggest that the system of public education in the US, in an attempt to maintain the social hierarchies in place, actively:

criminalize behaviours that don’t conform to middle-class norms: schools are many students’ introduction to institutional punishment. More times than not, they teach an

inaccurate and flag-waving version of US history and how the world works. In essence, they often strengthen racial and class inequality as well as militarism. (p. x)

These normative pressures within public schools, along with the readiness deficits with which many poor and racialized students enter school, may result in lower levels of academic success and higher drop-out rates. Although many theorists and educators can “zoom out” far enough to see these causes as external factors, for students in the system, it is hard not to blame themselves. “The oppressed blame themselves for school failure – a failure that can certainly be additionally attributed to the structuring effects of the economy and the class-based division of labour” (McLaren, 2009, p. 67). Before school begins, during school years, and later in the labour market, many marginalized individuals fair badly and many, understandably, blame themselves.

Some have argued that this issue might be addressed by granting equal access to all schools for all students. Would students from economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, if allowed to attend schools in higher socio-economic neighbourhoods, be more successful? In the majority of Ontario school districts, we will never know because, for the most part, students are not allowed to attend schools outside their catchment areas, thus perpetuating the “good neighbourhood,” “good school,” “good student” and, conversely, the “bad neighbourhood,” “bad school,” “bad student” mythology. Private schools in the US and in western Canada have been aggressively lobbying for charter or voucher systems which they say would allow students to be more “mobile” and grant them access to better educational opportunities. Aronowitz, in his 2009 *Against Schooling: Education and Social Class*, suggests not. He argues that, “the structure of schooling already embodies the class system of society, and, for this reason, the access debate misfires” (p. 108). In fact, “‘Equal Opportunity’ for class mobility is the system’s tacit recognition that inequality is normative” (p. 108). “Mobility, rather than being a possible

solution to issues of class differences in public schooling, the notion of letting children and parents move out of “bad” schools and move into “good” schools, may be one of many elements of the conservative and neoliberal agenda to further privatize public schools. The outcomes of marginalized students are less likely to change due to a change of venue. I would argue that the marginalization itself must be addressed both for the student and in the education system. Education profiteers may simply be promoting “the idea that class deficits can be overcome by equalizing access to school opportunities without questioning what those opportunities have to do with genuine education” (p. 108).

Marsh (2011), in referencing Isaacs, Sawhill, and Haskins’ *Getting Ahead or Losing Ground: Economic Mobility in America* (2008), finds that “the most common intergenerational mobility experience is to be born poor and to remain poor” (p. 52). He goes on to state that 2008 data reveals that some 40% of children born into the richest quintile in America remain there as adults, and that, conversely, about the same percentage who are born in the poorest quintile remain there as adults. There is the potential for SES movement, but it is much lower than the potential for SES stagnation. Of those born in the poorest quintile, 6% will move to the richest quintile. Only 9% of those born in the richest quintile will sink to the poorest, or as Marsh puts it, “end up in rags” (p. 52). Although there is evidence of the potential for social and economic movement in North America, it is clear, even with fully funded public education in every state and province, that people tend to remain in the socio-economic position they were born into.

Does this reveal the failure of public education or an aspect of its mandate?

The Promise of Diversity:

How an attempt to address poverty in Ontario's public schools fell flat.

In Ontario, the vast majority of reform comes from the provincially controlled, inherently top-down, Ministry of Education. In an attempt to address issues of poverty, along with other aspects of “diversity,” and their effect on education, The Ontario Ministry of Education, in 2009, published, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*. In it, they identify diversity as, “The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society” (p. 4). They go on to list the “dimensions” of diversity: “ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status” (p. 4). The Ministry then defines “inclusive education” as, “Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum... in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.” Are they suggesting that we “honour” poverty? How can poverty be celebrated the way we celebrate our culture, ethnicity, and ancestry?

Socio-economic status is misplaced here, as all the other dimensions listed are attributes for which we do seek equity, inclusion, and celebration. Poverty can never be celebrated. It is not something to be honoured. We seek equity for those in poverty by eliminating poverty, not by treating the inevitable suffering that those in poverty face as an acceptable “human quality.” Would we suggest, to anyone, that any other attribute on this list is something that they can change if only they work harder? If you do better in school, you won't have to deal with the “problem” of your race or your sexual orientation. Never.

Although students who are suffering in poverty do need to see themselves reflected in their curriculum, the underlying purpose of this reflection must be to better understand the root causes of poverty and the inequitable marginalization of poverty, with the hope of working to repair, not celebrate, it. Students living in poverty need to get out of poverty. Poverty is punishment for which there has been no crime. It is, as Gandhi famously said, “the worst form of violence.” Poverty is the very opposite of equity and inclusion. Poverty is exclusion; and, for the children suffering through it in our public schools it may seem inescapable. How could the governing body of education in Canada’s largest province get it so wrong? Or did they? Is it possible that the notion of the inevitability of poverty is such an entrenched hegemonic ideology that schools teach students that it is as much a part of our society as ancestry and culture?

Are we saying that, if one is poor it might be their fault? Are we saying that the solution to poverty is to work harder? Are we saying that, if one is poor, it might be their parent’s fault, that they should get used to it? Are these the lessons embedded in public schooling?

The System:

Public education may be part of the problem rather than the cure.

Although the early designers of public schooling clearly saw and sold it as a means to move unskilled poor children off the streets and into factories, it must have been difficult for more socially progressive citizens not to place hope in the notion that public education might be a possible solution to many of society’s ills. This hope began, in part, by the very designers of

schooling who, having sold it to the wealthy as a means to increase their wealth, needed to sell it to the rest of society in a more socially conscious, however blatantly underhanded, fashion.

Given the clearly stated overt intentions of public education, namely to produce more productive and compliant labourers, the hopes of the more socially conscious were not to become a reality.

Marsh (2011), in summing up Hunter's (1904) findings, states:

Education, though useful in saving children from their dissolute parents, would not by itself lead children out of poverty, not when the majority of poor children would become unskilled workers, and when Hunter found, the majority of unskilled workers lived on the edge of, if not below, the poverty line and were thus at risk of falling into pauperism. (p. 112)

Sadly, Hunter could be speaking of today. Across Canada and the US a great many people are working full-time hours for part-time wages with little to no benefits or security, and finding themselves living at or under the poverty line. In Ontario, minimum wage is \$11.25 an hour. If one works 9-5, Monday through Friday, one would work 2,080 hours a year. Before tax and other deductions, without one sick or vacation day, this would total \$23,400 per year. Statistics Canada suggests that the poverty line for a single mom with one child in Ontario is approximately \$28,000 per year. Many people who work full-time are poor.

Hunter recognized, over 100 years ago, that “people usually fell into poverty – and the ranks of the much more dependent and hopeless paupers – not because of bad behaviour but because of unemployment, illness, or injury” (Marsh, 2011, p. 112). We could certainly add to this list, being underpaid. As multi-national corporations rush manual jobs out of North American cities, as factories continue to be moved overseas, public schooling seems no more prepared to address unemployment, illness, injury, or low wages today than it was 100 years

ago. Even for those who come from marginalized family backgrounds, who beat the odds, excel in public education, and aspire for secure, well-paying jobs, there are fewer and fewer jobs available. “Some people may escape poverty and low incomes through education, but a problem arises when education becomes the only escape route from these conditions – because that road will very quickly become bottlenecked” (Marsh, 2011, p. 19). Why, then, do we continue to believe in education as a solution?

Perhaps we continue to believe that schooling can solve society’s ills because we continue to be sold the message. Perhaps even more so today, as capitalist and neoliberal agendas seek to privatize and profit from schooling, the general public is told and retold, sold and resold, the view that education is the “way out.” “Nothing dominates our thinking about poverty and economic inequality so much as the belief that education (or lack of it) causes these problems and thus that education (and more of it) will fix them” (Marsh, 2011, p. 16). Although there is very little evidence that schooling is the solution for those who are living in poverty, we continue to believe that it is. Complicating the matter, “the present day push for ever more schooling and credentialism is all the more suspect when schools become the profit making private enterprises of corporations” (Lewis, 2015). Although the working and middle class have been told, for decades, that there is a direct link between schooling, credentials, job opportunities, and salaries, and although for some this is the case, for far too many, 13 years in a public school may not be enough to significantly alter their socio-economic reality.

Knopp (2012) summarizes Bowles and Gintis (1976), Anyon (2005), and Marsh’s (2011) findings, and asserts that they, “all argue that education cannot solve the problem of poverty. Further, educational attainment, or lack of it, is not the largest factor in predicting one’s social status, income, or wealth” (p. 11). That distinction, the greatest predictor of future wealth was

found by the OECD to be the wealth of one's parents. Unfortunately, poor students sit amongst their poor classmates and neighbours in underperforming schools, while students in more fortunate socio-economic neighbourhoods attend schools which, year by year, publish top performances on standardized assessments. The underprivileged students must wonder, what they have done wrong, how they could be so lacking. As McLaren (2009) said, they will blame themselves; "the oppressed blame themselves for school failure – a failure that can certainly be additionally attributed to the structuring effects of the economy and the class-based division of labour" (p.67).

Bale and Knopp (2012) suggest that "Knowledge is power only if it helps us to have more control over the resources in our communities" (p. 6). I cannot help but think that a single mom in Ontario, working full time, making \$5,000 under the poverty line, paying a third or, in some cases, half of her wages for day care, is feeling that whatever knowledge she gained in school, and she must have gone to school because the majority of minimum wage jobs in North America demand a high school education and increasingly more, is granting her adequate access to the resources she needs.

How then can we better ensure that the education students receive in public schools will allow them equal access to resources and opportunities when public schools were built to deliver the hegemonically embedded ideology of classism? How do we ensure that every student has equitable access to the same opportunities in every classroom and every school no matter what their socio-economic or ethnic background? For many this would entail an undoing of the one-size-fits-all funding formula in place in Ontario today. Many would argue that schools and, in turn, students in socio-economically depressed communities should receive additional funding.

Others have clearly chosen another route. Standardization, it seems, has been sold as an answer to ensure equal teaching and equal learning.

I am cognizant of my original intentions in this thesis to soften polarities and provide a more textured analysis. There are however, some aspects of the exploration which, due to their structural nature, remain somewhat binary. I believe that the question of equal vs. equitable, is one. How we move forward once we choose a direction remains a much grayer and much more complex narrative.

Standardization:

Everyone can be the same now.

In the preceding chapter, I outlined the origins of standardized testing in Ontario, that a great deal of data-driven change in Ontario schools is now based on EQAO results, that neighbourhood schools, and teachers, are judged by the publication of testing results, and, most importantly, that marginalized students persistently do poorly on the tests. Granted, EQAO is not as high-stakes as some of the standardized assessments in the US, where teachers can be fired for persistently low results. That said, as EQAO results become more and more public, teachers, particularly in schools located in socio-economically depressed neighbourhoods, are increasingly judged by parents, peers, and administrators based on their students' results. Schools in areas of high immigration, high levels of poverty, and diverse ethnicity are increasingly judged as underperforming because of EQAO results. Students who do poorly on standardized assessments are told that they do not have the literacy and numeracy skills that their provincial government expects of students their age. High school students who are unsuccessful on the OSSLT are

reminded, not only that they are not as “literate” as their peers, but that they may not be able to graduate.

Why then do we continue to enforce the tests? Why are we continually sold the belief that these tests provide accountability for our schools, teachers, and students? How is the institutionalization of standardized testing changing the way teachers teach? What are the real effects of these tests on marginalized students, particularly those in low socio-economic neighbourhoods? The standardization of assessment, in which every student takes the same test at the same time in the same grade, might create equal opportunities for evaluation of learning; it does not, however, create equitable opportunities for evaluation of learning.

Public schools, for the most part, are designed on a factory model. As Gatto (1992) said, our schools look and sound like factories, in which attendance is taken, bells ring to transition through the work day, and reports are given which evaluate how well the job is done. Recently, under an increasingly persuasive neoliberal agenda, schools are moving, more and more, toward business models of accountability. These models necessitate new levels of standardization so that schools, teachers, and students can more efficiently be assessed. Many teachers spend more and more time teaching to standardized tests, perhaps because they believe it is an important part of their students’ learning, perhaps in the hopes that their students will do well so they do not let their parents and school and community down, or, perhaps, because teachers know that they too are being assessed.

Some may believe that standardized accountability is an opportunity to ensure equality in teaching and learning. Students from rural areas will learn the same material as students from urban areas. Recent immigrants will learn the same material as generational Canadians. Children from impoverished families will learn the same material as children from wealthy families.

Whether or not students have learned the material and can communicate their learning well enough to meet provincial expectations, they will be assessed in the exactly same way. This is a model that mistakes equal for equitable, much like our provincial funding formula. However, one-size-fits-all is not equitable; it is, in fact, the opposite. Under this model we know that marginalized kids do poorly. We have 15 years of data that consistently reveal that students living in poverty, recent immigrants, and those with exceptionalities do poorly on standardized assessments. Why then do we continue down this path? Is there another agenda?

I would suggest that those who aim to demonstrate that public schooling is not functioning effectively and efficiently, is not accountable, are keen to utilize standardized assessment results as proof. Data analysis of these assessments will always reveal deficits. There will always be areas of underperformance. I would argue that underperformance can be manufactured. Is it possible that there is a crisis in Grade 6 Math today because the questions on the Grade 6 Math EQAO assessment are much more difficult than they were five or six years ago?

It is important to note the potential that the underlying purpose of this supposed accountability is to constantly reveal deficits in the system. It may well be the creation of “crisis accountability”. Below standard results, real or manufactured, so often located in socio-economically depressed neighbourhoods, open the door for the commodification of schooling and new levels of privatization. Voucher programs can be offered as a solution. Charter school systems can be sold as a new and improved education system. Choice will be advertised as the means by which to save our children.

Lipman in her 2009 article, *Beyond Accountability: Toward Schools that Create New People for a New Way of Life*, suggests that “accountability has become a new regime of truth”

(p. 380). I have to assume that Lipman is using the term “regime of truth” in a Foucaultian sense, a truth which is “produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint” (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). Which is to say that education is being driven by a “truth” which has been “created” to achieve a stated goal. The overt goal we are sold regarding standardized testing is to achieve accountability in schools, to provide an equal playing field. The covert reality is quite different:

Business metaphors of quality control, accountability, and standards replace any notion of democratic participation in education as a public good in a democratic society. The purpose of education is redefined to develop the skills and dispositions necessary for the labour market of a post-Fordist, globalized capitalism. (Lipman, 2009, p. 366)

The agenda of standardization, rather than accountability, may well be control. Those who create and grade standardized tests, because of the focus on data-driven change, play an increasingly prominent role in the control and direction of spending. Ontario school boards pour millions of dollars into yearly initiatives which, since the implementation of mandatory standardized testing, are often driven by EQAO results. For a few years, the crisis is in Mathematics, a few years later the crisis is in Literacy. Every year there is a crisis in student success and teacher effectiveness. Schools may find themselves moving from crisis to crisis in order to justify both spending and cuts. And the cuts I have seen over the past 10 years are happening at the classroom level, particularly in regard to special education resources and educational assistance. To reiterate: accountable crisis creation.

Schools in low socio-economic neighbourhoods will constantly need reforming as their test results are chronically low. Students who do not do well on the test will need something other than their local public school and local public teachers, because the school, and in turn the teachers, are clearly not preparing students for the prepackaged tests their province insists is

integral to their learning and the evaluation of their learning. Parents will have the data with which to demand change. Profiteers will, conveniently, have alternatives to offer: voucher programs, charter schools, private university preparatory colleges. Proof will be available to illustrate the need for private intervention in school, proof that public education would be better managed in the hands of more conservative business managers. The question that needs asking though, is: Is the alternative more effective? Lipman (2009) does not think so, “despite a vocabulary of excellence that clothes school accountability, this is a discourse that produces mediocrity, conservatism, and narrowly instrumental conceptions of people, learning, and the purposes of education” (p. 367). We are sold the notion that new measures of accountability can usher in a renewal of a more historically conventional schooling model, one in which standardized reading, writing, and math will keep both students and teachers in line.

How are teachers adapting under the microscope of standardized testing, the results of which are sent home to parents and published in community newspapers? I have taught Grade 6, a year in which every student across Ontario sits through three days of EQAO testing in Math and Language, and, even though I do not see the test results as truly reflective of student understanding, it is nerve racking to get the results back. Typically, EQAO results are passed around in the first staff meeting of the year. Everyone on staff gets to see how all the grades scored in relation to previous years. Typically, the principal, no matter what the results, perhaps because they are mandated from the board, perhaps because they believe the results are important, point out low scores and, hence, areas of weakness. They may suggest that all teachers have to focus our instruction in these areas, with the implication that the reason the scores were low in a particular subject area or a particular grade level is because the teacher or teachers did not teach it well. When scores are low across the board, it may be assumed that this is a

reflection of poor teaching across the board. Teachers are thus motivated to teach to the test. Copies of tests from previous years, which are readily available on EQAOs website, may be passed along to teachers. It may be suggested or we may be instructed to review past EQAO questions with students in preparation for future assessments. It is made explicitly clear that we are to make sure that our class, and thus our school, will not underperform again. We do this during the time they would usually do other things. Art, Music, Drama, Outdoor Education, Science, Geography, Social Justice Education, Citizenship Education, etc. become less important than EQAO because none of these results are published. Inevitably, “standardization reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught and learned in schools” (McNeil, 2009, p. 384).

Many educational theorists have looked into the question of how standardization affects teaching, perhaps most notably McNeil in 2009 with her article, *Standardization, Defensive Teaching, and the Problems of Control*. Through her study of four inner-city schools in Chicago, all of which had implemented mandatory centralized and standardized assessments, she found that:

there began to emerge phony curricula, reluctantly presented by teachers in class to conform to the forms of knowledge their students would encounter on centralized tests. The practice of teaching under these reforms shifted away from intellectual activity toward dispensing packaged fragments of information sent from an upper level of the bureaucracy. And the role of students as contributors to classroom discourse, as thinkers, as people who brought their personal stories and life experiences into the classroom, was silenced or severely circumscribed by the need for the class to ‘cover’ a generic curriculum at a pace established by the district and the state for all the schools. (p. 385)

Although the standardization movement in the US has gained ground more rapidly than in

Canada, we seem to be moving in the same direction. It is a sad admission that the results McNeil witnessed in Chicago, I have witnessed in every Ontario school where I have taught. It is sadder still to admit that I have done the same in my own classroom, if only to avoid the judgement of administrators, colleagues, and parents. I have to agree with Aronowitz (2009) who said, “These tests are the antithesis of critical thought. Their precise object is to evaluate the student’s ability to imbibe and regurgitate information and to solve problems according to prescribed algorithms” (p. 107). I do not believe that standardized assessment improves teaching or learning in any way. I would argue that they are constructed to locate deficits. I am not sure, though, how to escape them.

