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**(DE)POLITICIZING THE ENVIRONMENT CLUB:
ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES AND THE CULTURE OF SCHOOLING**

by

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

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(De)Politicizing the Environment Club:

Environmental Discourses and the Culture of Schooling

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Master of Arts Degree 1998

Abstract

Critical ethnographic research with four urban, multicultural secondary school environment clubs is presented through the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy. The analysis explores how teachers and students reflect and re-construct mainstream environmental discourses and representations of nature as they negotiate the structure and culture of schooling and social relations of race/ethnicity, class, and gender. The liberal-humanist, community service approach to environment clubs adopted by teachers is deconstructed as the author considers the role of the club in constructing student apathy and in depoliticizing student activism. The clubs' moralized discourse of green consumerism, centred around the activity of recycling, is examined for how it serves more to deflect and suppress environmental criticism than to "make a difference." Lastly, it is argued that environmental values and perspectives are not simply inculcated through positive "nature" and community service experiences, but are shaped by racial/ethnic, class, and gender identities and relations.

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I Introduction

When I moved to Toronto in January 1997 to begin my masters degree, I decided to gain some experience of environmental education in the classroom. I had long held an interest in the contradictions between schooling and ecological ways of living and knowing, yet was active mostly on the community side of environmental organizing. I felt it was too easy to criticize schooling from the outside and desired some insight into the position of the teacher trying to teach environmentally. Through a few contacts, I set up a volunteer placement with a teacher in a Toronto high school who invited me to organize something for his grade 10 environmental studies class. My first meeting with them was memorable: they informed me that environmental studies was boring. Comparing environmental studies to math, they suggested some students will like it, some students will not. *They* did not. Passionate in their complaints about their teacher and classes, they had no interest in discussing environmental issues with me at all. Not only did they *not* care about the environment, they declared in a pointed tone of defiance, but they *wanted* big cars and big houses and lots of money for consumer goods. I was at a loss for what to do. Were they just self-centred, materialistic teenagers? Were they rebelling just to give me a hard time? When I looked around the multicultural classroom--the different races represented, the different languages spoken--I realized I had no idea who these students were, what issues they faced, what experiences they would have had, or what their lives were like at all. So different from my Anglo-Canadian rural background, my middle class white privilege so proud of rejecting consumerism. It seemed like they had already rejected the environmentalism I was coming to them with, leaving me with little ground from which to initiate any kind of dialogue.

As I pursued my coursework and read as much as I could in the areas of critical pedagogy, feminist theory, and environmental thought, the image of that classroom stayed with me almost as a puzzle to be solved, decoded, somehow understood. What could I have done in that moment of incompatibility, when our discourses and desires seemed incommensurable and dialogue impossible? How does one engage those who refuse to be engaged? Or rather, how could I learn the terms according to which they would be willing to engage with me and is there some space for environmentalism there? I sought out multicultural perspectives within the literature of environmental education and found a gaping absence.

When time drew near to develop a thesis proposal, my thoughts returned again and again to that site. I had no clear, articulate question, just that image and my confusion. But I hesitated to take on what appeared to be a necessarily negative project: clearly, the classroom climate had been deadening for the students. Did I want to merely document another list of the ills of schooling?

But another experience I had working with teachers and students in high schools, this time in the area of human rights rather than environmentalism, prompted me to consider the space the school offers for activism and organizing. Working as a volunteer with the educational programme of a human rights centre in Gaborone, Botswana, I came across human rights clubs in a number of local schools. The initiative had been developed by the human rights centre, but then abandoned with staff turn-over. Enough interest had been sparked however, that teachers in over 50 junior and senior schools had started clubs and were calling the centre for ideas on what they could be doing. While a network of teachers and university students, in conjunction with the human rights centre, were working on a curriculum module on human rights, the idea of the human rights clubs seemed to be to create a network for peer education and a forum for action and education within the community. The clubs regularly attended monthly discussion forums on current human rights/social issues and demonstrated a keen interest in political affairs. I was most impressed with the teachers advising the clubs: they saw themselves as change agents within the school and within society. During a candid and serious discussion of the problem of teenage pregnancy and the consequential gender gap in educational attainment it has caused, the teachers shared the different strategies they employed to keep girls in school, ranging from procuring birth control counselling and distributing condoms to keeping a girl's pregnancy quiet until the end of exams, and they raged at the men within all levels of the educational system, including the Ministry of Education, who they knew had been responsible for their students' pregnancies. They were keen on lobbying for changes to the law which dictates pregnant girls must be expelled and on lodging complaints against these teachers and principals, but they were fearful for their jobs and needed to know what sort of support they--as individuals and as a network--could count on from the human rights centre.

When I returned to Canada and returned to my studies in environmental education and returned to the dilemma of developing a thesis proposal, I remembered that students at two youth environment conferences I had attended frequently mentioned how they

were part of their schools' environment clubs. Even many students I encountered in environmental studies programmes at university mentioned their high school environment clubs as meaningful precursors to their current studies and activism. Were these environment clubs created in the same spirit as the human rights clubs? Did they similarly provide students and teachers with a forum for activism? Could they serve to infuse the school culture and curriculum with an environmental ethic? These questions grew into a thesis which named the environment club as a provocative site of study at the ambiguous, possibly contradictory, crossroads of schooling and organizing. I ask: *What kind of space might an environment club open up for counter-hegemonic discourses and practices within the school and within society? And how might we create such moments?*

To answer this question, I set out to conduct ethnographic research with a sample of environment clubs, spending time with them and finding out what was going on. The questions driving the data collection were elaborated into: What meaning(s) and function(s) does the club hold for participating teachers and students? What is their understanding of environmental issues and environmental activism? How might social relations of race/ethnicity, class, and gender intersect with their involvement in the club and their understandings of environmental issues? How are the actions, understandings, and achievements of the clubs shaped by the community, institutional, policy, and social contexts within which they take place?

I realize now that much of my enthusiasm for the site of the environment club was from a liberal attraction to the student-centred, experiential, leadership-through-community-service pedagogy embodied in school clubs. I think I was hoping to locate the "key ingredients" behind this "empowering" process and these motivated actors, presuming they represented some kind of model for environmental activism/education. But such abstraction dangerously glosses over the relations of power and contestations of definition which shape and comprise such groups; the more this became apparent, the more my focus shifted from trying to capture the essence of the club experience to analyzing the underlying discourses and practices of the clubs. By doing so, I am *politicizing* the environment club: probing the political implications and social relations of a phenomenon and a site not usually considered "political." This is no 'how-to' guide for environment clubs, nor a catalogue of their activities, but more of an exploration into the (constructed and potential) place of youth and schools in environmental discourse and politics. As such, my analysis is based on the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy

and cultural studies and the premise that education is inherently political.

Indeed this research project has represented my movement from a liberal to a critical analysis of education. And it is my first attempt at combining environmental thought with an analysis of class, race/ethnicity, and gender relations. My analysis of gender relations is more elaborated and extensive than my analysis of race/ethnicity and class as I have a stronger academic background in feminist theory than in anti-racist education, but I do attempt to consider the interconnectedness of these relations of power. The text I have produced is a tentative offering, the result of an impetuous graduate student who ventured onto the shaky foundations of an undeveloped terrain. It is driven as much by my theoretical interests in critical pedagogy as by the particular themes and patterns which emerged in the research, and alternative readings of the data presented are no doubt possible.

