Changing the System: 
A Narrative Perspective on Education

by

Ana Bahamonde

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts 
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning 
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I follow a journey into narrative inquiry. I explore my experiences as a teacher in two different settings, the private ESL industry and the public school system. Part I combines my experience and those of ESL students. We share our stories within the ESL industry, a business concerned primarily with the accumulation of wealth. Part II examines my dilemmas teaching high school students within a tracking system that perpetuates the hierarchical structure of power and the social division of labour. Part III encompasses my narrative and those of public school teachers, to show how the educational system reproduces the patterns of discrimination against women.

I demonstrate that the concept of education, as providing equal opportunities to everyone, is still an unfulfilled goal. Finally, I hope that the findings and conclusions of my analysis will serve to improve the educational experiences of both students and teachers at all levels.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Johan Aitken, for her patience, assistance, and encouragement throughout this strenuous process. Her insightful guidance is the framework of this thesis. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. David Booth for his support.

I thank all the participants who volunteered to share their personal lives. Their experiences were crucial to my narrative research.

Ellen Wasserman deserves my sincere appreciation for being the mother I never had, and for being an inspiration to strive always for the best. I am also thankful to my sister, Maria Jose, who knows that teachers make dreams come true.

Finally, I would like to thank the two most important men in my life, my father, Franklin Bahamonde, and Fabian Garcia. Without their love and dedication, this thesis would never have seen the light.

In loving memory of my grandfather, Dr. Ezequiel Molina Valdivieso
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**Introduction**

We need to listen closely to teachers and other learners and to the stories of their lives in and out of the classrooms. We also need to tell our own stories as we live our own collaborative researcher/teacher lives. Our own work then becomes one of learning to tell and live a new mutually constructed account of inquiry in teaching and learning. What emerges from this mutual relationship are new stories of teachers and learners as curriculum makers, stories that hold new possibilities for both researchers and teachers and for those who read their stories.

Schwab, 1983

**Narrative as a Form of Inquiry**

People experience storied lives. By recounting our stories and reading the accounts of others, we learn and develop. John Dewey noted the organic connection between personal experience and education (1938). Analysing and exploring such personal experiences enhance a natural learning process, in which the key element is the construction of narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I decided to write a thesis using narrative inquiry because it most appropriately links the study of education with the qualities of human experience. This type of research establishes a bond between theory and practice, and transcends the idea of education as an abstract component of a theoretical field of knowledge.

The aim of my thesis is to plunge the reader into an experiential world of qualitative research. Sharing my experiences both as a student and teacher, and
interweaving my own narrative with other people's stories, I will immerse the reader into a journey of heightened emotions that will allow me to highlight the daily struggles and dilemmas of those who live in the field of education. Through these narratives, I reveal not only the intricate difficulties that I personally have encountered throughout my career, but also the paradoxes that characterize our current educational system. Essentially, my thesis is a critical exploration of the assumption that education provides equal opportunities to all.

**Why I became a teacher**

The essence of the educator does not lie in technical expertise, but in a complex of pedagogical qualities.

Max van Manen, 1993

It is hard to recall the specific day, month, or even the year, in which I made the decision to become a teacher. In elementary school, I often role-played at being a teacher. In high school, I always collected interesting books that I knew would be useful resources for teaching. Throughout, I always kept in mind the imaginary students I would teach in the future.

When I completed high school in 1991, my family and I moved from Germany (where my father had been working) to our country of origin, Ecuador. I was nineteen years old when I was first hired as a part-time High School English teacher. Both young
and inexperienced, I was afraid of those tall young adolescents who stared at me in the hallway as I walked past them into the first period of my morning class.

There were many times when I thought I would never survive the school year. I would go home, cry, and dread the thought of the next day. Sometimes I would be so emotionally exhausted after work that I was able only to gaze, despondently, at the growing pile of notebooks waiting to be corrected. Yet, there were also good times, which made me realize that there was more to teaching than transmitting knowledge. I saw that those rebellious adolescents wanted more than my expertise in the English language. They also wanted my friendship, caring, and trust.

Throughout my six years of teaching experience in Ecuador, I came to understand that teachers are among the most influential persons in a child’s life, both positively and negatively. Their responsibility is to make the learning process a useful and enjoyable experience. From my own school years, I recall that the best teachers were friendly, approachable, caring, kind, and charismatic. These teachers increased my self-confidence. They possessed such mastery in their profession that their friendship never became a barrier to their authority as educators. They also produced a relaxing and comfortable classroom atmosphere, one in which students were free to express their opinions, knowing that their views would be respected. Above all, I always remember the best teachers as the ones who taught me to see the beauty of life, the infinity of our passions, dreams and emotions, and the importance of never giving up, no matter how hard or unfair life may seem.
From my own teaching experience, I have learned that providing all students with equal educational opportunities, teaching them to develop to their full potential, and giving them greater access to the same choices and benefits in the larger society, are not easy tasks. These ideals often are in direct conflict with the reality of the everyday classroom. As I have become increasingly aware of the antagonisms and contradictions that are deeply embedded in the educational system, I have felt the need to look for answers; to seek solutions. I left my homeland and came to Canada to crystalize my dream of becoming a certified teacher, and to pursue my understanding of this complex profession.

The Facade of Equality

Let me suggest again that equality in our sense involves an equal right of every child to achieve excellence, to excel. This is what equality means...

Peter H. Odegard, 1962

The first step toward equity in education is to recognize that students do not have equal opportunity.

Alex Molnar, 1985

I entered the teaching profession believing in the immense possibilities of making a difference in students’ lives, and easing the path of their educational experiences. I truly believed in education as a means of providing equal opportunity to everyone, regardless
of economic background, social class, and gender. Unfortunately, it did not take me long
to realize that equality of opportunity is an ideal that has not yet been achieved, despite
all the rhetoric for educational reform.

Providing equality of education has long been perceived as a means for eliminating
social inequities. However, the contradictions that characterize our complex social milieu
are reflected in society's institutions. Hence, the principle of equality of educational
opportunity in our schools has been tarnished by the practices of the larger society.

Equal opportunities in education should be a basic human right which everyone
should possess simply by virtue of being human, and independent of such factors as
wealth, class, gender, and so forth (Blackstone, 1969). Unfortunately, the social
phenomena of exploitation, class struggle, and sexism are constantly reflected in the
microcosms of our schools.

**Capitalism: Profit, Inequality and Patriarchy**

Repression, individual powerlessness, inequality of incomes, and
inequality of opportunity did not originate historically in the
educational system, nor do they derive from unequal or repressive
schools today. The roots of repression and inequality lie in the
structure and functioning of the capitalist economy.

Bowles & Gintis, 1976a

Under a capitalist mode of production there is an unequal distribution of power,
and it is in the interests of those who hold power to ensure the perpetuation of the status
quo. Maintaining the existing social relations of production is crucial for ensuring the power of the elite, and this is achieved mainly through social institutions (Dale, Esland, & MacDonald, 1982). Thus, our schools have evolved both to meet the needs of a capitalist economy and to provide a mechanism for social control, rather than to ensure equal educational opportunity to all (Bowles, 1972).

To understand the relationship between education and capitalism, it is necessary to review the productive relations that regulate our current socioeconomic and political system:

First, the motivating force in a capitalist economy is the employer’s quest for profit/surplus value. Profits generally are made through hiring workers and organizing production in such a way that the price paid for the worker’s time (the wage) is less than the value of goods and services produced by that labour. Workers sell their capacity to work in order to gain their livelihood. However, because the employer owns the tools, structures, and goods required for production, he possesses power over the workers and a legal claim to the profits (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). When capitalist objectives enter the realm of education, private schooling becomes another arena for the creation and expropriation of surplus value. Knowledge becomes a commodity accessible only to those who can afford the enrollment fees, and the private owners who supply this service will try to maximize their monetary return.

Second, the dichotomy created between employers and workers is reflected not only in increasing economic inequality, but also in the way in which capitalism elects to
educate both of these groups. Influenced by the market, private property, and power relations, the system seeks for employers and workers to have certain technical specifications, skills, and motivational patterns which determine their respective roles in economic productivity. These productive traits become enhanced and reinforced through schooling (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). In this manner, schools allocate students to different positions in the occupational hierarchy and in the production process by imparting different types of knowledge.

Third, the sexual divisions of labour both in the family and in society at large, also strengthen the capitalist mode of production. By excluding domestic work from paid employment, a large pool of cheap and efficient labour is created. Thus, the ideologies and practices of patriarchal capitalism reinforce the secondary socioeconomic status of women (Clarricoates, 1980). Traditionally, schools have provided girls with a different form of schooling from boys, one in which the transmission of gender roles and stereotypes serves to maintain the bourgeois family unit of production. In this context, schools attempt to confine the wife to the private sphere of the home (child-rearing, food preparation, and housekeeping) thereby reducing her access to the public sphere of production and political power. Hence, the respective roles of male as breadwinner and female as homemaker contribute to the patriarchal form of domination in a capitalist economy (Halsey, Lauder, Brown, & Stuart Wells, 1997).

In summary, capitalism is a system whereby one class, because of its position within the socioeconomic structure and political relations, is able to dominate and exploit
another. Such a system is clearly unethical and inconsistent with the most fundamental principles of democracy (Liston, 1988). According to Dewey (1926), democracy is more than a form of government, it is a mode of conjoint communicative experience which repudiates the principle of external authority in favour of voluntary disposition and interest. In essence, it creates a space free from barriers such as wealth, class, gender, and so forth. However, the capitalist imperatives of profit and its rigid patterns of dominance and subordination are in direct conflict with the principles of democracy. Bowles and Gintis (1986) add:

...capitalism and democracy are not complementary systems. Rather, they are sharply contrasting rules regulating both the process of human development and the historical evolution of whole societies: the one is characterized by the preeminence of economic privilege based on property rights, the other insists on the priority of liberty and democratic accountability based on the exercise of personal rights (p.3).

The undemocratic structure of economic life is mirrored in our educational system, in which schools reproduce, contribute, and legitimize the beliefs and values that are congruent with the demands of a capitalist economy. It is the aim of my thesis to demonstrate that by reproducing, implicitly and explicitly, the structure and culture of capitalist social relations, schools fail to provide equality of educational opportunity.
Structure of my Thesis

We learn something new and that may be said to be theory. It becomes practical when it seeps into our personal practical knowledge and becomes part of us so that we act in ways that reflect the new ideas.

Connelly & Clandinin, 1988

After arriving in Toronto in 1997 and obtaining my teaching certificate from OISE/UT in 1999, I had the opportunity to work in two different educational settings, the ESL Private Industry and the Ontario Public School System. The experiences I gathered from these professional ventures, in combination with my early memories as a student, have provided the general framework of my study. The research data collected for my thesis will be presented in three narrative forms: (a) my autobiographical memoirs, (b) my journal entries, and (c) interviews with students and teachers.

Clandinin and Connelly maintain that “autobiographical writing is a way to write about the whole context of life” (2000, p.101). The main purpose of using my memoirs is to reconstruct these experiences, and through that process reveal the lessons I have learned. The second narrative form, journal writing, creates field texts as the basis for constructing research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The journal entries I have included not only provide accounts of my experiences, but also capture inner feelings and dilemmas I have been confronted in the course of those experiences. Finally, the interviews offer true stories both of students and teachers. Their experiences have been juxtaposed with my own, and together suggest the changes especially needed in the
I have divided my thesis into three major sections. In the first section, I discuss both my experiences as a teacher and those of international students in Private ESL Institutes. Teaching and learning English has become one of the most lucrative, competitive, and growing industries. Around the world, entering a local university and getting a good job or a career promotion often depend on proficiency in the English language, a situation which private ESL schools all too willingly exploit.

Through a massive use of propaganda, foreign students are lured to believe that they will master the English language in a very short period of time. How realistic are these promises? Are ESL schools accessible to all? What teaching methodologies are used by these schools, and how effective are they? The experiences of ESL students have been gathered through in-depth interviews, which have captured their perceptions and concerns. How do the students’ academic expectations compare with their actual experiences within the ESL system? Are the schools supportive of students’ concerns and needs? And how productive is their learning experience?

In the second section of my thesis, I will examine the consequences of streaming high school students at the Public School Board level. The current curriculum in Ontario places students in two main areas or streams, academic (previously known as advanced) and applied (general). According to such criteria as motivation, achievement, interests, or a combination of these, students are steered toward a particular educational and occupational career.
Streaming students has an impact on our society as a whole. Is streaming providing equal opportunity to all students? What are the consequences of streaming, and who benefits from it? How does a teacher respond to the different sets of expectations imposed on students?

Extensive research has been conducted on the advantages and disadvantages of streaming, and on the relation of this educational practice to the perpetuation of the hierarchical socioeconomic structure in our society. Less research has been focussed on the frustration and dilemmas which inevitably teachers confront when abiding by these rules. The journal entries included in this section provide reflections on my teaching practices and insights into my emotional response toward streaming.

The third section of my thesis will combine my experiences and those of other female teachers, concerning the issue of gender equity. When young children enter school, they already have developed strong views on sex roles and stereotypes which determine what is masculine or feminine. Throughout their school years, these concepts are reinforced. By the time students reach graduation, schools have successfully socialized males and females into distinctive gender roles. What external factors influence children to develop stereotypical views and gender roles? What internal workings of schools and subtle messages are being sent to students to reinforce these phenomena? To what extent are girls precluded from receiving equal educational opportunity?

Although there is vast research dealing with the issues of gender equity, little has
been done to incorporate teachers’ narratives with the intrinsic and complex social
analysis of gender relations. Experiences of Elementary and High School teachers have
been gathered through in-depth interviews, to demonstrate how the educational system
shows signs of gender inequity both within the curriculum and the classroom. How does
the curriculum cover the contributions of women? Do instructional materials give equal
representation both to males and females? Are there different sets of expectations for
males and females?

Finally, my thesis will offer conclusions and suggestions based on the moral and
educational meanings of experiences that emerge from the field of education. In what
sense is the meaning of equal educational opportunity dependent upon equal opportunity
in society at large? What type of teacher should we become to better enhance the
educational experiences of students at all levels? How should we strive for educational
and social equity?

This narrative is the lens through which I provide concrete moments of
transformative pedagogic possibilities. I do not attempt to offer innovative teaching
methods, but I suggest a context from which such teaching strategies may arise (Lewis,
1993). I hope that those who read this account will be able to grow and develop
personally and professionally as they re-live these narrated experiences. Moreover, my
thesis will make two main points: equal educational opportunity is a goal that has not yet
been fulfilled, and the achievement of this goal will require major changes in the
educational system, as well as the economic and political attitudes of our society at large.
PART I

Education for Profit: ESL Private Language Institutes

And who in time knows whither we may vent
The treasure of our tongue, to what strange shores
This gain of our best glory shall be sent,
To enrich unknowing nations without stores?
Which worlds in the yet unformed Occident
May come refined with the accents that are ours.

Samuel Daniel, 1599

1.1 Introduction: Language and Global Order

Throughout history, languages have been imposed or have spread from one nation to another through the military, cultural, and economic supremacy of its speakers. Languages such as Greek and Latin became the main languages of international communication over 2,000 years ago, because of the political and military power held by their people. The assimilation of an ethnic group within a more dominant society has caused many languages to die in the process. The birth of a global language has hastened the disappearance of many other minority languages. Estimates suggest that perhaps 80 per cent of the world's 6,000 living languages will die out within the next century because of the supremacy of the current global language (Wolfson, 1989).

The success of the British colonial empire as well as the rise of American industrial and technological power have made English the modern global language. The world position of the English language today comprises approximately some 300 million
native speakers, and it is now regularly used as an additional language by many non-native speakers throughout the world. Nearly 40 nations use English in an official capacity within their own borders, and others require that it be learned as a second language (Wolfson, 1989).

Since the 1960's, English has become the normal language of instruction in higher education for many countries where it is not the official language. For example, in the Netherlands, most of the advanced courses at the university level are taught in English. In fact, a great deal of the world's knowledge, especially in areas such as science and technology, is recorded and taught in this language. A 1981 study of the use of English in scientific periodicals showed that 85 per cent of papers in Biology and Physics were written in this tongue, followed by 73 per cent of medical papers, as well as 69 per cent in Mathematics and Chemistry. Moreover, all these areas had shown an enormous increase in their use of English during the preceding fifteen years. In the case of chemistry, it had had an increase of over 30 per cent, and Medicine had had an increase of over 40 per cent (Crystal, 1997).

With the impact of globalization, it is not surprising that English has become the language which is most commonly associated with professional and economic success, hence the large number of people who put a great deal of effort into knowing the language. Teaching and learning English has become one of the world's most lucrative and competitive industries. The pressure and demand of learning English have made the teaching of English as a foreign or second language as much big business as the export of
manufactured goods (Tucker, 1999).

1.2 The ESL Industry

[English] is rapidly becoming the great medium of civilization, the language of law and literature to the Hindoo, of commerce to the African, of religion to the scattered island of the Pacific. The range of its influence, even at the present day, is greater than ever was that of the Greek, the Latin, or the Arabic; and the circle widens yearly. Though it were not our living tongue, it would still, of all living languages, be the one most worthy of our study and our cultivation, as bearing most directly on the happiness of mankind.

E. Guest, 1838

The teaching of the English language is an industry that has been growing around the world for the last thirty years. An example of this phenomenon can be traced from the work of the British Council. In 1996, this institution promoted cultural education and technical cooperation through a network of offices in 109 countries. From 1995 to 1996, over 400,000 candidates worldwide sat English language examinations which were administered by the Council. At one time during that year, there were nearly 120,000 students learning English through this network alone, and for 1997, the Council had estimated that over one billion people would be learning English around the globe (Crystal, 1997).

In many parts of the world, it is a fact that having a good command of English is one of the most important assets a person can have. Getting a good job, a career promotion, or an increase in salary may depend on this factor. Private ESL schools take
advantage of this situation and charge students exorbitant fees, thereby failing to provide
equal educational opportunities to all. Low income students are excluded from learning
English at private institutes and, as it will be analysed in this section, those who can
afford the high fees do not get the quality of education they deserve.

Ironically, students often spend their money only to be prevented from learning the
language efficiently. Individuals studying ESL sit for hours in a classroom, and it is there
that their learning is often thwarted. True learning of a language begins outside in the real
world. The key to learning a language is observing it in action. However, in many cases,
the opposite principle is applied when teaching a language. Students are led to believe
that the longer they are in class, the more they will learn. In reality, the longer they spend
in a poorly-taught class where language is alienated from meaning and context, the less
opportunity they have to learn and apply their knowledge of the language to the outside
world (Gethin, 1997a).

After having worked for over a year in private ESL institutes, I can say with
certainty that the ESL industry is rife with policies of deception, and utilises a pedagogy
of entrapment. The policies of deception involve the grandiose promises that these
institutions make and fail to keep, such as the items included in the cost of the course, the
schools’ facilities, and the type of resources which are made available. The pedagogy of
entrapment refers to the massive use of propaganda which lures foreign students to
believe that by some magical power they will master the language in just a few weeks.

It is very unfortunate to realize that the current monetary structure in which we
live, the global capital economy, has caused the decay of essential social values. Priority is given to personal gain and a lack of concern for others. As I will demonstrate, the ESL industry has not been immune to this trend. The business of teaching English has been set up within a system of structural flaws, which is only concerned with the accumulation of wealth at the expense of others.

Everybody who has learned another language knows that a language requires a lot of self-learning. It is mainly an individual process that requires a lot of personal endeavour, persistence and self-confidence. Therefore, it is very difficult to determine exactly how long will it take one student to learn a language. In my opinion, it is scandalous that some of these institutes, which purport to serve educational purposes, and open the doors to success, are in fact taking advantage of the term “educational” to serve their own ravenous purposes.

1.3 Revisiting my Personal Experience in Private ESL Schools

One theory in educational research holds that humans are story telling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general concept is refined into the view that education and educational research is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers and characters in their own and other’s stories.

Connelly & Clandinin, 1990

In the summer of 1999, I graduated as a high school teacher from the University of
Toronto. I was excited to get out into the real world and put into practice the wonderful and creative pedagogical methods that I had learned during the eight-month program of pre-service. I had already applied to the Toronto Board of Education early in the year and was therefore eagerly waiting for the phone to ring and to be called up for an interview. Unfortunately, the days went by and the phone never rang. Then, the weeks and months went by while I waited impatiently to get a teaching job with the Board. I had hoped to go somewhere for the summer holiday, but since I had not heard from the Board yet, I thought that it would be a better idea to stay in Toronto, just in case the phone might ring for an interview. In the meantime, I decided to look for a job as a private tutor or an ESL instructor.

I must say that I have been blessed with having a wonderful father who has always supported me spiritually, emotionally, and financially. Since my father has represented Ecuador with honour and dignity within the diplomatic core, I have had the opportunity to travel extensively to far away lands, which otherwise I could only dream of visiting. Luckily, and to my advantage, my father’s career has enriched my soul as a human being, and has quenched that intense curiosity that one feels about other cultures, languages, and continents. After learning three languages and possessing a multicultural vision of the world, finding a job as an ESL teacher in South America several years before coming to Canada was not a difficult matter.

I lived for six years in Ecuador, where I worked as an ESL teacher in two international high schools and two private ESL language institutes. My significant
experience as an ESL teacher in South America proved to be a life-saver in the summer of 1999, when I was waiting for the Board to call me for an interview. Since I was determined to put an end to my anxiety, I decided to apply for an ESL teacher position in a private language institute, a job which I found in the classified section of *The Globe and Mail*.

I sent in my résumé via fax, and in no time I was scheduled for an interview. After thirty minutes of answering the usual interview questions, the job was mine. The program coordinator did the usual tour around the school. She showed me all the facilities and introduced me to the four men who constituted the Board of Directors. The school was small, and the corridors were packed with students from all over the world, mainly from Asia and South America. The facilities included a small computer lab for students, a large TV room for students and teachers, and a photocopy and resource room reserved only for teachers. To my surprise, the school did not have a library or a lunch room, though the TV room was used as both a lunch room and social lounge.