What impact does standardized assessments have on marginalized students? How does this regime of “prescribed algorithms” and “packaged fragments of information” affect the learning environment for racially marginalized students and students living in poverty? McNeil (2009) found, “There is growing evidence that the institutionalization of standardization is widening the gap between poor and minority youth and their peers in more privileged schools” (p. 388). Perhaps the students attending expensive private schools and middle class kids growing up in high socio-economic neighbourhoods are more prepared to ingest and regurgitate random bits of information; Levitt and Dubner’s (2005) work would suggest that they are just better prepared for any kind of schooling. That upper tier private schools and public schools in high socio-economic neighbourhoods continually score high on EQAO tests across Ontario does not necessarily reflect a better standard of education. More likely, these high scores reflect the higher level of school readiness with which students enter school and the high level of resources available to them should they have difficulty along the way. The community at large would benefit from being reminded that teachers change schools all the time. Was I a better teacher,

working harder, when I taught in a high socio-economic neighbourhood school, in which students, on average, did quite well on EQAO tests than I was when I taught in a low socio-economic neighbourhood in which students, on average, scored lower? I can say, without hesitation, that I worked harder with fewer resources and assistance, because there was just so much more need, when I was working at a school in a low socio-economic neighbourhood.

It is not just a matter of the skills one needs to be successful in school; there is also the ideology. “Socioeconomically well-off students are more compliant because the culture of the school maps directly onto the culture of their middle-class homes” (Lewis, 2015). Perhaps they do well at school because the expectations, both in terms of skills and ideology, mirror home. Perhaps their parents did well at school, as evidenced by their credentials and careers and middle-class resources, which has prepared them to do well enough to perpetuate a middle-class existence. Conversely, marginalized students often find themselves, year in and year out, in quite a different situation, comparatively ill prepared for school and without the academic resources and cultural compliance they need to succeed. Even if they do well academically, they may not have the cultural capital necessary to utilize their credentials in the middle class job market.

In the short term, all that standardized testing delivers for marginalized students is the embarrassing publication of their results and a more formalized judgement of their schools, their teachers, and their community. Sadly, standardized assessments do not provide equitable learning or assessment opportunities. This is, in fact, what we have learned from them. The standardization of assessments through EQAO has provided clear and consistent data that equal assessments are not working for Ontario’s students. “The long-term effects of standardization are even more damaging: over the long-term, standardization creates inequities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged

students” (McNeil, 2009, p. 384). What marginalized students clearly need is more equitable learning and assessment opportunities. I argue that to create accountable equity in assessments we must de-standardize them.

In *Brave New Teachers: Doing Social Justice Work in Neo-liberal Times* (2011), Solomon and Singer heard from recently graduated teachers of York University’s Urban Diversity Program who stated, “EQAO tests and similarly standardized tests focus on uniformity and sameness as opposed to valuing diversity in the classroom and honouring experiences that students new to Canada bring with them to our classrooms” (p. 86). Even the newest of teachers, when given the opportunity to critically assess standardized models, are recognizing the inherent inequities mandating standardizing assessments for racially and financially marginalized students. Here Solomon and Singer refer to Nezavdal (2003) who reiterates Gatto’s (1992) metaphor by suggesting that standardized tests epitomize the factory model of education. They go so far as to suggest “that a standardized test can be viewed as a form of ‘educational ethnic cleansing’” (p. 83). This is certainly an extreme position, but it elucidates the frustration of those who witness the negative effects of the standardization of curriculum and assessment.

Equal Opportunity:

The search for equity.

If the standardization of curriculum and assessments along with movements toward privatization of public education are widening the gap between wealthy students and poor students, what can be done to narrow the gap? This question necessitates a step outside of the walls of our schools. It may necessitate that teachers see their roles as more than educators in

their schools. It requires that teachers become social justice advocates and activists within the communities of their schools.

Socio-economic status not only affects success in education and future income, it affects every aspect of one's life. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) explore the costs of inequality in their meta-analysis, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. The authors compare countries that have more social equality, such as Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, for example, with those that have less social equality, such as the US, UK, and Australia, for example, and those that are somewhere in the middle, such as Canada, Ireland, and France, for example. They then chart these countries in terms of their social well-being in areas ranging from imprisonment to obesity, drug abuse to life expectancy, mental health to education. Across the board those countries in which wealth is distributed more evenly, whose citizens realize more equity, have better records in all social areas studied. The most revealing aspect of this research is that more equality is, in fact, better for everyone. Applying these social determinants of well-being, Wilkinson and Pickett found that the wealthiest in unequal countries often fare worse than the general population in countries with more equality. Inequality is also, somewhat ironically, expensive. Poverty creates a systemic disadvantage to those who suffer in it, and to everyone else in a society that accepts it. Poverty “creates significant additional costs in regard to health care, criminal justice, unemployment, and social assistance, as well as reduced productivity. For Canadian society these must be in the billions of dollars per year” (Levin & Riffel, 2000, p. 184).

In terms of educational performance, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) found that, “although good schools [and teachers] make a difference, the biggest influence on educational attainment, how well a child performs in school and later in higher education, is

family background” (p. 103). The social disadvantages for children born into poverty are immediate. Mirroring Levitt and Dubner's (2005) findings, Wilkinson and Pickett suggest, “Social inequalities in early childhood development are entrenched long before the start of formal education” (p. 110). Because learning begins at birth, “early learning can be enhanced or inhibited by the environment in which a child grows up” (p. 110). From early literacy to math scores, from graduation rates to drop out rates, across grade levels, Wilkinson and Pickett found that, the more inequitable the society, the worse students perform.

What are the long-term costs of poor school performance, high early drop-out rates, low post-secondary entrance rates? They are not only financial. Wilkinson and Pickett reveal that, in countries with high inequality, violence, imprisonment, drug use, early pregnancy, obesity, and lower life expectancy are all higher. Unfortunately, Wilkinson and Pickett also found that Canada is moving, more quickly than any other developed nation, toward greater inequality. We are very close to joining the UK and the US, which have the distinctions of the least equitable developed nations on Earth.

Looking back to public education policy in Ontario, it is clear that our movements toward equal opportunities for every student by providing equal funding for every student and assessing every student’s learning in the exact same standardized fashion, are, in fact, movements toward inequity.

Conclusion

There are long held beliefs about the differences between public and private schooling; namely that public schools serve the masses and readies them for work and that

private schools provide a more liberal education, which would be suitable for those who might own or oversee places of work. As Anyon (1981) suggested, one might argue that, historically, public schools have offered schooling and private schools have offered an education.

Increasingly, similar tiers can be seen within the public school system itself. Standardized assessments, along with more conventional indicators like grades and drop-out rates, are revealing that the higher a neighbourhood's average income, the higher, on average, its schools perform; conversely, schools in socio-economically depressed neighbourhoods report, on average, lower standardized assessment results and higher drop-out rates. The promise of standardized assessments, like Ontario's EQAO, to collect consistent and unbiased data on these inconsistencies, and, in turn address them, is, I argue, a deception. Since their inception, the data has remained stable; on average, marginalized students do poorly. We have been looking at these results for over 15 years.

Although standardized assessments have revealed that assessing every student in the same way is inequitable, little, if anything, has been done to address the underlying issues of inequity that face marginalized students. Rather, EQAO, in publishing school results, year after year, serves only to perpetuate stigmas surrounding the mitigating and marginalizing factors of immigration, learning exceptionality, and poverty. Perhaps even more concerningly, EQAO data may also be used, by those who seek to commodify and privatize public schooling, as a measure of accountability or lack thereof.

The next question is: if public schooling is a system that was expressly designed to create skilled workers out of poor citizens for the express purpose of increasing the prosperity of the wealthy, a "pedagogy [which] maintains the existing patterns of stratification and

differentiation in society, which marginalize students on the basis of gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation, and other differences” (Matthews, 2005, p. 96), what can those who work in the system, particularly teachers, do to help achieve true equity of learning and assessment and, in turn, move toward legitimate social equality? What can teachers do to promote and advance the slow evolution from schooling to education?

Chapter 4: Teachers

Unless teachers have the authority and power to organize and shape the conditions of their work to that they can teach collectively, produce alternative curricula, and engage in a form of emancipatory politics, any talk of developing and implementing progressive pedagogy ignores the reality of what goes on in the daily lives of teachers and is nonsensical.

--Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education: Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition*, 1983/2001

pedagogy is a practice within which one acts with the intent of provoking experience that will simultaneously organize and disorganize a variety of understandings of our natural and social world.

Seen in these terms, pedagogy is hardly innocent.

--Simon, *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility*, 1992

Introduction

In this chapter I utilize both secondary sources and personal experience to explore the theoretical and substantive issues that teachers face in public schools. First, using primarily the foundation laid by Dewey (1938), I reflect on the implications of teaching through the theoretical lenses of historically conventional models and progressive models. Second, I examine present-day neoliberal movements toward standardization and privatization and the systemic and individual effects these movements are having on the teaching profession. Third, I take a closer look at how teachers perceive students who are marginalized by socio-economic inequality, recent immigration, and learning exceptionalities, and how they might develop and deliver curricula that takes into account these experiences and engages students in potentially

transformative discourse. Lastly, I begin to frame the potential positions from which educators might teach.

What Should Public School Teaching Be?

Historically conventional and progressive models.

In considering the potential politicization of teaching, Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett (1982) suggest that, “Teachers too have to decide whose side they are on” (p. 208). I want to reiterate here, before I move on to clarify what I believe to be the possible “sides”, which we might avoid, and potential “positions,” which might aspire to, that I do not believe, neither from my experiences as a student, as a teacher, nor through the research conducted for this thesis, that anyone working in schools enters the profession with the intention of harming students or communities. I believe that the vast majority of educators are very well-intentioned. I believe that they, like myself, enter the profession with the hopes that they can make a difference and aid in the growth of the students whom they teach and the communities in which they work. As we enter the teaching profession, as we stand in front of a room full of students and we begin to talk; we begin to impart information that we believe to be important. And, as teachers, we take positions on what we believe to be important, what we deem important to talk about, and what we understand knowledge to be from our own experiences and our own schooling. Regardless of our position, we do this, we “teach,” in a highly politicized institutional environment, which is heavily laden with history and convention.

The possible positions that I believe exist in teaching are much harder to “see” than the sides. Sides are often black and white; in teaching they are a simplification of “good pedagogy”

or “bad pedagogy,” “good teacher” or “bad teacher”. Positions are hues of gray in comparison; they are much more textured and much more elusive. To begin this discussion, it would be beneficial to briefly revisit Dewey’s (1938) *Experience and Education*, in which he attempts to elucidate the differences between what he terms traditional education, which I would term historically conventional schooling, and new education or progressive schools.

Dewey suggests that historically conventional schooling, has three main goals: first, the subject matter of what is taught in schools is information which has been worked-out in the past and needs to be transmitted to the present; second, the necessary rules and standards of morality have been developed in the past and students’ habits and conduct must conform to these standards; lastly, the patterns of school are institutionalized and must conform to rules of order consisting of: schedules, classifications, examinations, and potential promotions (p. 17). This model of schooling is, inherently, “one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject-matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity” (p. 18). As stated in the previous chapter, Matthews (2005) summarizes historically conventional schooling as an institution which “maintains the existing patterns of stratification and differentiation in society, which marginalize students on the basis of gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation, and other differences” (p. 96).

Currently, in Ontario, standardized curriculum and assessments were developed and mandated by a provincial government whose most prominent slogan was “back to basics.” Perhaps we should not be surprized then, that in regard to design and implementation, historically conventional teaching and assessment is rather familiar to today’s standardized curriculum and assessments.

In preparation for standardized assessments, it is necessary for teachers to deliver ready-made fragments of information to students which have little or no connection to their life experiences. These fragments of information are doled out across standardized curriculum areas, with the express intent that students have some familiarity with the questions and material that they will find on standardized tests. During EQAO assessments, elementary students must sit, silently, in rows, for three days, with no assistance from teacher, text, or anchor charts and answer questions, primarily multiple choice or short-answer, which are based on information which has been deemed important within the framework of a regulated set of knowledges. In regard to subject matter, conduct, and scheduling, the resemblance between current standardized models and historically conventional models of schooling is uncanny.

Concerning the teacher's role in conventional schooling, Dewey stated, "teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct are enforced" (p. 17). I would not argue that "communicating knowledge, skills, and conduct" are part of the job description of teacher; I would argue that these are but a few of the many aspects of teaching and are not, even remotely, the most important. Dewey (1938) seemed to agree; he stated that the three most important responsibilities of teachers are: to ensure that the problems we engage students in must arise from their present experiences, the questions we ask students must be within their range of ability to answer, and that the problems we ask students to consider must "arouse in the learner an active quest for information and for the production of new ideas" (p. 79).

In Wagner's (2012) publication, *Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will Change the World*, he addresses the issues of conventional schooling through the lens of successful entrepreneurs. Wagner interviewed a selection of individuals whom he deemed to be

successful innovators and asked, quite simply, how they became innovative. In each instance, as he outlines in detailed case studies throughout the book, innovators can reflect back on a teacher or two who broke the mold of instruct-and-regurgitate and allowed students the space to be creative and reflective of and in their world. These teachers bravely asked students to look between and beyond the curriculum, often at great risk. Time spent away from standardized expectations and preparation for standardized assessments risks being “found out” when the results are analyzed. Yet, even before teachers are potentially “outed” by low test scores, Wagner fears that the most creative and innovative teachers will leave the profession, “Who would want to teach in a system that measures your worth as an educator by how much your students can regurgitate on a two-hour multiple-choice test and that has reduced much of the curriculum to tedious test-prep exercises?” (p. 152)

Wagner (2012) interviewed a handful of teachers who were mentioned by the innovators he profiled and they all spoke of the resistance they felt in their attempts to push beyond conventional boundaries. Through these innovative and inspiring examples, Wagner witnesses the benefits of teachers who slow down, listen to the needs and interests of their students, and adapt their practice to them, rather than insisting students adapt to standardized curriculum and assessment expectations. He further suggests that:

Another equally serious problem with the traditional model is the exponential growth of information. One cannot possibly cover all of the academic content in a given area. The more the teacher tries to do this, the more the curriculum becomes a kind of forced march through the material. The result is that far too many of our students graduate from high school and college knowing how to pass tests, but less motivated to learn and lacking essential skills. (p. 142)

In today's schools, teachers are asked to race through curriculum in the hopes that they might prepare students for questions they may or may not encounter on standardized assessments and for the exorbitant curriculum expectations of the grades to follow. Some refuse. Like the teachers Wagner interviewed, taking the time to get to know students and offering them a voice in their schooling, however counterintuitive to standardized models, however risky, are the goals of a more progressive education.

In considering an alternative to the conventional schooling he witnessed, Dewey (1938) supported a movement toward experiential and progressive models. He outlined the alternatives in a model of opposition; if educators do "this," a method common in historically conventional models, they must oppose "that," an outcome progressive educators and theorists deemed essential to a purposeful education. Dewey argued: to impose an education from above is to oppose the "expression and cultivation of individuality; to discipline externally is to oppose "free activity;" to learn only from teachers and text books is to oppose "learning through experience;" to acquire "isolated skills and techniques by drill" is to oppose acquiring them in a way by which the means lead toward a sensible and appealing end, in which students develop the capacity to change; to prepare for a distant future, is to oppose "the opportunities of present life;" to focus on the same goals and materials is to oppose "a changing world" (p. 19). I would add: to mandate standardized curriculum and assessments in every school, to every student, regardless of background or ability, and publish test results for parents, teachers, and the broader community, is to ignore the mitigating circumstances and uniqueness of neighbourhoods, schools, and individuals. Standardization, as I suggested earlier, is inequitable.

As I attempted, at the outset of this chapter, to remind the reader, and in turn myself, that endeavouring to recognize the different positions an educator can take in his or her educational

philosophy, curriculum delivery, and evaluation of student achievement is not meant as an exercise in judgement, rather in elucidation. In attempting to address the issues in the schools of his time, and fully recognizing the deficits of conventional methods, Dewey (1938) stated, “I have not made this brief summary [*Experience and Education*] for the purpose of criticizing the underlying philosophy” (p. 18). This is very important. For Dewey, both conventional teachers and progressive teachers hoped to teach students what they believed they needed to know and to prepare them for adulthood. Although Dewey criticized both the sort of life for which students were being prepared under historically conventional ideologies and the method by which they went about their work under historically conventional pedagogies, he also realized that all he proposed, his progressive ideology and pedagogy, was building from past educators and past methodologies.

Further, those teachers who remained adherent to conventional educational philosophies, even in light of his suggestions, surely did so with the belief that they were doing what was in their students’ future best interests. Neither do I, in my questioning of past and current methodologies, suggest for a moment that teachers who advocate for conventional methods or standardized testing, for example, do so with the intention of harming students. Rather, I believe that teachers are trying their best to do their best with what they have. I also believe that teachers have been “taught” a pedagogical position. Whether through their time as a student, their parental or community influences, media or political propaganda, teaching colleagues and administrators, or through their instruction in education, the way they teach, the perspective from which they take on what and how to teach, was taught to them. Teachers have, whether consciously or not, chosen a position and are teaching from that position. My aim is to elevate the dialogue beyond the polarity of sides and to illuminate possible positions and potential

outcomes. Since there are, indeed, positions from which we teach, are we not better off understanding which ones we have chosen and why, or perhaps even more importantly, which ones have been chosen for us and why?

What might moving beyond historically conventional practices and moving toward a more progressive approaches, look like for teachers? As previously stated, Dewey (1938) believed that the most important responsibilities of a progressive teacher were to ensure:

First, that the problem grows out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present, and that it is within the range of the capacity of students; and, secondly, that it is such that it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for production of new ideas. (p. 79)

It was critical for Dewey, in moving away from the historically conventional model of education, to propose a model based on the human experiences of students. He felt that, if a student was not deeply connected to the subject matter of their schooling, then they could not find it interesting, could not be fully engaged in it, and, in turn, could not be fully successful. Not only do teachers need to develop subject matter which is connected to students' experience and which is within their "range of capacity", teachers need to, "arrange for the kind of experiences, which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences" (p. 27). It was essential for Dewey that teachers know their students. They need to know them if they are to create educational experiences which are connected to their lives, are possible to complete, and which have the capacity to create for them purposeful learning. Lastly, Dewey suggested that the subject matter of school could not be chosen entirely by the teacher but must include the input of

the student as well. This could only be achieved, he argued, if teachers had as much understanding of the subject matter as of the students:

The educator is responsible for a knowledge of individuals and for a knowledge of subject-matter that will enable activities to be selected which lend themselves to social organization, an organization in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute something, and in which the activities in which all participate are the chief carrier of control. (p. 56)

He was suggesting a democratization of public schooling. He suggested that, not only do teachers have the responsibility to develop curriculum which they believe suits the needs of the students in front of them, but that students, too, are responsible to engage in the development of their own learning, learning that will suit the personal and social needs of a future that they will collaboratively envision and co-create.