I begin by placing these questions and this site within the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and critical environmental thought. In Chapter 3, I define and outline my research methodology, explaining where critical ethnography fits in both this theoretical framework and educational research generally. I conclude by detailing the procedures I followed in carrying out the research. In Chapter 4, I profile the four clubs I worked with and elaborate the context in which they exist, namely the environmental policies and curriculums and the dynamics of race/ethnicity and class within the schools, the Board of Education, and the province. Chapters 5 through 10 represent my analysis and discussion of my findings. I begin with a look at the social relations and culture of the school in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, presenting three different, yet co-existent, versions of the archetypal high school club. I first present, then deconstruct the standard liberal tale of leadership, mentoring, and community service by considering the role of the club in constructing student apathy and in depoliticizing student activism. In Chapters 8 and 9, I shift my focus to the environmental discourses taken up and produced by the environment clubs. Chapter 8 examines the implications and positions of the clubs within the mainstream discourse of green consumerism or lifestyle environmentalism, while Chapter 9 gives special attention to the different narratives of nature provided by students of different class and cultural origins. In Chapter 10, I take gender as the central theme and consider the roles of schooling and environmental discourses in shaping the gender relations and identities of the club members. Chapter 11 serves as both a summary of the analysis and a reflection on the research methodology and process. I end

with the recommendations I will take back to the teachers and students in the participating environment clubs.

II Literature Review

Much of the debate within environmental education around the issue of activism has been a liberal versus conservative stand-off between those who posit citizen participation as part of the purpose of education in a liberal-democratic society and those who vigilantly guard against bias and politicization of the schools.¹ The liberal view has generally prevailed, as evidenced by the inclusion of “empowerment” and “citizen action” in most sets of environmental education objectives (Hungerford and Volk 1990; Palmer 1998), and environmental activism is not uncommon in North American schools. Informed by the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and cultural studies, I ask a different set of questions about activism in schools, concerned that the liberal argument rested with the twofold assumption that the experience of activism empowers youth and that the empowerment of youth is what is needed for ecological social change. Rather than asking whether environmentalism should enter the schools, I ask how is environmentalism--persistent in popular culture and political struggle even if still marginalized within the curriculum--taken up and re-constructed by teachers and students and how is their activism mediated by the institution of schooling, social relations of race/ethnicity, class, and gender, and mainstream environmental discourses.

After briefly re-visiting the liberal argument, I will lay out the theoretical framework which guides my analysis. I provide an overview of the major concepts of critical pedagogy in order to delineate the difference between the liberal and critical approaches. Then I explore the relevance of the critical work on youth subcultures to the analysis of school clubs. However, since environmentalism itself seems to remain in the blind spot of critical pedagogy, I then turn to consider environmental activism and the environmental movement from a critical perspective sensitive to the cultural politics highlighted within critical pedagogy. Together, this triad of critical work--critical pedagogy, critical subcultural theory, and environmental thought--should prepare the theoretical ground into which the seeds of my ethnography are sown.

Education for Action

Environment clubs receive token mention in the literature of environmental

¹ See Sanera (1998) and Smith (1998) for a recent manifestation of this debate.

education,² referenced in passing as exemplary models of environmental action in schools or evidence of environmental concern among youth. Raffan (1990), for example, closes his discussion of the "failed curriculum" with these words of optimism:

Some of the most exciting initiatives in environmental action are occurring in schools, but *not* as a planned result of instruction. Environmental clubs, recycling groups, student action committees are leading whole communities--and often teachers--into new forms of responsible environmental behaviour. (49)

Such action projects are elaborated in 'how-to' guides and teacher manuals, which describe examples of success stories or offer lists of possible projects schools could do. Recommendations range from "running a planet-conscious home by, for example, conserving energy, recycling waste products, repairing broken goods whenever possible" to "establishing a school garden to produce organically grown food for consumption at school" and "questioning candidates for local and national elections on their views on major global issues" (Greig, Pike, and Selby 1987, 58-59). While the literature includes many spectacular stories, such as Lewis' (1991) grade six class which cleaned up a neighbourhood toxic waste site then lobbied the Utah state legislature to create a State Superfund to clean up hazardous waste state-wide or Hammond's (1992) high school students who purchased a local 1,000-acre swamp for environmental protection through a municipal tax approved by referendum, Weilbacher (1991) points out these groups are exceptional. His informal survey of environmental education professionals concludes that "most action projects are recycling newspapers or picking up litter" (Weilbacher 1991, 34).

The rationale for such action or involvement projects comes from the literature on citizenship education, which stresses democratic participation and social responsibility. As Greig, Pike, and Selby (1987) implore:

If the generation now at school is to be any better equipped to bear the enormous responsibility for the [planet], students urgently need to practise and refine action-oriented skills. ...This goal is unlikely to be achieved unless schools provide opportunities--and support--for students to become

² I have chosen not to link contemporary environment clubs to the long (and continuing) rural legacy of 4-H Clubs and agricultural competitions because these do not seem to have provided any stimulus or model for the current environment clubs, which have only existed in any widespread way since the late 1980s. While a province-wide survey was clearly beyond the scope of this study, I would speculate that environment clubs are more of an urban and suburban than rural phenomenon. A comparison of how rural and urban youth take up and construct environmental discourses and practices would be valuable research.

involved in social and political processes both within and beyond school grounds. (58)

Citizenship education is central to the liberal project and experiential learning foundational to that goal. In an impassioned foreword to *Education for Citizenship*, Barber (1997) invokes the spirit of Dewey to define the purpose of schooling as citizenship education:

If schooling is to be guided one again by its democratic mission, it needs to be not only supported financially but also reendowed with a sense of civic passion. This means that public schools must be understood as public not simply because they serve the public, but because they establish us as a public. (xii).

He then outlines three principles of citizenship education: multicultural tolerance and respect; democratic procedures and structures; and experiential learning. He emphasizes that the idea of citizenship not be limited to political forums such as voting and elected officials, but should include community service. "Serving others is not just a form of do-goodism or feel-goodism, it is a road to social responsibility and citizenship," Barber (1997) insists and his plea for experiential learning through community service is echoed across the literature (xiii). Jones and Jones (1992) also link community service experiences with citizenship, remarking that " 'participation' for the English child almost invariably means services to the local community," and comment that "active participation appears to be a key theme in all the publications to date" (11).

Environmental education is largely premised on this two-pronged argument that the purpose of education is to create a socially-responsible, actively participating democratic public and the appropriate pedagogy to achieve this goal is experience in action projects or involvement in the community. In the preface to her comprehensive book surveying the theory and practice of environmental education, Palmer (1998) justifies environmental education in citizenship terms: "Few would doubt the urgency and importance of learning to live in sustainable ways...and of taking care of the Earth today so that future generations may not only meet their own needs, but also enjoy life on our planet" (ix). In her review of international conferences on environmental education, Palmer (1998) further notes how values, commitment or responsibility, and action skills consistently appear in their statements of objectives. Action projects in schools have provoked the criticism that environmental education is ideological, promoting one particular agenda rather than "objective knowledge" (see Jickling 1993; McClaren 1991;

Sanera 1998), but experiential learning remains vigorously defended by practitioners and theorists. And, while the field is not as experientially-based as many would like (Raffan 1990; Weston 1996), arguments for empowerment of youth through action experiences abound. "Such experiences," claims Smith (1998), "teach children that by acting as environmental stewards, they can contribute to the health of their communities" (52). He suggests that not only will such experiences lead children to be responsible adults who know they are capable of "making a difference," they can prevent children from falling into an "ecophobia" coma, frightened and intimidated by problems they cannot fix (Smith 1998, 51).