By the end of the month, I was called to an orientation meeting which was held at lunch time in the school’s TV room. A total of six teachers had been hired that week, including myself. At the meeting, we immediately proceeded to introduce ourselves, and we also met the staff and administration. Unfortunately, we were not given a syllabus or a core curriculum to follow, because the institute did not have one. The school had no guidelines concerning the various skills of language efficiency that students were expected to acquire from each level. We were also not provided with any grading or
marking criteria. Furthermore, I was surprised that we did not receive any kind of training on how to deal with the difficulties and misunderstandings that could potentially arise in a multicultural classroom. Instead, we were informed of the school’s strict rules, some of which seemed ridiculously harsh:

- One hundred per cent English policy, which required English to be spoken at all times in the school premises.

- Students who were caught talking any other language than English were to be reported immediately to administration, and suspended from attending class.

- If students were more than 10 minutes late, they would not be allowed to enter the classroom, and they were to be sent to administration immediately.

- Students who were absent more than three times in a one month period would be required to repeat the level.

I thought I was going to work for a private language institute where the majority of the students are usually adults, and many of whom are professionals. These students pay large sums of money to the school in order to take these English courses, therefore, these harsh rules seemed to me very unfair and unnecessary.

After my first month of teaching in this school, I felt frustrated with many little things, which in the end amounted to one huge pile of problems that made my job extremely hard to fulfill. For one thing, students did not have textbooks, which meant
that I had to spend a lot of time photocopying the material for all the students in my class. Everyday photocopying took away precious time which could have been better spent preparing for my classes. Since the school had only one photocopy machine, there were constant line-ups of teachers, who tediously waited for their turn to use the photocopy machine. Another problem, about which all teachers complained, was the lack of consideration that administration had for both the staff and students. As soon as a new batch of international students arrived at the school, they were just shoved into any level that had available space. Many students arrived halfway through the course, and most of these late comers struggled endlessly to catch up with the rest of the class.

My second month at the school happened to be at the peak of summer, which meant the high season for the school. My original class of twelve students increased to twenty halfway through the course. This was already breaking the first promise of the school to both teachers and students, which stated that there would never be more than twelve students per class to enable teachers to address students' individual needs. We were all stuffed in a little room, which had no windows, hardly any ventilation, and the air conditioning did not work properly. The summer days dragged on like an endless heat wave, which gradually smothered us. The tiny classroom soon adopted an odour of human perspiration, as my students and I desperately fanned away the drops of sweat, which were constantly being secreted by our bodies. During those stifling summer afternoons, I found it very hard to be a dynamic and enthusiastic teacher. Most of the time I felt sleepy or exhausted from the sweltering heat of the summer. My usual energy had suddenly
vanished as a result of the torrid days, so common to that season.

I also had to deal with the numerous out-of-school activities which were constantly being organized during class time by the administration. Since most of the students participated in these events, there were times when classes were nearly empty. Furthermore, students who did not wish to participate in the school’s outings, often decided that they also had the right to take off some time. Despite the strict rules for tardiness and absenteeism, teachers were left powerless to enforce them.

During my third month of teaching, not long after a new course had started, I noticed that I had a student with special needs in my class. He was a warm and kindhearted sixteen-year-old. He was the kind of student who did all his homework, never missed a day of class, and was always in the classroom five minutes before the bell rang. He was helpful and respectful, always smiling and eager to learn. This bright young boy possessed many wonderful qualities, but he had some difficulty when it came to learning and memorizing. Through the vision of a normal eye, he was immediately outcast as someone at a disadvantage when compared to his fellow classmates. Through my eyes, he was just a slow learner, who was perhaps more capable in many other respects than the rest of the class. However, he needed time, confidence-building, and above all lots of patience. Towards the end of the month, teachers were required to fill out reports on those students who should be recommended to the next level, and those students who deserved to fail. Throughout my years of teaching experience, I have come to realize, that failing a student with special needs paralyses any type of progress that the
student has been able to achieve. Therefore, I felt it necessary to promote this student to the next level. If his advancement was to continue at a steady rate, it was vital to build up his self-confidence.

A week later, this student came to see me with a drooping head and an aura of sadness. He told me that the administration had made him repeat the level despite his passing grade on the final exam and my recommendation. I felt humiliation slowly piercing my heart to pieces. I was appalled at the fact that my professional advice was not being considered, thus causing extreme damage to the student. I decided to talk to the Board of Directors, and to put this matter to rest as soon as possible. For two consecutive weeks, I talked and I bickered with administration, until finally they opted for my student to retake the final test, which he had already passed. They claimed that they needed to verify his level of efficiency. The student passed once again and administration was morally forced to promote the student to the level I had initially suggested. However, this whole procedure of wrangling took away a lot of precious time from the student’s process of learning. The time which was lost was never fully recuperated, and my student had to repeat the level to which he had been finally promoted.

Teachers were further faced with the problem that there was a wide range of ages within the same class. For example, in a class of fifteen students, ten were adults, mostly professionals, whereas the rest were precocious and rebellious teenagers, who had been released from their parents’ authority for the first time. I had to teach two types of students in the same class who had conflicting sets of values. Many of the older students
were continuously upset at the fact that many times I had to spend a lot of instruction time on classroom management. These older students rightly felt that any loss of time was money thrown down the drain.

The school’s resources were scarce and available only for teachers. It was a constant challenge to come up with dynamic and creative lesson plans. At one point, from ten members of staff we went up to twenty-five teachers on board, and we were definitely sinking like the Titanic. We all shared the limited resources, such as the ten tape recorders, of which only six worked properly, one TV, one large video-room, and a few good books. Since the school exercised no control of the teachers who signed out materials, most of the school’s good teaching resources were always missing or lost.

Working in that ESL school was hard enough with all the peculiarities that were part of a normal day, but times were even harder when I had to witness the sexual harassment that most of the young female teachers, including myself, were forced to endure from members of the Board of Directors. I had also heard rumours that sexual harassment was also aimed at the pretty, young, female students. It was not until one day, when I decided to attend to a party organized by the administration, that I was able to verify that the rumours were true. The party was held on a boat cruise along the shores of Lake Ontario. Teachers, administration, and students met outside the school. As soon as everyone was there, we proceeded to walk towards the harbour. I remember that it was a beautiful fresh, summer evening. The light breeze made it possible to hear the soothing ripple of the waves as we approached our destination.
It did not take long for the music to start blasting as the evening grew darker. Soon the sound of the water died against the noise of loud music and laughter. I was having a good time socializing with students and getting to know others, and I decided to take a walk along the deck. It was then that I saw some of the directors flirting and buying alcoholic drinks for some of the female, teenage students. I felt revulsion creeping to the depths of my soul. I realized I was in the wrong setting, and worst of all, I knew that confronting them meant losing my job. My professional, ethical, and spiritual values were clashing against the walls of an unethical and corrupted system, which outwardly claimed to be a respectable and highly academic language school.

During my fourth month of teaching, I had an excellent student who clearly belonged to a high advanced level. For some reason, he was placed in my intermediate level reading class. This student was a fast learner. He knew all the answers to my questions, he had a vast vocabulary, which even surpassed the vocabulary known by students in the advanced level. He could talk for hours on any topic, from Hollywood films to world politics. In a matter of days, I realized that my intermediate reading class would not quench the thirst of this keen and exceptional student. When I brought up this peculiar situation to the attention of the administration, I was told that they were unable to place this student in a higher level, because he had already paid the school for six months. It dawned on me that by placing him in a lower level, the student would be kept longer in the school. This tactic would prevent the student from finishing sooner, and receiving a refund. I had already come across many students who spent thousands of dollars
believing that by sitting in a classroom for five hours a day, for a period of at least six months, they would go back home mastering the language in some miraculous way. They dreamed of being able to get that promotion, or get that better paying job or pass those fearful university exams. It was their money, as well as their precious future, which the language institute held in its hands.

I was further told by the administration not to worry about misplaced students, and to let them just audit the course. I was unable to do what administration had so unscrupulously told me, so I decided it was up to me to challenge this student. I have always believed, that for a student to progress more deeply into the well of knowledge, there must be two important factors which must be considered if the learning process is to be successful:

- The student must be motivated by a topic which provides a genuine personal interest; and,

- The student must be challenged objectively. The challenge is never to be set too high, since this would discourage a student. However, it is also never to be set too low, since then it would no longer be a challenge. How does a teacher determine this? By knowing his or her students by what I call ‘real teacher intuition’.

I took the time and extra effort to study with this student on an individual basis. The first task I assigned him was to read *Long Day’s Journey Into the Night*, by Eugene O’Neill, one of my favourite plays. He read the play in less than a week, and after discussing it together, he was ready to write his first English essay. I was fascinated by
the motivation I had been able to instil in my student. He wrote the most profound and beautifully written essay that I have ever read from an ESL student. He managed to critically analyse a work of literature in a foreign language with ease. His syntax was clear and there were hardly any grammatical mistakes. This student was ready to cope with an English-speaking university.

I soon realized that this student was not misplaced; he did not belong there. His money could very well have been wasted, but I was determined not to let this happen. I will always remember how much he enjoyed discussing the themes, characters and plot. I knew I had touched the inner soul of this student, and that was my fortune.

The last month that I worked there, the administration started making a series of drastic changes. For example, they had promised the teachers a raise, which they failed to keep, they took away the phone from the teachers room “to save money”, they took away our prep time, and they increased our teaching hours. They also established regular meetings which were made compulsory, and which were held during lunch time. We were scorned, we felt de-professionalised, and diminished. Within a week of these new policies, I decided it was time to submit my resignation. Other resignations from fellow teachers eventually followed. Likewise, they felt deceived and let down by the institution.

I was scared and full of anxiety, since I was at a particular moment in my life where I could not afford to be unemployed. I started looking for another teaching position. I had never been very keen in reading the newspaper, but suddenly I became an
addict. During those weeks, I never failed to read the classified sections of either The Globe and Mail or The Toronto Star. After three weeks of agonizing distress, I was finally scheduled for a job interview at another private ESL school. I took the job desperately, without realizing I was heading into the same old vicious cycle. The problem did not lie within a single school, it was a pattern throughout the whole ESL industry.

At first, I was impressed with the fact that this school had a small library. Unfortunately, the library was only for teachers and students had no access to the resources. This school seemed more organized, since the program coordinator gave me a copy of the core curriculum, although the guidelines concerning the outcomes and expectations for each level were missing. Everybody was dressed in those typical ‘bank teller’ suits, and it did not take very long for the program coordinator to tell me, that since this was to be run like a business, I would not be allowed to wear casual outfits. I was not very happy to hear this, since I am the type of person who feels that formal gear constrains the body and represses the soul. However, I knew that if I wanted the job I would have to abide by their rules.

I was also given the teachers’ manual containing the school’s rules and regulations. I was surprised to read that teachers were not allowed to use the phones in the school office. For emergency reasons, teachers were required to use the public phone booth, which was located in the students’ lunch room. Teachers were also not allowed to hang students’ work on the walls. Therefore, the walls of the school looked weathered, flaked and dirty. The atmosphere of this school was dull and gloomy, and as I walked through
the dark corridors looking for my first period classroom, I felt a heavy burden press
against my heart.

My first period class involved teaching pronunciation. I was very concerned since
I had never been trained to teach the phonetics of the English language. I was also
unaware of the features and sounds of my students’ native tongues, therefore, I did not
know what types of drilling exercises would be more efficient. I realized that having my
students imitate and reproduce the sounds which they heard from either the tape recorder
or from me, was not enough. Without the proper guidance, students were often unable to
identify their own mistakes, or to correct them. My students needed to be given an
analysis of the points of pronunciation, stress, and intonation, which I was unable to
provide thoroughly. I am a teacher, but not an expert linguist. How I wished
administration had set up a training program, which would have dealt with the difficulties
in presenting English as a foreign language to a population of culturally diverse students.

As I was preparing the material that I was going to use for my next period, I was
informed of my photocopy limit which could not exceed 120 copies per month. This was
more than I could handle, since I had at least ten to fifteen students in each of my classes,
and I taught five different classes a day. This meant that I had at least sixty students for
that month, and 120 copies could not possibly serve my needs.

Due to these harsh circumstances, I was obliged to buy a small photocopy
machine. Every day, I made photocopies of all my material for every single one of my
students. During the time I worked there, the money came out of my pocket, as I supplied
my students with all the copies that they would need for my course. In the end, the photocopying came to be quite expensive, because I am a teacher who loves to use a lot of different resources. I believe that in order to teach well, one must bring into the classroom as many resources as possible. A teacher cannot attempt to teach successfully from one book only.

This school had absolutely no extra-curricular activities for the students. The dull environment needed some life and some happiness, but nothing I suggested lightened up the place. Throughout my experience as an ESL teacher, I have come to the conclusion that having too many school activities during class time eventually comes into conflict with the goals of instruction. However, having no activities at all prevents students from applying their knowledge to real life situations. Moreover, no venture was taken to bridge the wide, icy gap between administration, teachers, and students. While I worked there, I never met the director or other members of administration, apart from the program coordinator. Overall, I can say that there was no communication among the members of the institute.

As the months dragged along, I struggled constantly with the fact that I had to work another day in that school. I was depressed and unmotivated. I had finally made my dream of becoming a teacher come true, yet I could still not find a place where I was allowed to freely bestow the assets which had taken me so long to achieve.

The students loved me because I taught not for the monthly pay check, but for love. Fellow colleagues stared at me with envy and resentment, and administration ignored my
whole existence. Only my students kept me from putting in my resignation. I woke up early every morning for my students, wishing only to see and talk to them. My students became my only friends. They were the only ones who acknowledged my hard work, and above all, the only words of gratitude I have ever heard came from them.

Even though I tried to remain faithful to my students’ educational strife, after a few long months of labourious sacrifice, I was driven away by those external forces of a market economy that promote a business, not a school. Once again, I realized that I had fallen into the trap of a deeply flawed system. I put in my resignation, and I decided to walk away, never once looking back, but always looking forward. I knew that my quest for a new and better tomorrow was not over, it had only begun.

1.4 Multicultural Experiences: Students’ Narratives

What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives.

Carolyn Heilbrun, 1988

Methodology

Language researchers such as Calkins (1983) claim that life’s narratives are the context for giving meaning to school situations. Due to its focus on experience and the
qualities of life and education, narrative is situated in the area of qualitative research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), narratives emphasize the lived experience as a cognitive and emotional one. Thus, narrative develops a sense of morality by providing an emotional tone to the authorship of moral choices, actions and feelings (Tappan & Brown, 1989).

By presenting my students’ narratives in private ESL schools, I have attempted to reconstruct a moral and educational meaning of their lived experiences. As a qualitative researcher, I was concerned about the difficulties of learning and teaching in an anti-pedagogical, economically motivated setting. This research has provided a useful structure which has encouraged reflection, analysis, and understanding of the constant struggle and fears which culturally diverse students have to face when learning a new language in a strange and unfamiliar country. My research will serve as evidence of the radical educational and pedagogical reform which is needed within the ESL industry.

Through in-depth interviews, I documented the experiences of five international students. They will be referred to as students A, B, C, D and E, in order to respect their confidentiality. The interviews were semi-structured, and as open-ended as possible. I encouraged the students, who volunteered for this research, to share with me their stories of what it is like to learn English in a private ESL school abroad. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and both translated and interpreted. My purpose is to provide a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning process of ESL in a setting which prioritizes profit maximization.
Data Analysis

The current trends of the globalization of a capital economy have made learning English an imperative for many people. Therefore, it is not surprising that English has emerged as the language of opportunity, and learning it has become a necessity for many people around the world.

One of the first questions that I asked the students was to tell me how long have they been in Canada, and the reason why they had decided to come here to learn English.

Student A, a forty year-old male, responded as follows:

I have been here for three months. I came to Canada to study English because I need it for the future development of my profession. I need to know English, to understand English, and to speak English, since this is a requirement in order to find a job in my country. My father was a peasant, my mother was illiterate, and I am the only one in the family with a profession, and I have to encourage my children to get a better education.

Student C, a twenty-eight-year-old female, added:

I have been here for two months. I came to Canada because I think English is better here than in other countries and also because I love Canadian people. English is very important for me because if you know how to speak English, you can find a better job, a better position anywhere, and it is important for everyone to learn English. I preferred Canada instead of the States because people here are less arrogant, I also felt safer here.

It is evident from these remarks, that those who speak English will automatically be in a position of power and privilege compared to those who do not know the language. Thus, the highest paying jobs in countries where English is not the native discourse require
people to be able to understand and communicate in this tongue. According to my experiences as an ESL teacher, I can claim that the main reason for adult students to come to Canada to learn ESL is for professional development.

My second question dealt with the importance of students’ first impressions in a foreign country. Most of these students come to Canada without knowing a word of English. Therefore, they usually pay for the school to pick them up at the airport. Unfortunately, these language schools see this as an extra opportunity for obtaining a larger profit. After encouraging students to pay for this service, they invariably fail to arrange the pick-up. This is what students A, D, and E had to say on this matter.

Student A:

I also paid in my country 110 Canadian dollars for a pick-up at the airport, something that never happened. I preferred to pay for the pick-up in my country because when one comes to a strange country, and one doesn’t know the language, you ask yourself: what am I going to do in such a big city? Therefore, I preferred to have them [the school] pick me up and take me to my home-stay, in order not to go through any further anxiety. But since they never picked me up, I had to pay 44 dollars for an airport cab to take me to my home-stay.

Student D, a twenty-seven-year-old female:

When I arrived at the airport, nobody was waiting for me, even though I had paid 100 dollars for the school to arrange a pick-up. I had to pay an extra 35 dollars to take a cab and get to my home-stay, and that, I thought, was a bit unfair.

Student E, a thirty-three-year-old male:

After having lived here for three months, you realize that it is a real rip
off. For example, to arrange for someone to pick you up from the 
airport, they [the school] charge you 120 dollars. I paid a cab, a 1999 
limosine, only 30 dollars to take me to my home-stay.

Most of these students also experience a sense of isolation and alienation due to a 
cultural and language shock. Some of them even enter into an extreme form of depression. 
These situations occur because the school fails to offer students the necessary information 
to cope in a foreign country. The school also neglects to provide students with a good 
orientation program upon their arrival. The students also claimed that the school never 
offered any kind of counselling support, which would have helped them to understand the 
emotional and psychological problems they encountered. Student B, a twenty-year-old 
female, was so depressed on arrival in Canada that she could still remember vividly how 
she felt during those first weeks:

The next day that I had arrived to Canada, I stayed home all day. I did 
not want to see anyone or even go outside. I was scared because I did 
not know anyone and I did not understand English very well... The 
school never provided me with a formal orientation. They only gave me 
some brochures, all of which were in English...They know that some of 
us do not know a word in English and they should understand that most 
of us feel kind of lost...

The school has no concern for you. They never give you advice...what 
to do if someone is following you... They fail to give you any useful 
information. What is lacking in the school is concern for the clientele, 
because that is what we are. I could have stayed in my country studying 
ESL with no need of being here and suffering. I asked myself many 
times if I should stay or if I should go.

I did not want to be in my home-stay...I would only lock myself in my 
room and I would cry. I felt that people here were not friendly, 
compared to the people from where I come from, who even talk to you
in the subway. Nobody here talks to you in the subway. Here your house could be burning down that you can be sure nobody will help you. The cultures are very different... The school never welcomes you nor gives you the necessary information. They only give you a bunch of maps and you read them, and you are supposed to figure it out all by yourself.

The powerful vested interests of the global English-teaching industry not only fail to provide equal access and opportunity for all due to expensive fees charged for their 'educational' services, but they also exploit thousands of people who pay large sums of money to study English as a second or foreign language abroad. Entrepreneurs and institutions have made large amounts of money by convincing people that they will help them learn the language as fast and effectively as possible (Gethin, 1997b). My research was also able to confirm this phenomenon. Most of the students who were interviewed expressed their concern for the promises that lured them to pay the exorbitant fees. Some of these students had even made an enormous financial sacrifice to be able to come and study English in Canada.

Student A:

The school assured me that in a minimum of four months I would achieve a 60 or 70 per cent of English, something which is definitely not true...Most of us come here with a very limited amount of money, I can't even call my family because I can't afford it. I was liquidated by the company that I had been working for in my country. I have already spent 50% of this amount in this adventure, with the expectation, and also praying to God, that learning English in four months would be possible, so that I could return home and find another job easily, in order to provide food and shelter and a better education to my family. But it was not true, I now know that they [the school] have ripped me off. I paid 571 Canadian dollars for the plane ticket, 50
dollars for courier expenses, 125 dollars for a four-month visa, and 805 dollars per month for the immersion program, which is supposed to offer six hours of English lessons every day from Monday to Friday... But this is not true since you only receive classes from 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., which is only five hours and a half and not six. The afternoon classes receive classes from 1:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. and this is also only five hours and a half.

On the other hand, every time a new course of four weeks starts, the first day of that course is never taught. [This is because administration gives students as well as teachers a day off in order to arrange the new class lists and schedules.] This means that they are ripping you off another six extra hours...Because of breaks, the school also rips you off another 45 minutes every day, since we have 3 breaks of 15 minutes each. If you make calculations, this is definitely one huge rip off.

Student C:

I was attracted to this school because they offered a method through which students would learn English as soon as they arrived to Canada...But once you are here it is all very different...I was placed in a level where I was practising things that I had already learned before. I could not believe I had paid so much money to practice what I already knew.

As a teacher who has worked for these private ESL schools, I have constantly witnessed how the system has deceived students. I have also seen some of the brochures and pamphlets that the schools send out internationally to market their business. It is shocking to realize how much of this is pure misrepresentation, and how little of it is reality. Some of these schools promise to deliver an intensive English program, which, as confirmed by the latter student, is not always the case. Schools also offer facilities, language aids, and a variety of programs on their brochures which never even exist within
the school. Students C, D and E made the following comments:

Student C:

When I contacted the school by e-mail, they told me that they offered grammar courses, but when I got here they told me that they did not have any grammar courses, only conversation courses. The school is always contradicting itself or it is lying. They tell you that they have a computer lab full of computers for students to check their e-mail anytime. But when you get here you realize that there are only three computers and it's nearly impossible to use them since the demand for them is huge.

Student D:

The brochure says that the school has a cafeteria, a library for students, and a kitchen. If you find any of these things in the school, please let me know because I have never seen them. It is all a big lie.

Student E:

There is a program that the school encourages you to take, which offers you a paid job and the opportunity to practice the language in your professional field, but it is a big lie...They have a list of at least 100 large Canadian companies and you choose the one which you like the best. But when you get here, they only offer you jobs such as giving out flyers...or as a bartender... They say that the companies will not let you work for them because your English is too weak. In my country they said one thing and here they say another...When I got here, they also told me that there was a language laboratory where you could practice your pronunciation. I have been here already three months, and I have not been able to do that...There is no language laboratory at all...