The benefits of a more progressive and democratic form of schooling, and the difficulties of implementing it, were addressed, perhaps most notably, by Paulo Freire in his 1970 call to action, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire, like Dewey and Connell et al., saw two rather polarizing sides in education. He labeled Dewey's traditional education, which I have termed historically conventional schooling, as the "banking model", in which teachers, working on behalf of the larger social authority, have "banked" information which they dole out to students in measured doses. This doling out of banked information, Freire argued, "anesthetizes and inhibits creative power" (2000, p. 81). This type of banked knowledge, or text-based knowledge, is further problematic in that it grants authority to one perspective; it invites the notion that there is one "truth". In this context, Felman (1987) argues that "The teachers' authority lies in textual knowledge – and yet she has no mastery over it: Textual knowledge knows but does not know

what it knows” (p. 92). In banking and doling out textual knowledge, teachers may create, for students, the notion that teachers hold the power of truth and that students do not. For Simon (1992), “the more dangerous (more invisible) impact of power is its positive relation to truth; that is, in the ‘truth effects’ it produces” (p. 17).

Freire (2000) offers an alternative. He suggests a progressive pedagogy, “a problem-posing education [which] involves a constant unveiling of reality,” and which “strives for the emergence of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality” (p. 81). This is a teaching position from which the authority of teachers and texts and truths are to be questioned, through which experiential truths might be uncovered. It is an education based in liberation, transformation, and emancipation.

For Freire, the banking model was implemented, not by teachers, but by those in power, those who created public schooling, with the express purpose of oppressing and controlling the masses, Chomsky’s (2000) “bewildered herd.” In his introduction to the 30th Anniversary Edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Richard Shaull suggests that, for Freire:

There is no such thing as a *neutral* education process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it [one is reminded of the incentives of the architects of public education: Mann, Wilson, Carnegie, etc.], *or* it becomes the ‘practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 34)

Although emancipation, freedom, and liberation sound like educational outcomes for which most teachers would claim to be striving, the situation is, of course, more textured than that.

Freire argued that reforming the teacher/student relationship, and suggesting that teachers become students in the act of teaching, may cause considerable discomfort for those who see their role through the more historically conventional lens of: teachers teach, students learn. “To resolve the teacher-student contradiction, to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students would be to undermine the power of oppression and serve the cause of liberation” (p.75). This “liberation” may play out as simply as undesirable behaviour in the classroom and as endemically as a diminishing of teachers' social position. The conventional relationship between student and teacher was not designed to be a democratic one; the control of the student, by the teacher, was at the very core of historically conventional schooling models and was seen as necessary for the delivery of mandated curriculum and the management of schools, classrooms, and students. Again, I would suggest that this reluctance to relinquish power and control, which continues to play-out in many of today’s classrooms, is not necessarily a conscious decision by educators. Today’s teachers may have been schooled in this fashion and, as teacher candidates, may even have been taught to organize their classrooms, their lessons, and their relationships with their students from these historically conventional and, in turn, potentially oppressive positions.

Teachers may enter the profession with dreams of freeing their students and, whether due to their own experiences, their own schooling, or advice from colleagues and administrators, find themselves lining students up in rows and delivering the information outlined for them in standardized curriculum documents and preparing students for standardized assessments. This historically conventional relationship is, potentially, dehumanizing; and, “if the humanization of the oppressed signifies subversion, so also does their freedom; hence the necessity for constant control” (Freire, 2000, p. 59). To uncover and recognize these complex, potentially polarizing

positions, both within the system of schooling and within ourselves as educators, is a difficult and potentially uncomfortable undertaking.

To change this relationship, to reform it, is surely even more difficult; it is, quite plausibly, frightening and, potentially, risky. If teachers are being rewarded, financially and socially, by an inherently top-down public schooling system, one which they themselves navigated successfully, they may, whether consciously or not, work to sustain it. Sadly, I would argue that there is as much support, both internally and externally, for conventional pedagogy today as there was in Dewey's time, perhaps more so than there was when Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in the 1970s. A correlation could be made between incentives to adhere to a more conventional model, a model which, in many ways, mirrors modern standardized assessments and incentives to raise test scores, as the results of these assessments are, increasingly, a public measure of teachers' effectiveness.

How do educators strive to create more progressive and emancipatory classroom environments? How do they move from training to education? How do they move from authoritarian positions to democratic positions when a key element of how they are measured as teachers is not by how well they know their students, how liberated their educational spaces are, or how prepared their students are to engage in an ever changing world in socially conscious ways, but rather, by how efficiently they can line students up, dole out fragments of information, and instruct them to regurgitate said information in the same way, in the same amount of time as every other student in the province?

What Educators Are Up Against:

The repositioning of conventional schooling.

I have suggested that many teachers, whether consciously or not, whether willfully or not, uphold and reinforce the relationship of teacher as the imposer of information and student as the imposed upon. It can be said that teachers, given that they graduated secondary school with high enough grades to be accepted into university and, consequently, did well enough in their university studies to be accepted into a post-graduate degree, were successful in conventional schooling models and, therefore, may be comfortable perpetuating them. In fact, they may feel compelled to perpetuate them. Administrators and Ministry officials, even professors of education at universities, may, actively or passively, reinforce these models. Certainly, those who designed public schooling in the hopes of profiting from the skilled workers it produced, relied on conventional models to maintain control over their workforce. The majority of the factory owners of the industrial age no more wanted a liberated and emancipated working class than the multi-national corporations of today. Many of today's barons of industry, often led by neoliberal ideologies, hope to profit not only from the skilled workers that public schools produce, but from schooling itself, by privatizing previously public domains of schooling. To do this effectively, they need traditional business-like models and business-like accountability to prove that there is both a crisis in public education and that there are private alternatives that can fix it.

The practice of crisis creation for profit, outlined in the previous chapter, bares brief re-examination here. The notion of creating something to fix and profiting from the crisis creation itself is outlined in detail by Klein (2007) in, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Regarding schooling in Ontario, she reveals that the Minister of Education in 1995,

John Snobelen, was caught on video saying that the unpopular reforms to public schooling that the provincial government had in mind, reforms that would withdraw millions of dollars in funding, needed a “climate of panic” to be successfully enacted. He called it “creating a useful crisis” (p. 311).

The ongoing threat of the privatization of public schooling is no longer controversial. It may have been, as recently as the 1990s, when Nobel Lauriat economist Friedman wrote an article for the Washington Post titled simply, *Public Schools: Make Them Private*, in which he argued:

The only way to make a major improvement in our educational system is through privatization to the point at which a substantial fraction of all educational services is rendered to individuals by private enterprises. Nothing else will destroy or even greatly weaken the power of the current educational establishment--a necessary pre-condition for radical improvement in our educational system. And nothing else will provide the public schools with the competition that will force them to improve in order to hold their clientele. (1994, p. 4)

In referring to the children that privatized education would better serve, Friedman uses the business language of “clientele” rather than student. Surely better served clientele is not what Dewey or Freire had in mind for their progressive and emancipatory education models. One might ask, what does Friedman mean by “improvement”? What does improved mean to an economist? Does Friedman envision an education system which challenges students to meaningfully engage in their world, to ask why and how it was constructed, who benefits from its construction and who does not? Or does Friedman see improvement as producing skilled workers at a lower cost? He does note, “As in every other area in which there has been extensive

privatization, the privatization of schooling would produce a new, highly active and profitable private industry” (p. 5). Whatever improvement looks like for public education, there is money to be made in its privatization.

Whole systems of public education have been bought, and are being sold in the US, state by state, as charter and voucher systems are increasingly put into place. The “educational land grab” (p. 6) which happened in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina is but one example of crisis creation for profit in education. “The American Enterprise Institute, a Friedmanite think tank, enthused that ‘Katrina accomplished in a day... what Louisiana school reformers couldn’t do after years of trying’” (p. 6).

In Canada, charter schools are also gaining ground, particularly in the more traditionally conservative province of Alberta. Privatization is such a concern in Canada that a July 2015 news release by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation titled, *Privatization, Commercialization and Financing of Public Education*, stated, “The underfunding of public education and how it has opened the door wide to privatization and commercialisation will be at the heart of debates tomorrow for delegates attending the 7th World Congress of Education International” (p. 1). Giroux (2001) suggested that:

Teachers are under siege like they never have been in the past, and schools are assaulted relentlessly by the powerful forces of neoliberalism, which want to turn them into sources of profit. What is good for Disney and Microsoft is now the protocol for how we define schooling, learning, and the goals of education. (p. xxii)

As public educators work to improve schools and schooling for the students in their communities, private educational interests are actively selling their “improved” models: more choice for students and parents, freedom from public oversight and over spending, focus schools

for art or religious studies, a vast array of new “credentials.” It is important to note that the privatization of schooling typically includes the standardization of curriculum and assessments, as the majority of private schools also take part in state or provincially mandated standardized assessments. In Ontario, only the Grade 10 literacy test is mandatory for all schools but the majority of private schools administer all EQAO assessments across grade levels. In fact, private schools, and in turn their teachers and students, may feel additional pressure to excel in standardized assessments as their clientele can easily move to another school, should a school’s published results be seen as lacking. These assessments may mean more to private endeavours than to public institutions as parents may use them as report cards for schools and for teachers.

Perhaps ironically, some private schools are considering opting out of standardized assessments. A recent article in the *Globe and Mail* summarized the thoughts of teachers and administrators at a prestigious private school in a major urban center in Ontario. The school in question has a history of performing very well on EQAO assessments but teachers are questioning if preparing for them and administering them is a productive use of time. “Although they indicate how the school might stack up against others, administrators began to question whether such data helped to improve student learning. The resounding response from the school’s teachers? No” (Kimmitt & Millar, 2014, p. 1). One administrator stated, “Teachers feel students have to perform well on the tests, so they sacrifice what might be rich learning experiences [in favour of] rote learning”; she also added that she is actively instructing teachers not to “teach to the tests” (p. 1). When EQAO assessments are seen as the defining assessment of student learning, the stakes become very high. Increasingly, “Teachers put too much emphasis on preparing for the tests, which distracts them from creating deeper learning experiences for children” (p.1). In this particular private school, the emphasis is moving away from EQAO and

toward “non-academic skills that are important to success but less tangible than reading, writing or math” (p. 1). Interestingly, the authors of this article noted that while this particular private school is rethinking its participation in EQAO assessments, “the Ontario Auditor General recommended the province increase private schools’ participation” (p. 2). Sadly, most continue to follow the Auditor General’s advice.

How do these new privatized models play out for teachers? In regard to the increasing privatization of schools, Education International (2004) suggested that, “the market aided by performance indicators, produced by a growing private evaluation industry, will lead inexorably to a change in the nature of teaching, indeed the very concept of education” (p. 19). In privatized schools where teachers, typically, lack the support and intervention of unions, teachers’ security, salary, and benefits, their effectiveness as teachers, may be determined by accountable standardized student success indicators. Russom (2012) notes, “The growth of charter schools has caused a marked decrease in the number of teachers represented by unions. In the states where charter schools are expanding most rapidly, the density of teachers’ unions is declining” (p. 132), as was the case in New Orleans where some 4,700 unionized teachers were fired and contracts were shredded with the implementation of state-wide charter schools (Klein, 2007, p. 6).

Without the protection of unionization, teachers will increasingly be forced to focus their practice on data rather than on students. “The effect on teachers’ condition of service and pay can be extreme, with paperwork and box-ticking exercises taking the place of creativity and joy in teaching” (Compton & Weiner, 2009, p. 339). The increased weight placed on the outcomes of standardized assessments has created working conditions in which teachers find themselves concerned more with conventional ends than progressive means. Sanchez (2012) has pointed out

that “A word that has become more popular with school administrators these days is ‘fidelity’ – in other words, ‘How faithfully are you teaching what we’ve ordered you to teach?’” (p. xvi) Surely in private schools, where teachers can, much more easily, be dismissed, the authority of administrators to control and enforce standardized curriculum, standardized assessments, and fidelity is heightened. Lipman (2009) suggests the increasing effects of standardization are extreme:

Regulation of teaching through direct external oversight, standards, and assessment by high stakes tests strips teachers of opportunities for professional and ethical judgment, further eroding whatever agency teachers, principals, and communities have in relation to their schools. As a result of mandated curricula, imposed standards, and the exigencies of preparing for standardized tests, teachers and communities are losing control of knowledge, to the extent that they ever had any. (p. 368)

As public education, along with curriculum and student assessment, become increasingly standardized and threats of privatization loom, the practice of schooling moves ever further from the notion of education as transformative and liberating possibilities. Teachers who attempt to teach from a position of transformation and liberation can be caught in the middle, walking a tight rope between their careers and the welfare of their students.

Achievement and Expectation Gaps:

How marginalization might frame perception.

It is critical to recall that socio-economically marginalized students, on average, do not do as well as their financially better off classmates on standardized assessments. This is not only

the case in Canada and the US, but worldwide. Levin (2007) references a Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study which worked with students and teachers in over 40 countries and found “striking and consistent” achievement gaps between students of varying SES backgrounds. In fact, “the reality, in PISA and in every other assessment of student outcomes, is that socioeconomic status remains the most powerful single influence on students’ educational and other life outcomes” (p. 75). Perhaps these gaps stem from the conditions students are living in; perhaps they are a result of gaps in earlier learning; perhaps they are the result of their teachers’ perceptions of their capacities, or, more likely, a complicated combination of these and many other factors.

Keddie (1971) found in her research into high school teachers’ perceptions of students from varying socio-economic backgrounds that their belief that middle-class and working-class students approached school with differing expectations and interests, led them to create differing modes of teaching. Essentially, working-class students were taught how to follow rules and not ask questions, whereas middle-class students were encouraged to become involved in the manufacturing and questioning of classroom material. This is all too reminiscent of the differences between the private liberal education offered to the wealthy and the skills based education offered to the poor in the early 1900s. Some 100 years later, in Ontario secondary schools, students must choose between applied level courses, which typically lead to entering the work force or to college, and academic level courses which typically lead to university. A closer look at the expectations of these courses, across subject areas, reveals that academic level students are expected to: describe, analyze, and evaluate information, whereas applied level students are expected to: describe.

How will marginalized students fare in a system which presupposes they are incapable of higher order thinking and imposes more of what they are already struggling with? Dewey (1938) reminds us:

Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted. (p. 25)

Not only does standardization highlight systemic achievement gaps, it exacerbates them. McNeil (2009) concurs: “over the long term, standardization creates inequities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged students” (p. 384). Poor students, whose teachers may not believe that they can achieve at the same levels as their middle class peers, are forced to sit through standardized lessons and assessments which are increasingly removed from their life experiences and which provide them with feedback which may support their own negative views of their potential for success.

I have watched, for well over a decade, as diversely marginalized students sit through EQAO assessments, and I believe that “engendering callousness” is the perfect description of their experience. I believe that we will see more marginalized students failing, becoming disenfranchised, and dropping out of school if we continue down the road of standardization and privatization. These are students who are already potentially lost in public institutions; I do not think that they will be saved by private options. Educational profiteers are not building their “best schools” and hiring their “best teachers” in low socio-economic neighbourhoods where potential profits are also bound to be low. Will the marginalized students who live in socio-economically depressed communities, who are underserved by present funding formulas in

public schools, and shamed in local papers with the publication of low standardized assessment results, fare any better in private schooling options? Common business practice would lead one to assume that more private capital would be invested in schools located in more affluent neighbourhoods, where standardized assessment averages are systemically higher, and where parents may have the means and incentive to pay higher tuitions.

The further privatization of public schooling will, I contest, reinforce and exacerbate the pre-existing two-tier public system. Rather than address the inequities in the current system of schooling, inequities which play-out long past graduation, the data and accountability which arise from increasingly standardized and privatized schooling will “justify the creation of the haves and the have not’s; the deserving and the non-deserving; the few highly paid professionals and the masses of underpaid labourers whose position in society will be justified by their lack of credentials” (Lewis, 2015). Perhaps even more insidiously, due to the hegemonic effects of the institutionalization of these social and economic exclusions, those who do not have the credentials to succeed will “blame themselves and believe themselves to have received what they deserved” (Lewis, 2015). As stated by McLaren (2009), “the oppressed blame themselves for school failure” (p. 67).

Teachers, who are increasingly required to provide pre-packaged material to students in preparation for state-wide or provincially mandated assessments, may spend less time getting to know students and providing students with learning opportunities that are directly connected to the experiences of their lives, thereby making schooling meaningful and productive. This connection to persons and to personal experience is not only beneficial for the academic achievement and success of all students but is potentially integral for that of marginalized students. Unfortunately, the more teachers believe that standardized assessments actually assess

them, the further they may move away from progressive possibilities in their classrooms and the further they may move toward, perhaps circling back, to historically conventional, banking, and factory models. Lipman (2009) bemoans the notion that “Teachers are reduced to technicians and supervisors in the education assembly line – ‘objects’ rather than ‘subjects’ of history” (p. 371). Teachers may feel like they do not have the space, the time, or the approval to genuinely get to know their students, and to allow their students to get to know them. Teachers may not have the skillset, or feel that they do not have the consent, to become learners alongside their students, as they may have been taught, or are being instructed, to be a channel of delivery for prepackaged information. But, as Freire (2000) reminds us, “all educational practice requires the existence of ‘subjects’ who while teaching, learn. And who in learning also teach” (p. 67). As essential as it is for educators to have a deep, meaningful, and applicable understanding of what they intend to teach their students, it is equally important that they are also fully present in the lives of their students and are learning alongside them.

Perhaps ironically, Freire argued that it might be the students who save the teachers, rather than the reverse. Perhaps teachers are too entrenched in the systemically oppressive structure of schooling to be able to change it. Perhaps teachers cannot zoom out far enough to see that they may be acting as agents of oppression in a system which they successfully navigated and, in turn, perpetuate and benefit from. Perhaps teachers have to “buy-in” to further standardization and privatization to keep their jobs, pay their bills, provide a home and schooling for their own children. Perhaps teachers, like their students, are increasingly oppressed by the system of schooling which they worked in and now work for. Freire (2000) suggested that to fight against the dehumanization of schooling “is the great humanistic and historical task of the

oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 44). How then, might teachers help students, and, in turn, themselves, challenge the oppression of their classrooms?

Othello Got A Bad Rap:

Getting to know our students.