Despite this apparent consensus on the objectives for environmental education (Hungerford and Volk 1990), the meaning of 'citizenship' remains hotly contested and the vague phrase 'action' harbours numerous and contradictory interpretations. How activist can or should students be? While some in the field of citizenship education emphasize personal responsibility, others stress community service and volunteerism, and still others argue for social critique and change (Jones and Jones 1992; Reeher and Cammarano 1997). Rimmerman (1997) elaborates a broad conception of democracy and participation to include "community discussions, community action, workplace action, public service, and protest politics" (7). Manley (1992) notes how definitions of 'good citizenship' have tended to refer to community service and obedience to laws, implying a depoliticized conformism towards maintaining social stability characterizes the ideal citizenry. Like Rimmerman (1997), he challenges this notion: "good citizens cannot be only those who fit into systems, who express their altruism by caring for the less fortunate... good citizens are also those who want to change things through 'actions that affect the distribution of resources, status, opportunities and life chance among social groups...' " (Manley 1992, 72). Banks (1997) concurs with Manley's (1992) estimation of the field, suggesting

Citizenship education has been constructed historically by powerful and mainstream groups and has usually served their interests. It has often fostered citizen passivity rather than action, taught students large doses of historical myths in its attempts to develop patriotism, conceptualized citizenship responsibility primarily as voting, and reinforced the dominant social, racial, and class inequality in American society. In other words, citizenship education in the United States has historically reinforced dominant-group hegemony and student inaction. (4)

Clearly these terms and assumptions--citizenship, action, empowerment--need to be

examined much more thoroughly. Environmental educators need to ask *who* is constructing *what kind* of experiences to lead *whom* to take action *for what*, before presuming that environmental action projects are 'empowering' for youth. Transformed into a research question, I ask: *how* are the experiences and actions of teachers and students in environment clubs mediated by their social and institutional contexts and *what* effect do they have on *which* individuals, institutions, and social structures *for what purpose*? Whose interests do these consequences serve? Are they consistent with the social and political goals and principles of the environmental movement?

Critical Pedagogy: Theorizing Social Change

Critical pedagogy is not commonly referred to in the literature of environmental education, nor in environmental thought generally. Nor has critical pedagogy taken up environmental issues at any length. Indeed, as Bell (n.d.) observes,

"the literature is notable, in fact, for its failure to acknowledge connections between the human oppressions that it aims to address (racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism...) and the exploitive, degrading and despotic relationships that are all too typical among humans and the rest of nature in modern industrial societies." (2)

The value of adopting and working from the perspective of critical pedagogy is the attention it pays to the interface between culture, power, discourse, and education. While environmental thought as a tentative social theory, and environmentalism as social movement, are concerned with interrogating the ideologies which underlie and shape modern relationships between humans, their social institutions, economic systems, and the rest of nature, and changing these dominant values and practices, they have paid little attention to the processes by which the dominant hegemony is established and maintained. Critical pedagogy asks the more general questions of "how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not" and seeks to understand how these dominant ideologies can be contested, reshaped and overthrown in popular democratic struggles (McLaren 1989,169). These are clearly central questions for a social movement which aims to fundamentally restructure social and economic organization on more sustainable terms.

The school is just one of many cultural sites which contributes to the production and reproduction of social structures and meanings; indeed, many would suggest that the

media plays a much larger role in shaping people's understandings, particularly around environmental issues. But the school remains an important social institution nonetheless with at least a partial mandate, if never quite realized, of nurturing knowledgeable, active, caring citizens. Critical pedagogy considers the school as a terrain of cultural struggle, "function[ing] *simultaneously* as a means of empowering students around issues of social justice and as a means of sustaining, legitimizing, and reproducing dominant class interests" (McLaren 1989, 167, emphasis in original). As opposed to mainstream educational theories which conceive of schools as socializing agents which provide students with the universal skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed for productive and responsible future lives as workers and citizens, critical pedagogues view school knowledge as socially and historically constructed. Knowledge is not some cumulative body of universal, objective facts, but ideological expressions of historically-specific relations of power, and bound to political and economic interests within the wider social reality, often linked to social relations of class, race/ethnicity, and gender. As such, the task of critical pedagogy is largely archeological, uncovering these interests and the mechanisms by which they are legitimated.

Schools reinforce and reproduce the dominant culture by means of both the overt curriculum and also the implicit, or hidden, curriculum in the social relations embodied in classroom practices. While bureaucratized into a technical process of experts, facts, implementers, and audiences, school curriculums are highly political. The development of a curriculum, deciding which discourses³ and representations of social life are included and which are not, constitutes so many political acts. And the separation of curriculum writing from delivery and from learning disempowers both teachers and students from being historical subjects creating their own meanings and understandings to being subjects of history. McLaren (1989) further insists that "knowledge should be examined not only for the ways in which it might misrepresent or mediate social reality, but also ...[how well it] provides grounds for understanding the actual conditions that inform everyday life" (183). Thus efforts to ensure that women, racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, the poor and working class, people from other nations, and

³ To refer to discourse is to acknowledge that knowledge is always an ideological construction linked to particular interests and social relations, and governed by a set of anonymous, historical rules which Foucault calls discursive practices: "rules that govern what can be said and what must remain unsaid, who can speak with authority and who must listen" (McLaren 1989, 180).

animals are equitably and fairly represented within textbooks only partially disrupt the dominant discourse if they fail to explore patriarchy, colonialism, racism and discrimination; minimize social conflict; and omit or present negatively the struggles of labour unions, social movements, and freedom fighters, as school textbooks tend to do (Anyon 1981; Apple 1990).

The hidden curriculum consists of the tacit ways in which knowledge and behaviour get constructed: the “messages that get transmitted to the student by the total physical and instructional environment, governance structures, teachers’ expectations, and grading procedures” (McLaren 1989, 183). Many theorists and popular writers have noted how classroom social relations teach obedience, passivity, apathy, provisional self-esteem, competitiveness, dis-connectedness, and indifference.⁴ Critical theorists ask how this is connected to relations of power in the wider society: how routinized, passive work complies with the needs of efficiency and productivity in the corporate marketplace, how apathy is desirable for suppressing opposition, how competitiveness undermines solidarity movements, and so on. More specifically, feminists and critical pedagogues have noted how students get treated differently in the hidden curriculum, on the basis of their gender, class, ability, and/or racial and ethnic background, often contradicting and displacing the rhetoric of equality or multiculturalism which might prevail in the explicit curriculum. Bourdieu (1977) developed the notion of “cultural capital” to explain how the language, social practices, and knowledge of students of working class and ethnic minority backgrounds are devalued in the classroom. Cultural capital refers to “the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed on from one generation to another... [including] *ways of talking, acting, modes of style, moving, socializing, forms of knowledge, language practices, and values*” (McLaren 1989, 190, emphasis in original). As teachers come mostly from white, middle class origins, they tend to reflect, affirm, and relate better to students who exhibit middle class language and behavioral codes. Starting with elementary school, academic performance often reflects the appreciation or devaluation of students’ cultural capital and such expectations become ingrained over time. In Toronto, this results in the disproportionate labelling of students from working class, black Caribbean, and non-English speaking backgrounds as special needs or behavioral problems, setting into motion a subtle mechanism of streaming with lifetime implications (Henry 1994; Curtis et al. 1992).

⁴ See Gatto (1992) for a particularly poignant account.