Students are also led to believe that they will be provided with an authentic educational experience. This unique exposure is meant to enrich students' learning as well as speed up the acquisition of the language. Moreover, students pay an extra amount of
money to live with the host or home-stay family. By accommodating them in a native English-speaking environment, students will be immersed into the English culture. This is not always the case, since many students are placed with families where English is hardly ever spoken. There is also evidence that the home-stay families are not being supervised or regulated by the school. Students have reported cases in which they have been exposed to situations where they experience racism, sexual harassment and assault. During the interviews, this is what some of the students reported:

Student C:

They told me that I would be placed with a Canadian family, but they sent me to a family that is Canadian only because they’ve lived here for so many years. My home-stay mother spoke very bad English and I could hardly understand her, besides she was very rude. The home-stay is very expensive, 760 dollars without lunch or 860 dollars including lunch. Even though I paid 860 dollars, my home-stay mother never gave me lunch. I complained to administration, but they told me that I had to complain to her directly...The man who lived with her was rude and revolting... His way of looking at me was extremely perverted...I felt very uncomfortable living there...I had a very bad experience with the home-stay.

Student D:

My home-stay family was constantly reminding me that I was not in South America. They were very discriminatory...My home-stay mother was not Canadian, she yelled a lot, and she would always give me food that I did not like. One day she wanted to force me to eat fish by saying: “This is not stinky fish from South America.” That day I felt like dying...

Then the school placed me in another house, where I lived with another student. This student... has some kind of learning problem, and the woman from our home-stay would treat him very badly. She yelled at
him all the time, and one day she even said that his father probably worked in a cocaine farm because he was Columbian. This woman never considered that he was a teenager with learning problems, you can’t say something like that to him...

I think administration does not control the home-stays where students are placed. There was the case of a classmate who was nearly raped in her home-stay, and administration did not want to believe her. She wanted her money back to go home immediately. Only then, seeing her reaction, did administration finally believe her. They promised to send her a refund only after she returned to her country. Therefore, one of my friends, who was this girl’s closest friend, started collecting money around the school to help the girl to go back. When she returned to her country, she probably sued the school because a month later my friend was called to administration. The school told her that they were willing to give her a full refund, or help her change to another school... We suspected that there was something very strange happening since such politeness was not the norm. My friend knew the whole story, therefore she was a potential witness in this incident. The school wanted her not to say anything and have her on their side. But she never accepted....

Student E:

It [the home-stay] is very expensive. Currently I am renting a basement apartment with my family who just arrived... and I pay 1,000 dollars, whereas at the home-stay I would be paying 850 dollars for one person. Now we live here three people... Imagine that one of the last evenings at the home-stay, I heard a weird noise, and it was the noise of a rat. They [the home-stay family] told me that in Canada, to find rats inside a house was normal.

The school also promises you that in the home-stay you will practice your English, and that the family will help you with everything. In the two months that I lived there, I only saw them three times. They never helped me... Moreover, even though I had paid until the end of the month, the woman from my home-stay told me that since another student was coming, I was to leave my room and sleep on the floor because my room would be given to another person. I had to phone a friend that I had met here in Canada, and two hours later he picked me up and he took me into his home. I have received more help from this
friend than I ever received from the school.

Some of the techniques used by these schools to teach a language do not take into account that the majority of the students are adults. Adult training evolved during the 1960's, when research and analysis demonstrated that the assumptions about children as learners may not be valid for teaching adults (Shoemaker, 1991). All the interviewed students complained about this matter.

Student A:

They make you play stupid games like “Simon Says”. They say this helps to learn vocabulary.

Student B:

Some teachers had us singing songs and we would all fall asleep...Another teacher would say: “Eyes! Eyes! But jump as you point at your eyes!” The teacher wanted us to jump as we pointed at the different parts of the body, so that we could learn the vocabulary. It’s ok if we must learn like children, but I think there are other ways for us to learn better. They treat us like kids.

Student C:

In all the levels you learn the same games and the same stupid things. Now I could work in a day-care and I would be perfect for that...One day we were supposed to sing Barney songs and clap together. We do not want to be treated like kids, it’s stupid. These activities do not benefit us in any way. We don’t learn any new vocabulary or grammar. As adults, we would put much more effort in a topic that is more interesting rather than spending our time playing children’s games.
Student D:

There are teachers who spend their class making students complete crossword puzzles, I can’t even do them in Spanish let alone English. In our Business Class we used to spend the whole hour playing Monopoly.

Student E:

The technique of this school is that you will learn the language the same way a baby learns a language. That is why they don’t teach you any grammar.

Children are dependent persons, but as they grow toward adulthood, they experience a need for others to see them as capable of self-direction. Therefore, adults tend to resent being treated or taught like children. When adults are faced with learning a new language, their mature self-concept is often in conflict with the fact they have reverted to childlike patterns. This makes it essential for language teachers to treat these students as adults. When adults experience self-directed learning, their motivation to learn increases (Shoemaker, 1991).

Another important factor to consider is that age also affects the way a second language is acquired, therefore, we cannot teach adults to learn a language using the same strategies as if they were native English-speaking children. Scientific research has confirmed that there is a critical period during which language acquisition takes place naturally, and once this period is over, language is acquired with more difficulty and in different ways. Evidence of this research comes from the imprinting of birds. In order for
young birds to be able to produce the adult song, they must hear it within the first 50 days of their life. If the bird is exposed to the song after the critical period, learning does not occur (Archibald, 1959).

The teaching method used by most ESL schools is the communicative approach, which focuses on cooperative learning as well as encouraging the students to talk through conversation activities. By using these activities, students do most of their talking amongst themselves, where they hear others’ incorrect speech far more than they hear their teachers or English native speakers. In this way, students are prevented from learning anything new, as well as the correct form of the language. Gethin (1997c) claims that in many cases, students’ English skills were less accurate at the end of the language course than it was at the beginning.

Through the communicative approach, little emphasis is given to learning the grammar of the language. According to Chomsky (1988), being a native speaker of English or any other language, means having an innate sense of grammar, i.e. a set of rules that allows native speakers to produce and understand the sentences of their language. Thus, grammar becomes the unconscious rule system that characterizes a native speaker’s knowledge of the language. It is essential for students who are learning a second language to study the grammatical foundations of the new language. Second language acquisition can never be as simple as learning vocabulary and memorizing expressions. Chomsky claims that for second language acquisition to be successful, students must acquire a generative sense of grammar.
Private ESL schools also promise to give students all the necessary materials that they will need for their classes. The price for each English course clearly states that all textbooks will be provided by the school. During the time that I worked there, students were always in need of textbooks. The exception was one particular book which was available, but it would always arrive after the course had already started. As a result, teachers were supposed to photocopy most of the material. Since teachers were restricted in the amount of photocopying, students were never allowed to keep this material. I always wondered how the students were expected to improve their second language if they were deprived of essential resources.

Student A:

In my country they told me that the 805 dollars that I paid for the one-month-course gave me the right to acquire all the material. When I came here, they did not give me all the books nor the damn photocopies. They say it is very expensive and they expect you to memorize all the new vocabulary by heart. When they do give you books or copies, they always take them away at the end of the class. It is very important that one may be allowed to take books home or at least the photocopies. In my case, I had to buy the books which I liked, that cost me an extra 40 dollars. In a one month course, the teachers use at least six books, but the school only gives you one out of six...And the one book, which they do give us, is always late...

Student C:

The fact that they give you books and materials is another big lie. They charge you I don’t know how many dollars for materials. The result is that they give you only one book. This month and last month we had to use the same book. The first month they never gave me a book...When I complained, they told me that it did not matter because the course had already finished. I don’t care what they say, I paid for my book, so in
the end, after complaining a lot, they decided to give it to me. Photocopies are never given...They have not given me any copies except the one with the schedule, the calendar of activities and all that kind of crap. Teachers make four copies for the whole group to share. When the class is over, only four students are able to keep the copies.

Students are also presented with the problem that the school assures them that classes will not have more than 12 students per class. This obviously is not the case, since I have had to teach classes of about 20 students. This poses a serious difficulty as teachers are not able to give individual attention. Another problem for both teachers and students is the fact that the school mixes a wide range of ages within a single classroom. Adults are placed in the same classroom as teenagers. In these cases, I have had to spend valuable instruction time dealing with classroom management. Adult-students are constantly frustrated to be subjected to this waste of time.

These schools also do not have a defined set of criteria of the level of efficiency students must reach before they are promoted to the next level. This causes students to be misplaced, and many times promoted to the wrong levels, thereby causing a class to be too heterogenous in a wide range of skills and abilities. This eventually complicates the teaching process, and slows down the learning process for many other students.

Student A:

The system of the school is not adequate for me. First of all, they mix you with students who are very young, teenagers who come here for vacation and have different expectations compared to someone like me who has a family and a lot of responsibilities back home...For the conversation course...they mix students from level two with people from level seven, and this is obviously very difficult...Students from the
higher levels feel frustrated, and one feels embarrassed and shy to participate in a class with them... The school also promises that a class will not have more than 12 students, but there are times that we have been more than 20 in one class.

Student D:

Another thing that the school does is to place students in the wrong levels, only because they have paid for a certain amount of time. Therefore, they try to retain students by putting them in lower levels. For example, last month level 3 was divided into two levels, 3A and 3B, only because these students had already paid until June. This helps the school retain the students longer instead of refunding them the money... Another problem is that they mix adolescents with professionals... We came here to learn the language and we have to bear with these young students who have come only for fun... They say that classes will have a maximum of 12 people, and in my pronunciation class, which is very important, I had 22 classmates and the poor teacher was trying to make everyone speak. We would advance the material one millimetre per day and you can’t study like that.

Student E:

Here they talk about levels, but it is all about business. If you go to level 4 or level 15 it is all the same. There are people who can’t speak English and are placed in very high levels... I have had classmates from level 3 who have been transferred to level 7, only because they did not like the teacher. Examples like these there are many... My morning class is a mixture of students from level 2 and level 7. What do I have to do with students in level two? If I am going to waste my time, I’d rather stay home sleeping...

Most of the policies which these schools practice, are 100% profit-driven. The cost of the courses and the home-stay arrangements are very high, considering that the students do not get the value of service that they have been promised. It is evident that
these schools make a profit regardless of students' needs. Furthermore, the schools show no support for students' problems or concerns. Students feel swindled, since they are led to believe that they will learn the language in a matter of weeks. These students come to Canada with very high expectations and leave with a lot of dreams that are left unfulfilled. The following accounts demonstrate the level of students' discontent with the school's false promises.

Student A:

There have been a lot of protests from lots of students...The school assured me that I would learn English in three months, and that I would go back home speaking the language fluently...It is not true: this is a new form of kidnap because they force you to stay here since they are not willing to give you a refund...Last month, a young man also protested just like all of us. He just took it a step further...He made flyers which he had written in English, stating that the school was a fraud, and he started giving them out to the whole school..The school expelled him...He thought he was in a free democratic country where he was allowed to express his opinion...

Student B:

The school is 100 per cent lucrative in nature. I can't recommend it at all. I am only staying because I paid for 6 months and the school won't give me a refund if I go back now. That is the bad thing. There have been lots of complaints put forth to administration...But the school does not care, and they are very rude. They have no concern for their students...I am very disappointed with the school for everything they have charged me and the little they have offered in return...

Student D:

I have felt as if my money has gone down the drain. It was like getting a bunch of dollars and throwing them in the garbage. I am very
disappointed, you can’t even imagine how much sadness I feel because I never stole that money, it had taken me a long time and lots of hard work to earn it. I know that it will be very hard work to save up that amount of money again.

In spite of the great disappointments about the school, students still tried to find something positive about their experience. Student A best summarized what other students said:

I can’t say I am leaving the same way I came, because that would not be true. I leave with the advantage of having learned a lot about other cultures and other people. I leave behind a lot of good friends and a lot of positive people...I hope that I am able to make the negative experience with the school become a positive one as soon as I get back home... Who knows if tomorrow I will have to come back and knock on the doors of this country again. I just hope this time they will be open.

Overall, coming to Canada rendered students with a unique experience, in which they learned to appreciate the vast differences as well as the many similarities which are part of other cultures. The opportunity of interacting with people in a multicultural setting provided students with understanding and awareness of other peoples’ virtues, values and traditions. They also gained insight into the dilemmas and difficulties that other students experienced, which, beyond the language impediment, built a strong bond of friendship among them. Moreover, students learned to see the world from a multicultural perspective, and this is an ability all by itself which many people lack, but for which we should all strive.
1.5 Conclusion

Linguistic models, no matter how innocent and theoretical they seemed to be, not only have distinct economical, social, and political presuppositions, but also consequences...Linguistic (and other) inequalities don’t cease to exist, simply because their socio-economic causes are swept under the linguistic rug. The veil of linguistic manipulation that is drawn across the consciousness of the underprivileged, can only hide, not abolish the existing state of social inequality.

J. Mey, 1985

English-speaking countries have emerged as economic and political leaders, and English has become one of the most powerful means of inclusion or exclusion from further education, better employment, or an upwardly mobile social position. In many countries, small groups of English speaking elites are using English language education as a crucial distributor of social prestige and wealth (Pennycook, 1994). Therefore, people around the globe have felt the intense pressure to learn English to succeed economically, climb the social ladder, and remain competitive in a world where this language has become the international form of communication.

Teaching English as a second language has become a big business, which has been influenced by the capitalist mode of market competition and profit maximization. In this framework, Yorio (1986) extends this view further:

It is clear that we are suppliers of a product (or service) which consumers need and avail themselves of. Students are consumers that pay for our product...we are like “corporations” which on the basis of certain management decisions produce a service that we hope will be
purchased by many...we advertise the product...we hire personnel to deliver the product (teachers), and we build and administer the locations where the product changes hands (schools and classrooms) (p.670).

The process of consolidating English language supremacy does not occur neutrally, and it has become part of an international system whereby one part of the world dominates another politically, economically, and culturally. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1989) state that “it has been British and American government policies since the mid-1950s [that] establish English as a universal ‘second language,’ so as to protect and promote capitalist interests” (p.63). The core of this transnational system involves a structure of exploitation of one group over another, and the ESL industry is nothing but a microcosm, which resembles the characteristics of the new Global Order. Thus, ESL private institutes are parallel components which endorse the spread of the dominant culture, where the goal of equal opportunity is forgone, and where students are economically exploited at the expense of their education.

ESL private institutes have set up a whole system of massive propaganda, aimed to lure solvent students with deceitful services and benefits. Students are charged with excessive fees for pick-up services, home-stay arrangements, instructional materials, school facilities, and the variety and content of courses. ESL private institutes profit not only by failing to deliver the quality of services promised, but by leaving them in many cases completely unfulfilled.

Students who can afford the fees are promised that it is possible to learn a language
in an unrealistic period of time, and they are exposed to inappropriate teaching methods.

ESL private institutes have little knowledge of the theories and methods that are involved in teaching adults, confusing pedagogical instruction with andragogical teaching.

Pedagogy comes from the Greek words paid meaning "child", and agogus meaning "leader." This term is therefore defined as the art and science of teaching children. In contrast, andragogy comes from the Greek word aner meaning "man", thus, it involves the art and science of helping mature human beings learn. The methodology for teaching adults needs to involve self-directed learning, which describes the process in which the individual takes the initiative with the help of a facilitator (teacher) in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating their own learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975). ESL institutes need to implement these methodologies, as well as offer sufficient training programs for teachers in this field. As Perren (1968) states, language teachers need specialised training. It is not enough to speak the language they are teaching, but they must receive a particular kind of training in how to teach the language that they speak. ESL schools should also place emphasis upon developing teachers' cultural sensitivities to learn how to interact and understand other cultures.

These improvements would mean taking a step forward for an industry that needs to be more accessible and accountable to students' needs and expectations. Foreign students come to learn ESL because they dream of a better life, if not for them, for their
families. Unfortunately, these students return home full of disillusionment and with their hopes shattered. These feelings of disenchantment and disappointment are portrayed in a Mexican *corrido*, which was recited to me by one of my students before he left:

> Goodbye dreams of my life,  
> Goodbye movie stars,  
> I am going back to my beloved homeland,  
> much poorer than when I came.

Throughout this section I have tried to lay a foundation for radical change in attitudes, beliefs, and practices within the ESL industry. I have also critiqued and challenged the profiteering approach involved in the teaching of ESL. It is evident that through the ESL industry, students enter a cycle of exploitation that runs parallel to the global scheme. ESL students have become victims of a farcical system, where capitalist interests, elitism, and profit maximization have destroyed both the principle of providing equal opportunity and the meaning of true education.
PART II

Streaming: Unequal Access to Knowledge

Most governments have been based on the denial of equal rights; ours began by affirming those rights. They said, some men are too ignorant, and vicious, to share in government. Possibly so, said we; and, by your system, you would always keep them ignorant and vicious. We propose to give all a chance; and we expected the weak to grow stronger, the ignorant, wiser; and all better, and happier together.

Abraham Lincoln, 1858

2.1 Introduction

Streaming or tracking is the placement of pupils in groupings according to such criteria as ability, intelligence, achievement, interest, needs, or some combination thereof, purportedly to provide instruction with suitable educational goals and at an appropriate rate (Cheng & Wright, 1980). However, tracking tends to benefit students who already have many academic, economic, and social advantages, by providing them with a challenging and meaningful curriculum, more engaging instruction, and higher teacher expectations. On the other hand, students who struggle both in school and in life, receive a weaker curriculum based on lower expectations, which eventually limits their capacity to learn (Wheelock, 1992).

Upper and lower educational streams differ significantly with respect to the quality and content of instruction. Knowledge and skills are distributed according to a hierarchy which stratifies students into different levels (Coryell, 1985). Therefore, streaming results in unequal access to knowledge and instruction.
Historically, and contrary to the rhetoric of the times, access to education in North America was the privilege of an elite. The aim of education was to sustain the superiority of the upper class over the illiterate masses. As a result of the policies of compulsory schooling at the turn of the century, a large number of black people, immigrants, and working class students entered school. Shortly thereafter, the streaming system was developed to segregate those students destined for higher education from the masses, who went on to occupy menial industrial jobs (Education Week, 2000).

According to Jeannie Oakes (1985), the provision of different knowledge to different groups of people, was a practice that was shaped largely by an application of the theories of Charles Darwin to human society. Social Darwinism maintains that some groups of people are of lesser social and moral development than others. Moreover, those holding social and economic power constitute the elite most fit to survive. Their success in a competitive and social environment is presumed to be proof of their evolutionary superiority. Given this assumption, it follows that ethnic minorities and the poor are themselves responsible for their lower evolutionary stage; correspondingly, their inferiority is biologically determined. Therefore, Social Darwinism provides a scientific rationale to educate children belonging to diverse ethnic and socioeconomic groups differently.

In contrast, the more progressive Darwinists claim that it is the environment that influences the direction of human evolution. On that basis, they propose that by altering the environment, they can facilitate the progress of humankind. It is from this perspective
that John Dewey proposed education as the fundamental method for promoting social progress. Unfortunately, the assumption has prevailed that biological and not social factors account for the inferiority of some groups (Oakes, 1985).

In Ontario, as early as 1853, government officials responsible for public education attempted to meet the needs of the elite and the economy by organizing schooling into different levels. Eggerton Ryerson advocated that schooling be designed both as university and non-university preparation. The latter approach was intended to produce skilful citizens who would contribute to the economy by entering blue-collar jobs. By 1906, secondary schooling in Ontario was divided into two separate streams: special, designated for qualified students who would enter university, and general, for everyone else (Pullen, 1955).

The current curriculum in Ontario is still structured according to fixed streams or tracks, such as academic (advanced) or applied (general). The academic level is perceived to be of higher value than the applied, since it opens the doors to university education. In contrast, the applied level serves as a gatekeeper to future educational opportunities. The hierarchical educational structures derived from this practice determine whether a student is in a high or low-achieving group, which publicly identifies the student's supposedly intellectual abilities and accomplishments. An academic student will be defined as a bright, smart person, whereas the applied student will be identified as a slow, below average, and low-achieving individual. Moreover, children assigned to high ability classes will be encouraged critical thinking, independent questioning, and research skills. On the
contrary, students in low-ability classes are taught less socially valued knowledge and skills, where emphasis is placed on rote learning, drills, and hands-on activities (Oakes, 1985).

Under the streaming system, and influenced by the advice of parents, counsellors, and teachers, students choose their area of specialized education. Most of the time, this advice is based on past school achievement and standardized test scores. In this manner, students are prematurely steered into a particular educational and occupational career. Researchers have found that the lower tracks tend to be populated largely by low income and ethnic minority students. As John Goodland (1984) notes:

> Minority students and those from the lowest socioeconomic groups have been found in disproportionate numbers in classes at the lowest track levels, and children from upper socioeconomic levels have been found to be consistently over represented in higher tracks (152).

Moreover, the students in the lower streams consistently score lower in standardized tests compared to other students. The main reason for this phenomenon is that the substance and procedures used to standardize and administer these tests are culturally biased in favour of white middle-class children. Thus, such children are more likely to perform well because the language and content of these tests are compatible with the language and experiences of these students (Oakes, 1985).

In Ontario, several studies have shown that students in the academic and applied levels experience school in different ways (Watson, 1975; Hall & Carlton, 1977; Warren & King, 1979; King, Coles, & Warren, 1980). Among the findings, applied students tend
to remain at that level throughout high school. They drop out of school more often than academic students, and fail to get involved in extra-curricular activities. Applied students also tend to take most of their courses at that level and fail subjects more frequently than academic students. Similarly, teachers’ expectations of students at the applied level are lower, which in turn affects students’ success rate.

Moreover, by streaming students, schools contribute, inadvertently, to the problems they seek to prevent, such as rebelliousness and delinquency. According to Schafer and Olexa (1971), students who are placed in lower-tracks are more likely to fail, become alienated, and develop a pessimistic attitude toward themselves, the community, and their future careers. As I will demonstrate throughout this section of the thesis, streaming has become both a structural barrier to equality and a form of oppression for large numbers of ethnic minority and low income student groups.

2.2 The Hidden Curriculum

As a country we need to realize the long term results of tracking. Then we must commit ourselves to educate. Only a change in philosophy of education - away from the factory model - can bring about needed results. Our country will not survive in its present form with anything less.