How do teachers help marginalized students fight against the oppressive elements of their schooling? Quite simply, they teach them that their schooling has oppressive elements. Just as we would with fellow teachers, we show them alternative teaching positions. Freire (2000) argued, “As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically ‘accept’ their exploitation” (p. 65). For many, the thought of teaching students that their schooling and, in turn, their teachers may be oppressive, is not only an inconvenience, it may be downright frightening. Just as the early architects of public education worried that an education might lead the lower classes to ask for more, teachers may fear that opening their students’ eyes to the inherently oppressive nature of their schooling may cause rebellion in the classroom and, in turn, society.

I recall the first day of the Grade 11 Applied English class I had been assigned to teach in my second year at a high school in a large urban center. This was a school that served a very depressed socio-economic neighbourhood. It was a place filled with joy and opportunity. It was a place filled with sorrow and loss of hope. It was also a place where I felt I had made a name for myself with students as a teacher who was non-judgemental and trustworthy. It was February, a new semester. I walked in and said, “Okay, it is Black History Month so I guess we will read some stories by some black authors and then get back to ‘important’ literature.” I had also made

a name for myself, both with students and staff, as a teacher who took risks in the classroom by engaging students in potentially controversial subjects. Many of my colleagues felt that this behaviour was unsafe, not only for myself but for everyone. They believed we should not instigate any argumentative behaviour in an already “difficult” student population. I recall one teacher saying, at lunch in the staff room, that the community we were teaching in was a “self-cleaning oven;” he felt that we should just stand back and get out of the way, we should watch, as students and families were “taken care of” by their own drug addictions, poverty, and violence. The students in this particular class were predominantly black. Many were from Somalia and many were from the Caribbean; there were also a handful of students from India and Pakistan and a few who were white. When I made the comment about Black History Month, the room exploded. I listened.

“Why would we put aside a month for Black History,” I asked. “Are all other months White History then?” “Why is Black History Month the shortest month of the year?” I distinctly recall a student who had been in my class in the previous semester saying, “Wait a minute. Mr. Stevens is doing that thing where he is asking us questions to get us upset and get us into a debate.” I was. We talked for a long time that morning about black and white voice in school. We counted black teaching staff: one in over 40. We talked a lot about how many of the black students in my class had never read anything from a black author. We took a short field trip to the book room where I asked the students to find a black author. They found none. I pointed out an old copy of Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God* but had to admit that I had not read it. I asked the girls to find female authors. They found Mary Shelly and I pointed out T.S. Hinton, which instigated a discussion about women being taken seriously as authors. It was one of the best semesters of my career. From that day forward, we read only black authors, the majority of

which were female. The students took on the task of finding new black authors and brought their work to class. We read inner-city stories of poverty, crime, and broken homes. Many students saw themselves for the first time in the words they read. They told their own stories to each other. They found voices that were grounded in the anger of realizing oppression and in the possibility, once knowing it, of doing something about it. They were learning who they could be; and, although I was also learning what they could be alongside them, I was really learning what teaching could be and what I could be as their teacher. That semester I was reprimanded by the head of the English Department for not doing a Shakespearean play, as was expected of Grade 11 students, so we spent 1 period talking about Othello, who the students felt got a “bad rap” because he was black. Again, I agreed.

hooks (1989) suggests that “the academic setting, the academic discourse [we] work in, is not a known site for truth telling” (p. 29). Simon (1992) suggests that the form of “truth” that hooks is referring to here is that which would “struggle to break the hegemonic discourse that continues to rationalize and reproduce practices of domination” (p. 63). For students to move past the realm of training and enter the realm of education, the truths that work to maintain both historically and presently entrenched power positions must be uncovered and told. I believe that the work we did together, in that Grade 11 Applied English class, in that significantly underserved school and community, uncovering the void of black and female authors and, in turn, the void of black and female voice, was the beginning of genuine truth telling. We told truths based in experience rather than power, truths based in the present rather than in the past. It was, I believe, the beginning of education. The problem was that my colleagues, department leaders, and administrators were much more interested in whether or not I had covered the curriculum. They insisted I get back to schooling.

For educators, there is not a lot of time to “cover the material” and to truly get to know students. Many aim for the first. Few find ways to do both. Yon, in his 2000, *Elusive Culture: Schooling, Race, and Identity in Global Times*, found, through interviews with teachers that:

There is a desire among many teachers to know the many and varied cultures that students bring from other places. But alongside this desire to know is also a desire to be left alone so that one can continue in the imaginary old ways. (p. 44)

He further discovered that, although the teachers he spoke with seemed to display an honest desire to know and better understand the different cultures in their classrooms, there was also a “resentment toward having to know and adjust to them ‘in order to teach’” (p. 44). Sadly, I have witnessed teachers step further away from their students and say, “Why should I learn and, in turn, immerse students in the failed culture they already know, rather than spending time teaching them ‘our’ culture so that they might be successful in it.” Further confounding teachers’ desire to better understand the different cultures present in their classrooms is the notion that their honest attempts to get to know their students may matter little in the eyes of colleagues and administrators. As Lipman (2009) suggests:

Teachers recognized for their commitment to children and the community, their determination to help students become people who could ‘read’ and ‘write’ the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), and their defense of children’s language and home culture were ultimately judged by a single, instrumental measure. Students, as well as teachers, with all their varied talents and challenges, were reduced to a test score. (p. 366)

As much as I agree that this is the case for many, I know that many others, teachers and students alike, find diverse ways to see and challenge the oppressive realities of their schooling.

Interestingly, Yon (2000) found another “form” of culture in the schools he visited, one beyond the historical culture of ethnicity or gender. He found a culture of transgression:

there is another meaning of culture that has to do with the ways that students work upon the imagined attributes and transgress the boundaries that attributes might otherwise sanction. Students produce new forms of culture, as well as race, and new cultural practices that facilitate their everyday social relations. The attributes of this other meaning of culture are elusive and changing. (p. 44)

Teachers who find it difficult to accept the varying cultural expressions of their students, who may find alternative cultural expressions subversive, and who work to prevent them, may unwittingly create spaces in which students construct “elusive and changing” cultures to express themselves. hooks (1994) suggested that poor, working class, African Americans, “must find creative ways to cross borders” (p. 183). If students find new ways to cross borders, perhaps they are also finding new ways to tell their truths. Teachers, I would argue, must help students see and realize the borders and give them the time and space to find new and transformative ways to cross them; “it is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves” (Freire, 2000, p. 65). As frightening as this may be for some educators, the alternative is a covert form of residential schooling, where culture is suppressed and those who do not conform are punished. Today’s punishment is not the physical, emotional, or sexual punishment of Canada’s residential school system, which existed from the 1830s through the 1990s, in which First Nation’s children were torn from their parents’ arms, jailed in schools, forced to forget everything of their own culture and forced to learn everything of the white Christian European culture. It is the mental and emotional punishment of failing and dropping out. It is an ongoing engendered callousness.

It is the punishment of exclusion and poverty. It is the public recognition that, due primarily to EQAO results, their school is ranked on the bottom and this ranking is published in local papers. Perhaps most heinously, the system which built and maintains the borders, and the marginalization and inequities that result, may also teach its most vulnerable citizens that their vulnerability, their marginalization, their exclusion and poverty is their fault. It may teach them that they have a role in society and that their role is not to be questioned.

Surveillance and Control:

Accommodation or punishment?

The view that a healthy society necessitates its citizens perform, without question, their assigned role is not, I would argue, a social philosophy; it is a form of control. It is a fear tactic (Chomsky, 1988). Those in power perpetually remind us that chaos would rule if we do not stand fast at our stations and unquestioningly perform our assigned duties. Foucault, in his 1977, *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*, envisioned society as a panopticon, a jail of sorts, in which those in power are potentially watching, all the time. Because those being watched assume that they may be watched all the time, they internalize their own domination. “This is the most powerful and ‘economic’ form of social control” (Lewis, 2016).

The ways in which we are surveyed and scrutinized are immeasurable, both overt and covert, so entrenched in society that they have become normative, almost invisible. This surveillance is not only a necessary tool of social control through the obvious means of policing and imprisonment, it is also, “a decisive economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power” (p. 175). Just as

the early designers of capitalism saw surveillance as necessary in the workplace, so too did they see it as necessary in their new form of production: the production of skilled and compliant workers through public schooling. In fact, as Foucault claims, “the details of surveillance were specified and it was integrated into the teaching relationship” (p. 175). Public schools would perfect surveillance and enforce its necessity through punishment. If students do not follow the rules, if they do not conform, they are punished, either corporally or through the penalty of failure:

This hierarchizing penalty had, therefore, a double effect; it distributed pupils according to their aptitudes and their conduct, that is according to the use that could be made of them when they left the school; it exercised over them a constant pressure to conform to the same model, so that they might all be subjected to ‘subordination, docility, attention in studies and exercises, and to the correct practice of duties and all the parts of discipline’. So that they might all be like one another. (p. 182)

If a student is unsuccessful, if they are not “like one another,” if they do not achieve to standardized expectations, and commit to “the use that could be made of them” (p. 182), their punishment may be never ending.

In schools, this punishment takes on two forms: academic and behavioural. If a student does not behave, they are reprimanded. They stand in the hall, stay in at recess, sit in the principal’s office, sit in meetings with their teachers and parents, get suspended, and, finally, get expelled. The expectations and the discipline are overt. If a child cannot perform his/her role as a student academically, the consequences, though less explicit, less overt, are based on subordination and insistence on compliance. Should a student find herself/himself unable to live up to the “constant pressure to conform” (p. 182), an ever increasing remediation is in place to

progress them to expected levels. If their teacher has the extra time, which is increasingly unlikely under the weight of standardized curriculum expectations and the defunding of educational assistants (EAs), students who struggle get extra help. If teachers are available and not working with students who have even greater achievement gaps and needs, which is most often the case as school boards move to allot EA time for behavioural issues rather than academic support, a struggling student might get help from an EA. If these first, lower-tier interventions are unsuccessful, students will typically receive accommodations, which may or may not be noticed by peers, which may or may not “out” them as being less able. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are drafted so that teachers are legally bound to give students more time, a quiet space, scribe for them, allow technology for assistance, and/or other accommodations.

If accommodations do not improve success to expected levels, modifications to curriculum expectations are put into place. Modifications to a student’s learning program, by which a student in their age appropriate grade works at curriculum expectations from lower grades, are always noticed by peers. If modifications do not work, requests for psycho-educational assessments are made and, when the school board or the parents can afford it, students are referred to an educational psychologist whose role it is to assess, diagnose, provide some understanding of why the previous interventions are not working, and suggest new, inherently higher-tier interventions. If this does not work, the student may be referred to doctors or psychiatrists who have extended powers of hospitalization and medication. When this last step does not work and there are additional behavioural issues along the way, which there almost always are, perhaps inherently, perhaps due to the social implications of being “outed” as “different” or “less-able,” there is always, eventually, jail.

In jail those who are not “like one another,” those for whom the far-reaching system of

schooling's considerable efforts to conform them to standardized expectations have not been successful, the nonconformists, can be housed away from the rest of society and overtly monitored, 24 hours a day, to ensure they do not infect the rest of us. Foucault (1977) argued that these institutions [schools and jails] were 'experts in normality'. He asked, "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (p. 228)

This is the society that some want. It is a position that was chosen and great effort was expended to impose and rationalize it. It is, of course, one position. There are, of course, many others. Countless professionals, who work with students of greatly varying capacities, care deeply about their students and strive to provide for them the accommodations and modifications they require to be academically successful. Teachers and EAs work diligently to provide assistance for exceptional students which is less "visible" to their peers. Psychologists and doctors seek out new treatments for those who have acute learning disabilities or mental health issues. Prison staff work to provide programming to educate and reintegrate the most severely troubled citizens. Unfortunately, they all do so in environments that were built on less socially just principles. Unfortunately, they do so in societies in which both overt and covert marginalization remain.

Students who struggle in school, both behaviourally and academically, those who need accommodations and modifications, those whose aptitudes and conduct are not in line with expectations, often come from places of marginalization. Grundel, Oliveira, and Geballe (2003) found that "poor children typically enter school a full year and a half behind their middle-class peers in language ability" (p. 5). Gewertz (2007) found that, even when children from low SES backgrounds somehow overcome the mitigating factors of living in poverty and start out doing well in school, over time their parent's economic status will threaten their potential for success in

future years. In regard to learning disabilities, Dresser, Dunklee, and Howard (2009) refer to results from Child Trends Databank (2007) which found that, “between 1997 and 2004, 11.3% of all 3 to 7 year-olds living in poverty were identified as having a learning disability, as opposed to 7.9% of children from households above the poverty line” (p. 11). In fact, “social and behavioural deficits, instead of classroom performance, may be the major factor influencing low SES students’ referrals for LD placement” (p. 23).

Students who enter school economically or ethnically marginalized are often perceived to be ill prepared for school even if they have overcome social and economic deficits and are ready and able to be successful. Dresser, Dunklee, and Howard (2009), in referring to Alexander, Entwisle, and Thompson’s (1987) research, summarized that:

Teachers who came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tended to have lower expectations for minority and poor children, and these teachers frequently rated minority and poor children lower on behaviour assessments and maturity. (p. 24)

That some teachers have a deficit perception of marginalized children, that they may see them as not fulfilling their expected roles as students, may not only diminish students’ potential for success it may remarginalize them and sort them out of regular streams and into special education streams. Gottlieb and Atler (1994) found that “almost half of all referrals of children as LD in urban schools involve misbehaviours and not academics” (Dresser, Dunklee, & Howard, 2009, p. 23). Teachers’ notions of what students “should be” may not only affect their perception of students but, for marginalized students, may also increase the likelihood of being identified with behavioural and/or academic learning disabilities. Entering school poor or ethnically diverse, no matter one’s potential academic ability, in some cases results in being reidentified as “other,” labelled as learning disabled, and forced into potentially socially ostracizing special

education programs.

Lipman (2009) argues that the latest form of surveillance and control in education is being implemented through the assumedly innocuous, purportedly beneficial, movements of accountability and standardization; “Accountability works as a panoptic system of surveillance that teaches people to comply and to press others into compliance” (p. 369). Like Foucault, Lipman sees the standardization of education as an intentionally over-arching implementation of economic control aimed at schools and the products of schools: namely, labour and compliance. “Under the rubric of standards, the policies impose standardization and enforce language and cultural assimilation to mold the children of the increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse workforce into a more malleable and governable source of future labour” (Lipman, p. 371).

Moving Forward:

Beyond the sides and toward an articulation of positions.

Bowles and Gintis (1967), in their work, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, suggested that western models of schooling are deterministic. They are determined by the inherent class system of capitalism. As capitalism needs a class based system in which some win and some lose, some are rich and some are poor, so too does public schooling need a system in which some win and some lose. As with capitalism writ large, the population of Ontario, for example, the number of winners must be significantly smaller than the number of losers. A 2016 article by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC), utilizing Oxfam data, titled *Richest 62 People Own as Much Wealth as Half the World's Population*, revealed just that; that the richest 62 people on Earth have more accumulated wealth than the poorest 3.5 billion. Fewer than 100 people have more

wealth than half the world's population, and the majority of those 62 people are white males who live in the US. Not only do there need to be more losers, they need to lose big. This notion is reminiscent of Wilson's (1909) argument that a small group of people will need a liberal education and the rest "a very much larger class, of necessity" (p. 25), will require schooling which provides them with the simple skills to get a job, agree to do whatever work is offered for whatever little remuneration, to potentially lift themselves out of pauperism, and be thankful for the opportunity. This system of schooling is a "system [which] is fundamentally about the negation of human agency, despite the good intentions of individuals at all levels" (Lipman, 2009, p. 371).

Knopp (2012) agreed with Bowles and Gintis, suggesting that, "the economic needs of the capitalist system shapes schools" (p. 24). How do teachers react to the notion that class systems shape schools and that schools, in turn, maintain class systems? Cole (1988) found, "some of [his] student teachers have even looked upon the principle [that the goals of schooling are predetermined by the needs of capitalism] as reassuring in its promise of stability and the maintenance of the status quo, while others, with more radical minds, have despaired at the seeming lack of space for individual and collective action" (p. 35). It should come as no surprise that many of those who are successful in the present capitalist, class-based system would see its maintenance as "reassuring". But what of those radicals, adherents to the philosophies of Dewey and Freire, how do they move forward? McLaren in his 2009, *Critical Pedagogy: A Look at the Major Concepts*, suggested:

the main question for teachers attempting to become aware of the ideologies that inform their own teaching is: How have certain pedagogical practices become so habitual or

natural in school settings that teachers accept them as normal, unproblematic, and expected? (p. 71)

Educators must ask themselves what aspects of schooling that they were able to navigate successfully are difficult, potentially even impossible, to navigate for their students. Educators must also ask themselves, what aspects of schooling inherently promote and preserve prejudicial class-based systems, which endorse the maintenance of division, inequality, and marginalization. I must ask myself, how was I, as a white, heterosexual, able, middle-class, male, preconditioned to be successful in a system of schooling that was developed and continues, I would argue, to be delivered with whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, ableness, and middle-classness in mind?

Rather than framing the potential sides of schooling in opposition: conventional or banking models vs. progressive or liberating models, McLaren, utilizing distinctions developed by Habermas (1974), suggests that there are different “forms of knowledge” from which educators must choose: technical knowledge, practical knowledge, and emancipatory knowledge. The first form of knowledge McLaren summarizes is “technical knowledge,” which is emphasized by “mainstream educators who work primarily within liberal and conservative educational ideologies” (p. 64). This form of knowledge “is that which can be measured and quantified”; it is “evaluated by, among other things, intelligence quotients, reading scores, and SAT results, all of which are used by educators to sort, regulate, and control students” (p. 64). I would suggest that this form of knowledge is that which is expected of historically conservative models of schooling and present day standardized curriculum and EQAO assessments. The second form of knowledge is “practical knowledge,” which “aims to enlighten individuals so they can shape their daily actions in the world” (p. 64). McLaren suggests that practical knowledge “is generally acquired through describing and analyzing social situations historically

or developmentally, and is geared toward helping individuals understand social events that are ongoing and situational” (p. 64). Although both of these forms of knowledge are necessary, as parts not wholes of an education, for the educator they are primarily without risk.

Yes, students must be able to measure the perimeter and area of the school and yes, they must be able to describe when and how the school was built. The risk lies in asking why the school was built. This question arises from what McLaren, along with Habermas, calls “emancipatory knowledge.” Emancipatory knowledge attempts to unpack and understand the power and privilege intrinsic to the social and class relationships of society. Emancipatory knowledge:

Aims at creating the conditions under which irrationality, domination, and oppression can be overcome and transformed through deliberative, collective action. In short, it creates the foundation for social justice, equality, and empowerment. (p. 64)

For marginalized students, emancipatory knowledge creates opportunities to both understand marginalization and to do something about it.