Through the explicit curriculum and the implicit norms and meanings which structure school relations, schools define and shape the boundaries of what constitutes knowledge and an “educated” person. As Giroux (1983) demonstrates, “the imprint of the dominant society and culture is inscribed in a whole range of school practices, i.e. the official language, school rules, classroom social relations, the selection and presentation of school knowledge, the exclusion of specific cultural capital, etc.” (66). While schools privilege and legitimize certain kinds of knowledge, behaviour, and meanings over others, the significant social and political consequences of this process ensure this “regime of truth” is not established and maintained without opposition and struggle. Giroux (1983) emphasizes how culture and knowledge are constructed through “specific processes that involve lived antagonistic relations among different socio-economic groups with unequal access to the means of power and a resulting unequal ability to produce, distribute, and legitimize their shared principles and life experiences” (74). Thus, “what counts as knowledge in any given society, school, or social site presupposes and constitutes specific power relations” (Giroux 1983, 75).

Oppositional ideologies do exist; indeed this would be the way to understand the sociopolitical challenges launched by social movements such as feminism and environmentalism, which aim to change existing stereotypes, re-construct social values, and expose institutional structures of inequality/destruction. But McLaren (1989) notes that “the dominant ideology often encourages oppositional ideologies and tolerates those that challenge their own rationale, since by absorbing these contradictory values, they are more often than not able to domesticate the conflicting and contradictory values” (179). Token opposition allows the illusion of popular democracy, while neutralizing its effects. Oppositional ideologies are most visible in the domain of popular culture where political resistance is more easily sublimated into fantasy and desire and co-opted by the logic of consumerism.

Giroux (1983) cautions that cultural representations do not simply embody the interests of the dominant class, as early Marxist analyses of schooling presumed. While the social practices and representations of the dominant social culture tend to “affirm the central values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society,” the dominant ideology needs to be sufficiently responsive to individuals’ social, emotional and psychological needs for it to maintain its legitimacy (McLaren 1989, 172). Moreover, the hegemony of the dominant culture is never complete

nor universal, as people variably accept, resist, and accommodate the dominant culture as they make sense of and live out their lives. What this analysis reveals is a dialectical idea of culture. In critical social theory, culture is not just a "way of life:"

Intimately connected with the structure of social relations within class, gender, and age formations that produce forms of oppression and dependency, ...culture is viewed as a field of struggle in which the production, legitimation, and circulation of particular forms of knowledge and experience are central areas of conflict. (McLaren 1989, 171)

The dominant culture is not the only "culture" or way of life, despite its seeming universality in school and media discourses. In addition to the different cultural practices and meanings people from minority ethnic/racial backgrounds maintain, subordinate cultures and subcultures develop which provide people in subordinate social positions with different, sometimes oppositional, meanings and coping mechanisms; however, the ability of their members to express these cultural practices and values through the authority of social institutions such as the school is limited by their collective power in society. The power of the dominant ideology lies in its ability to legitimize, conceal, or reify as "natural" and permanent (or common sense), domination and inequality.

Translating critical pedagogy into classroom practice is not simple nor straightforward. In principle, the practice of critical pedagogy makes an explicit commitment to "analysis and rejection of oppression, injustice, inequality, silencing marginalized voices, and authoritarian power structures" (Ellsworth 1989, 300). But there is no simple 'how-to' guide for practitioners to follow; indeed, such abstraction runs counter to the historical and archeological task of critique. Ellsworth (1989) elaborates how critical pedagogy dissolves into liberal humanism in practice, with its abstract promotion of "social change," "empowerment," and "student voice," and reliance on critical thinking and rational dialogue. Too often, the targets of so-called critical pedagogy become students from the subordinate class--who need to change their consciousness or understandings or help in speaking from their silenced voices--instead of a project which works with students (or with groups outside of formal educational structures entirely) to target, through analysis, trust/respect, and political action, oppressive formations and power structures. As Ellsworth (1989) details, the analysis will always be incomplete, contradictory, and partial; the results of actions will be unpredictable, unknowable, and maybe even counterproductive and/or oppressive to others' struggles for self-definition; a fully safe, open, and equitable classroom can never be achieved in a racist, sexist, and

class society; and defiance, talking back, silence, and emotions are all a part of the dialogue. She concludes that the task of critical pedagogy is

not ...one of building democratic dialogue between free and equal individuals, but of building a coalition among the multiple, shifting, intersecting, and sometimes contradictory groups carrying unequal weights of legitimacy within the culture and the classroom. (317)

Most importantly, we must heed Giroux's (1983) reminder that "theory and critique comprise only one essential means of illuminating the conditions that maintain the existing society, and that ultimately such conditions cannot be altered through a change in consciousness but through the force of collective action" (64-65). Environmental education, for example, is no replacement for an environmental movement; moreover, a critical environmental education should be directed at furthering both the political goals of the movement and a deeper understanding of its theoretical underpinnings, implications, and possibilities. Through education, we can attempt to engage in social critique and reshape our own acts of complicity in structures of oppression, but education is only one part of social change.

Adolescence, Clubs, and the Culture of Schooling

School clubs enjoy a special place within the institution of schooling, perceived to be somewhat more autonomous and student-driven than classroom activities. While environment clubs may be a new phenomenon in secondary schools, extra-curricular activities generally enjoy a long tradition in liberal education as participatory sites for leadership and citizenship skill development. To outline a critical approach to analyzing clubs, I turn to the literature of critical youth subcultures which explores how youth negotiate social relations of class, race/ethnicity, and gender and dominant cultural stories through expressions of style, oppositional behaviour, and social groups. The organizational histories of school clubs and youth organizations provide a critical stance from which to approach and analyze environment clubs.

Adolescence is commonly presented as a "natural" stage of transition between childhood and adulthood, outside of historical time and place and certainly outside of class struggle. Sometimes categorized as a social class unto themselves, with their own "youth culture," teenagers are assumed to be hormonally-driven, peer-oriented, and identity-seeking, or, in other words, "emerging from within rather than socially constituted and constituting" (Lesko 1996, 148). The critical sociological literature of youth subcultures

argues that youth practices must be understood in the context of wider class cultural structures and struggles and explores different youth subcultures as strategies used by subordinate groups in negotiating, resisting, and/or subverting the dominant culture and their “parent” cultures (Valentine et al. 1998). By “naturalizing” the social processes through which “adolescence” and “adolescents” are produced, the popular and dominant discourses of adolescence obscure, on one hand, the social and organizational practices that help create and reproduce a raced, gendered, and class society, and on the other hand, the class, gender, and race/ethnic specificity of what gets considered the “normal” developmental outcome of mature adults (Lesko 1996).

By focusing on culture, i.e. the particular ways, including customs, social relations, institutions and material objects, in which a social group lives out and makes sense of its conditions of life, critical theories of subcultures take as their premise that so-called delinquents are expressing social critique or *political* resistance and opposition through *style*: clothes, appearance, language, and rituals (Hall and Jefferson 1976, Hebdige 1979). But the cultural dimension of this “resistance” also means that these subcultures represent but *imaginary* resolutions to structural problems of class and race oppression. Structural dilemmas are, for the most part, sublimated into psychological resistance rather than political organizing, although some groups, such as ‘Punks,’ also articulate a political critique or become politicized, such as the L.A. ‘Bloods and Crips’ gangs after the 1992 riots (Katz 1998). Sociological literature exploring political activism in new social movements, such as environmentalism, has been ignored by and appears to ignore this literature on youth subcultures, likely due to the focus on middle class populations in the former and working class populations in the latter. This leaves a gap in our understanding of how to approach the potential or practised political activism of youth which environment clubs might embody. How do I go about sensitively placing an environment club’s activities and practices within the dialogical process of social construction and the contextual framework of class, race/ethnicity and gender relations without denying or undermining agency?