Launa Ellison & Clara Barton, 1992

Revisionist historians Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) claim that schools were created not to promote equality, but to meet the demand of employers for a trained labour force and to serve as vehicles of social control and stability. Thus, schooling serves
to reinforce and reproduce the inequality of classes in a capitalist society.

British sociologist Michael Young (1971) argues that the unequal distribution of power in our society is a consequence of the uneven allocation of knowledge imparted by schools. On the other hand, Michael Apple (1978) proposes that high-status knowledge is a result of the reproduction of socioeconomic inequality. Regardless of the relationship of cause and effect between education and power, it is evident that there is a correlation between lack of social equality and the specialization and compartmentalization of knowledge. In this process, schools distribute to select groups the cultural resources that are related to the established power relations.

Within this struggle for knowledge and power, students from all levels are exposed to a hidden curriculum. Giroux (1983) defines the hidden curriculum as the set of unstated norms, values, and beliefs transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and in the classroom. He contends that the hidden curriculum functions both as a vehicle of socialization and an agency of social control, providing differential forms of schooling to different groups of students.

In the case of streaming, the 'message' sent to applied students via the hidden curriculum is that they are not as valued as students who have been placed in the academic levels. In this manner, schools convince students in the lower tracks that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to their lack of merit. In short, their supposed inadequacy is constructed as a personal rather than as a social problem (Bordieu & Passeron, 1977). Framing the problem in this way causes certain students to become alienated and
disempowered, thereby causing further inequities within the school system (Mathews, 1992).

A variety of factors can increase the probability for any young child to be placed in an applied level. Some of these factors are endemic to social class and certain practices of the school system. It is widely believed that the teaching of students with a low I.Q. factor, should occur at a slower pace than those having a higher I.Q. Therefore, students’ I.Q. level often determines the stream in which students are placed. This is a ludicrous practice, given that intelligence is not fixed forever at birth. Human beings, regardless of their I.Q. scores, have the potential to increase their I.Q. by being immersed in a stimulating learning environment (Wheelock, 1992). However, for reasons relating to the availability of educational resources, parental time allocation, and other elements that influence the development of the child’s intellectual quotient, discrimination based on I.Q. measurements tends to affect mostly low income students. Students stricken by poverty have less access to educational resources, are exposed to fewer intellectual stimuli, and their parents are constantly absent due to a more demanding work schedule.

Moreover, publications such as Herrnstein and Murray’s The Bell Curve in 1994, argue that intelligence runs ‘in the genes’ of certain racial groups. Their results were based on separate I.Q. measurements of black and white individuals. However, we must keep in mind that many of the questions in I.Q. tests are racially and sexually biased, and they do not take into account the experiences of all children. Research based on results of I.Q. tests are thus never ‘neutral’ (Cohen, 2000). Who is writing the questions? What
kinds of questions are asked? Who pays for the research? Who interprets the results? These are all subjective decisions outside the realm of ‘pure science’. 

There is no valid way of predicting how an individual child might perform on standardized I.Q. tests (Cohen, 2000). Such an attempt would bring questionable results and we must consider the validity of this kind of research. The search for any relation between race or class and intelligence is important only under the assumption of a discriminatory society, where the mean I.Q. of members of a certain class or ethnic background is relevant to the situation of a particular individual. What sort of education should this individual receive? What kind of work should a person do? (Chomsky, 1972). Within a discriminatory society, the concept of intelligence acts only as a protective mechanism of control that legitimizes and perpetuates the social position of a dominant elite at the expense of others (Henderson, 1980).

The applied label both creates and perpetuates educational stereotypes, influencing teachers to have extremely low expectations from such students. The label is also seen to be predictive, and thus functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy (OECD, 1995). Furthermore, streaming has been shown to have a devastating effect on the motivation and self-esteem of applied students (Boyer, 1983), who often are outcast, misunderstood, and belittled by the school system. It is assumed that these students will never make it to university, and possibly not even to graduation. Given the common assumption that these students are not particularly intelligent, teachers often experience an unwillingness to put time and effort into teaching them. According to Smith, Lincoln, and Clark, streaming is a
way of penalizing students for the unwillingness of schools to reach these children:

They [applied level students] are said to be failing in school, and yet it is clear that it is we who are failing to educate them. The danger this failure of education poses to these youth and to all of us grows apace. It is best described first in terms of the realities of today's and tomorrow's job market and then in terms of the young Americans who will be expected to fill those jobs (1988, p.2).

As a result, students from lower tracks lack the basic skills that are required to function successfully in our present society.

Furthermore, students in the applied levels bond together. Marginalised by the system, they pull each other down by constant cheering and applause when receiving failing grades. Lewin (1948) states that unsuccessful individuals tend to set their goals very low, frequently below their past achievement, whereas successful individuals set their goals above their last achievement, thereby raising their level of aspiration. Therefore, if the standards of a group are low, students will slacken their efforts and set their goals far below those they could reach. However, if the standards of a group are high, the students will raise their goals. Thus, the goals, motivation, and standards of applied level students are constantly being eroded by peer pressure.

There is evidence that school practices and policies, such as streaming and low expectations, influence students to dropout from high school (Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1989; Gilmore and Smith, 1989; Desnoyers & Paulker, 1988). Furthermore, a curriculum that is perceived to be boring and irrelevant to one's life is also reported as a reason why some students leave school (Karp, 1988; Sullivan, 1988; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, &
Fernandez, 1989). These students assimilate negative attitudes toward the curriculum and the educational system, which often leads to poor grades and misbehaviour.

It is important to take into consideration that low group standards take a direct toll on the proportion of time that teachers spend on discipline. It is not surprising that applied students perceive their teacher as more punitive and less concerned about them than their high-streamed counterparts. Negative feelings and attitudes among applied students are also exhibited toward one another, which supports the assertion that those at the lower levels are led to poor affiliation with their school experience (Oakes, 1985).

Radwanski (1987) noted that the majority of applied level students do not intend to go on to post secondary education because they do not believe that remaining in school will give them any future advantage in the workplace. From the dropouts’ perspective, leaving school is a consequence either of the treatment they received at school or of the failure of the curriculum to meet their learning needs (Tanner, 1987; Kunisawa, 1988). In this context, the majority of dropouts have experienced many difficulties adjusting to the demands of the school programme, resulting in resentment and hostility towards school, hence collaborating to reduce the already limited opportunities granted to them by the educational system.
2.3 Personal Experience: First Practice Teaching Component

Learn about the terms on which others make sense of their lives: what they take into account and what they do not; what they consider worth contemplating and what they do not; what they are and are not willing to raise and discuss as problematic and unresolved in life.

Brodkey, 1987

In every school I’ve visited, there is a clearly delineated ‘top’, ‘middle’, and ‘bottom’ group. There is an across-the-board comfort with the notion of ability grouping, and it dictates the critical process of aligning youngsters with instructional experiences and with one another. In almost every classroom I’ve visited, the teacher has given me a fairly direct signal as to how fast or slow, how gifted or average, or how facile or struggling the group is – and what effect this has on depth, pacing, and other instructional considerations.

Peter Buttenwiser, 1985

In Teachers’ College, during my first practice teaching component, I was placed in a school located in an area with a large immigrant population. I was assigned to teach Grade 10 students both academic and applied, as well as Grade 11 applied students. I was extremely surprised to find that all students in the Grade 11 applied course (and who were in the majority) were recently arrived immigrants who had only a basic knowledge of the English language, whereas students in the Grade 10 academic level were all native speakers.

The program for the Grade 10 applied level differed drastically from that of the academic level, both in content and teaching approach. Overall, I found that the academic courses were characterized by more effective teaching practices. For example, there was a
stronger focus on higher level cognitive processes and more emphasis placed on conducting research and engaging in independent questioning. Academic students were taught to go beyond the basic skills by developing methods of inquiry and applying critical thinking to different subject areas. In contrast, less socially valued knowledge and skills were taught in the applied level courses. To illustrate this issue, the following excerpts were taken from the present curriculum in Ontario:

**Canadian History in the Twentieth Century,**  
**Grade 10, Applied**

This course traces Canadian history from Wilfrid Laurier’s pronouncement that the twentieth century belongs to Canada to the United Nation’s recognition of Canada as one of the best countries in which to live. Students will learn about various expressions of Canadian identity, the stories of individuals and communities, and changes in political and social structures. Students will discover the importance in historical studies of chronology and cause-and-effect relationships. As well, they will be given opportunities to formulate appropriate questions, develop informed opinions, and present information in a variety of ways (p. 37) [my emphases].

**Canadian History in the Twentieth Century,**  
**Grade 10, Academic**

This course explores Canadian participation in global events and traces our development as a country through changes in population, economy, and technology. Students will analyse the elements that constitute Canadian identity, learn the stories of both individuals and communities, and study the evolution of political and social structures. Students will learn about differing interpretations of the past, and will come to understand the importance in historical studies of chronology.
and cause-and-effect relationships. They will also learn to develop and support a thesis, conduct research and analysis, and effectively communicate the results of their inquiries (p. 27) [my emphases].

( Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990)

What is expected from students is clearly reflected in the use of verbs in both excerpts. Applied students are given the opportunity ‘to learn’, ‘to discover’, ‘to formulate’, ‘to develop’, and ‘to present’. On the other hand, academic students will learn ‘to analyse’, ‘to study’, ‘to understand’, ‘to develop’, ‘to communicate’, as well as to ‘conduct research and analysis.’ The difference in terminology invites a deeper and wider intellectual effort from academic students, and also implies that a higher level of cognition and information will be made available to them.

I felt outraged at the different criteria assigned to students. I could not understand why students in the applied levels, would not benefit from a more challenging curriculum, and were provided with an inferior form of education. As I aired my concerns in the staff-room, most of the teachers responded by saying that ‘homogeneous classes’ enable them to provide appropriate instruction to the needs of respective groups of students. They maintained that streaming allowed them to give slower students the extra attention needed, without shortchanging the gifted or more able students, who would otherwise be pulled back by the pace and quality of instruction. Unfortunately, these teachers failed to recognize that in practicality, ‘homogeneous groups’ of students do not exist. Even in the most consistent classroom, teachers are always faced with considerable student diversity.
During my first week of teaching Grade 11 applied students, I felt completely frustrated. The first problem I encountered was the lack of educational resources. All of my students were studying ESL, and no history textbooks were available to meet their needs. I had to search constantly for outside resources, and then adapt them to my students' language proficiency. Some of the students were extremely motivated to learn and many conducted their own research. They would bring their findings to class for approval and often stayed after class to ask me further questions. Their progress, however, was greatly hindered by the limited availability of dictionaries, textbooks, and reference guides.

Considering that these were ESL students, it was also vital for them to be able to take home material to read and prepare for the next class. Unfortunately, since there were no textbooks, the amount of photocopying required was always far beyond the limited number I was allowed to make. I was so desperate to keep up with my students' eagerness to learn, that I paid for the extra photocopies myself.

The most gratifying experience I had with this particular class was in relation to a lesson plan I had devised, which required that the class be divided into groups to work on projects. Each group was assigned a topic relating to the Second World War, and students were informed that they would be responsible for researching and becoming 'experts' in that particular area. Furthermore, all students were required to hand in a written copy of their contributions, as well as relate their insights on what they had learned as a result of working on this project. They were encouraged to be as creative as possible and to use a
variety of visual aids. Each group also had to teach one topic per day, and to assume responsibility for organizing the appropriate activities for their lesson.

At the beginning of the project, most of the students appeared to feel intimidated and insecure about their oral skills and language proficiency. My associate (an experienced teacher who guides student teachers during their practicum) was curious to see what the results would be, since this was the first time the students had been assigned the task of combining various skills, such as research, speaking, listening and writing. After two weeks of planning and hard work, the students were ready to teach their classmates what they had learned. The projects were a success, and each group displayed great interest in and knowledge of the assigned subject.

During this project, one student, a recent arrival from Russia, made a great impression on me. Her research topic was the life of Anna Frank. She was so enraptured in the topic, that she asked me to lend her my copy of the *Diary of Anna Frank*, which I had brought to class one day. As soon as I lent her the book, she could not put it down, and soon she became an ardent reader, an activity that she confessed she had not enjoyed in the past. I was so excited to have been able to plant that seed of motivation within her that I decided to buy another copy of the book to give her as a gift.

This Russian student spoke very little English, but by encouraging her to become more involved with other ESL students, she soon began to show more confidence and initiative. This development was an eye opener for me, but she was hardly the exception. I noticed that the other students’ behaviour had started to change, that interaction among
group members increased, and that each student showed more self-esteem and confidence through becoming temporary teachers with knowledge to share with their classmates.

I realized that cooperative learning was a great technique, one that gave me the opportunity to dedicate more individual time to students who were weaker in their English skills. It also allowed students who were more fluent in the language to speed up their learning process by moving ahead with their work. I was able to manage wonderfully with these ESL students who ranged widely in their language fluency, and wondered why many teachers were so sceptical about desstreamed classrooms.

My associate assigned me to teach Grade 10 applied History for the first two weeks of my practicum, and then Grade 10 academic for the remaining weeks of my practice teaching component. I found it a real challenge to have to prepare completely different lesson plans for both of these courses. Despite the fact that they were both learning 20th Century Canadian History, they were practising different skills and were using different resources. I had never realized how differently both courses were taught until I had to teach them myself. I found that I was forced to come up with totally different activities for each class.

I told my associate that I would use the same lesson plans and activities I had already prepared for my Grade 10 applied with my academic course. He told me I could not do that both because my academic students would become bored, and my previous lesson plans were not sufficiently challenging for a high track level. Internally, I disagreed. I thought my lesson plans for the applied level had been fun and creative. The
activities I had prepared ranged from group work, presentations, and debates to critical interpretations of primary historical sources. My students not only had learned but, at the same time, discovered how to enjoy learning. Students were not passively absorbing information, but they were actively being responsible for their own learning process. I did not understand why my academic course could not be taught in the same way. Nevertheless, my associate insisted that I should change the whole scope of my lessons. Less group work and more lectures.

I started experiencing symptoms of anxiety because I am not the type of teacher who can lead a Socratic-style lesson for seventy-five minutes. I started calling up my classmates from teachers’ college to see if they could give me some ideas. Unfortunately, most of them were going through similar dilemmas, or worse. I contacted my History instructor, who provided me with some useful insights. My associate also equipped me with a lot of useful lesson plans and materials, which could be used with the academic level. However, the problem was neither the advice nor the lack of it. The problem lay within me. On one hand, I felt that by changing my lesson plans for the academic level, I had shortchanged my applied students. On the other hand, I did not agree with the idea that to transform lesson plans into academic ones, a teacher must avoid cooperative learning techniques or joyful and creative methods of teaching, to adopt instead a sedentary and monotonous approach in which students were mere receptors of ideas and facts.

As a student teacher, I found it difficult to be myself and to freely adopt a personal
teaching style, since I felt pressured to duplicate the teaching methods and practices of my associate. The constant surveillance of the guru made me feel self-conscious and uneasy, I decided to comply, but I felt devastated. I had fallen into a vicious trap, in which more was expected from the academic students than from the applied pupils. Moreover, it was too late. I had already taught my applied course, and I would not have the chance to teach them again. I felt disappointed with myself, since I ended up teaching more content and more critical skills to my academic students. I had unwillingly gone against everything I believed in. I was angry at myself, and I entered a phase of guilt, which made me go over my previous applied lesson plans, trying, mentally, to fit the academic expectations into them.

Despite what my associate had told me, I decided that I still had a chance to make my academic course more exciting and enjoyable. I incorporated cooperative learning techniques into my activities. I had my academic students give speeches and presentations that empowered them to use their own creative style of learning. Although my associate internally was reluctant to approve this sudden change, as he witnessed the joy with which students were learning, he came to accept it.

When the time came to say good-bye to students and teachers, I felt a genuine warmth of friendship and appreciation. I learned a lot from them, but I know that deep inside, they also learned from my vision and determination to change things. Moreover, I knew that the goals for my second practice teaching component would be set much higher.
2.4 Excerpts of Journal: Second Practice Teaching Component

Journals are a way of finding out where I really am...They have to do with encounters with people who come here, who talk to me, or friends whom I see, or the garden. They sort of make me feel that the fabric of my life has meaning.

May Sarton, 1982

On a broader scale, life in the “real world” involves dealing with people who are not at the same level as you. Therefore, I feel that heterogeneous grouping does not disadvantage any student academically, and the social and psychological gains are tremendous.

Amy Pelletier, 1991

When the time arrived for my second practicum, I was determined to keep a journal of my teaching experiences. I wanted to observe and reflect on the differences of content, skills, expectations, and students’ responses in both the applied and academic levels. Following are a few excerpts:

February, 1999
Day 3

I was given a warm welcome by the Vice-Principal and teachers in the English department, despite the fact that I was three days late into my teaching component. The reason I was late was because the school that originally was chosen for me to complete my second practicum resulted in a personal fiasco between my associate teacher and me. Giving the personality clashes between us, our relationship had become tarnished.

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Therefore, I had to request the university’s administration to change the school to which I had originally been assigned. Fortunately, it did not take long to find another school for me, and now I am here. In this school, I feel more comfortable because of the warmth displayed by staff and administration.

There are major differences between this school and the school to which I was originally assigned. (In order to avoid confusion, I will refer to the school that I am presently in as School B, and the original school as School A). The extent of the differences within Canada’s public system of education is difficult both to comprehend and accept. School A is located in a middle class residential area. The school has a huge library, which is the pride and joy of the entire school, and is equipped with numerous resources and technological devices. The programs offered in the school range from a variety of academic courses to an International Baccalaureate. In contrast, School B is located in a low income area. The library lacks most basic resources. It contains hardly any reference books, and the number of computers is severely limited in relation to the large number of students in the school.

The content taught in both schools is also different. The associate from School A was teaching university material to his Grade 12 I.B. students, who were studying Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales in Middle English. My current associate in School B is teaching The Great Gatsby by Scott Fitzgerald to her Grade 12 advanced. Furthermore, School B does not offer an International Baccalaureate programme. I realize that there is an inadequate distribution of resources and programmes, which depend largely on the
location of the school and its population. Thus, the more affluent areas have better
equipped schools than the less affluent ones.

While the students were working in their independent reading projects, my
associate and I discussed my future schedule. I will be teaching English to Grade 9
destreamed, Grade 11 applied, and Grade 10 academic. She wants me to experience
different approaches to teaching academic and applied students.

Day 5

The Grade 10 academic course is very interesting. Students are reading Harper
Lee’s novel To Kill a Mockingbird. My associate told me that as soon as they were
finished with the novel, I would teach Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. I observed that this
class was actively involved in critical discussions concerning the historical background of
the novel, the effect of prejudice, and the importance of fighting for justice and tolerance.

My associate showed me a sample of the syllabus for each level. She also showed
me the list of books and plays that must be studied for each stream. Based on what she
showed me, it was clear that the content taught in academic courses is definitely more
challenging than that taught in the applied courses. The academic levels study more works
of literature and are expected to learn more through expository writing and presenting
research reports. Expectations for students in the applied levels, on the other hand, focus
more on acquiring basic literacy skills.

I cannot believe that today my associate read to her Grade 11 applied class again.

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Yesterday and today, she read for the entire seventy-five minutes. How does she manage not to lose her breath? I must admit that she reads beautifully, with the right intonation, making different voice sounds for each character. From time to time, she jumps up from her chair and waves her hands wildly to visually represent an emotion or feeling conveyed by the story. She has a marvellous talent to make every written word come alive. She vibrates with excitement while she reads, while I become plunged into a world of fantasy and adventure as I escape reality. My associate’s reading is definitely a craft that she fully masters. However, the audience was not captivated by her reading. Just like yesterday, the students were yawning and day-dreaming. Some of them were even falling asleep. Overall, I noticed that they are clearly unmotivated, and I think that part of it is because they have been passive listeners for more than two consecutive days.

After class, I asked my associate if she read to her Grade 11 applied students all the time. She replied that she always did, because it was the only way to make sure that the students would cover the whole novel. She told me that applied level students would never read a novel on their own. She referred to them as the ‘slow learners’, which she attributed to their lack of motivation and their deficiency in basic literary skills.

These children might be ‘slow learners’ or economically disadvantaged, but they certainly are not deficient. I believe that one of the reasons most teachers have low expectations of applied students is because they tend to link the term disadvantaged with the definition of being deficient or lacking intellectual ability. These students are not ‘slow learners’, they just lack the motivation to learn.
Since I will take over her teaching load next week, I also asked her if I could have the students take turns reading. She told me that it would not work, because most of them lacked good reading skills; if I had them read the novel out loud, it would take me longer to cover. I was outraged. How could they improve their reading skills if I am the one reading for them? This time I promise myself that I will not let the system drag me into the applied and academic game of expectations. When my turn comes to teach, I will be the one setting the same standards and expectations for both levels.

Day 8

My Grade 10 academic class is so much fun to teach. As soon as I take over the class, it seems as if I enter another world. The kids are so motivated and responsive. They want to be in the classroom because they want to learn. Today I had students take turns reading parts of Julius Caesar. Their reading skills are impressive. The intonation and tone with which they read conveyed the mood of the particular scenes we were reading. We also discussed the historical background of the play, as well as Shakespeare’s use of literary devices. This raised important topics of discussion, such as the use and abuse of power, and the writer’s use of foreshadowing. I assigned them a couple of questions in which they had to analyse critically the parts we had read and discussed. Overall, I am satisfied with the way this class has unfolded. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for my Grade 11 applied.

Most of the students in my Grade 11 applied were late today. Two were absent. I
am frustrated and angry because my associate insisted that I read to them again for the entire seventy-five minutes. I heard a student comment that the way I read was boring. I know I do not have my associate’s ability to read. I know that today I read poorly but it is because I am unmotivated myself. I do not believe that I should be reading an entire novel to them. What am I teaching these kids? Am I empowering these students to take responsibility for their own learning? Am I not wasting precious class time by reading the novel to them? They should be reading the novel on their own. Why does my associate insist that I should treat them as if they were in elementary school?

I wonder if students find this kind of treatment offensive and humiliating. Why is there this preconceived idea that they won’t read on their own? I must try and motivate them to read, and I do not think that by reading to them every day I am accomplishing anything. They were clearly bored today and some even fell asleep. It seemed as if they did not want to be in the classroom.