I began this chapter with a reminder that Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett (1982) suggested that teachers must choose a side. Some 50 years prior to this suggestion, Dewey stated that educators must recognize the differences between traditional and progressive forms of education. In the 1970s, Freire insisted teachers leave the banking model of education behind and take up a liberating model. McLaren (2009), in reframing Habermas (1974), suggested a critical pedagogy through which emancipatory knowledge is sought. Emancipatory knowledge may be seen as surpassing, even transcending, the polarity of sides in schooling and creating a path through which all teaching and learning can become potential positions through which historical oppression and future emancipation can be explored. Through this lens, educators are asked to

consider what Ellsworth (1997) refers to as potential teaching positions, rather than choose a side. “The critical educator doesn’t believe that there are two sides to every question, with both sides needing equal attention. For the critical educator, there are many sides to a problem, and often these sides are linked to certain class, race, and gender interests” (McLaren, 2009, p. 62). Because the sides are linked to issues of class, race, and gender, emancipatory knowledge, unlike technical or practical knowledge, is politicized. It is risky. The results are uncertain. As Ellsworth (1997) said, “We teach, with no knowledge or certainty about what consequences our actions as teachers will have” (p. 17).

I believe that, for our students, the obvious question that arises from teaching toward emancipatory knowledge is, “Why should I listen to you?”

Why would educators take this risk, teach from this position, move beyond the standardized and the measurable, democratize their practice and their classrooms, and give up control? Perhaps it is a matter of hope; as Marsh (2011) suggests, “our belief in the transformative power of education owes to our primal and somewhat naïve` desire to believe in a just world” (p. 21). Perhaps it is a matter of necessity; as Simon (1992) states:

Without articulating a vision of how one’s practice might relate to a vision for the future and without seriously taking up the question of how pedagogy is constituted as a form of moral practice, any talk of teaching as a responsible and intellectual practice becomes an empty and abstract form. (p. 14)

Developing, articulating, and putting into practice a vision for the future is a complicated and, in turn, risky endeavour for educators. It necessitates an understanding of the polarizing history of sides in schooling and the potential positions available to educators along with the potential questioning and divergence from the status quo. It necessitates the movement from

training and schooling to education and liberation. It necessitates the conscious articulation of a position. How do educators take this risk? How do we move forward? Unfortunately, “there is no cookbook solution for transformative teaching” (Tisdell, 2001, p. 96).

Conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to outline the systemic differences between historically conventional schooling and progressive education, the effects these models have on teachers and teaching, the effects that maintaining conventional methods have on marginalized students, and the difficulty teachers have navigating these methods, among others, given current neoliberal political agendas. I looked to the work of Dewey, who set the stage for comparing conventional and progressive pedagogical methods in the 1930s. Paulo Freire, along with countless other critical theorists and pedagogues, reignited notions of progressive teaching and pressed teachers to consider the liberating possibilities of developing and delivering emancipatory education.

There is evidence that marginalized students do not perform well in conventionally constructed schooling. Conventional schooling may, in fact, work to maintain, reinforce, and reiterate class divisions. Recent standardization and privatization reforms are moves toward financial accountability and, more insidiously, crisis creation, rather than reforms that address the struggles marginalized students face in schools. Standardization supports a construct of equal rather than equitable.

Teachers may struggle to move from schooling to educating, due to any number of complex causes. Some teachers may have been successful in conventional models and assume that their repetition will serve their students. Others may model their instruction on that of their

teachers or of senior colleagues. Some may be under the assumption that conventional models will serve their students best when it comes to standardized assessments and credentialism. Others may not have contemplated alternative positions at all.

For those who do envision alternatives to conventional methodologies, change and feelings of potential isolation as they travel new paths may cause anxiety and be limiting. Change is always risky within institutions.

Teachers who take on new positions in their pedagogy may do so in the hopes of discontinuing a system of conventional schooling which may be seen as maintaining systemic marginalization. They may push themselves out of familiar spaces and truly get to know their students, utilize student experiences and voices in the development and delivery of curriculum, and educate to emancipate. Whether they like it or not, educators are already in politicized positions. Whether they like it or not, they are already teaching from a political position.

As Kearney (1988) so aptly put it, “we reach a point in the endless spiral of undecidability where each one of us is obliged to make an ethical and political decision, to say *here I stand*. Or, at the level of collective responsibility, *here we stand*” (p. 361). Teachers who do not take the time to question and to critically assess the many places from which, and through which, they both speak to and listen to the diverse students in their classrooms, teachers who do not take a stand and choose a position from which to educate, may stand the risk of having a position chosen for them.

Chapter 5: Possible Positions

we have to stray afield of ‘education’ as it’s currently defined in academe, and practice knowledges foreign to us. In doing so, we breach the circle of education in the name of becoming educated about what the field of education itself prevents us from knowing and thinking.

--Ellsworth, *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address*, 1997

freedom is not a state of being but an openness to a process of possibility. As a practice, freedom is not a passive state but an activity, a method, a mode of living as questioning and changing. Freedom does not lie in discovering or being able to determine who one is, but in rebelling against those ways in which we are already defined, categorized, and classified.

--Simon, *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility*, 1992

Introduction

Having explored, in the previous chapters, what I consider to be some of the most important issues facing public schools, public school students, and public school teachers, I hope, in this chapter, to begin the process of relocating the thesis from “what was” to “what might be.” First, I consider some of public education’s strengths, needs, and possible areas of improvement. Second, I take a quick look back at some of the main polemics which have arisen out of both historical and present day attempts to seek direction in public schooling and the potentially polarizing effects that simplifying the discussion into one of “sides” can effect. Third, through reflection on my own personal practice and a re-examination of some of the fundamental philosophies of my research, I explore the potential positions from which educators might

develop and deliver a pedagogy grounded in possibility.

Strengths

Teachers are asked to provide feedback to students in three distinct phases. Whether commenting on individual work or overall achievement, we give feedback and recommendations based on students' areas of strength, areas of need, and next steps for improvement. Although I have said very little, in this thesis, regarding the strengths of public schools, there are many. I believe that collectively paying for a public school system which is open to, and accessible by, all of its members is one of the most important endeavours a society can undertake. I believe in public schools. I have dedicated my professional and academic careers to public education. I have entrusted the education of my two children, Noah and Asha, to public schools. I am writing this thesis to ask, what I believe to be, essential questions about past, present, and possible future manifestations of public schools. I am also asking teachers to consider the positions from which they teach. I ask these questions with the sole intention of playing a small part in the improvement of public schools and the improvement of teaching.

The foundations of public schooling, as I outlined in Chapter 2, are unsettling. The wealthy elite, the majority of whose children were already receiving privately funded education, assembled and created a system of publically funded schooling for the express purpose of manufacturing better factory workers out of the newly urban, often impoverished masses. These newly trained factory workers would be granted jobs at which they could spend a lifetime toiling in the hopes of sustaining their working class existences. They would be employed; they would be content; they would be controlled. Any labour unrest would be dealt with swiftly and harshly. It was considered that they would, or should, be thankful.

In fact, it was not only the wealthy few who supported publically funded schooling. The poor and labouring classes were actively seeking publically funded schooling because they assumed that one of the main differences between the poor and the wealthy was education. They may have felt that, at the very least, basic literacy and numeracy skills would be beneficial in helping them out of the often desperate poverty of the industrial age. Little did they know that the public schooling their children would receive, skills-based training centered on factory and farming schedules, was not the liberal education that the wealthy were receiving in private domains. While poor children learned to work more efficiently, wealthy children learned to more efficiently manage resources. While wealthy children learned to question their world, poor children learned not to question their superiors.

Somewhere along the way though, perhaps starting in North America with the proposed reforms of Dewey in the 1930s, and continuing through to the democratization movements, rights movements, and Free Schools movements of the 1960s, followed by the critical work of Freire and others in the 1970s and beyond, many children in the public education system were offered more than training; they were offered an education. Open-minded, innovative, and progressive public school teachers pushed themselves and their students beyond the bonds of training and toward the potential of liberation through education. In turn, groups of students and teachers, groups of parents and community members, demanded that schools educate rather than train. They demanded a reconsideration of what public schools could be, of what they could do. And, in many cases, to varying extents, public schooling evolved. Public schooling became much more than it was originally designed to be; it became educational. It became, for many students, a way to potentially move beyond the working class and to move forward socially and economically, however slowly and however marginally.

Public schools, eventually, and not without struggle, became places where the walls of racism could be broken down. Public schools became buildings in which poor kids learned alongside middle class kids. Girls were afforded increasingly equal opportunities. Educational assistance was provided for those with learning exceptionalities. Public schools became neighbourhood symbols of community and hope. Today, in many layered ways, and to varying degrees, public schools continue to represent all of these things. There are a great many strengths in public education which should, more often, be recognized and celebrated through the work of committed teachers, enlightened communities, and engaged students.

Needs

Unfortunately, there is something hostile growing beneath the strengths of today's public schools, something noticeably reminiscent of its earliest designs. Many of today's stakeholders in public schooling are increasingly focused on standardization and privatization under the guise of accountability. Perhaps in the same vein as the wealthy few who created public schooling for their own ends almost 150 years ago, today's private profiteers are asking: How can we continue to financially benefit from the product of schooling, well trained and compliant workers, but also financially benefit from the design and delivery of schooling, a new and untapped site of profit making? Can we own public schooling? If we did own it, how would we know which ones or which parts would be the most profitable? Can we implement a standardized tool of assessment and accountability so that we can grade students, teachers, administrators, and schools just as we grade products? Can we, simultaneously, manipulate the public to accept the propaganda of hyper-capitalism and the privatization agenda?

Today, I fear, that the capitalist neoliberal inspired movements of standardization,

accountability, and privatization threaten to undo much of the progressive restructuring of the design and delivery of public schooling. I believe that these movements are counterintuitive to effective teaching. I believe they are inequitable. I believe that the financially driven corporate models of standardization, accountability, and privatization threaten to bring us back to a time when schooling's express purpose was to create content and controlled workers: Freire's (2000) "oppressed masses," Chomsky's (1988) "bewildered herd." Granted, given the profit driven exodus of industrial work in North America, the role of the working class looks very different today than it did when public schooling was first conceptualized. This is an evolution that some believe we should applaud. I disagree. Although working in a factory, for most, is not a dream job, decades of labour struggle by organized unions helped establish a living wage for workers, while making this work safer and more secure. Today, much of the working class of North America toil away at service sector jobs, often referred to as "McJobs"; they do so with little job security, scarce benefits or pension savings, often working full time hours for part time pay. Rather than working on an assembly line manufacturing cars, tomorrow's working class are more likely to be greeters at a Walmart. I would argue that, for the working class, things are getting worse.

In the midst of this social and economic regression, caused, I would argue, by the greed of the extremely wealthy, many educational theorists and teachers are asking how public schooling can be reformed to better educate those entering new job markets. Many teachers are implementing new ideas and pushing students to consider the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful as adults. Again, open-minded, innovative, and progressive public school teachers and students are the great strength of public education. However, the needs may be greater.

The work of progressive educators is increasingly overshadowed in today's schools. Their voices, from my experience, are nowhere near as loud as those with the capital to control the media and the propaganda of public schooling. And those who have the capital, those with the capacity to ask loudly and act quickly, seem to be asking not how public schooling can be improved for students but how public schooling can be held accountable so that it can be more efficiently profited from. This accountability, primarily measured by the results of standardized assessments, in turn functions to silence progressive educators. As teachers' effectiveness is increasingly assessed through the results of standardized assessments, teachers' time is increasingly spent preparing their students for them.

This is a movement away from teaching experience-based emancipatory knowledge and understanding and a movement toward training to recall and regurgitate banked technical knowledge. Is this not a movement in reverse?

For all of public schooling's strengths, this movement, inspired by the neoliberal individualization of our society and the never ending, unchecked, insatiable appetite of modern capitalism is, I believe, its most pressing area of need. Those who believe that public schools can play a critical role in the education and empowerment of individuals and the transformation of communities must be willing to ask questions regarding standardization, accountability, and privatization movements in schools. They must ask their questions loudly and they must be prepared to act quickly on their resolves. If we do not ask loudly and we do not act quickly, as the standardization and privatization of schooling are well underway across North America, we stand to lose all that has been done in the decades of critical and progressive research and reform which hoped and helped to make publically funded schooling more educational and potentially more genuinely empowering.

Areas of Improvement

Before we engage in any discussion of how to improve public schooling, we must first ask what improved public schooling might look like. This is not to say that there must be a fixed end in sight for education. As Ellsworth (1997) said, “I am not searching for absolute answers or fixes for these questions and dilemmas” (p. 12). There must, however, be a sense of direction. To genuinely consider the potential positions from which we might teach in public schools and to develop, from these positions, a functioning and understandable pedagogy, we must attempt to conceptualize both the desired outcomes of public schooling and the possible means by which we might achieve them.

Questioning what we want our public schools to look like also begs the larger question, what we want our society to look like. Public schools are, in a sense, a reflection of society and society is, in turn, a reflection of our public schools. Unfortunately, questioning what we want our society to look like often results in a movement toward opposing sides. In a final attempt to evolve the discussion beyond the polarity of sides I will, very briefly, outline what I consider to be the most polarizing elements of the questions: What do we want our society to look like? And, what sorts of public forms of education might we imagine to support our visions?

Each of the following polarities are conceptualized in detail in previous chapters.

A Review of the Sides:

Function or conflict?

I have suggested that, rather than asking if our public schools are healthy, we should ask what a healthy public school is. In other words, in what direction shall we educate our children,

and with what purposes in mind? To ask these questions necessitates asking what a healthy society is. Considering what a healthy society is or is not, entails very complex and complicated questions. They are questions that have been debated for centuries. Two significantly polarizing sociological theories, structural functionalism and conflict theory, illustrate the potentially diametric notions of how a society might be organized.

Structural functionalism, which was first developed by sociologists such as Durkheim (1933), is a sociological theory which suggested, among many other things, that everyone in society has a role to play. If workers could just be better workers, if wives could just be better wives, if we could all just accept our role and stop yearning for more, our society would be healthy. The potential fall-out of this theory is that it is difficult to change roles, to be socio-economically mobile. To adopt this notion of a healthy society would allow the increasingly few, increasingly wealthy, those in control of a society's resources to go on reaping more and more benefit from the labour of those who, by definition, do not benefit from their own labour. The children of the wealthy could be schooled in private institutions through which they would receive a liberal education which would prepare them to perpetuate their role in society. The increasingly many, increasingly poor, however, would be trained sufficiently, through public schools, to toil away at jobs which would, as long as they are lucky enough to stay healthy and no accidents befall them, sustain their low or middle class existence.

Conflict theory, first developed by Marx (1848), stands in opposition. It proposes that the health of a society should be measured by the equality of its citizens. It suggests that society is a construction of oppression, with those in power claiming and maintaining power which was established through their class-based position. It suggests an active reorganization of power and resources. Conflict theorists and critical pedagogues such as Ellsworth (1997), Freire (2000),

Giroux (2001), Lewis (1992), and Simon (1992), rather than asking if everyone is playing their role appropriately and unquestioningly, have asked: Do men and women have the same opportunities? Do we respect diversity? Can the poor escape poverty?

Private or public?

Although great strides have been made in the organization and delivery of public schooling, the division between private and public schools remains rooted in their histories. Private schools, through which a more liberal education is offered, are for the wealthy. Public schools, through which a more focused, skills-based schooling is offered, are for everyone else. This was the case over 100 years ago and, with some exceptions, it remains the case today.

However, the discussion surrounding private and public schooling in North America has, quite recently, changed in kind. There are those who, quite vocally, have suggested that public institutions are incapable of providing quality schooling and that the job would be best laid in the hands of private organizations. It has been said that public schooling is “broken” and that, as public interests have been unable to “fix” it, private interests should take over (e.g., Freidman, 1994, p. 4). It has been said that not only can schools be fixed, through increased accountability, standardization, and, finally, privatization, we can also cure a great many of our societal ills (Finn, C. E, Manno, B. V., & Vanourek G., 2000; Freidman, 1994).

Conversely, it has been suggested that movements away from publically funded schooling and toward voucher systems, charter schools, and other forms of semi or full privatization are well suited apparatus to build schools and, in turn societies, from which the few profit while the many learn, indeed embrace, an ideology that leads them to accept a role that does not serve their own best interests.

Historically conventional or progressive?

Dewey (1938) was one of the earliest educational theorists to methodically delineate the differences between what he termed traditional teaching methods and progressive teaching methods. Dewey suggested that teaching from an historically conventional perspective would not effectively engage students in their learning and would not efficiently prepare them for their adult lives. He stated that “an educator cannot start with knowledge already organized and proceed to ladle it out in doses” (p. 82). Rather, Dewey suggested a progressive method, through which teachers democratize their classrooms and actively elicit their students’ interests and experiences in their education. He believed that, “No experience is educative that does not tend both to knowledge of more facts and entertaining of more ideas and to a better, a more orderly, arrangement of them” (p. 82).

Many progressive educational theorists and critical pedagogues followed Dewey, perhaps most notably Freire (2000), who, through reframing the language of the narrative to one of banking information and emancipatory education, continued to suggest that only progressive methods of teaching could “free” students. He felt that conventional education is an “exercise of domination,” that its “ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) [is] indoctrinating [students] to adapt to the world of oppression” (p. 78). Rather, progressive liberating forms of teaching and learning can promote, in students, the ability to “be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively” (p. 32).

Historically conventional schooling methods, it could be argued, are well suited models to perpetuate historically hegemonic socio-economic structures. If students are being taught “banked” information from historical stances, Lessing (2013) suggests that they are “being

taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a self-perpetuating system” (p. 21).

Equal or equitable? The role of standardization.

Under Ontario’s public school funding formula, every student has a dollar value. As outlined in Chapter 2, an elementary student is valued at approximately \$10,000 per year; secondary students are valued at approximately \$11,000. It is through this funding formula, provided through the taxes of local citizens, that all aspects of public schooling in Ontario are financed. It is a standardized model. Every student is worth an equal amount. This means that 100 students in an upper middle-class neighbourhood where the majority of houses are owned, the majority of households are two-parent, the majority of parents have a post-secondary education, and the majority of parents are not recent immigrants, for example, make available \$1,000,000 in funding to their local public school. 100 students in a socio-economically depressed neighbourhood where the majority of parents are single, the majority of houses are rentals, parents’ education level, on average, is low, there is a high percentage of recent immigrants, and household incomes are well below the city average, for example, make available the same amount of funding to their local public school. As stated in previous chapters, in great detail, marginalized students require much more support than non-marginalized students. English as a Second Language programs, Special Education programs, before and after school support, Educational Assistants all cost a lot of money and all are required in greater numbers in areas of greater diversity, marginalization, and need. Equality is not Equity.