While reversing the assumptions and constructions of criminality and normality in traditional studies of youth, critical approaches have largely maintained the focus on delinquency and deviance (and male youth), renamed as “subordinate groups” (examples are Hall and Jefferson 1976, Hebdige 1979, Willis 1977), until recently (see Valentine and

Skelton 1998).⁵ Indeed Valentine et al. (1998) acknowledge that “we have an inadequate understanding of young people who perform well at school, have good and positive relationships with their parents and other adults, who participate in a range of activities which do not cause harm or annoyance” (24). The result is that there seems to be an underlying assumption that the “others,” in this case non-delinquents or mainstream youth, accept and conform to mainstream values: their cultural practices can be read unproblematically as the internalization of the dominant hegemony. Just as early ventures in subcultural theory tended to economic determinism and romanticization of the underclasses by equating resistance with subordination, this absence suggests an oversocialized view of “good” adolescents, whose ranks include not only the white, middle classes, but also the majority of working class and racial or ethnic minority youth. As Valentine et al. (1998) remind us, even those “who basically get on with their lives as young people... have to face an enormous range of social, cultural, educational and financial pressures” (24).

Presenting an ethnography of a suburban Detroit high school, Eckert (1989) explores this dualism between “conformists” and “deviants” or, in her words, “jocks” and “burnouts,” and argues that these stereotypical categories exist in relation to each other, creating a peer-enforced polarization reflecting and reinforcing adult middle class and working class behaviours and values. Rather than seeing some students as deviant and the rest as conformist/mainstream, Eckert (1989) suggests that the peer relations of the school are structured around a “Jock-Burnout opposition,” with most students falling (and identifying) somewhere in between. Jocks, predominantly (though not exclusively) of middle class backgrounds, are defined as those who are “into” school, the students who get along well with their teachers, do well in school, participate actively in school activities, assuming leadership roles as they advance in grades. Burnouts, predominantly of working class backgrounds, dissociate themselves from the school and school activities, follow vocational or general-level academic streams, and engage in “adult” or illicit activities such as smoking, drugs, city nightlife, and sex, more frequently or at an earlier age than their peers. Beyond these well-known stereotypes, Eckert (1989) also reveals how Burnout student culture tends to be cross-generational, neighbourhood-based, and

⁵ There is also a substantial body of feminist work on subcultures, but it does not seem to hold as much relevance for the current discussion due to its overwhelming focus on the cultures of femininity.

more egalitarian while in Jock student culture, personal identity is defined in terms of their institutional roles, activities demonstrate commitment to the institution, and are socially-competitive. Both represent values held within their respective class origins or "parent cultures." Eckert (1989) argues these peer relations, identifiable almost universally in American schools, contribute as much as curriculum content and classroom practice to how schools socialize students into class structure and belief-systems. In particular, Eckert (1989) points out how extra-curricular activities, as the domain of the "jocks," play a significant role in the culture and political economy of the school as a social tracking system parallel to academic tracking structures.

Extra-curricular activities, including sports teams, student council, and clubs, provide one of the only means for students to exercise any degree of self-determination and control over student life. Eckert (1989) insists this "freedom" and "empowerment" be viewed within the structure of the high school as "a corporate setting," created through "its strict delimitation of the corporate community, its isolation from the outside community, its internal hierarchical structures, its emphasis on role-oriented individual identity, and its task-oriented determination of interpersonal association" (103). While widespread consumption is required for the success of activities students plan, such as dances, spirit rallies, and competitions, etc., only a limited few can participate in their production and fewer still in the control/leadership of the production groups. Considered then as the means of production of student cultural activities, extra-curricular activities can be viewed as a corporate structure of hierarchy in the power relations of an age cohort, sanctioned and nurtured by teacher favouritism and academic/social success. In return for this limited power, status, and limited freedom, the students involved in extra-curriculars must endorse the corporate norms of the school and the ultimate authority of teachers and administration.

Student leaders, athletes, and their social circle are being groomed for a corporate mode of existence in a number of ways: learning how patience and loyalty while in the lower ranks have pay-offs once one becomes a senior, how informal contacts and networking are the grease that smooth one's upward mobility in the meritocracy: "as a substitute for participation in the larger community, the school offers mobility within an elaborate internal structure, which is clearly intended as preparation for later participation in an analogous adult structure" (Eckert 1989, 101). Eckert (1989) emphasizes how those who stand to lose power in this highly structured peer society

“react quickly to reject the context [the high school] itself;” moreover, while participation in extra-curriculars has a direct role in procuring college and university entrance for academic students, even the skills school clubs foster are not as relevant for vocational students (13). Despite the rhetoric of student free choice and recognition for individual merit, students do not arrive at high school on an equal setting, but already differently socialized for leadership in their respective elementary schools. The hierarchy of high school peer relations solidifies and normalizes social inequality among students.

As a hallmark of progressive education, extra-curricular activities are sure to be defended vigorously by teachers, parents, and students alike in the face of Eckert’s (1989) analysis. As a recent editorial exclaims: “What’s school life without sports, the arts and clubs?”⁶ School clubs are steeped in the liberal ideology of individual empowerment. Clubs are considered avenues for students to develop self-confidence and leadership skills, to explore their creativity and develop skills in the arts and music, to foster mentoring relationships between adult role models and youth, and to provide a meaningful and healthy social life for youth within the school structure. All of these are important tasks, but liberal-humanist intentions do not erase the role clubs might play in perpetuating an oppressive and unjust system. In critical pedagogy, by contrast, empowerment means more than self-confirmation, but “the process by which students learn to question and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social order” or, in other words, to become an “active political and moral subject” (McLaren 1989, 186).

Lesko (1996) traces the history of youth service clubs, such as Boy Scouts and the YMCA, to the racist and sexist discourse of “character-building” in late 19th century Britain and America. Concerned that the influx of “disorderly immigrants (e.g. Catholics, Eastern Europeans, Blacks from the South)” and “feminized boys” would undermine social progress at this crucial turning-point in American development, the white, middle class establishment gathered its boys together to train them in “manliness, strength and

⁶ “Schools need their activities.” *Brockville Recorder & Times*, June 17th, 1998: A5. This editorial is a response to an announcement by OSSTF, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers union, that stated many teachers feel their additional workload will prevent them from supervising extra-curricular activities in the schools next year. Of note is that the editors address their outrage not to the government but to teachers, trying to shame them into assuming the extra burden “for the sake of the students.”

dominance" (Lesko 1996, 145). Adolescent development was one vehicle to "secure strong wills and disciplined bodies among middle-class White males" (145). The Boy Scouts were founded in the aftermath of the Boer War. Fearful for the viability of the British Commonwealth, Lord Baden-Powell "wanted to promote early and continuous training of boys to be nationalistic, disciplined, and obedient to orders" (Lesko 1996, 146). Traces of these militarist, nationalist, and masculinist themes are not hard to find in contemporary versions of these organizations, which still adopt uniforms with badges of merit and service, pledge allegiance to Queen and country, emphasize physical training, develop comradeship and loyalty among groups of men, and so on.