I decided to assign them a whole chapter to read at home so that we can speed up things. My associate told me not to be disappointed tomorrow, because she knows they won’t do their homework. I only hope she is wrong.

Day 9

My Grade 10 academic class did their homework. They were prepared to discuss the answers to the questions and to continue the study of the play. Part of my class activity today was to divide the class into groups. Each group was assigned a scene and
had to act it out in front of the class. They were cooperative and enthusiastic throughout the lesson. I also noticed that these students look happier compared to my Grade 11 applied students who, most of the time, seem sad and tired, and are constantly displaying symptoms of boredom.

The same students were late and the same students were absent in my Grade 11 applied course. I asked about their homework. Unfortunately, my associate was right. They confessed that they had not read the chapter. I felt discouraged and disappointed. My associate made me read to them again. However, she did not stay long in the classroom, and I used that opportunity to make the students read instead. I was shocked at their reading ability, given the fact that this was a senior class. The pace of the reading was very slow, they had difficulty pronouncing long words, and they stumbled a great deal as they read. I told them to read with more excitement and more feeling, but they were reluctant to try.

Five minutes before the bell rang, I asked them why they had not done their homework. Some of them told me that they worked after school, while others told me that they worked during the night. Therefore, they had no time to do their homework. I did not know what to say, so I let them go. I asked the students who were late to stay behind, mainly because I wanted to ask them why were they late again. One of the students told me that she had a baby, and that she went home for lunch to feed the baby and put her to sleep. Another student told me that he was late due to personal problems. He did not wish to discuss the matter further and I wished not to pry. The rest of the students were
just staring at me, without providing any justification for their tardiness, but promised they would try their best to be on time in the future. I am curious to see if they fulfill their promise.

March, 1999
Day 11

My associate told me today that she will be away for a couple of days because she is part of a board team that is reviewing the new curriculum. This made me feel very relieved, because now I will have the opportunity to experiment different teaching strategies with my applied course without any interference.

I have noticed that the pace of the lessons is completely different for both levels. It is amazing how quickly I am able to go through the material with the academic Grade 10 students. Also, they love to participate in debates and dramatizations. I have found that it is very easy to make the class fun and exciting for them because they are so lively and cooperative. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same from my Grade 11, but I do not blame them. I am bored myself teaching that class. It seems as if everything in that class is in slow motion. It is always the same routine, reading consistently for seventy-five minutes, stopping from time to time only to ask a couple of questions. I would love to get my Grade 11 class involved in the kinds of activities that take place in my academic course, but we are so far behind that I am afraid we won’t be able to finish the novel by the time my practicum is over. I have to think of another way to get through the novel with them.
Reading the novel to them is taking too much time and getting them to read it in class takes even longer. On top of it all, they still do not do their homework.

I now know why the same two students in the Grade 11 have been absent for so long. My associate told me that one of the students had been suspended because he had been caught with drugs, while the other had dropped out of school.

Day 12

Today I gave my Grade 10 academic students a test. The scores ranged from satisfactory to unsatisfactory. This just proves my point that so-called homogeneous groups are still heterogeneous in ability and achievement.

Since my associate is away, I was finally able to change the routine for my Grade 11 applied students. I gave them three essay questions to choose from and write their answers during class time. Amazingly, it took them the whole period to put together one paragraph. As I went around to help them individually, I was surprised to find that some of them could not even write a topic sentence. They also lacked the skills to support their answer with quotations from the book. Furthermore, they had no idea how to make a connection between the question asked and the quotations needed to support their answer. Comparing them with my Grade 9 destreamed students, they are extremely far behind.

I have come to realize that this is a matter of extreme concern. After class, I voiced my concern to one of the teachers in the department. She told me that for applied students, the core subjects are just another set of loopholes they must jump through. She
also told me not to worry too much, because there was nothing I could do for them. According to her, they were all a lost case and the best thing was just to give them the credit so that they could graduate. I am very saddened by her response. I really want to take the challenge and teach these students the skills they so desperately lack, but I know that it will be impossible to do so in such a short time. I am truly desperate, and I do not know what to do. They never do their homework and when they are not being disruptive they are apathetic. What can I do? What can possibly motivate them?

Day 13

Since my Grade 11 applied students will have a test tomorrow, I decided to play a game with them today to make the review fun and worthwhile. The game consisted in dividing the class into teams. The aim of each team was to answer as many correct questions as possible. The winners would get bonus marks in the test. Unfortunately, they were so unmotivated that I had to stop the game before the end of the period. I gave them individual reading time instead. I do not understand why this activity did not work. It worked fine with my Grade 10 academic and my Grade 9 students. Both classes enjoyed the game and asked me if we would ever play it again.

Day 14

I gave my Grade 11 students their tests back. The grades were really bad, worse than I had expected. What shocked me was the way my students reacted when they saw
their results. They were proud of their poor marks, and the lower the grade, the more they cheered for each other. I decided that it was time for me to have a serious conversation with them. I wanted to hear what they had to say, and I wanted them to tell me what was wrong. I knew the time had come to hear them speak out.

They told me that I was treating their course as if it were an academic one because I was giving them a lot of homework, and applied level students were hardly ever given homework. They claimed that they were not smart and that I was asking too much of them. Moreover, most of them work to help support their families. By the time they get home, it is either too late or they are too tired to study. They also thought that it was unfair that they were reading boring books while the academic students were not.

I asked them what their plans were after finishing high school but, to my dismay, all of them had very low aspirations for the future. Some of them even said that they wanted to be squeegee kids! I realized this was the perfect teachable moment, therefore, I told them exactly how I felt. I opened up to them. I told them that I believed they are all capable of achieving and doing wonderful things. I also told them I had the same expectations for them as I had for all of my other students, regardless of their level.

Above all, I tried to make them realise that to succeed it is important to create dreams and set goals, and that persistence and determination are vital for making those dreams come true. After a long conversation, they agreed they would finish reading the novel during March break. Now I am only hopeful that they will keep their promise.
Day 16

Back to school after March break. The Grade 10 students are in the process of developing a class project in which they will produce a newspaper as if it had been published during the time of Julius Caesar. The students have been divided into groups, and each group is responsible for completing a different section of the newspaper. The main objective is to have students use both historical research and critical analysis of the play to assess events and issues. Furthermore, they must work cooperatively with each other to produce the final product. Eventually, students will link this information into creative forms of expression, such as writing, designing, drawing, etc.; we are all excited about this project.

Some of my Grade 11 students have fulfilled their promise. The majority have finished reading the novel. My associate is so pleased that she keeps on asking me, in a joking manner, what did I do to make this miracle happen!

Today I divided the Grade 11 students into groups of four. Each group was assigned a couple of chapters, and I told them that they will be responsible for making a class presentation based on those chapters. I gave them some class time to prepare for their presentations and to discuss the novel in groups.

Day 18

Today the Grade 10 students went to the computer lab to continue their newspaper project. I have noticed that some of them are very knowledgeable and skilful when
working with technology. I am also learning from them how to operate certain computer programs.

My Grade 11 class seems a little bit livelier since they have been working in groups and preparing for their presentations. I have also provided them with some questions for each chapter, so that they can think about the main themes throughout the novel. With their new acquired responsibilities, they are beginning to respond positively. I believe they are now more motivated and, hopefully, in better control of their own learning process. I am curious to find out what will be the outcome of all this.

Day 20

My associate is pleased with the progress the Grade 11 students have made. For the first half of the period we listened to a couple of presentations, and during the second half we discussed the class presentations. The class is finally more alive, and the students are interacting and interpreting information. The dynamics of the class are changing slowly, and it is beginning to show promise.

Day 21

The newspaper project of my Grade 10 students is nearly finished. They are now working on the lay-out and final editing. They have put a lot of effort and hard work into it and it definitely shows! It is not yet finished and it already looks incredible.

The presentations of my Grade 11 students so far have been a success. In this
short period I have managed to get most of them to do their homework and to interact more in class. They are now able to write two paragraphs instead of one in seventy-five minutes, and some of them have managed to support their answers using quotations from the text. With a lot of patience on my part and their cooperation, they have learned how to write a topic sentence. Most important of all, I think they have learned that I believe in them, and that I know they are capable of achieving if only they put their heart to it and try. On the other hand, they have taught me the importance of never giving up on them and this lesson has given me a gratifying sense of accomplishment.

My practicum is nearly over. A few more days and I will be back in class as a student instead of a teacher. It has been a long and intensive month, and although I am happy to return to my studies, at the same time I am sad. I know I am leaving my mission unfinished, that of raising the academic standards of my applied students.

2.5 Conclusion and Suggestions

Understanding things make it possible to change them. Coming to see things differently, we are able to make our possibilities for liberating collective action as well as for unprecedented personal growth.

Bartky, 1985

We need classrooms in which beauty is savoured, truth honoured, compassion practised, and fellowship engendered; classrooms where creativity is encouraged, where youngsters are assisted in dreaming of a better life, classrooms that are laboratories of living rather than places in which teachers talk and students listen.

John Lounsbury, 1991
In a true democracy, schooling is intended to provide equal access to economic, political, and social opportunities. However, streaming interferes with this goal. The implications of streaming within the curriculum are extremely negative. Labels like applied or general shut down self-esteem, stigmatize students’ sense of identity, and perpetuate inequalities among students, a clearly undemocratic practice.

Furthermore, streaming has become a legitimate system that benefits certain students but disadvantages others. It reproduces the current division of social classes and the structure of hierarchy in our society. Streaming is a product of a ‘selective tradition’, where knowledge is included and excluded following a functional relationship: the curriculum persist because it is conductive to capitalist society (Liston, 1988). In this context, streaming is also oppressive, since it prepares a small percentage of the population for jobs to run the country, while the rest of the population struggles for survival and remains a subordinate mass. Within this system, students internalize the values to which they have been exposed. They learn that their role in society is appropriate and acceptable.

Instilling democratic values and equal educational opportunity requires immediate amendments to the school system. Educational reform should comprise the following:

- All students need to be exposed to a destreamed, challenging, interdisciplinary, and meaningful curriculum.
- Mentoring and tutoring programs should be implemented to help students deal with academic and professional challenges.
• Traditional methods of instruction should be replaced with more innovative teaching practices that acknowledge the diversity of background, learning styles, and abilities of all students.

• Authentic types of assessment, such as projects, demonstrations, portfolios, should be incorporated as part of the reform.

Research from England indicates that the majority of students do better in destreamed classes. At the Cardinal Allen Grammar School in Liverpool, many more students did better on the “O” level examinations after the classes had been destreamed. In the Woodlands School in Coventry, detracking was accompanied by a doubling of the proportion of students staying in school (Appleford, 1990).

According to Coleman and Hoffer (1987), countries such as Japan and South Korea are able to reach very high levels of academic achievement without streaming practices. Detracked American Catholic high schools are also more successful academically than public comprehensive streamed high schools, particularly with respect to children of low social status and ability. A research project by Hugh Mehan and Irene Villanueva (1993) found that, when high school students were removed from a low stream and placed in academic courses with high-achieving students, they benefited in a number of ways, including significantly higher college enrollment. The researchers concluded that a rigorous and challenging academic program serves the educational and social interest of such students more effectively than placing them in the lower streams.

Traditionally, the curriculum has been organized into isolated subject areas. In
detracked schools, however, it is thematic and interdisciplinary. This approach presents students with learning activities that cross all disciplines while developing critical thinking skills. For example, if the connecting theme is the Pacific North-West Region, students can approach that theme from a number of perspectives: for example, they can study the climate and physical geography of the area. They can also read appropriate novels, such as *I heard the owl call my name* by Margaret Craven, which blend the traditional culture of the Kwakiutl people with the present urban culture of British Columbia. Students can role-play portions of the book, and analyse differences in character development.

Moreover, the book invites discussions on prejudice, international trade, and current events. Students can also develop graphs that compare and contrast regional trade in that region between Canada and the USA in terms of currency and goods. Thus, learning occurs through discovery, investigation, hand-on activities, and the discussion of meaningful and relevant problems (Wheelock, 1992). In this way, both theoretical and practical skills are combined to make learning both increasingly enjoyable and relevant to students’ lives.

All students should be offered challenging and interesting educational experiences, which currently tend to be reserved for high stream students. There is a desperate need for a dynamic and meaningful curriculum. Thoughtfulness, reflection, problem solving, and social criticism should be at the heart of its development. A more powerful vision for the future would include building the curriculum around social realities, and their ethical implications. Each course needs to be built around reflective investigation of central
questions, problems, and issues (Ross, 1997).

Innovative interdisciplinary methods of developing the curriculum should also link programs of study to the community. For example, in New York City, a federally funded five year program for students was developed. “Project Support” focussed on teenage alcohol, drug, and dropout prevention in four low-income, high-minority public school districts in the suburbs. It was designed to build bridges to connect family, school adults, community services, and children. The project established a school-based mentoring plan, a curriculum development unit, a parent participation component, a tutorial division, and the Outdoor and Environmental Education Program. The project was a clear success: it provided students with a strong bonding experience and raised their levels of achievement (Hurley & Lustbader, 1997).

School-based mentoring programs provide a safe environment in which students can develop resiliency. The role of the mentor is to care for the welfare and educational process of a limited number of students. Moreover, mentors guide the children as they develop self-esteem, problem solving, communication, as well as academic skills.

The curriculum also needs to provide students with a variety of extracurricular activities (OECD, 1995). Educational programs need to venture outside the walls of the classroom, and offer a wide range of outdoor activities that would provide an alternative to the traditional school setting in which some students find it hard to succeed.

Alternative methods of teaching have to challenge the traditional way which has been rote and mechanical, and does not take into account the cultural diversity and variety
of learning styles of individual children. Most of the time, students must sit silently in class while the teacher transmits the knowledge. Paulo Freire (1970) calls this traditional form of teaching “the banking method,” because students are treated as empty vessels waiting for deposits of countless and disconnected facts.

David and Roger Johnson (1975) point out that the instructional potential of student-to-student interaction is rarely taken into account. Students are likely to learn best when they are working actively and sharing responsibilities with others in small heterogeneous groups. Thus, teaching techniques such as cooperative learning, provide students with the most effective educational environment.

Each person should be stimulated to develop, learn, and grow as an individual, not as a standardized occupant of one of the several gross human categories (Schafer and Olexa, 1971). Students no longer should be evaluated exclusively by exams, tests, and traditional grades. Evaluation of students needs to include not only the final results of their learning, but involve as well the development of their learning process. In this way, grades would be based on individual effort, growth, and participation.

Teachers should refrain from the obsolete method of assigning grades throughout the year. Marks have never encouraged any pupils, except those who got good ones (Rowe, 1970). Instead, teachers need to provide feedback indicating students’ academic strengths and weaknesses. In this manner, report cards would present a list of objectives indicating whether the student has mastered each competency (The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1993). Alternatives to evaluation, such as
portfolios, need to be included on a more regular basis. Students would be allowed to keep all of their completed work in a portfolio and, at the end of the term, write their own self-evaluations by analysing their own work and presenting their progress throughout the year (Bigelow, 1995). Projects and demonstrations would also encourage students to look for their own answers, to be creative, and to think critically for themselves. Thus, these alternative methods would provide an egalitarian evaluation system that would acknowledge students’ individual pace of learning, as well as a more progressive and holistic approach to education.

New learning-teaching-living environments are needed, which would generate more satisfying and fulfilling experiences of personal development for each student. It is unfortunate that education has become so polluted by the economic structure of society, which strives to maintain the status quo. Schools can no longer be agents of the current social order, by using tracking and other means to screen out those judged not to be university material. On the contrary, it is to be hoped that schools will encourage and unleash the potential of each person to a maximum degree (Schafer and Olexa, 1971).

To bring about worthwhile social change, students need to value human diversity and reject exploitation in all its forms. Schools need to improve their philosophies, policies, and practices. They can yet become arenas of hope and agencies of human services for all students. The school system and the curriculum need to provide alternatives to students’ needs, and practice the philosophy of providing equal opportunities of education for everyone.
PART III

Gender Biases and Stereotypes in Schools

[I] know that the foundations are fragile. I know that it doesn't take women nearly as long to learn that males are not superior, as it does to learn that they are. I know that thirty years of learning patriarchal values can be undermined in thirty seconds, and that the world never looks the same again. I know that women have been victims of an enormous hoax—and that it won't work twice. I know that women can be autonomous and that we are becoming so. I know that this can happen in schools. I do not think we should cease to be outsiders in the terms that Virginia Woolf used, but I think that we should become so strong and our concerns so central, that the term outsider is no longer appropriate.

Spender, 1982

3.1 Reminiscences of Early Childhood

I remember, when I was a small child, I loved going to my cousins' house because we used to play all kinds of games like hide-and-seek and catch. My cousins were usually very generous with me, except when it came to some toys. I was not allowed to play with their lego. How I yearned to play with my male cousins' lego! Unfortunately, I was cast aside by my cousins since it was their game, and it was only something at which boys were good. I would watch them from the tiny corner of my eye while I played with my barbies. But I always played with barbies, dolls, and little tea cup sets. Wasn't there something else that I could play with? What about guns, ships, cars, and lego?

In my small mind I learned very soon that even though there were thousands of toys...
out there, I, being a girl, was only supposed to play with girls' toys. If I challenged my
own sex-role, I knew that I would be an outsider within my gender group, and the
punishment that would come with it would be too hard for a little one like me to endure.
There would be mockery, giggles, and laughter: "Look at her, she's acting like a boy!"
After that, isolation would follow. I was definitely not prepared to take that huge risk,
therefore, I complied with the norms of society.

One day in kindergarten, I decided I would challenge my sex role. I wanted to
build out of lego a beautiful castle. I wanted to create something beautiful just like the
boys in my class. I wanted to transform individual pieces of lego into one massive fort.
However, after probably ten minutes, I gave up. I could not even build a car let alone a
castle. I was so disappointed. Why couldn’t I do it? Why couldn’t I build something?
The tears gushed out like water descending from a waterfall into a stream of sadness. My
teacher grabbed me by the hand, embraced me, and soothed me by saying: "Don’t worry,
it’s okey, don’t feel bad, lego is for boys, that is why they are so good at it. I can’t build
anything myself, and I am a big person. Why don’t you go and play with the girls?” I was
led to the girls’ section, which meant I could cut, paste, colour, and play with dolls.

I still remember this scene vividly, sometimes it seems as if it had happened
yesterday. After that unhappy incident, I was never encouraged and I never felt motivated
again to defy the role that I was supposed to mimic. Lego, among many other toys of my
eyear childhood, became a taboo.
3.2 Schools as Social Systems

Girls may follow the same curriculum as boys — may sit side by side with boys in classes taught by the same teachers — and yet emerge from school with the implicit understanding that the world is a man’s world, in which women can and should take second place. To undermine this dynamic would be to make pupils aware of the possibility of the dismantling of sexual divisions. The transformation of pupils’ consciousness — enabling them to have confidence in their capacity to alter the course of their own lives — is and must be an important step in the process of social transformation.

Stanworth, 1984

Social institutions tend to reinforce each other as well as individuals’ concepts of sex roles, and education is another link in the chain. Education continues the process of socialization which is begun in the family’s culture and is strengthened by the media. By the time young children enter school, they have already developed strong views on what masculine and feminine should look like, thereby, adopting views of the appropriate sex roles (Stockard, Schmuck, Kempner, Williams, Edson, Sakre, & Smith, 1980).

Schools, instead of fighting against the sexist and stereotypical views which children bring into the school, reinforce them through both the written and the hidden curriculum. As it will be shown in this section of the thesis, some of the sex inequities that students are confronted with daily in schools involve a male-centred curriculum, differences in the depiction of males and females in curricular materials, differences in the amount of active participation in class which is allowed for females and males, and a constant environment which promotes sexist views and values, as well as stereotypical
roles (Stockard et al., 1980).

Schools clearly do not welcome children equally. The vision which claims that schools provide equal opportunities to everyone is yet unfulfilled. The educational system has still not embraced women as openly as it has men. Schools continue to create the conditions for the reproduction of inequality, and act as instruments for reproducing the patterns of subordination and domination which are characteristic of the society in which we live (Stanworth, 1984).

According to Sadker Pollack and Sadker Miller (1982), girls begin their school career with a great advantage over boys in speaking, reading, and counting. However, as they progress through school, their achievement declines, whereas boys continue to rise until they surpass their female counterparts. We must ask ourselves: What is the cause for this alarming decline in girls’ achievement as they progress through school? Do the specific practices of schools incorporate ideological and political trends that are harmful to the educational development of women? Arnot (1983) suggests that schools do not offer equality of opportunity to boys and girls alike, but rather that they actually close the door on girls’ educational needs. Our schools are failing our girls somewhere along the way and the aim of this section of the thesis is to analyse the various factors that contribute to this failure.

Sadker Pollack and Sadker Miller (1999) claim that educational equity has definitely become a political issue. Ultraconservatives have gone as far as to create research that has discredited the studies which have documented gender bias in schools.
The Women’s Freedom Network provides an example of a group which has sponsored attacks on the validity of the research as well as the motivations of the researchers. As a result, changing the system is not easy. It is a constant struggle which will require more than understanding gender bias or becoming aware of the issues of gender inequity.

To confront gender inequality, we have to take into account the politics of gender. We must be aware of the external and internal factors that influence the educational experiences of boys and girls. By external factors I refer to the experiences that children bring into the schools, such as gender stereotypes and roles that are reinforced by the media, the family culture, and early socialization. Among the internal factors, we must pay close attention to the internal workings of schools and the subtle messages sent to students. It is important to consider the content of the curriculum, the language and instructional materials, the interactions between teachers and students, and the structure of power and hierarchy in schools (see Appendix C). These are the issues which are going to be elaborated in detail. The findings and conclusions of this analysis will serve in the search for a common ground, in order to improve the educational experiences of both students and teachers, if our goal is a better and egalitarian society.

3.3 Revisiting my own personal experience within the educational system

Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers
us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known. The narrator too has a story, one that is embedded in... her culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history. This embeddedness lies at the core of the teaching-learning experience.

Witherell & Noddings, 1991

In elementary school, the only subjects that I really liked were English and History. I loved English because we got to read as many books as we liked. I remember there was a whole stack of books which were colour coded according to level of difficulty. Each book came with a card of comprehension questions, which we had to answer. As soon as we finished answering the questions, we could move onto the next colour. One of the reasons why I enjoyed reading so much was because it always transported me to different places and different worlds. I was immediately plunged into fantasies, adventures, sweet illusions, and dreams. Books became my best friends, and with them I never felt lonely.