Standardized assessments are equal measures rather than equitable measures. I recall delivering the EQAO Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) in a secondary school in

one of the most ethnically diverse communities in a major Ontario urban center. This is an assessment in which teachers, by law, cannot provide students with any information, assistance, or clarification as they write the test. Teachers are allowed only to reread the questions for students, and only if they request that they do so, in front of their classmates. One of the writing assessments asked students to answer questions based on a story about a Zamboni. Now the majority of white middle-class Canadian born kids might know that a Zamboni is the machine that cleans hockey rinks at half time, but there is no question that the majority of the students in my class, many from Africa, Pakistan, or the Caribbean, had no idea what a Zamboni was and, therefore, by definition, literally, could not do well on this reading and writing task. What many of my students learned from taking the OSSLT that year was that they could not read and write at the level that was expected of them by their school, their community, and their province. What they also learned is that the system is stacked against them (Curtis, Livingston & Smaller, 1992). I believe that this cannot be motivating; it can only be demeaning.

If a student in Ontario has been diagnosed with a learning disability, they are provided with an IEP and special education assistance, through which they may remain in their age appropriate grade level and work at a reduced grade level which is deemed appropriate for their learning profile. It is important to remember here that a much larger percentage of children living in poverty are diagnosed with learning disabilities (Child Trends Databank, 2014, p. 5; Dresser, Dunklee, & Howard, 2009, p. 11), are provided with IEPs, have modified expectations, and are referred to special education programs. This is an attempt at creating equitable learning opportunities for marginalized students. At the time of EQAO assessments, however, all students in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 write standardized Math and Language assessments at their grade level, no matter what they are actually learning in class. Every year thousands of Ontario elementary

students who are not learning at a Grade 3 or Grade 6 level, who may have had no contact with Grade 3 or Grade 6 curriculum at all, spend 3 days writing Grade 3 or Grade 6 Math and Language assessments. Although their academic programs may have been modified to lower grade levels throughout the year, their most high profile evaluation is not. Their results are then factored into their school's averages, which are then utilized to publically rank their school among others in their city. Given that more students who are marginalized socially or economically are working at modified grade levels but writing EQAO at age appropriate levels, the published results of EQAO assessments which consistently demonstrate that schools in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods do poorly, should come as no surprise.

Lipman (2009) suggests that, "By defining the problem of education as standards and accountability they have made simply irrelevant any talk about humanity, difference, democracy, culture, thinking, personal meaning, ethical deliberation, intellectual rigor, social responsibility, and joy in education" (p. 373). To fund, instruct, and assess students under the notion that they are all the same ignores the wonder and the richness of social diversity.

Three Rs or six Cs?

It is impossible today to say what the world will look like in ten years. Perhaps the manual skills that the working class will need to gain employment in whatever factories are left to work in might remain similar, but the knowledge and technical skills that will be required in the future are hard to predict. Fullan (2013) has suggested that the historically conventional teaching methods, which focused on the three Rs, reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, are out of date. He argues that we must now concentrate on the six Cs. We must teach kids: character education, citizenship, communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. I would

agree, as long as no attempts are made to standardize these attributes. In each case, they can and should be given opportunities to reveal themselves in myriad ways. None of them, save critical thinking to a limited extent, are evaluated through EQAO. EQAO has three sections: Reading, Writing, and Math. It is eerily familiar to outdated historically conventional notions of what should be taught and evaluated in schools.

Standardized testing in Ontario is a movement in reverse. It does not evaluate the attributes needed in today's working world. It highlights the difficulties that marginalized students, families, and communities face, without offering any insights. It forces teachers to deliver unrelated chunks of information at a break neck pace. It forces students to undergo a process of regurgitation rather than learning. As Lipman, (2009) says, it "enforces language and cultural assimilation" (p. 371). It creates a system of measurement convenient for the monetization and privatization of public education. It assumes that one form of "knowing," in the sense of learning a "fact" or a skill, is imperative above "understanding," in the sense of gaining critical awareness of the complexities and inequalities of the world. Referencing Apple (1996 & 2001) and Bohn and Sleeter (2000), Lipman suggests that "imposed standardization negates the contested nature of what would constitute common knowledge" (p. 369). Darder (1995), Delpit (1988), and Ladson-Billings (1994) all suggest that standardized testing negates that which constitutes effective schools and effective teaching.

The six Cs that Fullan (2013) suggests are the qualities today's students will need in the future cannot be measured through a standardized paper and pencil, multiple choice, short answer test. They require conversation, discussion, exploration, and, in many cases, for the learning to be lasting, they require a disturbance of previously adhered to notions of "the way things work." In fact, Katz and Dack (2013) argue that true learning happens only when

previously adhered to understandings, or banked “truths, are “intentionally interrupted.” To focus on Fullan’s six Cs, rather than the three Rs of historically conventional teaching and of present day standardized assessments, would entail a considerable shift in direction; it would also require a substantial shift in teaching positions.

The chicken or the egg?

As we seek out the areas in which public schooling should be improved, and as we consider the directions in which to turn, we must also remember that improving public schooling alone will not be enough to address larger social issues. Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggested that there must be a “revolutionary transformation of the educational system, integrated with a dramatic re-ordering of control of power in the economic realm” (p.8).

It is important to remember that, although the history of public schools is inextricably tied to the systemic maintenance of social norms such as poverty, the marginalization of ethnically diverse students, and the negative perceptions of low socio-economic communities, it did not cause them. The architects of schooling did not create public schools to cause vast differences in wealth and social class. They had already accomplished that through capitalist and nepotistic social and economic policies.

Public schooling was created, in part, to sustain these inequalities. And sustain them it has. Today, the further standardization and privatization of public schooling may well play a part in both the maintenance and solidification of social and economic inequality. Rather than reforming the school system’s socially marginalizing consequences, through progressive and liberating pedagogies, mandated accountability and standardization may serve to entrench and

propagate them. Rather than re-ordering the systems of power embedded in our economic realms, these policies may well set the stage for another generation of students schooled not to speak out against prejudicial and discriminating economic dogma.

Perhaps ironically, it may be the case that transforming schooling may be the only way to set the stage for a generation who are capable of transforming society. The question is, will there be a generation brave enough to reform public schooling, to refuse policies which maintain and sustain inequality, and to provide for the next generation the freedom to be able to question societal norms and inequities, and work toward restructuring them?

Herein lies the necessity of moving beyond the simplicity of sides. To choose one side or another simplifies human beings the way that standardization simplifies the student. If we are to seek equity in education, if we are to risk progressive pedagogy in our classrooms, we must accept that the means by which these ends are achieved may be as complex, complicated, and differentiated as individuals and the societies in which they live. Not devolving into talk of sides, though, is difficult. Dewey (1938) said, “It is with reference to organization of knowledge that we are likely to find *Either-Or* philosophies most acutely active” (p. 82). But dualities are chronic and dismissive simplicities. Educators, in particular, must resist. Rather than choose a side, I would argue, we must seek multiple directions and multiple positions from which we might arrive both near the directions we choose and in new unpredictable spaces. As this may necessitate an active refusal of the status quo, it is not only difficult, it is risky.

Educators and students who choose to venture beyond the status quo of schooling’s past and present incarnations demand change within an historically laden and hegemonic institution. In doing so, in seeking new directions in public schooling and new positions from which we

might teach and learn, we can create spaces in which students, along with teachers, question and recreate their world. We can create democratic spaces in which all voices are learning opportunities. The product of public schools, rather than workers, could be innovators who challenge inequities and who develop the knowledge and understanding, the capacity to creatively and collaboratively address the social issues of today and tomorrow.

What positions will we adopt? What directions will we aim toward?

Teaching to Learn and Learning to Teach

It has been my experience that people want to learn, particularly young people. They crave meaning for themselves and their world. In almost two decades of teaching, in different countries, cities, neighbourhoods, and schools with different age groups, and across multiple subject areas, I have never met a student who did not want to learn something. The something that they wanted to learn at the time may not have been the something that I wanted to teach at the time but, if I got to know them, and they got to know me and trust me, and I genuinely asked them, they were all keen to share their interests and their questions. This desire is the underlying strength of the student, no matter their age or background. They are not all optimistic; they are not all healthy; they are not all born into supportive homes; they do not all possess the ideas or ideals that their present society rewards; but, every student I have ever met wanted to learn.

I taught a very challenging Grade 11 English class many years ago. It was challenging in terms of both behaviour and academic ability. The students in this class were not very respectful to me, to each other, or to themselves. There were a lot of mitigating factors in their lives: poverty, recent immigration, broken homes, drugs, crime. These were students who were not

only used to poor grades and negative comments on report cards, many had come to believe them. Many felt that they could not be successful at school. However, in less than one month in this class, every student had researched and written a very successful essay. There was a large range in regard to what was successful for one student and what was successful for another, given considerations for English Language Learners (ELL) or students working with modified programs, but every single student completed the assignment. Their essay assignment was: Research and Write about Whatever You Want. One student did an essay on Nazism. I guided the research toward valid historical sites. I suggested that writing about why the Nazis hated Jewish people rather than why she hated Jewish people would make a more effective and less offensive paper. Another student wanted to learn why drug dealers made so much money. He did the research and found out. The student who did her paper on Nazism came to the conclusion, on her own, that the atrocities of the Holocaust were so inconceivable that no human being should have been treated that way, and the student who researched drug dealers learned that the average life span of a drug dealer in the US was 34. What I learned was that they learned when I gave them the time and space to learn what they wanted to learn.

In fact, I do not think that what we were studying was important at all. I do not think that the way I went about delivering or assessing the assignment was important. What I learned about learning in that class was that, while the students were learning about topics in the world, racism or crime for example, what the students were really studying was who they were in the world. By taking up a teaching position which gave them the freedom to make collaborative decisions about what we studied, they ended up studying themselves. They began trusting themselves as learners because their inquiry centered on a topic they knew a lot about: themselves. Ellsworth (1997) frames this much more eloquently, “maybe some pedagogies and curriculums work with

their students not because of the ‘what’ they are teaching or how they are teaching it. Maybe they are hits because of the who that they are offering students to imagine themselves as being and enacting” (p. 40). My essay assignment worked because the students’ biggest question, maybe all along, had been, “Who am I in the world?” Giving them an opportunity to think about that central question, necessitated that they also research, collaborate, read, write, talk, and a whole host of other expectations that are in the Language curriculum from Grade 1 through to Grade 12. All the expectations they may have been told that they could not do, that many believed they could not do and, in turn, often refused to do, when effectively personalized and grounded in freedom experience, and choice, they contentedly and effectively did.

When one considers the high drop-out rates of students from socio-economically depressed neighbourhoods, students who are recent immigrants, students who have learning exceptionalities, or are struggling with any number of other marginalizing factors, could it be that they leave school because they are fleeing the who that they are being told they are? If they are told that they are not good students, that they are not “going anywhere,” that they are failures, if they do not meet the literacy and numeracy expectations of their school and their province, they may feel that they are being told that the who they are is not good enough. If they disagree, they may leave school “in an effort to find the ‘who’ that they know themselves to be” (Lewis, 2016).

Interestingly, the students I am referring to in this Grade 11 class were the same students who, in great numbers, failed the OSSLT the year before. My job became building them back up after that experience had exacerbated their being torn down. EQAO had shown them they could not read or write. I spent four months providing them with the opportunity to remind themselves that they could. No wonder they were reluctant learners coming in.

Young people want to learn and they want choice. This notion is not new. Some 80 years ago Dewey argued:

There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his (sic) activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active co-operation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying. (1938, p. 67)

Dewey promoted an education in which students are freed from the restrictions of the mechanical uniformity of historically conventional schooling practices, a freedom not as an end in itself but “as a means to a freedom which is power: power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen ends into operation” (p. 64). That the ends are unknown is an integral aspect of the stated goals of progressive educators. For those who wish to sustain the status quo, however, this may be threatening.

Like the students in my Grade 11 class years ago, and like students in every class in every school today, who enter the day or term or year as reluctant, even hostile learners, if they are given opportunities to use their own voice and exercise the power of their past experiences in their own learning they can, not only learn, but excel in their learning. If teachers do not provide the space for students to exercise their freedoms, find their voice, and learn that they, too, no matter how they have been judged in the past, are powerful human beings, I do not believe that we can say we are educating.

Silent Majorities

Again, there are choices available, positions from which to seek alternatives, optional directions in which to aim. We can follow the present movements of standardization, accountability, and privatization, in the hopes of improving public schools and, in turn, our children and our future society; this requires little more than silently and passively following directions. Conversely, we can seek alternative teaching positions for the students in our classrooms. Greene (2009) pulls no punches in reminding us that the present reform positions in public education, “speak of those very children as ‘human resources’ for the expansion of productivity, as a means to the end of maintaining our nation’s [United States’] economic competitiveness and military primacy in the world” (p. 84). She further suggests that this is but one aspect of the goals of today’s education reform. She suggested that present positions are seeking out an “overtly controlled space” (p. 84), which relies on and hopes to sustain a “shadow of silent majorities” (Baudrillard, 1983). This direction in public schooling is “administered and media-mystified” (Greene, 2009, p. 84). It is a position which is “palpably deficient: there are unwarranted inequities, shattered communities, unfulfilled lives” (p. 84) and, although these “palpable deficiencies” create for us a “kind of blankness,” they also drive us to reach out, question, and desire an awakening. They remind us that, “The business of the school is not propaganda. It is equipping people with the knowledge and skills and concepts relevant to remaking a dangerous and disordered world” (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982, p. 208).

These determinations, in the midst of Baudrillard’s “shadow of silent majorities,” are reminiscent of Foucault’s (1977) panoptical “experts in normality” and punishment. They beg the question: “How are we to move the young to break with the given, the taken-for granted – to

move towards what might be, what is not yet?" (Greene, p. 84). How do we, as educators, take up divergent positions and provide opportunities for students to find their own voice, with which they can create their own path? Educators must consider that we, too, may be members of a "silent majority," labouring at a job that we have secured primarily through factory models of schooling. We, too, must yearn to and learn to find our voice, and seek out our own empowerment, "then, as teachers learning along with those we try to provoke to learn, we may be able to inspire hitherto unheard voices" (Greene, p. 95).

This is not easy. We find ourselves in a global-society driven by the insatiable appetite of capitalism pressed to its furthest limits by neoliberal ideologies of unchecked individualism and greed, sustained by untouchable corporations which hold more wealth and power than our governments, which pollute our planet at will, and cause unchecked inequalities of all social facets to widen and widen without foreseeable end. This is compounded by the fact that we are the never ending victims of mass marketing and propaganda that assures us that all is well and that we can spend our way out of any decline in which we find ourselves. It was no accident that President Bush's (2001) advice to Americans after the attacks on the World Trade Center was "to say as clearly as we can to the American public, get on the airlines, get about the business of America." "Get down to Disney World in Florida. Take your families and enjoy life, the way we want it to be enjoyed" (The White House, Press Release). This is often referred to as the "go shopping" speech. In all fairness, there are many other messages in the speech, but it is clear that the central message is that no major changes in the way we are doing things is at all necessary. In fact, under the tenure of Bush and, in turn, Obama, the main vehicle of reform in education in the US was, and continues to be, the standardization and privatization of public schooling.

Breaking the Silence

Bueno Fisher (2009) reminds us that Foucault, “believed that political issues are never dissociated from moral and ethical issues; according to this view, specific themes of education, as learning or discipline in school, for example, would have to be seen in terms of political strategies” (p. 205). In light of both the historical and present day political strategizing of public schooling, how do educators realize and adopt alternative positions that may alter the course of education toward new and potentially more equitable directions? As Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009) suggest, leaning heavily on Marx (1852), “people make their own history, but not under the conditions of their choosing” (p.16). More poetically:

Our only chance of transitioning into a sane sustainable future is to stumble onto something not yet here, but the spirit of which – its taste, its tone, its resonance – we can feel all around us... (Lasn, 2013, p.99)

Greene (2009) agrees that moving beyond politics and taking up a kind of resistive poetics is, in part, necessary. The project of transforming public schooling, which was designed to produce skilled workers, into public education and liberation, which has the capacity to emancipate human beings, may demand imagination; it may demand poetry:

Such a project demands the capacity to unveil and disclose. It demands the exercise of imagination, enlivened by works of art, by situations of speaking and making. Perhaps we can at last devise reflective communities in the interstices of colleges and schools. Perhaps we can invent ways of freeing people to feel and express indignation, to break through the opaqueness, to refuse the silences. We need to teach in such a way as to arouse passion now and then; we need a new camaraderie, a new one another, open to the world. (p. 95)

We certainly cannot do it without first questioning ourselves. We certainly cannot do it alone. Educators who choose this direction, this position, or path must solicit the help of likeminded, risk taking colleagues and, more importantly, we must enlist the help of potentially reluctant students and possibly fearful parents. Most importantly, it can be done. Unbeknownst to the capitalist architects of public schooling, “by grouping future workers together in schools, it is inevitable that some of the tools that are given to them will be used against the capitalist class itself” (Knopp, 2012, p.31).

Although teachers may be seen as textbook examples of those who successfully navigated the system and benefit from its being maintained and sustained, teachers are also in a particularly powerful position to question it. “Schooling and teaching is pointedly political and gives teachers an enormous power, as a collective, to change the world. There is no other institution which every member of society is required, by law, to attend for 13 years” (Lewis, 2016). In no other profession are children in the care of adults for over 190 days a year. Students are a captive audience; they have to listen to teachers. What are teachers saying to students? For many students, in particular those who are marginalized, teachers might be saying: Look at me I am middle-class; I accepted and worked within the system and it really paid off. Study hard and you can be middle-class too.

Conversely, students might, I would argue should, hear from their teachers questions like: Why are there so many people living in poverty? Why are so few so wealthy? Why do white men make up the vast majority of the wealthy? How did I get to be middle-class? Is the status of middle-class a goal worth attaining and sustaining? If teachers want schooling to be educational, they must first challenge their role in it. “There can be no intervention that challenges the status quo if we are not willing to interrogate the way our presentation of self as well as our

pedagogical process is often shaped by middle-class norms” (hooks, 1994, p. 185).

Though we may need a kind of poetic rethinking and reframing of public school teaching, the profession and, in turn the discussion, remains political. Teachers are in a position of power; we have the ears and eyes of hundreds, sometimes thousands of students over our careers. We hold our students’ fate, and the fate of the society in which they live, in our hands by means of what we do and do not teach them. Teachers are also in a position of powerlessness; we are mandated to teach standardized curriculums and to deliver standardized, often externally imposed, assessments and evaluations; our careers are held by school board and government administrators who, increasingly, through increased privatization, can find us redundant and dismiss us. Again, we must consider alternative positions:

We cannot negate the fact of power. But we can undertake a resistance, a reaching out toward becoming *persons* among other persons, for all the talk of human resources, for all the orienting of education to the economy. To engage with our students as persons is to affirm our own incompleteness, our consciousness of spaces still to be explored, desires still to be tapped, possibilities still to be opened and pursued. (Greene, p. 95)

If teachers choose to think of students as resources, as products for the machinations of society, and the economy it currently embraces, then they cannot be blind to the fact that they are as well. If teachers turn their backs to the students who, perhaps due to factors of ethnicity, socio-economic background, deficit perception, or learning ability, all of which are out of their control, are struggling to find a voice in the present incarnation of schooling, we turn our back on society as a whole. However, if educators openly question the roles of both our students and ourselves, in school and beyond, if we consider the possible positions from which to teach, we may truly educate students and potentially play a part in the transformation of society. For this to become a

reality, “educational discourses and practices need to be reconnected to a progressive emancipatory project based upon solidarity and social justice” (McCarthy, Pitton, Kim, & Monje, 2009, p. 48). If teachers are to become transformative educators, the transformation of their classroom selves may not be enough.