Fine and Mechling (1993) explore the modern forms youth organizations took after the 1950s, with reference in particular to Little League and Boy Scouts--the icons of middle class, suburban American (male) childhood. First, they note a shift from the morality of 19th century "character-building" to the psychology of "personality," and correspondingly from an emphasis on social morals to fun, creativity, and expression. Third, the growing individualism of the post-war era, which prompted a shift in some schools towards child-centred learning, also led to a child-centred, personal choice approach to leisure activities and youth organizations. The fourth significant shift was the domestication of boys' play: "the ideal child of the 1950s, therefore, was well behaved, knew how to control his or her anger, and shied away from aggressive or violent play" (Fine and Mechling 1993, 125). This ideal was constructed--by media, science, schools, parents--in opposition to the "juvenile delinquent," notably *not* white, middle class, suburban. Indeed Fine and Mechling (1993) describe how the Boy Scout troop was explicitly conceived of as a "wholesome version of the boy's gang," providing the same identity-group loyalty structure as gangs, through uniforms, rituals and routines passed on through peer culture, but within an acceptable moral framework (128). These hybrid service-recreational youth organizations exemplified middle class ideology and lifestyle in a number of ways, such as the prescription that fun and leisure should be structured and ordered; assumptions of leisure time and disposable income and sufficient distance (social and material) from poverty and "need" to volunteer one's time to anonymous others; and the justification of individual personal growth and development. All of this contributes to the construction of individual altruism (or liberal guilt) as the appropriate response to social and economic inequalities depoliticized and dehumanized into "charity cases."

McLaren (1989) insists that "schooling always represents an introduction to,

preparation for, and legitimation of particular forms of social life" (161). The cultural ethnocentrism of schools has been well-noted in curricular content, where white, middle class individuals, culture, and interests are disproportionately represented and promoted, but this bias towards middle class ideology also permeates the structures of schooling beyond the explicit curriculum and beyond the classroom. The "fun" side of school, the sports teams, the clubs, the student council meetings, and the dances, also function to initiate students into middle class values and skills, including gender roles and heterosexism; meritocratic individualistic advancement; corporatism, competitiveness and upward mobility; a consumerist approach to democratic participation; and the universalization and normalization of these ethnocentric practices and beliefs. The internal functioning of clubs--roles, rituals, power relations, and rewards--and the roles they assume within the institution of schooling are not politically or culturally neutral, as these histories reveal.

This "hidden curriculum" of clubs does not deny that their members may be well-intentioned, nor suggest that we do not need articulate and socially-engaged people in our society, for we most certainly do. I would not dispute the value of the liberal-humanist goals elaborated in citizenship education; but, just as in the classroom, the norms, values and beliefs embedded in club pedagogy may be as important as the content; and who is included and who is excluded important considerations in evaluating the outcome of the club experience. As McLaren makes clear,

Let me stress that the pedagogical position I am advocating does not prohibit students or teachers from... developing a sympathetic, affectionate, confidence-building relationship with each other; rather it emphasizes that such sentiments and relationships need to be pursued within a pedagogical context in which the issue of self and social transformation is taken seriously. (1989, 235)

Moreover, the liberal rhetoric of participatory, empowering, youth-centred organizations does hold some possibility of reclaiming the club for a critical pedagogy of possibility. I have located two examples of school clubs organized with emancipatory intent within the literature of critical pedagogy.

Dey et al. (1991) discuss the creation of a Women's Committee which organized activities for "Women's History Month" as a precursor to the development of a Women's Studies elective in an inner city New York high school. Confessing a personal tendency towards "rocking the boat," the group organizer considered the creation of the group as the opening of some "autonomous" and "public space" for women at the school. The

Committee transformed into a discussion group and Dey et al. (1991) describe the process of learning that ensued: “young women primarily known by their sexualized appearance, and passive classroom demeanour, found themselves active participants in creating real events in the school setting: panel discussions, guest speakers, ‘rap sessions.’ ” The initiative was not without controversy, including criticisms that they held “man-hating sessions in the library,” but Dey et al. (1991) maintain that it legitimated the idea that young women had concerns not addressed by the regular school activities, which then opened up space for discussion of the establishment of the Women’s Studies course.

Bruno (1989) offers a less promising account of the creation of a Young Leftists club at an upper middle class suburban high school. While the club itself, initiated by students, successfully attracted 75 students to join in regular events discussing contemporary social, political, and economic issues absent or trivialized in the regular curriculum, Bruno (1989) suggests he lost his teaching position for supervising their activities. He describes institutional resistance ranging from harassment of students by teaching and administrative staff to intimidation attempts such as compiling a list of all members and ritual interrogation before any program was approved, and diluting their radicalism by insisting students present “both sides of the issue” at their public forums. While some teachers were supportive, they were also intimidated into silence: “Teachers privately gave us a thumbs-up, while publicly steering clear of the whole situation” (31). In fact, half a dozen teachers refused to advise the club before Bruno agreed to do it. Bruno (1989) concludes his story on a positive note, arguing that the Young Leftists club “became synonymous with free thought, new ideas, progressive movement and citizen participation... [and] a course in contemporary issues, and a classroom where learning was student-directed” (31).

Thus we see that school clubs have to capacity to provide opportunities to explore topics or to engage in activities that are absent from the formal curriculum and as such could constitute a social critique and reconstruction of the school’s “regime of truth.” And the coming together of interested and concerned students and teachers for discussion and action can provide a forum for participatory, egalitarian, and authentic learning and thus contribute to furthering the self and social empowerment critical educational theorists have noted are so absent from schools. On the other hand, school or youth clubs tend to develop into traditions with expected forms and functions--cheerleaders to supplement the football team, student council to plan dances and rallies, etc.--which often serve to

reproduce and reinforce the meritocratic and corporatist ideals of the dominant hegemony of school knowledge and culture. If participation in school clubs is considered as the definitive expression of adherence to the norms of the school, and thus to norms of white, middle class, capitalist North American society, we need to ask how this impacts students who may not share nor wish to give in to such norms, yet may have talents or interests in music or art or athletics or contemporary social issues which could be fostered by extra-curricular activities. As McLaren (1989) asks:

To what extent does adherence to the norms of the school mean that students will have to give up the dignity and status maintained through psychosocial adaptations to life on the street? To what extent does compliance with the rituals and norms of school mean that students have to forfeit their identities as members of an ethnic group? (188)

Environmental Activism: Culture, Class and Nature

Critical pedagogy, and critical theorists generally, are remarkably silent on the question of environmental issues and oppression/destruction of nature. Within the field of environmental education, a critical educational discourse is beginning to emerge, with debates about the ethical and ecological implications and political and epistemological biases of scientific knowledge; re-valuation of indigenous peoples' perspectives and knowledges; linkages drawn between race and gender oppression and cruelty to animals; and criticism of technocratic and behaviourist research paradigms (Corcoran and Sievers 1994; Gough 1990; Greenall 1987; Orr 1992; Robottom 1991; Robottom and Hart 1995; Selby 1995). The dominant approach to environmental education is rooted in a positivist, analytical-empirical paradigm that considers the environmental crisis as a range of technical problems: toxins or nuclear radiation or ozone depletion or deforestation or overproduction of waste are presented as problems *in the environment* that can be solved by more scientific research and development. By contrast, Di Chiro (1987) explains that

The environment is not something that has a reality totally outside or separate from ourselves and our social milieux. Rather it should be understood as the conceptual interactions between our physical surroundings and the social, political and economic forces that organize us in the context of these surroundings. (25)

She continues that, "if we view the environment as a social construct, we can also view the 'environmental problem' very differently... Environmental problems are...social problems, caused by societal practices and structures" (25). This socially-critical

perspective argues that environmental problems are the result of destructive and misguided *social, economic, political, and cultural policies, practices, and beliefs* which negatively impact our biophysical environment such that the sustainability of human life on the planet is now threatened. While problematizing the enduring reduction of environmental education to science and environmental problems to technical issues, socially-critical environmental education has paid very little attention to relations of class, race/ethnicity and gender. I thus find it more fruitful to turn to the practices and literatures of the environmental movement to consider what an eco(critical)pedagogy⁷ might entail or, at least, the cultural politics which it must engage.