Since I was in a British School, History also became my favourite subject, but I must admit that it was only when we were studying about the Queens of England that I really enjoyed the subject. I was among the greatest fans of Mary Queen of Scots, Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Victoria, and all the other female figures we studied. My friends and I were completely obsessed with these prominent females, and we loved to impersonate them during recess. I came to the conclusion that I also wanted to become a strong and famous female character. I wanted to be someone whom people would admire and respect, as well as fear. By the end of Elementary School, I knew I wanted to go to
England and marry a man of noble birth.

My worst subject became Math. I did not like it mainly because, to succeed in Math, one needed to be quick at answering, and classmates usually turned against each other to compete. I was neither mentally quick for calculations nor competitive. Therefore, I was a failure in this subject. I started dreading Math class; I became nervous, my hands would start sweating ten minutes before the class would begin. I wanted to go to the bathroom, I fidgeted, I felt nauseous, and my stomach ached. I knew public humiliation would soon follow if I could not put up my hand as fast as my other classmates. Most of the times I would put up my hand pretending to know the answer. I prayed the teacher would not pick me to explain the answer, but when she did, I was completely devastated. My eyes were lowered, my head started to bend down so I could only stare at the floor, I sat motionless and speechless, dead silence seized our classroom, until it was suddenly battered by loud laughter which echoed in my ears. Mockery came next, treading triumphantly on my little self and stepping all over my sense of pride as a human being. I felt dumb and stupid. Maybe I was really dumb and stupid after all. If the teacher said I was stupid, then she was probably right. If my classmates thought I was dumb, maybe they were right too.

These were just simple mental calculations, and yet I was unable to come up with the answers. The worst part was when the teacher would make us stand on top of our chair to see if we could think better that way. She probably thought our brains would open up and become enlightened if they were closer to heaven. But, little did she realize that it
just caused us to become more flustered, stressed, and nervous. And on top of it all, our brains had decided to block out for the entire morning. The only thing I could think of was: “I need to go to the bathroom. I wish the earth would be so hungry that it would just open up for a second, take a big bite and swallow me up forever.”

When the time came to go to High School, I was glad to know that the worst of my mathematical nightmares was over. I would take basic Math and I would be with other students who were just like me -- dumb at Math. I never even had to worry about subjects such as Chemistry and Physics, because I never took them, since they were not course requirements for those students who were taking basic Math. A couple of weeks went by during my first year in High School, before I came to hate another subject: Physical Education. To me it was a complete waste of time, we never learned anything. The rules and skills needed for all sports were taken for granted. Physical Education was never about learning or having fun. It was only about winning the match. It was about competition. It was about public humiliation if you could not shoot the ball, or public disgrace if you shot the ball to the wrong side of the court.

There were a lot of gender inequities that did not take me long to figure out. Boys did more exciting things such as field hockey and football. I also wanted to play these games, I was tired of playing volleyball and basketball. When there were competitions against other schools, boys would always get preference over girls to get the gym for training.

One day the football coach of our school passed out a sheet to all the girls who
wished to be part of a girl’s football team. I was so excited I could hardly believe it. I even went around the school advertising the new idea of a girl’s football team for our school. Unfortunately, even though the coach did manage to get the team together, it was never recognized by administration and the dream soon vanished.

Another area of injustice was the gender division we had for Home Economics and Workshop. I found sewing buttons to a piece of cloth absolutely useless, tedious, and monotonous. I wanted to take Workshop with the boys, because they would build the most exciting things out of wood. The boys would bring their beautifully carved wooden treasure boxes and their floating wooden ships to the class. They would show our Home-Room teacher their end-products so proudly. They would also spend weeks working on exciting projects such as building hot air balloons, which were lit up and inflated in the courtyard. We (the girls) could hear the crunching sound of paper as it unfolded into the shape of a balloon. In excitement, we would drop our sewing kits to the floor to watch through the windows the boys’ success. As soon as the balloons took their own form, they would suddenly soar into the air, displaying their marvellous vibrant colours. There was a desperate sense of longing among us (the girls). How we wished we could do the same marvellous things!

During my undergraduate years of university, my family and I returned to our country of origin, Ecuador. Things were very different; the Ecuadorian society was more conservative and traditional than the European and North American societies which I had been exposed previously, due to my father’s diplomatic career. I decided to enter the
Faculty of Law, which was not a very common field for women in Ecuador at the time. It was tough being among the ten female students in a class of sixty. Professors would constantly humiliate female students if we did not know how to answer certain questions. All of my undergraduate professors were male, and their most usual comment was: “You should not be sitting here if you don’t know the answer, you should be at home taking care of your husband and children.” Not a day went by without female students being verbally and emotionally harassed by professors. Every single day became a struggle of courage to make it through the next.

During my first year of university, I started working as an English teacher in a private high school. Since I was very young, my relationship with my students was extremely pleasant. There was no generation gap and we had many things in common, such as music, TV programs, and even the latest fashion trends. I loved working there because I was among the three young teachers of that school, though I was the only female. We had so much fun together organizing school parties and extracurricular events for the students. We were loved by our students and we soon became the most popular teachers of the school. Our relationship with our students was very strong, and soon it was seen as a threat to administration and older teachers, who failed to enjoy the vitality that we brought to the school. They came to resent us, but only to me did they decide to pay close attention. I knew that every move I made was being watched and censored. One day, my principal decided to call me into his office to tell me that my relationship with students should be kept at a distance, and that I was not to be their friend, only their
teacher. Even though I was not the only one who saw the role of the teacher also as a friend, I was the only one reprimanded. My young male colleagues were allowed to continue their friendly relationship with students as before.

When I was twenty-one years old, I decided to move out and live independently from my parents. I started looking for a modest apartment to rent, but as soon as the apartment owners asked me if I were married, and my answer was negative, my hopes for renting vanished. No one wished to rent an apartment to a young single lady. They were concerned about my morality, principles, and values. I felt discriminated against for being a woman, and though I could not fully understand the reasons at that time, now I look back and I am able to grasp the true meaning of the word prejudice. After six months of having been rejected as a potential tenant, I was finally able to find a place through personal contacts. Unfortunately, the apartment was far from modest, but it was my only option.

Six years went by until my father finally told us we were moving to Toronto. I could not wait to pack up my things and go. I wanted to start Teacher's College because I had realized that teaching high school was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, and teaching was where my heart truly belonged.

During my first practice teaching component, I had to teach History. The first thing I was told by all the male teachers in my department was that, being a young female student teacher, I could not dress casually as they did, since this would make classroom management for me more difficult to handle. I knew they had not meant any harm, but I also realized that they were reacting according to their own gender bias. I never did what
they told me, I continued to dress casually as all the other men in my department, and I was glad to prove them wrong in that matter.

Another sexist incident occurred at the photocopy room. I was in a hurry to make two copies of a test for my associate. Two male teachers were before me and noticed that I needed the copies. One of them looked at me and said: “It is ok, I will let you go first since you seem in a rush.” The other teacher complained, saying: “How come you give her your place, I’m also in a hurry you know, what about me?” He replied: “I am sorry, pal, but you know that beauty comes before brains!” As I was walking back to my classroom, this brief conversation just hit me in the head. How sexist that comment was! I was furious the entire day, yet throughout my whole month of practicum, I never confronted that teacher about his sexist remark.

The first week of observing how my associate taught his history classes, I was extremely concerned, because I knew I could not teach the same type of content he taught. His areas of focus dealt mainly with Military, Political, and Economic History. I suddenly felt as if I knew nothing of the subject. He was an expert in explaining military strategies of combat, and all the different kinds of weapons and artillery. I was completely in awe of his knowledge, though I must admit that half the time I had to make an extreme effort to keep awake while he taught History.

During that week, I also realized that only the boys in the class were completely captivated by my associate’s stories. When I approached my associate to tell him that I was a Social Historian, therefore, I would not be able to teach the same content, he just
smiled and told me that I did not have to teach the same way he did. I would be free to develop my own style. Regarding the content, he told me he would just give me the general topics to be covered in the following three weeks, and the way I decided to cover them would be entirely up to me. I was very fortunate to have an understanding associate. A lot of the improvements of my teaching practice I owe to him, and I am very grateful to him for his support. But at the same time, I know that History, among many other subjects in high school, ignores the experiences of women. It is vital that as teachers we realize that we cannot take a single approach to teaching, one point of view, or a single vision.

I was determined that the experience of girls in schools needed a complete transformation from the old traditional ways of teaching. I realized that to improve the situation in schools, I had to go back to university to pursue my graduate studies in Education. The program I chose was Teacher Development. It made sense to me, that I needed to prepare myself more professionally to make others aware of the problems which students encounter at the school level.

Even though I knew things in life were not set on equal terms for women and men, I never really thought of myself as being a feminist. Feminism was a word, which for a long time carried a negative series of connotations for me. A libertine, a woman who wants to be like a man, a woman who seeks power over men, a woman who hates men, or perhaps a woman who suppresses her femininity and believes that the virtues of nurturing and caring are obsolete. It was not until I was a graduate student taking Dr. Johan Aitken's course “Women as Change Agents in Educational Systems,” that I started
opening up my eyes to the real meaning of the word feminism. I realized that feminism is a word that means justice, fairness, and equality for all. When I read Reasonable Creatures by Katha Pollitt, I realized for the first time that I too was a feminist:

For me, to be a feminist is to answer the question “Are women human?” with a yes. It is not about whether women are better than, worse than or identical with men...It’s about justice, fairness and access to the broad range of human experience (1995, p. xvi).

I started thinking about the episodes of my life, trying to remember instances in which I had felt I had been treated unfairly because of my gender, and I was able to remember quite a few. Moreover, I began to search for other common experiences among my female colleagues, and what follows is just a little grain in a big heap of women’s everyday struggles for gender equity.

3.4 Gender Inequity: Teachers’ Narratives

I believe increasingly that only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can enable women to create a collective description of the world that will be truly ours.

Rich, 1986

As women share stories of their own lives, a common experience of oppression and of resistance is recognized. This politicizing gives women the courage to persist in resistance, recognizing that their difficulties have not only an individual basis but also a social and political basis as well. Fear of moving beyond accepted definitions of behaviour is not definitely allayed, but the experience of self-affirmation and hope that comes from the
affirmation and community of sisterhood gives courage and enables creative resistance.

Welch, 1985

Methodology

Females constitute the majority of our nation’s population. Nevertheless, women have been “the half” which has been always neglected. The goal of today’s schools, “equal opportunities for everyone”, has become nothing but mere rhetoric. From governance to curriculum, the issue of gender and the problem of gender bias and gender blindness in schools are constantly present (Scollay, 1994).

The narratives that follow will serve others to become more aware of the reality with which our female children and teachers are faced. A reality which has serious and negative implications to the true meaning of what education should be. By writing and reading about women’s experiences, we realize that as women we are not alone. We learn that women have been seeking autonomy, self-determination, and recognition for a long time. Unfortunately, we also learn that we have been vulnerable both inside and outside the institutional environments, and that we have been nothing but pawns in a world which has been run solely by men. Finally, analysing women’s experiences and the politics of gender will serve to provide teachers with a foundation for transforming teaching and learning into a positive experience for all students, which will eventually challenge the status quo of education (Lewis, 1993).

Through semi-structured interviews, I tape recorded, transcribed, and analysed the
experiences of four female teachers. The teachers were recruited through personal contacts, and I asked them if they wished to volunteer in this research project. Through open-ended questions, I encouraged them to share their experiences on gender issues, both as students and teachers within the educational system.

To ensure confidentiality, I will refer to the teachers as W, X, Y, and Z.

- Teacher W teaches Math at the high school level and has twenty-four years of teaching experience.
- Teacher X teaches Math at the elementary level and has ten years of experience.
- Teacher Y teaches English at the high school level and also has ten years of experience.
- Teacher Z is a first year teacher, who teaches English and History.

External Factors:

Early Socialization, Family Culture, and the Media

Sex roles are characteristics that are attributed to individuals according to their sex. These attributes include those associated with behaviours such as cognitive skills, job choices, personality characteristics, feelings, and attitudes. Sex stereotypes, on the other hand, are pre-conceived notions of what men and women are like. They originate from archetypes which provide untrue perceptions of gender. Both sex stereotypes and sex roles involve rigid beliefs that are thought to be, by many people, universally true and biologically natural.

The process through which people accept and display sex stereotypes and sex roles
is called sex role development (Schau & Tittle, 1985). Early socialization is just the starting point from which sex roles develop. Davies (1988) makes an interesting analogy by stating that learning through socialization is like learning through "osmosis." Children learn how to act, be, and feel as gendered people by absorbing their knowledge of gender identity automatically from other children, adults, and the media. Therefore, it is important to remember that socialization is heavily influenced by both the family culture and the media to which children are exposed since the day they are born.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that depending on the culture of the parents, the child will be exposed to specific practices which will play a major role in a child's development. Some cultures will tend to reinforce the role of the female as being passive, emotional, cooperative, and helpless. On the other hand, the male will learn to suppress emotions and be more adventurous, aggressive, and competitive.

The media also recreates traditional sex role stereotypes and reinforces sexism. The subtle messages delivered to the public by the media continue to portray women and men in stereotypical ways. The media continues to woo boys for leadership positions while it teaches girls to be submissive. From the characters on sitcoms and soap operas, the marital vows which are recited at weddings, to the toys which are marketed, gender stereotypes and roles continue to be perpetuated (Chen, 1994; Couch, 1995; Schwartz & Markham, 1985; Knupfer, 1997).

Gender roles and stereotypes have already been deeply embedded by the external factors by the time children arrive to school. Teacher X clearly comments on this issue:
When I taught grade one and two, I had a centred program activity, therefore I had all kinds of construction toys like lego. When I had my free activity period, I encouraged the kids to use the legos to create something, then draw it, and write about what they had built. The boys loved it. They would fight over the different buildings toys, and they would build the most amazing things. But I had to force the girls to use the legos, they usually wanted to go to other kinds of activities, such as cut and paste, or the dress-up centre.

The girls wanted to do the things that allowed them to talk more with each other and to interact more with each other, whereas the boys were building in isolation. I tried to make the building activities as attractive as possible for the girls, but they didn’t seem interested. I don’t know if it was because it wasn’t social enough, or because they were afraid of the blocks, or maybe because they had never played with those kind of toys before...Girls would create the most amazing things in the art centre, but they were reluctant to go to these blocks and create something. I also realized that the boys did not like the reading centre, whereas the girls would grab a stuffed animal, sit them on their laps and read to them...I realized that there was a real division of activities...

Money and Ehrhardt (1972) claim that gender identity, which is the core of sex-role self-concept, is already established by children as early as 18 months old. When children are between two and four years old, they develop rudimentary notions about differences in toys, clothing, and even personality characteristics (Weinraub & Brown, 1983). Finally, by the time they reach elementary school, they have clear and fixed notions of which gender category they fit in. Moreover, they become aware of the characteristics that discriminate individuals in one category from individuals in another, and their knowledge of these characteristics influence their adoption of stereotypical gender roles (Martin & Halverson, 1981). Girls will become more nurturing and social, thereby preferring to participate in activities that will allow this type of interaction. On
the other hand, boys will become more competitive and individualistic, tending to choose activities which will allow them to work more on isolation. Consequently, children will naturally sex-segregate themselves when allowed to do so. Teacher W also gave an example on how students in high school continue to sex-segregate on their own:

I don't set a seating plan, and at the beginning of the year, when students march into my classroom, girls sit all together and guys sit all together. I try to make them aware that if I would have set a seating plan of guys on one side of the room and girls on the other, at least I would expect some of them to be screaming at me on the grounds of discrimination. Yet, that was what they themselves selected. The sex-segregated seating pattern continues up to this day, even though I have pointed this out to them. Therefore, if a teacher tries to strive for gender equity in the classroom, it can become very difficult since you usually have this sort of bias already coming in.

Family culture and family beliefs are also a major concern for many teachers who try to challenge sex stereotypes. Teacher X related an incident which clearly demonstrates how parents and their own cultural biases have an effect on their children’s sexist attitudes:

When I was a student teacher at the faculty, my first component was to teach grade 6 and 7 (a split class), and my associate put me in charge of Physical Education. I had to teach a dance unit in that subject. So I had to do folk dancing, and I worked really hard on my lessons, but I had this group of boys who refused to participate. They would say to the other guys who were participating that they were fags. They made all these derogatory comments, and they were really challenging me. So I kept them after school, to do an assignment and I told them that the following week when we had Physical Education they would participate whether they liked it or not.

These boys were the typical little macho guys... They came with notes
from their parents saying that they did not have to participate in Phys. Ed. when I was teaching dance. This went to the Principal, because I thought that it was unacceptable. The principal talked to these parents and told them that this was not an option. It was a unit and it was going to be marked on, and he also told them that it was not right for parents to say to their kids: “Oh, if you don’t like poetry in English, then you don’t have to do it.” Too bad if you don’t like it, it is in the curriculum! But it was because they were boys, and they were machos, and if they did folk dancing they were geeks. One dad even said: “My son doesn’t have to dance in school.” This shows how gender roles are more of a societal issue.

Teacher Y also stated that parents’ belief systems reinforce sexist attitudes, which eventually channel students into taking specific subject areas. In the long run, these patterns lead to establish future stereotypical gender roles:

Certainly within the educational system there are more opportunities for female students to take subjects that were traditionally seen as male. Now females can take Industrial Arts, and male students can take Family Studies. But how many students actually do? They are very few. I have gone to supply for Industrial Arts, and it is mainly guys and maybe two female students taking that class... I think this is a reflection of society, family culture, and norms. In the school where I teach, students are mainly Italian in background, so those students believe that traditional roles have to be clearly delineated. So there is no push from the home to do something which is outside from those traditional roles... I also had the case of a female student, whose brother was going to a private high school. The parents wanted for the education of their son to be better, therefore, they sent him to what they believed was a better school because you had to pay. However, the daughter was going to a public school, and the girl told me clearly that her parents cared more about her brother’s education than her own.

The English language is another component of early childhood socialization. Our language reflects sexist, male-centred attitudes that perpetuate the invisibility of female
experience. It sets male experiences as the norm (Sheldon, 1990). Even though a lot has been done recently in education to avoid language bias and use more gender neutral language, students are still bringing language biases into the classroom regardless of teachers’ constant struggles. Teacher W gives an example of how language bias has already been deeply ingrained in students’ beliefs:

When I am setting up problems with the kids in my Math courses, I use names that usually go either way, like Lee or Jordan. I also try to wipe out pronouns that identify as one sex or the other...A few years back, using that sort of language in my Calculus class, meaning that there were no words within the problem that identified the driver of the car as either male or female, or the police officer involved as either male or female, and yet including the young women in the class, the concluding sentence was “He should do” such and such, and I wrote across the bottom of everyone’s paper: “What makes you assume that the driver is male?” We had a discussion about it, and the young women realized that there was nothing in the problem that made them assume that... Therefore, the next time I set a problem like that, I got a back and forth response of either he or she. I told them I was intrigued why they used one way or the other, and not simply refer to it neutrally as “the driver.” Why did they have to assign a specific gender since there was no specific gender given in the problem? Why did they have to pick one? I was trying to make the kids more aware of this issue...The assumption is often the standard.

There are a lot of things that the teacher must work against in terms of the culture, values, and stereotypes that children bring into the schools. In order to achieve gender equity, it is not enough to look at the internal factors that work within the educational system, but it is important to take into consideration that children have already been influenced by external factors that go beyond the walls of our schools. Let us not forget that we were ourselves children, and we have also been socialized and influenced by the
same external factors affecting our students. Unfortunately, these factors have managed to creep under the little space left between the classroom doors and the floors of our schools’ walls.

**Internal factors:**
**Curriculum, Instructional Materials, and Content**

In twelve years of school I never studied anything about myself.

Twelfth-grade African-American girl,
American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1992

But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in...I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilence, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome.

Catherine Morland in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, 1817

At six months of age, boys are released into the outside world, whereas girls are usually being held inside the home. Because girls stay more inside the home than boys, they will be exposed to closer contact with adults. As a result, girls will listen to and participate in language more than their male counterparts. The play activities of girls will involve a lot of role rehearsals, which will help develop their speech quicker. Thus, they will become more familiar with the structure of language, and this will eventually aid them when learning to read. Since girls’ play is more sedentary, such as dressing and undressing dolls, painting, colouring, cutting, and drawing, it involves the usage of
smaller muscles. These activities will prepare girls better when learning to write, because they have already developed good finger and hand dexterity. The boys, on the other hand, will use their larger muscles more, and since they are exposed to the outside world more than girls, they will experience both greater spatial and behavioural freedom. In most cases, boys are encouraged by parents to be more adventurous and brave. Girls are encouraged to be more passive and docile.

By the time girls and boys reach pre-school, they have already had totally different learning experiences. Each gender will arrive to school with a different set of accomplishments and a different set of needs. Girls’ learning experiences will start them out ahead of boys in speaking, reading, and counting. However, as girls progress through school, their achievement will decline, whereas boys’ achievement will continue to rise through the school years, until it finally surpasses that of girls’ (Greenberg, 1985).

What is the cause for this alarming decline, which will eventually lead to different career options and different futures for both boys and girls? According to the research done in girls’ decline in performance by Sadker Pollack and Sadker Miller (1982), it can be concluded that schools are failing to fulfill the needs of our female students.

If we examine the curriculum at the elementary level, we can firmly claim that schools ignore to address girls’ educational gaps. Schools will only stress the skills that boys must develop in order to succeed in school, but which girls have already practised and mastered. The curriculum at the elementary level is usually centred around reading and verbal activities, such as singing and story telling, as well as small motor activities,
which involve the development of small muscles when painting, cutting, and pasting.

Unfortunately, girls' deficits, such as large motor activities, which would involve the development of larger muscles, spatial activities, such as block building and exploring the outside world, and experimental activities, such as using scales, weights, and tools, are completely neglected by the core curriculum (Greenberg, 1985).