“Pedagogy of Possibility”

When I first introduced the concept for this thesis to my supervisor, Professor Lewis, she prepared for me a reading list. Although I read everything on that initial list and everything on many, many later lists, two books from that original list framed my thinking in fundamental ways. The first is Elizabeth Ellsworth’s (1997) *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address*, from which the notion of positions in education, rather than sides, was developed. It is difficult not to take sides in matters one is passionate about. I slipped back, too often, to arguing for or against one side or another. My thesis committee member, Professor Martin, reminded me, time and again, that envisioning a “right” and a “wrong” methodology in education reduces the infinitely textured and complex reality of teaching and learning to a simplistic polarity. And, although I have come to understand and embrace the necessity of moving beyond sides and considering infinite positions, I know that, to some extent, the sides lurk in the shadows of this thesis.

The second book, Roger Simon’s (1992) *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility*, helped me understand teaching and education in a completely new way. Simon suggests that, due to the hegemonic institutionalization of both past and present manifestations of schooling, “a teacher’s work within an institutional context specifies a particular version of what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and

how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment” (p. 56). This “specified version” of “what knowledge is of most worth” is reminiscent of Dewey’s (1938) traditional education and Freire’s (2000) banking model. The notion that there are “truths” out there, known by those with power (teachers) and disseminated to those without (students), is also fundamental to the work of Foucault (1977 & 1980). These truths become symbolic of power and authority and can be used to oppress.

However, “existing, taken for granted ‘ways of life’ are value-laden human constructions and thus open to critique and revision” (Simon, 1992, p. 21). As Lessing (2013) said, “Everywhere, if you keep you mind open, you will find the truth in words *not* written down. So never let the printed page be your master” (p. 18). To consider the possibilities in pedagogy, educators must revise their notions of what knowledge and understanding is. Are we to disseminate “value-laden” truths framed by the authorities of history, or are we to seek out experiential understandings of the spaces in which we live? Simon argued that, “for diversity and dignity to flourish within an ethos of care and cooperation, everyone must be able to live under social and political conditions that enable us to assume the obligations of our mutuality” (p. 26). I would add that, as teachers, part of our obligation is to recognize that propagating the “knowledge” that has been deemed to have the most worth by employers, in curriculum documents, and through standardized assessments may not create for our students the “social and political conditions” through which “diversity and dignity [might] flourish.”

Central to Simon’s “pedagogy of possibility” is the goal of constructing “an education rooted in a view of human freedom” (p. 57). To first understand the necessity of this form of education and to begin working toward it:

will require forms of teaching and learning linked to the goal of educating students to

take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world that is ‘not yet’ – in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived. (p. 57).

I would argue that the first step toward an “education rooted in human freedom,” or as Freire (2000) would put it, an “emancipatory education,” teachers must first consider their own “ongoing power relations.” We successfully navigated the present form of schooling, which critical pedagogues, like Simon, argue is intended to replicate dominant forms of ideology and maintain class divisions and economic inequality. How then, do teachers disindoctrinate themselves sufficiently so as to see the power relations they may be paid to sustain?

Simon suggests that teachers are “cultural workers” who should contest dominant ideologies and strive to make meaning of themselves and their world. He suggests that his writing on teachers as cultural workers is “intended as a discursive intervention whose goal is to constitute, organize, and articulate a new set of relations between education and other practices of semiotic production” (p. 39). Teachers are tasked, then, to both question and “contest dominant forms of cultural production” rather than reiterate and reproduce them in their classrooms. Simon states that he is attempting, through his pedagogy of possibility, to create:

a provision of a ‘contravision’ to that one-dimensional view of schooling as a socializing institution whose aim is to regulate a sense of human possibility in support of the interests of the ruling bloc constituted within privileged positions of gender, class, race, ethnic, regional, and sexual relations. (p. 30)

He further states that, “This is the refusal to acquiesce; to fit ourselves within the existing practices through which we understand and rule ourselves and one another” (p. 30).

Lewis and Simon (1986) assert that truly progressive pedagogy, grounded in possibility, will always entail:

a struggle over assigned meaning, a struggle over discourse as the expression of both form and content, a struggle over interpretation of experience, and a struggle over ‘self’. But it is this very struggle that forms the basis of pedagogy that liberates knowledge and practice. It is a struggle that makes possible new knowledge that expands beyond individual experience and hence redefines our identities and the real possibilities we see in the daily conditions of our lives. The struggle is itself a condition basic to the realization of a process of pedagogy: it is a struggle that can never be won – or pedagogy stops. (p. 469)

Though it is a struggle that cannot be won, as it must continue to contest newly formed ideologies of dominance and oppression, it is a struggle that must forever attempt, as Benjamin (1973) stated, to “wrest tradition away from a conformism” (p. 255). It is a struggle that must begin in more classrooms and take hold in more schools.

Risk and Reward

Throughout my career I have attempted to develop curriculum for the students I have taught from the spaces they are in, rather than frantically mete out what was given to me by ministry, board, and school. I have often suspended the expectations of my employers and administrators, and of externally imposed assessment criteria; I have asked students to co-design our work collaboratively. I know now, that I have been trying to develop a “pedagogy of possibility.” And, like Wagner’s (2012) teachers of innovators, I, too, have felt like an outlier in

the buildings in which I have taught. Some administrators I have worked with applaud the risks I have taken, others admonish them. That said, I have never felt more engaged in the classroom when I teach from positions of possibility and aim toward directions unknown. I have very few behavioural issues in my classrooms and I truly believe that this is because students are never more engaged than when we gather together, find and exercise our voice, and challenge absolutely everything.

Hearing from colleagues that my philosophy and methods, that my teaching position is unproductive, even dangerous, is not new. Educators who embark on critical teaching, with a focus on student empowerment, can often find themselves on the margins of their profession. While teaching in an inner-city secondary school with ethnically and socio-economically marginalized students, I was often told that empowering adolescents to question the power structures of society, including the roles of teacher and student, can only cause chaos. Many teachers were already afraid of their students, therefore, empowering them was a non-starter.

While teaching at a school that offered secondary courses to adults who, for a myriad of reasons: teen pregnancy, poverty, criminal behaviour, for example, did not complete high school, I was told that asking students to question what was wrong with school rather than reminding them what was wrong with themselves could only add to their frustration and anti-social ideologies. As an intermediate elementary teacher in a predominately white middle-class neighbourhood, I am reminded, by colleagues and parents, on an ongoing basis, that asking students to think and talk about the social issues of their world is just too scary for children and can only end in creating unnecessary fear and anxiety.

I have worked with teachers who have openly criticized my teaching position and my practice, who have earnestly challenged the possibility of anything positive coming from

fostering student voice in the classroom. I have met with parents who wanted their children to come home and quietly fill in multiplication worksheets at the kitchen table every night, who were puzzled, perhaps even frightened, at the suggestion that their children would benefit from questioning their world and asking their parents why things are the way they are. I have worked with administrators who demanded I follow every word of the curriculum and prepare students, not for the potential world ahead, but for publically scrutinized standardized testing, who wandered through my often vociferous classroom, clearly distressed at what they saw as a lack of structure. I have worked with students who did not welcome a classroom environment in which they were asked to participate in the creation of what we studied, of how we studied, and of how we assessed our success. Many students cannot envision an alternative to the readymade structure of readymade curriculum; many students want, simply, what they are used to. As Lewis (1992) said, “We cannot expect that students will readily appropriate a political stance that is truly counter-hegemonic” (p. 187) unless we first acknowledge that challenging existing, inherently inequitable, power relationships is unsettling, even threatening.

What we are used to might be more convenient, but what we are used to may be extremely problematic. It may only work for some. As critical education theorists (Ellsworth, 1997; Giroux, 1988; Lewis, 1992; McLaren, 2009; Simon, 1992) have suggested, what we are used to was, in fact, designed to only work for some. When “back-to-basics” politics is on offer, who gains by going back? We must remember that our past is rife with racism, sexism, and a host of other systemic discriminations. When Mr. Trump demands that US citizens join him to “make America great again,” they might pause and ask, great for whom? Keeping in mind a history laden with slavery, patriarchy, homophobia, and environmental degradation, at what historical moment was America great? They might recall that their presidential candidate has

said, openly and unapologetically, “we won with poorly educated — I love the poorly educated” (Benac & Peoples, 2016, p. 1). Back to what? And great for whom? These are integral questions for society and essential questions for public schooling. Another important question is, why are we going back at all? Why are we not moving forward and imagining possibilities for what our collective future might be?

Questioning what we are used to and questioning what we are sold is difficult. Creating something new is even harder. As Marx (1898) observed over 150 years ago, “The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (p. 1).

The questions asked at the outset of this chapter remain. What does a healthy society look like? What does a healthy public school look like? What does effective teaching, teaching which might lead toward healthier schools and healthier societies, look like? If we are to talk of improvement we must also ask, what does success mean? For those who are successful in the public school system, can we say that having learned the skills necessary to perform acceptably in the working world, a world designed, dictated, and profited from by those with extreme wealth, is a genuine form of success? Are the very wealthy, who receive elite private school educations and go on to oversee the working world and the working class, the criterion for success? Or, is this definition of success part of the problem? Perhaps. Perhaps not. In each case the societal status quo of extreme inequity and marginalization continues. In each case the molds are hard to break. The “tradition of dead generations” continues to dictate directions, to force positions. Rather than asking which student is successful and why, rather than asking which system of schooling is successful and why, the question may be, has any past or present form of schooling been successful? However, creating success criteria for education itself, rather than for the students struggling to get one, is a risky venture.

Conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to articulate the possible positions from which educators might teach in public schools. To genuinely consider possible alternative positions I believe that teachers must first fully explore the positions from which we have been taught. Under what regime of truth were we instructed? How does our success in school influence our notions of what school is and what school should be? From a broader stand-point, how is teaching complicit in the maintenance of social norms which, in both historical and present incarnations, are marginalizing? Should we teach “existing, taken for granted ‘ways of life’” (Simon, 1992, p. 21), or should we “be organized around establishing the ideological and material conditions that would enable men and women from oppressed classes to claim their own voices” (Giroux, 2001, p. 116)?

I have explored, in the previous chapters, where we are and where we have been in public education. I have attempted, in this chapter to consider the possible positions from which we might develop, articulate, and employ a pedagogy of possibility. In the final chapter I will conclude this thesis by examining the ways in which we might choose new directions, the risk new pedagogical positions entail, and the potential outcomes of seeking out new possibilities in teaching and in learning.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

To transform what – and how? To move beyond ourselves – and where?... How can we (decently, morally, intelligently) address ourselves both to desire and to purpose and obligation? How can we awaken others to possibility and the need for action in the name of possibility? How can we communicate the importance of opening spaces in the imagination where persons can reach beyond where they are?

--Greene, *In Search of Critical Pedagogy*, 2009

Only one thing's sadder than remembering you were once free, and that is forgetting you once were free.

--King, *Prison writings: My Life is My Sundance*, 1999

Having Learned What Has Been, We Consider What Can Be

Public education was built on a factory model because it was designed by factory owners to be factories. The product of these factories, rather than cars or sewing machines, would be skilled labour. Not only would public schools train workers to toil in the factories of the industrial age, they would clean the streets of the idle and the poor. Remembering Foucault (1977), it is no more accidental that schools look like factories than they look like jails. In public schools the children of the poor could be trained and schooled; they would also be introduced to an ideology of inequity, to social surveillance, and to economic and class punishment.

However, very quickly, in less than 50 years of its inception, theorists began to realize and convey a radical suggestion, that schooling could be educational for all students, not just the privileged. What if teachers asked students about what they wanted to learn? What if teachers taught students more than work skills and more than the three Rs? What if students taught

teachers about their lives and questioned their role and the social class into which they were born? Frightening questions for those in power.

In the 70s and 80s, educational theorists would take the notion of empowering students and creating student voice even further; some would question the very fabric of democracy; others would suggest that only by directly challenging those in power and insisting that schooling become a refusal of hegemonic truths and an exercise in freedom, could education become truly emancipatory. Critical pedagogues attempted to look behind the curtain; they attempted to uncover and unravel the complex machinations of public schooling. Some found nothing but systemic marginalization and oppression. Others found avenues of hope and possibility.

Revolutionary notions of the possibilities of public schooling are often systemically thwarted by economic interests, driven by the unfettered capitalism of neoliberalism. Whilst critical pedagogy theorists, transformative leaders, and emancipatory teachers worked to help students find their voice, with which they might challenge the oppressive marginalizations in schools and in society, capitalist profiteers sought out ways to profit from not only the product of schools but from schools themselves. It was proclaimed by those with vested capital interest that public schools were broken. Some suggested that public management's inefficient use of public funds broke them. Some suggest that the whole system should be turned over to private interests to be fixed. If, at first, the systemic defunding and turn to privatization of public schooling is not bought by the public, crisis in public schooling can be created to prove how desperate the situation is. Means can be implemented to prove that public schools and public school teachers are not accountable. Standardized curriculum and standardized assessments can be mandated to

provide the data-driven accountability that corporate interests need to further privatize public schools and profit from not only their products but their design and delivery.

In private non-unionized schools, teachers and administrators can be judged not by the education that students receive but, rather, by the scores they achieve on externally imposed standardized assessments. Teachers or administrators who question the new private corporate structure of schooling can quickly be fired and replaced in tragically underemployed economies.

Yet, nothing is permanent. Change is always an option.

Shortly after the inception of publically funded schooling in North America, a movement started to completely alter the very notion and purpose of schooling. Early theorists suggested making it something it was never designed to be: educational. And, in many ways they were successful. The public schools of today are so much more than people factories. They are neighbourhood hubs of activity. They are places of increasing equality. They are places of ongoing discussion, of hope, and, in so many ways, they are the foundation of social revolution.

Who is Public Schooling Going to Be?

I hope that I have shed some light on *what* public schooling was designed to be and on *what* it has become. I am unsure, nearing the end of my research and my writing, if asking *what* it *should* be is the right question.

I have spent almost two decades working with intermediate and senior students. Students at these levels are asked, all the time, “What are you going to be?” They are repeatedly asking themselves, “What am I going to be?” They wonder if they will be astronauts or athletes, carpenters or cardiologists, dentists or dog-catchers. For quite some time now, I have been

suggesting that these are not the questions they should be asked or that they should be asking. I ask my students, “Who are you going to be?” I ask students to ask themselves, “Who am I going to be?”

I believe what we are and who we are to be very different things. I offer myself as an example. What I am is a long list and the following is not all inclusive. Presently, I am: a male, a son, a father, a husband, a brother, a teacher, a student, and a social justice activist; I am: Canadian, heterosexual, able-bodied, and lots and lots of other things depending on when I am asked and the perspective from which I am being asked. All of the elements that make up what I am are impermanent. I might not be a teacher next year. I might not be a husband. I might move to another country. I might have a disabling accident. I might come to a realization about my sexual orientation. I can choose to change my gender. All of the elements that make up what I am are state-dependent and mutable. Should they change, I do not believe that they would dramatically alter who I am.

Who I am is different. The who I have made myself to be is not done being made and thus not a permanent aspect of me either, but it is at the core of my being. I want to define myself more as trustworthy than as teacher. Who I am is also a long list and neither is the following all inclusive. Presently, I believe myself to be: honest, trustworthy, quick to judge, consistent, temperamental, constantly questioning, and empathetic; I am trying to be: open, non-judgemental, keenly aware, and more optimistic. Perhaps the differences between what I am and who I am is that the elements that make up who I am are aspects of me that I am actively working on. I am conscious of wanting to be less judgemental, for example.

It is difficult to ask *who* public schools are going to be, to ask what will be at their core. What we can ask, and I believe we must ask, is *who* are the teachers of public schooling going to be, and *who* are the students of public school going to be.

Hope Begins with the Question

Educators who choose to question the standardization of education and create individualized, student driven, progressive educational opportunities that will potentially open doors and function as a form of emancipation for all, may come to realize that questions are more important than answers. This is not a conventional approach. It may risk unsettling students, parents, colleagues, and employers. It may risk losing opportunities for professional advancement. It may risk careers. Educators who choose this direction, this teaching position, do so, often alone, often in an environment that is not conducive to change. However, their choice, and in turn their risk, might provide students “with the knowledge and skills and concepts relevant to remaking a dangerous and disordered world” (Connell et al., 1982, p. 208).

Like Sanchez (2012), I have repeatedly asked myself the question, “How can we teach fully and honestly about the enormity of injustice in the world and yet not totally discourage students?” (p. xii). How can we do this and not discourage ourselves. Like Sanchez, I continue to realize the same answer, “I think that ‘hope’ begins with students’ experience in the classroom” (p. xii).

Although teachers who attempt to create transformative educational opportunities often feel alone in their schools, they cannot embark on progressive pedagogies alone. The teacher’s most important ally in developing transformative education is their students. This was not lost on

Dewey:

The way is, first, for the teacher to be intelligently aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences of those under instruction, and secondly, to allow the suggestion made to develop into a plan and project by means of further suggestions contributed and organized into a whole by the members of the group. The plan, in other words, is a co-operative enterprise, not a dictation. (1938, p. 71)

This is not to say that one would not develop lessons based on the horrors of racism for students who have or are presently experiencing racism. Quite the opposite. It is the educators' role to know their students, as best they can, and allow them to guide the development of the lessons on racism. Where to start, where to focus, and where we might end must be collaboratively decided upon to elicit the voice of students as they reflect on past experiences and make connections between themselves and the world.

It is not the role of the transformative educator to merely present information, but, with their students in mind, to offer and guide learning opportunities about the construction of information, its meaning, and implications. "Critical theorists seek a kind of knowledge that will help students recognize the *social function of particular forms of knowledge*" (McLaren, 2009, p. 63). And, as students, alongside their teachers, work through difficult and sensitive material from the past and shed light on the inequities of the present, both parties are tasked to make meaning out of who they are and who they will be in the world. "Hope comes from being part of the solution" (Sanchez, 2012, p. xiii).