The label environmental movement is in some ways a misnomer as there is no such homogenous, coherent movement and the focus of environmental activism is exceptionally multifaceted and diverse: issues range from endangered species and wilderness preservation to global warming and ozone depletion, to urban smog and water pollution, to toxic accumulation in the food chain and hazardous waste disposal, to desertification and famine, to energy conservation and nuclear testing. Innumerable typologies exist which carve through the different perspectives and political goals clustered under the environmental umbrella;⁸ perspectives which are simultaneously shaped and negotiated through political struggle and by agents of cultural production, such as the mass media, the state, and schools. An added dimension to this ideological diversity is the mainstreaming of environmentalism that has occurred over the past two decades. Since the late 1980s, public opinion surveys from Britain, the United States, and Canada regularly cite large majorities of people in support of environmentalism and even self-defining as environmentalist (Dowie 1995; Furnham and Gunter 1989; Jordan and Maloney 1997; Macdonald 1991). Luke (1997) describes the remarkable shift that has occurred in environmental discourse as follows:

In the 1960s and early 1970s, any serious personal interest in the

⁷ In fact I prefer the designation "ecopolitical pedagogy" for socially-critical, social change-oriented environmental educations because it is open about its partial and partisan nature which, as Ellsworth (1989) notes, the title "critical" pedagogy (unlike feminist pedagogy) obscures. For similar debates within the field of environmental education see Russell's (1996) article aptly titled "Educating About, In, For, and With the Outdoors."

⁸ Examples include Dobson (1990), Dryzek (1997), Merchant (1994), and Paehkle (1989).

environment often was seen as the definitive mark of radical extremism. To deter the attacks of environmentalists, big business frequently argued that growth was good, that any legislation aimed at limiting pollution meant cutting jobs, and that ecologists were crackpot limousine liberals willing to put the existence of snail darters before modern humanity's material progress. ...Earth Day 1990 saw 'environmentalism' become a much more legitimate--or even mainstream--public good. Many major corporations now feel moved to proclaim how much 'every day is Earth Day' in their shop... (116)

Usually read as an indication of the success of the environmental movement, Luke (1997) equates mainstreaming with a domestication of ecological critique from production to consumption, transforming "a vernacular of 'Big business is dirty business' to dialects of 'Factories don't pollute. People do,' " which diffuses responsibility and obscures political agency (117).

In the face of such mainstreaming and corporate co-optation, Adkin (1992), in particular, attempts to distinguish between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic environmental projects, which she defines as

...those discourses critical of capitalist accumulation, of productivism, of science as domination of nature, of the prevailing ideologies of science and technocracy, of relations of subordination-domination (gender, racial, heterosexual), and of the institutions and social practices that underpin such relations, including the restricted nature of liberal democracy and the separation of the personal from the political, or the private from the public. (136)

Like Adkin, I am similarly concerned with the discourses of environmentalism which are taken up and produced within mainstream institutions, such as schools and youth clubs. To which aspects of environmental discourse are youth exposed and how is this mediated by school, family, state and media, and social relations of race/ethnicity, class, and gender? To which environmental discourses do emerging activists appeal? Whose interests and experiences do they serve and reflect? To what extent are they emancipatory, popular-democratic discourses or re-affirmations of the hegemonic model of capitalist development? What kinds of social, political, and cultural changes do they realize? How do these discourses shape the new generation of environmental activists both in terms of political ideology and in terms of ethnic/racial, class, and gender composition?

The sociological literature on new social movements paints a predictable picture of the composition of the environmental movement. Activists are predominantly white, well-educated, middle class professionals, working in humanistic-intellectual fields, such

as teaching, social work, health, and the public sector, as opposed to technical or business fields (Jordan and Maloney 1997; Mercier 1997; Skerkat and Blocker 1993; Skogen 1996). Leaders, lobbyists and consultants tend to be male, while grassroots members are disproportionately women (Di Chiro 1992; Jordan and Maloney 1997; Mercier 1997; Rocheleau et al. 1996; Seager 1993). Even more predictably, environmental education research locates the “significant life influences” of environmental activists in experiences common to people of this class and cultural background: childhood experiences in the outdoors, such as family or youth group hiking and camping trips; domestic pets; family or other adult role models; and positive environmentally-related educational experiences (Chawla 1998; Palmer 1993; Tanner 1980). Constructing educational programmes which mimic these characteristics, environmental educators presume their samples of environmental activists represent model environmental citizens towards which education should be directed. As Lewis and James (1993) point out, one of the most common misconceptions about racial and ethnic diversity and environmentalism is that the lack of nonwhites in the membership of environmental organizations indicates people of colour are not interested in environmental issues. A few multicultural studies, mostly looking at the perspectives of African-Americans, have begun to emerge which suggest that blacks are as supportive as whites of the “New Environmental Paradigm” (NEP) of postmaterialist values (Caron 1989). For the most part, however, the ethnocentric ideal of the “environmental citizen” or “environmental activist” remains largely unchallenged.

Some critical theorists and left-wing activists have argued that environmental issues are in fact luxury issues of the affluent who, not concerned with issues of basic survival, can afford to clamour for the material and aesthetic comfort of a nice and healthy environment and they postulate that poor and working class people do not have the resources or priority to give to environmental concerns (Beck 1992; Hays 1987). While this stance may help put morally-righteous environmental activists in their place, such a perspective ignores the voices and actions of poor and working class and racial and ethnic minority communities in North America and of third world peoples who hold that ecological sustainability is indeed a matter of survival. Taylor (1992) disputes both the assumption that people of colour and working class and poor people have little or no interest in or concern for environmental issues and that they have shown limited participation or political mobilization around environmental issues. Rather, she argues that the continued focus on wildlife and preservation issues by mainstream

environmental organizations are not as relevant to ethnic and racial minorities and the poor and points to the emergence of an environmental justice movement in the United States, primarily composed of communities of colour, which has largely focused on issues of human health and urban environmental issues, such as toxic waste disposal and pollution. Commonly dated to the 1978 Love Canal tragedy in New York state and a civil rights-esque protest of the disposal of PCB-contaminated soil in the largely Black community of Warren County, North Carolina in 1982, the environmental justice movement has only recently started garnering mainstream attention (Bullard 1993; Goldman 1996; Pulido 1996).

The 1991 First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit marked a milestone in defining the loose collection of grassroots organizing as a movement--and an *environmental* movement at that (Bullard 1994; Di Chiro 1992). Di Chiro (1992) documents how communities of colour have always been active around concerns of air and water quality, hazardous waste, and toxic chemicals, but they were approached variously as housing issues, or labour issues, or health issues; it is only the label "environment" that is new. Di Chiro (1992) cites Dana Alston, director of an environment program at a Public Welfare Foundation, on the environmental commitment of people of colour:

Now that gap in definition is being closed, but we always said that people of color were much more interested and invested in these issues than what was being said about us, that is that 'we're not interested, we're too busy surviving' even though the Black Congressional Caucus has had the best voting record on the environment in the past 20 years. (98)

Much more than just naming their presence in the movement, activists of colour are putting social justice on the environmental agenda by unravelling the universalized "common problem" and "common future" presumption of mainstream environmentalism with statistical evidence of environmental racism (Bryant 1995; Bryant and Mohai 1992; Bullard 1993; Bullard 1994; Pulido 1996). Despite the global dimensions of modern environmental problems, environmental resources, risks, responsibility, and decision-making power are not equally distributed. Environmental problems can be read as social justice issues where class, race/ethnicity, and gender are significant factors in determining who experiences the effects of, and who controls the causes of, environmental degradation.