Another deficit of the curriculum consists in how the contribution of women and ethnic minorities have been constantly left out of texts and content in all subject areas. Schools have supported and represented only one specific way of looking at the world – a man's perspective. Despite some amount of improvement made by publishers and ministry guidelines, sexual biases in both instructional materials and curriculum content, continue to be a major problem in education. Teacher W and Z give an account on the slight improvements made in text books in the last years:

Teacher W:

There has been some improvement at least in textbooks to address the issue of gender equity. The early attempts were pretty insane because you had things like "Karl the Cooker"..."Daisy the Driller"...The kids just fell down laughing, it was so blatant that it was never taken seriously. Now there is an attempt, certainly in textbooks, to use more examples that are more true to life and less contrived. Certainly the language used in text books has become more gender neutral...

However, if you pull down the statistics from the web page from the University of Waterloo, the enrollment within the last ten years in Math and Science according to gender, has not changed much. So if the curriculum would be doing a good job addressing that issue, then perhaps we would be able to see greater female enrollment at the university level in those subjects.
Teacher Z:

In regards to what kids should learn and the books that they should read, things have not changed drastically since the time when I was in High School. For example in History textbooks, I can say that, from the time I was in Grade 9 to the Grade 9 that I teach today, there has only been one different edition published since then. So within ten years, there has been one edition, which means that the changes have not been that significant. A one time revision is not going to alter a textbook that much. So now instead of there being a one page spread on the contribution of women, now there are two pages...This is not going to alter the way in which education and gender equity is looked.

Most texts have recently paid more attention to visuals and language, but women still remain marginal to the main text (Light, Staton, & Bourne, 1989). To fully address the issue of gender equity within schools, it will not be enough to change the language in textbooks and instructional materials, but it is vital to understand that, until the content of the curriculum does not undergo a complete reformation, true gender equity will not be achieved.

Regarding the curriculum content and the palpable messages of inequity which are being sent to female students, the following teachers commented:

Teacher Y:

Within my subject area, English, the curriculum is covered mainly by white European men, Shakespeare being number one...if you are speaking about gender equity, it is an exception to the rule to actually study female authors. When you do, she is a white, middle class female...In terms of the novels that must be studied, they are males...not females...And yet I am the one, who with my Department Head, devised the program...Interestingly enough, for the short stories and poetry, I have more females, and I don’t know what this means. I suppose,
somehow in my learning I made the connection that females are more aligned with poetry and short stories... Whereas males are more aligned with novels, which is a sad story... There is definitely a stereotype in the way we look at literature... It is only in the poetry anthologies that females and other minorities are included... Unfortunately, poetry is not an integral part of the curriculum...

Things have not changed greatly since the times when I was in High School because kids are still reading the same books that I read when I was in High School. I can say that there is more diversity in the anthologies, and this is because they are the easiest things to replace, in order to have more representation of the diversity in your classroom. But then to change a novel would mean to make a judgement call... To take out a Shakespearean play and replace it with a play written by an African female... I don’t think the curriculum is ready to do that... It all has to do with what is considered valuable enough in our society.

Teacher X:

Within my subject area, Math, I don’t think that the curriculum does a good job in covering the contribution of women from diverse racial, ethno cultural, and class backgrounds... If you look historically at Math, there are a lot of male mathematicians, but the curriculum does not really look at women in Math. I think this is something that should be addressed.

Teacher Z:

I don’t think the curriculum covers the contribution of women as nearly as enough as it covers the ideas and achievements of men. I don’t think that teachers or students second guess this, because that is the way the curriculum has been for so long. Therefore, it becomes natural that we learn all about male philosophers, but never thinking of learning about women... I have noticed that women’s contributions within the curriculum materials are not even set within the normal flow of the paragraphs. They have, for example, one page which is a different colour page, and it says at the top “Extra Study” or “For Further Consideration.” This means that it is not required and that only if the teacher has extra time at the end of the unit, they may consider taking a look at this section of the textbook. Therefore, the contribution of women is not included as a regular part of the unit... It is up to the
Concerning English... In terms of the authors that we study, it is completely unequal. For example in Grade 13, they study five novels plus poetry, and out of the five novels, not one is written by a female author, and only one of the books includes a female protagonist. This is really incredible because we talk about literature as a reflection about us and life, yet it is always in the eyes of what men are experiencing that these issues are studied... Only in the poetry anthologies, contributions of women are included, specially minority women... The problem is that poetry is for some reason always the last thing to be studied, and if there is not enough time, then poetry is not studied. So this area of literature is made less relevant compared to other areas of literature... Yet you see, I never really thought about all of this until now, that we are talking about it... It is terrible.

Teacher W:

Female students are expected to sit and write on a particular novel and admire the male hero, just as men do, but in order to do this, women must do a kind of "mental cross dressing," [they must imagine how it feels to be a man] so that they are able to identify with the male protagonist and produce the essay... Girls have to adapt and play the rules which have been set by the guys... I think you’ve got a culture that is still male dominated. If you look at the big names, Bill Gates is known as the richest man in the world, do we ever hear about a woman who is creating software and getting that sort of notice in areas where it counts?...

The curriculum does not really address women’s contributions... For example, in my subject area. Textbooks don’t go out their way to point out the numerous female mathematicians that there were out there. One of the reasons we do not know much about women throughout history is because most of their contributions got used by their brothers, husbands, or whomever. Just like composers, how many female composers do we know? Not a lot, there had to be more. How many female authors do we know? ... Who was writing? The men. Who was writing under cover? The women. And I think, the same phenomenon happened with a lot of mathematicians of the time.
Whether the subject is Literature, History, or Math, women’s experiences, achievements and interests are unequally explored. Gender equity teaching and learning must be integrated into the normal curriculum, and not seen as an “add-on” (Stevenson, 1992).

Women have done great things of marvellous importance to humanity, unfortunately, they have gone unrecognized because they were done by women. For example, Emily Greene Balch, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946, was still a name which did not appear in a major encyclopaedia of the fifties. However, generals Pershing and Patton each received entries of more or less a column plus a picture. As time has gone by, Balch has only received an entry of a few lines (Noddings, 1984).

Unfortunatly, examples like this are many. It would be more appropriate to look at these examples not as mere examples, but as the norm of the patriarchal society in which we live. Currently, for students to have a well and rounded English education, at least one Shakespearean play must be read and studied in every single year of high school.

Whatever happened to studying other female authors of the time? Where there any female authors at the time? Who has ever heard of Aphra Behn? She was born in England in 1640, and she wrote a number of poems, novels, and plays. The question remains: Why are her plays not part of the core curriculum when studying English Literature?

What about studying female writers from cultural minorities, such as Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (1648-1695), a prominent Mexican poet and scholar, who is best known for her defining work in feminist literature? Have we ever heard of Murasaki Shikibu
(978-1026), a great Japanese writer of the time? A woman who wrote an historical novel using her own experiences to narrate Japanese court life during the Heian period.

We learn about Plato, Aristotle and Sophocles, but what do we learn in school that has ever mentioned or recognized the work done by Sappho? A female Greek, poet and philosopher who lived two thousand years ago. Only a few of her poems survive, since her writings on philosophy were destroyed by priests of the time who condemned her for being a woman.

Who really determines what is a great book? Who classifies its complexity, ambiguity, and historical centrality? What has made most female writers along with ethnic minorities end up on the unrequited list of books to be studied in schools? Is it because they were written by women, and therefore presumed not to be of great literary quality? Is it perhaps because they were written by female and ethnic minority authors, and therefore presumed to be too unsophisticated? If books such as Their Eyes Were Watching God and The Colour Purple, get students thinking about their own experience, maybe they ought to read it and forget about that typical classic piece of literature that you yourself found dry and tedious and never got around finishing it. The goal of our schools to value women’s contribution and multiculturalism is still unfulfilled, since it means presenting as universally meaningful, books that reflect the interests, experiences, and values of privileged white men at the expense of women and ethnic minorities (Pollitt, 1995).

When we think about famous composers, who do we think of? Chopin, Mozart, or
Beethoven? What names can we come up with if we think of famous painters? Dali, Picasso, or Rembrandt? Do we ever think of Maria Teresa Agnesi (1718-1799), Anna Bon (1700's), or Fanny Mendelssohn (1800's)? Do we know who they were? Are we familiar with the music they composed? The answer is no. What about Gentileschi Artemisia (1593-1652), or Judith Leyster (1609-1660)? Are we familiar with their paintings? The answer again is no.

Tillie Olsen (1978) makes a question of vital importance, that we should all ask ourselves: “How is it that women have not made a fraction of the intellectual, scientific, or artistic-cultural contribution that men have made?” (p. 27). Women, as well as ethnic minorities, have been excluded from the mainstream curriculum. The purpose and the content of the curriculum taught in schools has to be understood in a political and historical context, in which women have been made part of the patriarchal conceptual framework that has placed them below men. Therefore, as long as the curriculum continues to be male-centred and male-biased, the mainstream curriculum will continue to be a feminist issue of concern (Warren, 1988).

The Hidden Curriculum: Teaching Practices and Expectations

When we look closely, or when we become weavers, we learn of the tiny multiple threads unseen in the overall pattern, the knots on the underside of the carpet.

Rich, 1979
Whether one looks at preschool classrooms or university lecture halls, at female teachers or male teachers, research spanning the past 20 years consistently reveals that males receive more teacher attention than do females.

Wellesley Center, 1992

Achieving gender equity in education extends far beyond curriculum content, instructional materials, and textbooks. The teacher’s behaviour, beliefs and pedagogical practices are also determining factors that we must be aware of, if we wish to improve the educational experience of girls in schools. Teachers and students are responsible for constructing the gender codes for classroom interactions, sometimes in unconscious ways. The powerful gender coding in schools makes up part of the hidden curriculum (Bernard-Powers, 1997).

Researchers have reported that at all grade levels and in all subject areas, boys tend to dominate classroom communication. Boys participate in more interactions than girls, and this phenomena becomes greater as the years go on (Sadker & Sadker, 1985). Males are called on more often, asked more complex and open-ended questions, and are more often engaged in inquiries that involve abstract thinking patterns. They also receive more severe criticism compared to girls for disruptive behaviour (Jones, 1989). On the other hand, the interactions of girls with teachers often involve more rewards for neatness, silence, and appearance. Females are also asked more basic recall questions and are given the correct answers when they cannot produce them, thereby encouraging helplessness and passivity in girls’ behaviour (Serbin & O’Leary, 1975).
Consequently, if we examine the way teachers interact with students, we can find a great deal of sexism, gender blindness, and sex stereotypes, which reinforce gender roles and have a negative effect in the educational development of female students (The National Project on Women in Education, 1977). The following teachers shared their stories:

Teacher W:

The teacher is the most important person when setting expectations for students. I always thought I made no difference in my classroom between males and females, until there was this computer error on my class list, which taught me a very interesting lesson about five or six years into my career. This student in Grade 9, whose name was Jody, had been indicated on my class list as female, and when I looked at Jody I thought: “Wow, that’s one rocky little girl!” This student was not particularly good at Math, and being female I was terribly worried that she got a good start. Therefore, I spent a good time with her making sure that she was understanding the material, whereas when a young man asked a question in the class, I sort of got him going, but I would not spend as much time with the guys as I did with the girls.

After three months, I asked the home-room teacher how was she doing in her other subjects, and the teacher said: “What do you mean ‘she’? Jody is a guy!” I could not believe it. I thought she must be mistaken. This was a thirteen-fourteen year old child with no obvious signs of masculinity, a very androgynous child, if the student was a guy the voice had not changed, nor had he any signs of facial hair. It turns out that the computer had made an error, Jody was indeed a man, as his home-room teacher said: “If Jody is a girl, then somebody has been missing a whole lot in the Phys. Ed. Department, because Jody has been taken Phys. Ed with the boys for the past three months.” I realized for the first time, that I had treated him completely different from the other boys in the class, because I thought he was a girl. I noticed, I had a reversed bias...In which I was extremely patient with the girls, and less patient with the boys. This was a real object lesson.
Teacher X:

At my school [single sex school] when I was a student, we had our graduation ceremony at the end of Grade 12, even though other schools would have it at the end of Grade 13, because they didn’t expect us to go to Grade 13, or to go to university. The year I graduated, our principal, who was a nun, was saying how this was a special year, because it was the first time that over half of the students had stayed onto Grade 13, and they were going to university, and this was not so long ago, but most girls were leaving at the end of Grade 12, going into hair dressing or college...My memory tells me that even though we were not discouraged, we were also not encouraged to apply to university...My own gut feeling is that there has been a different set of expectations imposed for both males and females. I don’t think most teachers would come out and say it, but I know from my own experience that this is so...

Two years ago, I was doing a writing course at the university, and they wanted us to do an action research project involving writing and Mathematics. The whole idea consisted of using a math journal to write solutions to math problems to help kids understand Math. So I partnered up with a Grade 7 teacher, and I worked with her class once a week for three months, and I videotaped myself teaching. That was the most enlightening thing... I thought I was ‘Miss Wonderful’, and that I did not treat kids differently, but when I watched myself, I realized I called on the same three people all the time, and they were all boys. They were the boys who were the first ones to have their hands up all the time, or they would be the ones who would call out the answer, or they were the typical obnoxious in your face type of guys. I called on them 90% of the time. The quiet girls sitting at their desks, who could probably offer just as much I never called on. I also realized I never gave enough wait time. I would pose a question and there would be these three boys with their hands up right away. I gave them tons of praise and I never realized before that I was doing this.

I also realized that if I could pose a question and wait just two minutes before calling on somebody, I would include a lot more people, but because I had these three quickies in the class they got all my attention. These boys were raised and put on a pedestal because they had the answers first. I don’t think they were smarter that the other kids, but because they could give me the answers that I wanted to hear very quickly, they were getting rewarded and they were all guys. A lot of
this has to do with socialization in which boys are rewarded for being 
loud and obnoxious, but if girls act that way they are seen as pushy. 
Usually, we like boys who are go getters and assertive and we prefer 
girls who are quiet and have neat printing. This made me stop and 
think the way I was interacting with students. I think as teachers, we 
are unconscious of these kinds of things.

Teacher Z:

The way I administer encouragement to both males and females is 
slightly different. I am more straightforward and factual with males and 
my praise is less emotional, whereas with females, there is a more 
emotional aspect to it. And that comes from an unconscious belief on 
my part. Now that we are talking about it, I realize that there is a 
difference in the way I interact with male and female students. The 
other day I did notice that I picked three boys in a row to answer 
questions, and I stopped myself and realized that I have to make a 
conscientious effort in asking boy-girl-boy-girl kind of thing...I have 
heard kids talk about teachers, and then they follow it by saying 
something like: “Of course you did well in so and so’s class, you are a 
female”, or “Of course he gave you a second chance, you are a girl.”...

Another example regarding a different set of expectations being set for 
females and males is Phys. Ed. Males are always better competitors 
and players. I regret the fact that now looking back at the time when I 
was in school, and had I felt remotely comfortable, I would have tried 
to be more involved in this subject, but I just never did. Phys. Ed has 
always been about skills, but never about learning to develop those 
skills. For some of us, [females] Phys. Ed was not something to have 
fun with, to enjoy, or to relax, but it was always about competition and 
winning. Even in the division of the teams the teacher would pick the 
guys first because they were better players, and in this way you would 
not end up with a team full of females. As a student, you internalize 
this and you realize that only the strong boys are being divided into 
teams, and with the girls it didn’t matter because we were supposedly 
all bad anyway. Phys. Ed. was never about learning how the rules 
worked for the game and it was never about teaching the skills needed. 
Either you knew them already or you didn’t. Therefore, whoever knew 
the rules succeeded, and usually the boys were the ones to succeed. 
Because boys are usually the ones watching the games on TV, they are 
the ones who are already familiar with all kinds of sports. Therefore,
girls were always at a disadvantage.

By the time you get to high school, it is too late, most girls lose interest. It is the worst time to even go to gym, because you are going through puberty, and it is altogether weird physically...Since I had never excelled in this area, it meant that I had to endure those forty-five minutes of class and I couldn’t wait until it was over...It was and still is very unfair.

Teacher Y:

Teachers tend to call upon all those students who respond. The question we should be asking ourselves, as teachers, is: “Who is responding in the class?” For example I know that I tend to interact more with male students who are causing me trouble, so I think that unconsciously we are socializing women to withdraw, since men are louder and more disruptive than girls in the class. As they say: “It is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease.”

According to teacher Y, teachers usually tend to interact more with male students because they tend to be louder in class, and this has traditionally been considered more disruptive. Teachers must not forget that female students are also disruptive but in a less conspicuous way. Thus, girls’ negative behaviour is more likely to be ignored. As teachers, we must be aware that when negative behaviour is ignored, it eventually ceases. Unfortunately, by trying to channel boys’ negative behaviour in class, we are actually reinforcing their disruptiveness, whereas by ignoring girls’ behaviour, we are correcting it (Ebbeck, 1998).

Teachers also need to make a conscientious effort regarding the language they use and the subtle messages that they send to students. Even though language is an abstract thing and it is sometimes hard to see it as an issue, it is important that teachers understand
that it is a fundamental part the problem, especially in the way language has been used to misrepresent women, and how this has caused female students to misinterpret their lives (Sheldon, 1990).

Teacher Z admits how hard it is to be aware of using gender neutral language, and how sometimes through the use of language teachers communicate sex stereotypical views:

I have to admit that regarding language, I have to make a very strong effort to use neutral language, and I find this extremely hard, because certain things come naturally, such as: "You guys." I have also reinforced gender roles unconsciously. For example, I had a Grade 10 general class last semester, and some of the mouths of the females were just unbelievable, so every so often I would correct both males and females, telling them that human beings should not treat each other that way. But to the females, I would always add: "Now, that is not a really nice thing for a lady to say, that is not very lady-like, and that language is not attractive on ladies" There you go! I was unconsciously reinforcing gender roles.

Female oppression, whether biological, economic, psychological, linguistic, political, or a combination of these, have produced a language based on sexual analogy, which has directed our manner of perceiving the world through a male perspective. Language structure and the way we use it to communicate with others is still a challenge for feminist supporters (Marks & Courtivron, 1981).

Another area of research has focussed on the teaching strategies to which girls and boys respond best. It has been concluded that girls do better in non-competitive situations and in group work (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, & Tarule, 1986). Therefore, it makes sense that according to the research done by the American Association of University
Women Educational Foundation (1998), males continue to outscore females on tests, particularly high-stakes standardized tests. Unfortunately, this fact has been used by many anthropological researchers to conclude that there are gender genetic factors that influence the development of certain skills over others. However, other researchers, like Cronbach (1969), claim that human development is a cumulative, active process of utilizing environmental inputs, instead of genetically given structures. Thus, there is no sufficient scientific evidence to suggest that there are gender genetic factors that make girls less or more able in certain subject areas.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider the significance for the investigation on gender genetic factors. What is the research trying to prove? What are the motives? What is there to be gained? Research on gender and genetic predetermination needs to be justified on the grounds of intellectual significance and the moral dilemma it pursues. It can be argued, that this kind of scientific research could be useful only in a sexist society, where a woman would not be dealt with as a person, but as a representation of her gender, and therefore, assigned to a specific role and type of instruction. In a non-sexist society, the one we should strive for, divisions of gender and genetic predetermination would be of no relevance.

The idea that boys are better in Math and Sciences and females are better in verbal skills is a myth which has infested schools for centuries. The fact is that subject instruction, especially the so-called 'hard sciences', which have been traditionally seen as male dominated fields, have been taught in a mechanical and rote manner, which
encourages competitive and individualistic learning. This type of environment is not the most positive for female learning experiences, and some may argue about the validity of such a hostile atmosphere as a fertile educational ground for both sexes.

Taking to account all the external factors that influence sex stereotypes and sex roles, we can claim that females have been exposed to a complete different socialization process. This approach has caused females to develop different learning styles, which traditionally have not been valued in schools. During the interviews some teachers made the following comments:

Teacher Z:

I have seen both girls and boys excel in English, but at the same time I have also seen both males and females do poorly in English. I believe that achievement ability is a very individual thing, and it is not related to gender. The belief that boys are better in the hard sciences and girls are better in the arts is a myth that goes back in History, where male dominated fields were science professions, because at that time women had a different role in society, that of becoming more the homemakers, and that they were more in touch with their emotions and verbal skills. I think that these stereotypes made their way into education, and have still continued, even though these are only stereotypes.

Teacher W:

The statement, that “boys are better in Math and Science and girls are better in verbal skills,” is definitely a myth. It is an assumption that really has no grounding. What happens is that you create conditions which eventually become self-fulfilling. For example, nobody gets upset if a young man in high school starts dropping out of languages and social sciences, everybody assumes this is ok. But we get upset when a young woman drops out of Math, because now we are trying to counter this assumption that we should try and keep women in Mathematics. I think we have to create an environment where women feel comfortable, so that they stay in these subjects.
Teacher Y:

I definitely do not believe that we are born that way [women better in verbal skills and males better in Math and Science]. I think that these are socialized skills. I believe it is a myth which unfortunately becomes reality. I remember myself, I used to be very good at Math and then something happened between Grades 10 and 11, where I stopped being good at Math. I honestly don’t know what happened. It is demoralizing to think I was part of something that I had no control over...

Regarding achievement, I cannot say that males are worse than females, or females worse than males. Usually both genders are proficient in many ways. Females tend to be more articulate and more diligent in their research, whereas males tend to be more insightful, more risk takers, therefore they are more willing to take more chances than the females in their answers, and I think this is more of a social effect. Both sexes can achieve equally, but they have different ways of achieving it. I think that women are socialized in a way that women learn to doubt themselves and usually prefer not to take risks. I don’t think this is the case for men.

Teacher X:

I think that the belief: “Boys are better in Math and Science and girls are better in verbal skills,” is definitely a myth. I think that the problem is that a lot of us have been socialized that way. I remember that as a student I was pushed into the arts, while my brothers were encouraged to go into Engineering. They were pushed in that direction and I never was...If I would have been encouraged, I would have pursued Math much earlier. I think that this myth has been kept alive not because boys and girls have different abilities, but because they have different learning styles.

The way we traditionally teach Math is rote and competitive. A lot of it involves testing and quick mental stuff, more of an individualistic type of learning environment. I don’t think that girls are socialized that way, and it is not the way they like working in school. My own experience as a teacher is that boys love time drills, and they love to keep scores to see who beat whom. But when I do cooperative learning problem solving...I have realized that the girls are much better at that. They really love it, they immediately put their heads together, and start talking and collaborating with each other, whereas boys work by
themselves, and they lack the patience to explain their solutions to the other team members. That is why men have usually done better in Math, because Math has usually been taught in that traditional way...For many years the educational system has valued and encouraged students to work in isolation...Therefore, students who want to show their teachers that they know how to solve a problem will not let anybody else see what they are doing, and they learn not to share their answers with other students...However, we must remember that in the real world you have to learn to work in a team, and everything is done in a team manner not in isolation, as students are usually taught in schools.