One would not be hard-pressed to enter any public school today and see the signs of charity at work: food drives at Christmas, trips to socio-economically depressed developing

countries to build schools, UNICEF boxes collecting change for the needy. However, what is the place of such charity? One could argue that bandages are sometimes necessary when there is so much bleeding. Yet, when we ask students why the charity is needed, why some are poor and some are rich, one might be hard-pressed to find an answer. Teachers can send students door-to-door to collect used boots for children in First Nations communities for example, but we cannot stop there. Transformative educators must spend time investigating the historical and systemic racism toward Indigenous Peoples and the social and economic benefit that Europeans derived from this discrimination. All the time spent in schools on charity drives must be combined and intertwined with educating children on the social construction of poverty. “It is important that our students realize that what’s needed is not a kind of charity to save the downtrodden, but that people are already fighting for better lives, and our role is simply to do our part in solidarity” (Sanchez, p. xiii). Educators must attend to the bleeding, help their students empathize with those who are bleeding, and ask their students to question why some are bleeding and others are not. “Students must be brought to understand that social justice, not charity, will heal the wounds of the Earth and its people” (Lewis, 2016).

In asking students to do their part, educators must ask the same of themselves. Charity has become so convenient for so many of us that it comes to our door. It phones us. It provides ready-made mail-ins, direct deposits, and convenient tax receipts. We are asked for a dollar or two as we check out at the grocery store. Sometimes competitions are held, complete with prizes, between charitable organizations and institutions. Teachers in Ontario are given a United Way donation form in our school mailboxes every year, just before Christmas, tax receipt attached. For transformative educators this is an incredible teaching opportunity. Imagine every teacher, rather than simply donating money, bringing that form to their classrooms and encouraging a

discussion about the causes of inequality and asking students what *they* might do to reduce it. Empowering students to better understand the social function and construction of knowledge is a process of empowering ourselves:

Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any conversation that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. (hooks, 1994, p. 21)

Teachers, too, must open themselves to the “enormity of injustice in the world.” In doing so they can create spaces and opportunities to, along with their students, derive hope from the possibility of “being part of the solution.” Students and teachers, together, must come to understand that, as they seek to reform the world they live in, as they aim toward communities based on equity and social justice, charity will no longer be needed. In doing so, all are empowered to take part in the revisioning and re-creation of our global society.

To open one’s self in this way, in potentially hostile institutional environments, in the midst of hegemonic status quo, in competition with the propaganda of hyper-capitalism and neoliberal individualism, to actively circumvent standards and collaboratively create both the means and whatever ends are achieved, is risky. This type of teaching and learning has no prescribed outcome. “Teaching about and across social and cultural difference is not about bridging our differences and joining us together in understanding. It’s about engaging in the ongoing production of culture in a way that returns yet another difference” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 139). We cannot know what we will find through truly democratic social justice teaching and, I would argue, we should not have to justify engaging in socially just pedagogy because it does not have a defined endpoint. True learning does not fit in a box. And, perhaps most importantly,

it cannot be achieved alone. As Readings (1996) said, “To do justice is to recognize that the question of justice exceeds individual consciousness, cannot be answered by an individual moral stance” (p. 162). And, as we seek out new, undefined, intentionally unpredictable and paradoxical knowledge and understanding together, aiming toward a socially just, ethical, and democratic pedagogy, we must also remember that, “No knowledge can save us from risk taking” (Readings, 1996, p. 154).

Change Entails Risk

Choosing to ask critical questions about your profession is always dangerous. When one chooses to do so, one risks learning that they do not like what they do and, potentially, they may not like aspects of what they are. For teachers this may hold extra weight. Teachers, unlike most other professions, have spent almost all of their life in the same space. We transition from students doing mandated time in schools, to students voluntarily investing a great deal of time, money, and effort in post-secondary schools, to, hopefully, being employed and paid to work as teachers in schools. We do not stray far from our beginnings. Our ability to criticize ourselves is compounded and compromised by the fact that we realise our profession by being successful at doing exactly what we eventually get paid to ask others to do. An educator might ask, how can schooling be so flawed when I was so successful at it? It is always difficult to look behind the curtain:

The challenge for teachers is to recognize and attempt to transform those undemocratic and oppressive features of hegemonic control that often structure everyday classroom existence in ways not readily apparent. These oppressive features are rarely challenged since the dominant ideology is so all inclusive that individuals are taught to view it as

natural, commonsensical, and inviolable. (McLaren, 2009, p. 68)

Seeing who one is inside a system in which one has always existed, and which one has successfully navigated, is incredibly difficult. It can be extremely unsettling. However, teachers who truly wish to educate must take this risk and attempt to confront and potentially transform themselves if they are to create transformative opportunities for their students.

Change is not easy. I have been attempting to teach critically for many years and yet often find myself mired in the minutiae of standardized curriculum expectations and upcoming evaluations and assessments. The constant hum of the machine of schooling, like the aging boiler in the basement of the school itself, is impossible to ignore. “Even those of us who are experimenting with progressive pedagogical practices are afraid to change” (hooks, 1994, p. 142). That said, it is only through change that we can offer truly educational opportunities to our students, in the hopes that they will be empowered in their world and seek to re-envision it. “If we really want to create a cultural climate where biases can be challenged and changed, all border crossings must be seen as valid and legitimate” (hooks, 1994, p. 131). It is a risk for me to engage in the process of transforming myself and a risk to ask students to allow me entrance into their transformations. But these are necessary risks. The act of crossing borders and taking risks, both as students and as teachers, is inextricably linked to the act of positioning oneself to consider, through new lens, how we see ourselves and our world. Only by crossing borders can we begin to understand from where we have been taught and from where we are teaching.

In reiterating the potentially unique fears of teachers to critically assess themselves and their profession, it should be mentioned that, from my perspective, teachers are uniquely afraid of failure. Public school teachers see failure and the fall-out of failure in their classrooms every day. We may feel, may have even been told by administrators or parents, that we have failed a

person. To fail at teaching is to fail another human being, often a child. Perhaps this failure holds many teachers to methods of the past. They might think, whether this works or not, at least I am not the only one doing it. This notion, I believe, is one which sustains oppressive historically conventional and standardized methodologies. Educators must take on the risk of failing, knowing that they can get back up and that their students will help them. Educators are agents of change, helping students to change and to find themselves, to become agents of change in their own fashion. We must consider, as Ellsworth (1997) so simply puts it, “there is an undecidability to teaching. The good teacher is the one who gives what s/he doesn’t have: the future as undecidable, possibility as indeterminable” (p. 173).

This is, of course, not what many of us hear from Ministry of Education officials, school board superintendents, or school principals, who so often speak of closing achievement gaps on standardized assessments. In the last four years, I have sat through hour after hour, day after day, of mandated professional development in Math. The reason for this focus on Math, as I outlined in a previous chapter, is that Grade 6 EQAO Math scores have been lower than expected, province wide, over the past four years. What I, and many of my colleagues are hearing is that we will be “good teachers” when our students’ Math scores improve. I have been instructed to seek out a very clear, decidable, and determinable outcome.

Critical pedagogues, practicing undecidability in hopes of creating transformative opportunities for their students, may feel like little fish in the ocean of education. Hegemony and the status quo, along with increasing standardization and movements toward privatization, may appear to be whales in comparison:

Freire advocated for liberatory teachers to struggle against hegemonic ideologies of inequality in their classrooms, but, as Freire also recognized, the reality of

implementation in any context means that oppressive forces are also at play in the battle of ideologies. Often, as is currently the case in the United States, these other factors are more powerful than liberatory ones. (Au, 2009, p. 228)

This reality necessitates a great deal of resolve. Emancipatory educators must recognize what they are up against, and work to transgress the powerful stake holders in public schooling who wish to further standardize and privatize for economic gain. Au (2009) references Freire and Macedo (1995) and reminds us that “liberatory educators have to be ‘radically democratic’ in their pedagogy, which translates into being ‘responsible and directive’ in the classroom while respecting students’ rights and abilities to come to their own conclusions” (p. 223).

Is all of this worth the risk? Is it actually necessary for effective teachers to question everything about themselves and their world, potentially seeing a side of themselves and their profession which they do not want to see? I think it is. I agree with hooks (1994), who said, “This risk is ultimately less threatening than a continued attachment to and support of existing systems of domination, particularly as they affect teaching, how we teach, and what we teach” (p. 131). I believe that the alternative to taking risks as educators, to crossing borders and seeking out new teaching positions, is accepting that schools were built to produce better workers for the wealthy and that current reforms will further monetize schooling so that both the products of schools and schools themselves will become means of profit. I believe that the alternative is the continuation of movements toward accountability and standardization which do not serve students or society, which are brought on by manufactured crisis and notions of a privatized fix. I believe that the alternative is accepting constructed inequalities and marginalization in our society and standing by as social and economic gaps widen. I believe that the alternative is handing out bandages to slow the bleeding, rather than stitching the wound.

Considering Possible Positions from which to Take a Stand

I not only agree with the majority of the arguments Dewey (1938) put forward in *Experience and Education*, I am inspired by them. He seemed to see, so shortly after its inception, the possibilities of publically funded schooling. To me his assertions seem so straight forward, almost obvious. There is one position, however, which Dewey proposed that I do not find straight forward, that I must go back to, and remind myself of, repeatedly. He declared that:

It is the business of an intelligent theory of education to ascertain the causes for the conflicts that exist and then, instead of taking one side or the other, to indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices and ideas of the contending parties. (p. 5)

Like much of what Dewey wrote, this is insightful and progressive. It is certainly true that “it is the business of an intelligent theory” of anything, particularly those things inextricably tied to the fabric of our society such as public education, that all positions are considered and “a deeper and more inclusive” representation of “practices and ideas” is articulated. It is, however, particularly for “contending parties,” awfully difficult.

Increasingly, the debate in most things political, certainly in education, is more corporate than collegial. It is increasingly, as Chomsky (1988), Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett (1982), and Klein (2007) warned, saturated with propaganda. It will certainly take a great deal of effort to move forward, as Dewey suggests, “proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive” (p. 5) than the simplicity and polarizing binary of conflicting sides, and frame the debate itself in pedagogy rather than conflict. But, I will try. I will add this to my list of who I want to be as I consider the positions from which I might teach.

To take risks, to cross borders, to consider potential teaching positions, and embark on

pedagogies of possibility necessitates that we never forget how textured and complex any talk of education is. I believe that my goal, as a potentially transformative educator and citizen, must remain to proceed “from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices and ideas of the contending parties” (Dewey, p. 5). Which is to say that the directions in which my students and I aim, the positions from which I teach, and the positions from which they learn must never originate from contending assumptions or end in binary conclusions. This can only result in blaming and exclusion at a time when I believe we desperately need cohesion and collaboration in education. That said, we cannot move forward while standing still. I believe, as Kearney (1988) suggested, that “we reach a point in the endless spiral of undecidability where each one of us is obliged to make an ethical and political decision, to say *here I stand*. (Or, at the level of collective responsibility, *here we stand*)” (p. 361). Feathers may have to be ruffled. ”The ground upon which we stand may need to shift” (Lewis, 2016).

I believe that we must discover how our understanding of the past “may be translated into a potent instrumentality for dealing effectively with the future” (Dewey, 1938, p. 23). Once we have considered all potential pedagogical positions, we can utilize an understanding of what has happened in the past, which may be counterintuitive to our present goals, and work toward alternatives. As Apple, Au, and Gandin (2009) argue, there are two important elements to consider regarding present neoliberal and neoconservative educational movements:

First, we can learn about the actual effects of neoliberal and neoconservative policies and practices in education. Second, and even more important, we can learn how to interrupt neoliberal and neoconservative policies and practices and how to build more fully democratic educational alternatives. (p. 12)

Through a greater understanding of the effects of the policies of the past and present, educators

might, with firmer footing, consider new teaching possibilities. To do so, should they choose to do so, they will have to critically analyze themselves, their profession, and their society; “the project of possibility requires the situated refusal of the present as definitive of that which is possible” (Simon, 1992, p. 30). Sitting through hours of mandated professional development (PD) on Math instruction does not mean that I cannot meet with and learn from colleagues who are pushing past standardized expectations in their classrooms and seeking out truly progressive and transformative teaching positions. In fact, mandated PD does not have to, should not have to, be the only or the most important learning that teachers do. Neither should the way we were taught be the guide for our teaching. If, as progressive teachers, we are to ask our students to honestly question us, we must honestly question both our past and our present learning.

Bueno Fisher (2009) reminds us that, for Foucault, “critical thought is directly related to questioning any closed schemes of creating or making history” (p. 205). Which is to say, we must critically assess any history we are offered. We must challenge the stories we were told, and those that we tell ourselves. Freire (2000) was emphatic that we must name the world ourselves, that we cannot allow others to name the world for us, that no true dialogue can take place between those who would name the world and attempt to force that naming onto others who may not be ready, or feel capable, to name the world themselves (p. 88). This is, of course, not only true for teachers but for students as well.

Perhaps in an historically conventional context, teachers believed their work to be naming the world for their students. Perhaps many of us continue, somewhat consciously, somewhat unconsciously, down familiar roads. We are provided with a standardized curriculum which outlines what is expected for students to learn in every grade in every subject. This is easy to follow. Students are then assessed by the standards of EQAO to see if they are working at

grade level. It is not hard to teach to these tests. All of the tests from years past are available online. We can hand them out to students and have them fill them in. Perhaps our principals will point out our great work at staff meetings if we do so. Perhaps less Math PD will be mandated if we do so. But is this teaching? Is this learning?

For progressive educators, it is not. Progressive teachers are critically reflecting on the past and present ends and means of public education. We are seeking out alternatives to the potentially oppressive and marginalizing hegemony of historically conventional practices. We are considering alternative teaching positions from which to educate. We are developing pedagogies of possibility. And, we are taking a stand against superficially accountable standardized methods of assessment. We are constructing classrooms as spaces of transformational possibilities, where students and educators alike take the risk of naming the world themselves and of naming themselves. For if we do not “engage in the process of repositioning,” if we do not “see the world through the eyes of the dispossessed and act against the ideological and institutional processes and forms that reproduce oppressive conditions” (Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009, p. 3), then we can only continue to reproduce them. The job of progressive teachers, of critical and transformative educators, then, may necessitate a movement beyond the walls of our classrooms.

Beyond the Panopticon

In Sanchez’ 2012 interview with Bill Bigelow, editor of *Rethinking Schools*, Bigelow quotes a line from the film *The Ad and the Ego* in which Sut Jhally, the executive director of the Media Education Foundation, says, “We have to get the fish to think about the water.” Reflecting on my work in this thesis, the fish might be seen as teachers and the water might be seen as the

hegemony of historically conventional teaching positions and the pseudo-accountability of standardization. For Bigelow, “Capitalism is the water” (p. xiv). Anyon (2005) agrees. She argues that it is not school that we have to reform to solve our social ills. For her, the problematic must be reversed. For families to have a better nutritional standard, for parents to escape lives of depression and stress, and for public schools to be effective for children, there must, Anyon argues, be a redistribution of income. Oxfam’s 2016 Davos Report found that “62 people own the same as half the world” (p. 1). Indeed, capitalism itself may have to be challenged and reformed before public schooling can genuinely be improved. Knopp (2012) argues, “Even quality education cannot be the antidote for the social ills of the majority without a dramatic restructuring of the economic power structure” (p. 10). For Knopp, public education does need reform, but that reform must come as part of a larger social transformation:

The economy must be changed, along with schools, in order to fundamentally transform education. For radical educators, this would mean that, rather than trying to change society solely (or mostly) through our pedagogy, we need to be involved in struggles for economic justice and democracy in our communities, in our unions, and in solidarity with other workers who are fighting back. (p. 26)

It is the responsibility, then, of progressive educators hoping to transform themselves, their students, and public schooling, to look even further afield and work to transform society. As I suggested earlier, perhaps our students are our best hope. Perhaps only by giving students the space to reconsider past and present ideologies can we set the stage for a generation that has the education to rethink and reform our current positions. Sadly, for students at this historical juncture, one threatened by the social and environmental fall-out of past practices, there may be no alternative to a complete reimagining.

Should we continue to focus on repairing areas of schooling and teaching that need improving, knowing full well that society itself needs a radical reimagining? Resoundingly, yes! In Bale and Knopp's (2012) preface to *Education and Capitalism: Struggles for Learning and Liberation* they contend that:

We should defend public education because so much of what its enemies say about it is a lie. For example, education is supposed to be the cure for poverty. Logically, then, if poverty still plagues our society, our schools must be to blame. The education system becomes a convenient scapegoat for our social problems when, in reality, the blame should be placed on an economic system that rests on low wage jobs. (p. 4)

Rather than fault public education for our social ills and inequities, let us remember the reason it was created: to produce workers for capitalist profit and to maintain and solidify social and economic inequities. We cannot find an institution designed by capitalists to sustain capitalism culpable for the inherent, systemic marginalization and inequity of capitalism. Rather, we can take a stand and collaboratively work toward a reformation of public schooling and, in turn, society. We can reimagine both its means and its ends, teach from alternative positions and collaboratively develop pedagogies of possibilities. Ironically, when we teach from a position of possibility, we create an anti-standardized anti-capitalist form of pedagogy. Ellsworth (1997) said, "Pedagogy, when it 'works,' is unrepeatable and cannot be copied, sold, or exchanged – it is 'worthless' to the economy of educational accountability" (p. 17). Progressive teaching positions are a genuine rebellion against unchecked capitalism and the status quo.

I believe that we must fight to keep publically funded schooling alive so as to keep it from sliding further into the hands of neoliberal profiteers. And, in doing so, we are not alone. McCarthy, Pitton, Kim, and Monje (2009) found that:

against these manifestations of the logics of neoliberalism we are also witnessing a growing resistance, as educators, teachers and students, and disadvantaged citizens fight back against gentrification, school closures, and the wholesale transfer of resources from the public school sectors to private ones. (p. 38)

There is movement. Positions are being considered and reconsidered. Borders are being crossed. Stands are being taken. Alternative possibilities are being created. There are signs of a cultural heave, a shift in ideologies. As we gather strength, take risks, seek out our voices, and help our students do the same we must also look to each other. We must provide space and possibility to those without a voice. The disempowered must wrest time and resources from those who hold them so tightly that they might continue to empower themselves and embark on their own naming of the world. We must find ways, as educators, to enable and empower others, who must, as Freire (2000) demanded, name the world themselves and never allow others to name it for them. It is only “in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it”; and by naming themselves and their world, “they achieve significance as human beings” (p. 88). As Ellsworth (1997) suggested, we have to “give what [we] don’t have: the future as undecidable, possibility as indeterminable” (p. 173). Finally, as Greene (2009) reminds us:

We have to find out how to open such spheres, such spaces, where a better state of things can be imagined; because it is only through the projection of a better social order that we can perceive the gaps in what exists and try to transform and repair. (p. 95)

Last Words

In an attempt to follow in the steps of those who have most influenced me, I will end with hope, with possibility, and with the question: From where will we teach?

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