It is essential for teachers to be aware that, regardless of gender, there are different learning styles that need to be addressed. Teachers need encouragement to implement different teaching methods and styles to motivate all students.

After having analysed the accounts of the teachers I interviewed, it is clear that a lot of teachers are unaware of the biased behaviours they exhibit through verbal interactions, eye contact, and body language (Sanders, 1997). It is very important to raise teachers' awareness of such behaviours. Teachers who reflect upon what they are doing in class, and what messages they are sending out to students, are likely to be effective practitioners. We ourselves are products of the unconscious and conscious processes of internalization of certain values and beliefs. Therefore, we are never completely gender blind and our opinions, personal and cultural beliefs will always come through as part of the hidden curriculum.
Classroom Interactions: Students vs students

Sexism is unique. It is unlike other forms of domination—racism or classism—where the exploited and oppressed do not live in large numbers intimately with their oppressor or develop their primary love relationships (familial and/or economic) with the individuals who oppress and dominate or share in the privileges attained by domination...[For women] the context of these intimate relationships is also the site of domination and oppression.

bell hooks, 1989

Student-to-student behaviour is another problem area in which sexism has been allowed to flourish. The continuous harassment of boys towards girls is seen many times as normal male behaviour. Teachers and schools need to understand that females cannot be expected to learn as well as boys when such behaviour is allowed to perpetuate (Streitmatter, 1994). Even if an only female environment is created for girls in certain subject areas, they still have to deal with the sexism that goes outside the classroom walls.

Teacher W said:

North York did a three-year study and created girls’ Math classes, in order to improve the participation levels of young women in Calculus. At the end of the three years, this project had little to no effect, and if anything the enrollment of females in Calculus had gone down. What had happened was that they had created a climate in which women were able to take Math without men in the room, and they felt comfortable and competent because there were no guys there for the put-downs. But the problem with this was that these were the same young women who had to go out into the halls and deal with what statistical reports called “incredible sexism” and “sexual harassment” by young men towards young women. These young women, who were in a safe environment, still had to go out to their other classes, which were still co-educational, where a lot of sexual harassment still goes unchallenged. This happens in very subtle and not so subtle ways, and unless you blow out the
whole system, you are not going to change what is happening to the participation rates [of boys and girls] because we are looking at a whole culture which is inside as well as outside the school.

Teacher X:

When I was a student, I used to go to a school for girls only.... We did not have Grade 13 Math. If you wanted to take it, you had to go to the boys’ school. The same happened with Physics... At the time it was not the norm for girls to even go to Grade 13. I was never discouraged as a student but the same opportunities for boys and girls were just not there. You had to go to the boys’ school if you wanted to take those subjects. You had to walk ten minutes and you had to face that whole class of guys. Then you had to ask yourself: “Do I want to be one of the three girls in that classroom, and do I want to be hauled and jeered at every day?” Because that is what happened. Boys would hoot and holler in the halls, and they would act stupidly in class, and we never said anything because we felt like idiots.

Sexism in schools does not only happen between male students towards female students, but many times it also happens between male students towards female teachers.

Teacher Z experienced student sexism towards her for being a young female teacher:

I have also noticed that some students see me as less competent because I am a young female teacher. I had the case of an eighteen-year-old student who is planning to go into Engineering, and it was amazing how little respect he had for certain things, he was extremely narrow minded, very sexist, and even though he was not rude to my face, I could tell that he wanted a teacher with more experience. One day the Vice Principal, who is a male, was going to give a lecture on poetry, but the day before he was supposed to teach it, he came in and said: “I’m looking forward to teaching you poetry tomorrow,” I felt so insulted when this particular student said out loud: “For the Love of God, come teach this class!”

It is of vital importance that teachers and administrators keep their eyes wide open for the amount of sexism which at times has gone completely unchallenged. Male
awareness towards what is sexist and inappropriate also needs to be raised, if we truly seek for gender equity.

**Power Structure and Power Relations**

It can be argued that in the nineteenth century (an onward) male dominance in the family simply takes new forms and is not ended. Thus, the narrow definition of the term “patriarchy” tends to foreclose accurate definition and analysis of its continued presence in today’s world.

Gerda Lerner, 1986

The hierarchical structure of schools and the power relations which are exhibited in schools is another area for feminist concern. Traditionally women have been classroom teachers while men have more often occupied positions of administrative power (Strober & Tyack, 1980). For example, at the high school level, the principal is almost always a man, and the proportion of men teaching at the high school level is generally higher compared to the men teaching at the elementary level. Girls’ and boys’ sports are often coached by men rather than women (Stockard, 1980). Moreover, at the secondary level, there is a clear demarcation in certain subjects taught (Schmuck, 1980). For example subjects such as Industrial Arts and Mechanics have traditionally been taught by males. It is obvious that this visible fact is definitely sending out stereotypical messages:

Teacher Y:

The way we impose different expectations to both males and females might be as subtle as having more female teachers for young kids, so
that students see teachers as a maternal figure, as opposed to a teacher figure...Another subtle message being sent out is when kids see more male principals and more female teachers. All of these things might impose certain expectations in terms of power structure, status, and that kind of thing...Even in the representation of teachers within subject areas, there has always been a male teacher for Industrial Arts, though for Family Studies, interestingly enough, we have had both male and female teachers.

The male power relations in schools continue to oppress women putting them in a less powerful position compared to men. Female teachers have to constantly put up with sexism and harassment in schools, both from male teachers and administrators. These inappropriate situations which females are forced to endure represent a scandal to present day society:

Teacher W:

The first job I got as teacher, the Department Head asked me to make him some coffee, and I told him: "I don’t do coffee and I don’t dust either."

Teacher Z:

There are also sexist comments among teachers and administrators towards female teachers, stuff like: “I hope you never get fat,” flirtatious comments which put female teachers in an uncomfortable situation that she should not be in when being in a professional environment. There is a lot of talking down to female teachers and some mentorships are not done in a friendly or professional way. They [mentorships] are done in more of a condescending way...I had an incident where one of the Vice Principals observed my class, afterwards he was giving me comments in front of every other teacher, instead of taking me to his office. He kept me outside the main office area where teachers are coming and going. I asked him three times: “When can we officially talk about this?” In order to hint that the situation was not appropriate at the moment, and three times he replied: “Well, aren’t we
talking about it right now?” I was in a situation where this big Vice Principal guy was talking to this little female teacher, and he was belittling me. I know for a fact that this is not done to male first year teachers. This is generally known in the school among female teachers. The gender issue is a big thing in schools in many different ways.

It is not by mere chance, that most male educators hold more powerful and prestigious positions in education. Similarly, it is also not by simple coincidence that most male educators tend to cluster around certain stereotypical male subject areas. It is a typical and inevitable pattern that happens due to both the internal and external factors that incite gender inequity at all levels. Unfortunately, these factors eventually produce male sexist values and beliefs that come through in a daily basis and influence the interactions between males and females, placing females in a position of constant subordination.

3.5 Conclusion: Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Education

Far from patriarchy and its associated world being an unexplained relic of previous societies, it is one of the very pivots of capitalism in its complex and unintended preparation of labour power and reproduction of the social order. It helps provide the real human and cultural conditions which in their... unintended and contradictory ways actually allow subordinate roles to be taken or ‘freely’ within liberal democracy.

Willis, 1977

According to Linn and Peterson (1985), gender equity means access to societal and personal accomplishments, including economic reward for both men and women. Equity gives freedom to both sexes to achieve their own potential without social condemnation.

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However, gender bias and gender blindness continues to affect and influence classroom life for students, despite the latest trends in education to address these issues.

Unfortunately, schools have acted as agents for the existing social order by contributing to reinforce a society in which patriarchal values are fully embraced. Therefore, gender rather than ability has determined the limits of a person's accomplishments (Pottker & Fishel, 1977).

As already observed, the educational system is a means of producing and reproducing the dominant ideological structure which is mainly capitalist and patriarchal in form. Historically, schools have been used to reinforce social and gender relations, that have constituted the bourgeois ideal of the family unit of male dominance and female dependency and subordination. Therefore, a sexual division of labour in family life arises and provides several advantages for the operations of economic production organized under a capitalist mode (Kuhn & Wolfe, 1978; Deem, 1980; Arnot, 1981; David, 1981; Walker & Barton, 1983).

Lynn Davies (1983) states that patriarchy and capitalism support the secondary status of women. Thus, the passive female will generate less confrontation than male workers; the female nurturing role means that women will form the caring and service roles which are supportive of the male labour market; and the masculine breadwinner role means that women will make fewer wage demands. Therefore, social institutions under capitalism, such as schools, reinforce the norms and values which promote the individual development of men, and inhibit the individual development of women by preparing
students according to their sex for different roles in adult life.

Equality of the sexes has still not been an educational goal. In order for gender equity to be successful, it will need more than just adding an extra aftermath on women’s studies in textbooks or transforming gender language into neutral. We need to challenge the causes which reproduce these gender relations in the first place. We should also uncover the hidden political agendas of our patriarchal system, because schooling cannot be analysed in isolation from other social institutions (Deem, 1983).

We must aim at abolishing the nature of femininity as a social construct in which children are socialized, and we should strive for a complete reformation of the educational system. In addition to the complete restructuring of an inclusive curriculum and the development of new textbooks, the reforms within the educational system should also include major amendments in teacher education, including in-service training programmes to shape teachers’ classroom practices. Most teachers hardly receive any instruction in gender equitable teaching or anti-sexist teaching during their pre-service program (Stevenson, 1992). Teacher Z, a recent graduate of Teachers’ College, stated:

During my pre-service year, gender equity was taught in a very superficial way. I think we should have spent more time on it. I just remember one class that even touched upon it, and that was more of a surface thing. I can say that the university does not make gender equity or anti-sexist education a main focus area of the program. There are some instructors in the faculty, that do address these issues, but unfortunately it is not a compulsory component of our pre-service program. You have to remember that we got a teaching degree in eight months, and that is just not long enough to prepare us to face all of these classroom issues.
Teachers need the preparation and the training that will provide them with the necessary tools that will ultimately change traditional teaching practices. Teachers are likely to motivate students at all levels regardless of gender, by adopting innovative methods of instruction. Cooperative learning is an example of a new trend in education, which contrasts the typical lecture-like and Socratic method of teaching. Cooperative learning involves principles in which students learn to interact with each other in productive ways and work in positive interdependence. Moreover, students become active partners in the learning process with mutual responsibilities. This method of learning helps overcome issues such as gender, since students learn to work together despite of their differences, and it also empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning process. Research has shown that students benefit from the equality of educational opportunity provided in the co-operative group setting (The Metropolitan Toronto School Board, 1988).

The changes and reformations necessary for achieving social justice will not be easy, but with careful attention to the nature of the problems and analyses of why they occur, the most effective ways to promote change will arise (Stockard et al., 1980). Even though teachers and administrators are bound by institutional constraints, they do have room to create change and improve the present conditions, as well as to be committed to humane values in which prejudice and social stereotypes cease to exist. Teachers should transform classrooms into sites of empowerment for the disadvantaged and the misfortunate, and work to promote beliefs about justice and equality both inside and
outside schools. Teachers and administrators need to bring about collective change, by helping students and parents develop an awareness and consciousness of what is meant by justice and equality (Weiler & Arnot, 1988). Moreover, people who are able to challenge unfair modes of production help to bring us closer to social justice and true equality for all.

It is essential for society to be better educated in order to create positive social change, and a climate in which people at all levels can work together to lobby for justice. To uncover the deeply political nature of education, we need to open our eyes wide and see what has been hidden, open our ears and hear the voices that have been silenced, and create curricula out of the people who have been invisible. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand why assimilation of values has not been the road to equality, and why compliance has not been the venue to opportunity (Lewis, 1993).

Having examined both the external and internal factors that produce gender inequity, there is still a lot to be done if we wish to strive for more equitable schools and classrooms. Teachers, administrators, and parents are fighting a huge monster regarding issues of gender equity, and if we want to slay the monster, the fight will require the support and cooperation of everyone who is an accomplice to this society. Only a conscientious society will be able to produce the catalyst which is required to bring about the changes, that will transform schools and classrooms into havens of social justice.
CHANGING THE SYSTEM

How does it come about that the one institution that is said to be the gateway to opportunity, the school, is the very one that is the most effective in perpetuating an oppressed and impoverished status in society?

Stein, 1971

Enable us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being.

Audre Lorde, 1984

This narrative has provided a useful structure for me in which to reflect, analyse, and understand some of the complexities and dilemmas of my profession. Despite the rhetoric of ‘equal opportunity’ in education, my thesis has explored some of the antagonisms and contradictions deeply embedded in our schools. John Dewey (1938) claimed, that “there is no intellectual growth, without some reconstruction, some remaking, of impulses and desires” (p.64). Thus, the retelling of my experiences stresses the need for immediate change in our educational institutions, which should eventually challenge the injustices of our socioeconomic system.

When I first began teaching, I truly believed that schools provided equal educational opportunity to all. However, I soon realized that schools perpetuate the existing socioeconomic relations. In this context, schools are not sites of equality,
especially to those who are not wealthy, the working class, and women.

The roots of these educational inequalities lie in the exploitative structure of the capitalist economy. Private schools accumulate capital just like the employer maximizes the creation of surplus value. Only those who can afford the enrollment fees will be able to benefit from the services supplied by the private educational sector. Schools also perpetuate the hierarchical socioeconomic structure of our society by imparting different types of knowledge to students. One group will advance towards higher education and decision-making, while the rest will fulfill the demand for menial jobs. Furthermore, schools socialize students into distinctive, gendered standpoints in our society to maintain the patriarchal relations of capitalist production. In short, capital accumulation, class antagonisms, and female subordination are the values, norms, and beliefs of our capitalist economy, which have inevitably been reproduced by our educational institutions.

Education for profit has become a priority for some institutions which claim to open the doors to opportunity. With the impact of globalization, English has become the language which is most commonly associated with success. Therefore, to succeed, people around the world have felt intense pressure to learn English. In this context, private ESL schools have emerged as competitive and growing industries.

Students pay exorbitant amounts of money for a number of services, such as the quantity of instructional materials, the school's facilities, the variety and the content of the courses. Private ESL schools profit not only by failing to deliver the quantity and quality of services promised, but also by practising outright deception and non-
compliance. Students are also promised that they will learn English in an unrealistic period of time, and they are exposed to inappropriate teaching methods which do not address the needs of adult learners. Furthermore, these schools show no support for students' personal and extracurricular concerns and needs. Consequently, students confront harsh realities in their academic experiences as they realise that their learning has been paralysed by the unscrupulous polices and practices of the ESL industry.

Unequal access to knowledge is not a worthy practice for any decent and democratic society. Nevertheless, streaming is an educational instrument in which students are screened either as university or non-university material. This educational practice has become a structural barrier to equality for large numbers of low income students and minority groups. Streaming secures the position of the dominant elite thereby recreating the socioeconomic structure in our society.

By streaming the curriculum, low income and minority students are channelled into a level of instruction which is labelled as inferior. Labelling students perpetuates and creates educational stereotypes, and encourages teachers to have extremely low expectations of these students. The term also becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in that it implies how students will progress in the future. Thus, students develop pessimistic attitudes towards themselves which makes them more likely to fail academically and become alienated.

Gender biases and stereotypes produce inequality in our schools. Family culture and the media are the external factors which socialize children to incorporate stereotypical
concepts of gender roles. The educational system continues this process of socialization through both the written and the hidden curriculum. Teachers are frequently unaware of the biased behaviours they exhibit through verbal interactions, eye contact, and body language. They are also unconscious of subtle, sexist messages they may send out to students. Moreover, students are confronted with a male-centred curriculum, differences in the depiction of males and females in curricular materials, and unequal amounts of active participation in class. As a result, the educational system has still not embraced women as openly as men. Schools continue to create the conditions for the reproduction of gender inequality and act as instruments of the patriarchal society in which we live.

As teachers, it is vital that we open our eyes to all forms of social oppression, and realize that our educational institutions are tools of a capitalist mode of production. Teachers need to be convinced that some of the practices, policies, and values of our schools are neither equal nor just. There is an urgent need for educational institutions to be constructed around principles of democracy and freedom, and to challenge the economic structures that oppress us.

Paulo Freire (1971) believed in the necessity to transform schools in order to overcome socioeconomic injustices. He suggested that the first step to liberation is to develop a critical consciousness of reality (conciênciação) and to discover one’s own particular oppression. In this context, consciousness implies the distinction between education as an instrument of oppression and education as an instrument of liberation. Therefore, teachers need support in order to effect change in education and to begin to
bring about social transformation.

Teachers have the immense responsibility of teaching and guiding future generations. It is essential that teachers transcend the superficial borders of their technical expertise and create an inseparable bond of trust and love with students. The establishment of a warm rapport with students is necessary to the awakening of the imagination and enthusiasm required for the learning process. In this context, an approach using critical pedagogy is crucial. McLaren (1999) defines critical pedagogy as “a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community” (p.51). This type of pedagogy calls for progressive teachers to help students understand and become engaged with issues of equity and social justice. Students need knowledge about power and how it works in order to analyse practices such as exploitation, oppression, and sexism. Through this process, classrooms are transformed into democratic learning communities (Giroux, 1988).

Critical pedagogues must ask themselves the following: do we want to create passive citizens who comply with the status quo, or do we want to create active political citizens who will take action against all forms of oppression? Do we want to create classrooms that silence those who have been marginalised, or do we want to create spaces of freedom and justice? Do we want to open the doors of empowerment, or close the doors to opportunity? Critical educators are activists in their questioning of the status
Moreover, they insist that knowledge take a dialectical approach, and offer a chance to rethink both social and educational experiences.

There are some characteristics that embody a critical and just classroom:

- A curriculum centered on the lives of students.
- Dialogue.
- Questioning/problem posing approach.
- Critiquing stereotypes and biases as forms of control mechanisms.
- The teaching of activism for social justice.

The voices and lives of students should be an integral part of the curriculum. Teachers should empower students to raise questions, such as what values, beliefs, and voices of history and identity are included in the official core curriculum, and whose interpretations and goals are taken into consideration. The aim has to be a multicultural perspective that broadens students' horizons and teaches them to understand and to value all cultures and ethnic groups equally.

Critical dialogue breaks free from the notion that children come to school as empty vessels who need to be filled with knowledge, which is primarily transmitted by the teacher. In a critical classroom, the teacher encourages students to reflect on the meaning of their experience and knowledge. It is a student-centered rather than a teacher-directed approach, that develops critical thought and democratic participation. In essence, it transforms the teachers unilateral authority, and calls on students to co-develop a joint learning process.
Problem posing is a dynamic approach in which students are engaged in active inquiry. The responsibility of the teacher is to diversify subject matter, and use students’ experiences as the base for developing critical understanding of the unequal conditions in society. It focuses on the power relations in the classroom, the institution, and society at large. It asks students to question how their lives are both connected and limited by society. The teacher’s aim is to pose substantive and challenging questions for the students to research and reflect.

Teachers guide students to challenge the biases and stereotypes in curricular materials, media, and our culture. Students need to learn the context in which these stereotypes and biases arise, and interrogate their validity. This practice desocializes students from internalized values such as class prejudice, sexism, and so forth. It also provides students with the opportunity to promote fairness both inside and outside the classroom.

The main goal of critical pedagogy is the quest for social justice. The belief that teaching can be neutral is a common pitfall for teachers. Teaching performs both a social and moral function that requires teachers to take a stand against social inequalities.

1. Sources:


To neglect activism in the curriculum is to prevent students from participating in the struggle for change in our society.

The aim of my thesis has been to advocate educational equity as the road to social justice. Education can foster full personal development as well as socioeconomic equality. Unfortunately, schools have alienated, marginalised, silenced, and excluded some students while benefiting others. We need to build an educational system that is free of market imperatives, class antagonisms, and all types of discrimination. As educators we must realize that we have the power to change education in ways that can both challenge the system and empower our students. Through our educational efforts and social endeavour, it is possible for us to be equal and create a humane and democratic world.
APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule for Students: ESL Private Language Schools

1. What is the main reason why you came to Canada?
2. How long have you been studying in this ESL language institute?
3. How did you learn about this institute?
   a) international agency,
   b) travel agency,
   c) consulate/embassy,
   d) word of mouth,
   e) other.
4. Please describe your first impressions upon arrival in Canada, for example,
   a) Were you picked-up at the airport by a welcoming party?
   b) Was an orientation session held by the school?
   c) Did your first impression match your expectations?
5. Please describe your experiences with your home-stay family.
6. What were your academic expectations before enrolling in a language private institute?
7. Compare and contrast your academic expectations with your actual experience in the private ESL language institute.
8. Are your teachers supportive of students' concerns and needs?
9. Is the administration supportive of students' concerns and needs?
10. Do you feel that what you have learned is worth the cost?
11. Do you have future plans to move to Canada as a landed immigrant?
12. Any other comments.
APPENDIX B

Interview Schedule for Teachers: Public School Board Level

1. What do you understand by the term gender equity?

2. How well does the curriculum (within your subject area) cover the contribution of women from diverse racial, ethno cultural, and class backgrounds?

3. Do the instructional materials give equal representation to both males and females? How? Examples? Why?

4. According to your experience, does the educational system direct females towards learning practical/applied skills, while males are more oriented towards abstract thinking patterns? Explain.

5. How would you respond if someone claimed that boys are better in Math and Science, and girls are better in verbal skills?

6. Have you felt that the educational system has imposed a different set of expectations for males and females?

7. Does the educational system reinforce gender roles?

8. In your subject area, are there differences in performance between males and females? (If yes, how?)

9. Do you consciously strive for gender equity in your classroom? (If yes, how? What are the methods and strategies you use?)

10. Do you think that changes are needed in curriculum in order to ensure that education is inclusive of women and other minorities in society? Any suggestions?
APPENDIX C

Internal and External Factors that Influence Gender Inequity in Schools

Internal Factors

- Content texts subjects
- Interactions expectations
- Teacher vs student

External Factors

- Media
- Socialization
- Family culture
  - Stereotypes
  - Language
  - Roles

Gender Inequity in Schools

Language

Power structure

Curriculum
Bibliography