Others have attempted to de-centre the hegemony of the mainstream

environmental movement by reconstructing the history of environmentalism, revealing how the work and activism of racial and ethnic minorities has been consistently left out of these histories.⁹ Lewis and James (1993) provide a few illustrative examples, such as how the first park rangers in Yosemite National Park were African-American soldiers and how Latino farm workers organized to discuss the effects of DDT at a charter meeting of the American Federation of Labour just three days after the publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962. In "Stories Less Told," Darnovsky (1992) suggests the "standard story" of environmentalism

...makes some voices inaudible and amplifies others; it renders some concerns invisible as environmental matters and places others at center stage. By setting the boundaries of environmentalist history, it helps to establish what counts as environmentalism today. In other words, these histories are not simply records of past events, but devices for producing--and constraining--meaning. (12-13)

For example, the urban reform efforts of the early twentieth century, led in large part by middle and working class women, which would today count as "environmental" struggles, are entirely absent from this history (Darnovsky 1992; Gottlieb 1993; Gugliotta 1998). Indeed, the Progressive Era urban reform movement could be read as the precursor to the contemporary environmental justice movement, substantiating a legacy of urban activism on the part of immigrants, workers and women which has been ignored and suppressed by mainstream environmentalism. These critical environmental theorists point out how definitions of "environment" and "environmentalism" are inherently political, and document how the consequences of these acts of defining--in terms of funding, credibility, and political influence--are very real (Di Chiro 1992).

While the environmental justice movement addresses issues of immediate human survival and quality of life, Taylor (1992) emphasizes that it should not be presumed that poor and working class or ethnic, racial and cultural minorities are not or can not be concerned with "higher order" needs and have an aesthetic perception of and connection to nature. This aesthetics may just not be based on the Romantic and Transcendentalist themes of the solitary individual in the wilderness which provide the symbolic justification for much wilderness conservation work. Ecofeminists and third world ecologists have pointed out how this story does not speak universally, largely ignoring and denigrating

⁹ Some notable histories of the environmental movement include Bramwell (1989), Hays (1987), Nash (1967), and Paehkle (1989).

women's and third world peoples' (diverse) experiences with nature, nor is it free from social and political implications (Butala 1994; Guha 1989; Seager 1993; Shiva 1988). As Wilson (1991) establishes in his book, *The Culture of Nature*, the meanings of "nature" and "environment" are socially constructed and culturally specific and emerge out of particular historical and political contexts. For example, Darnovsky (1992) suggests that in nineteenth century America, "nature could be construed as empty of human beings [i.e. as wilderness] only by repressing the recent history of the conquest and removal of indigenous Americans" (15).

Arguing that "the environment" is "a product of cultural responses to specific historical circumstances which give rise to shared sets of imagined landscapes," Lynch (1993) recovers a Latino environmental discourse which revolves around images and memories of the garden and the sea:

The garden and the sea are not only traditional sources of livelihood for the Spanish-speaking peoples of the Caribbean and real places where poor people could construct their lives at some remove from the brutal discipline of the sugar plantations, they have become symbols of resistance to the physical manifestations of political and economic power. Just as the emotional charge of the frontier, wild rivers, and redwoods in the Anglo-American imagination comes from the political content of these symbols, so the force of the garden and the sea for Caribbean Latinos is related to their political significance. (109-110)

Antiguan-born, African-American writer Jamaica Kincaid also reclaims the symbol of the garden as a Caribbean path to connecting with nature, and ties together the legacies of colonialism of people and places to suggest that a displaced people in a landscape of alien species under a system of slavery could never pretend to an "authentic" or unmediated nature experience (O'Brien 1998). Lynch (1993) concludes that

...while class, wealth, and forms of environmental activity are probably correlated, it is unlikely that socioeconomic status determines the presence or absence of environmental perspectives. It is more plausible to suggest that because the content of environmental consciousness varies radically with cultural background, Anglo-Americans' and U.S. Latinos' concerns will be different, and the expression of even common concerns will vary. (110)

Most importantly, Lynch (1993) considers the power relations which mediate expression of these different discourses:

If environmental discourses are culturally grounded, they will differ in content along class and ethnic lines. Where power in society is unequally distributed, not all environmental discourses will be heard equally. Thus, questions of environmental justice must address not only the effects of

particular land uses or environmental policies on diverse groups in society, but the likelihood that alternative environmental discourses will be heard and valued. (110)

Middle class, white professionals have not only dominated the membership of the environmental movement, they have defined its purposes and boundaries, and symbols and meanings according to a particular historically and politically-located discourse, notably one that carries echoes of genocide and colonialism.

All of this is significant when environmental issues are taken up into an educational curriculum or a school club. While North American youth may share the influences of the mass media on shaping their environmental perceptions, these influences will hardly have homogenous effects. What experiences, histories and symbolism of nature and environmental issues do students from different class and cultural backgrounds bring to their educational setting? Whose representations of nature and of environmentalism prevail? How might participation in environmental activities serve to deny, distort or affirm ethnic, racial and cultural identities, histories, and inequalities? Imagine what the simple activity of walking through the woods might mean and represent to these different students: a refugee to Canada who spent a year of his childhood hiding out in and moving through the tropical forest to escape guerilla warfare before reaching a refugee camp; a middle class, suburban Canadian-born girl who spends her summers at a cottage north of Toronto, camping and canoeing with her parents and siblings; and an urban black youth who has never left Toronto yet read of a white supremacist rally held in a farmer's field in rural Ontario a few years ago.¹⁰ As Tobago-born Toronto poet M. Nourbese Philip asks, "whose memories get celebrated and what do you do with your memory when you move into that space?" (Philip et al. 1997).

Giroux (1983) calls for critical or emancipatory educators to be attentive to the ways in which the discourses and practices of schools may be weighed in favour of the dominant culture, constituting further colonization of the life-worlds of students from subordinate class and cultural backgrounds and advancing the interests of the dominant class whose children come to school already familiar and conversant in the meanings and norms of the dominant culture. A pedagogy for the opposition would recover and validate those other(ed) stories, expose the relations of power which marginalize, silence and

¹⁰ All of these scenarios originate in experiences various individuals have shared with me personally, but are easily substantiated in the literature, for example Philip et al. (1997).

oppress, help us each unlearn and unsettle (multiple) positions of privilege and oppression, and tentatively reconstruct nonviolent ways of living and relating. This is no doubt as true for environmental educators as for teachers generally; indeed, more so if we intend to further a social movement committed not only to ecological sustainability, but also environmental justice.

Conclusions

Critical studies of youth subcultures often assume the students involved in school clubs are essentially those who accept, conform to, and in fact actively embrace school rules and norms. How does environmentalism, as a movement for social change, then get taken up within the structure of the high school club? Is it sanitized and depoliticized of its more radical undertones? Do the white, middle class, liberal biases of the environmental movement just mesh unproblematically with liberal methods of student “empowerment”? What kind of space might an environment club open up for counter-hegemonic practices? Rather than leading towards any hypotheses of what one might expect a high school environment club to be about, this review of the diverse literatures which inform an ecocritical analysis has raised questions, hinted at dangers, disappointments and possibilities, posed challenges, and cautions against finding any coherent, singular story. Given the diverse political perspectives, social locations, and symbolic referents which comprise environmentalism and the forms of state, institutional, and cultural resistance which oppose ecologically-grounded social change, environmental education and environmental activism within schools are undeniably sites of cultural struggle with an influential role in setting, constraining, and re-constructing the environmental agenda. The question that remains is how is this struggle experienced and enacted in the daily lives of teachers and students?

III Research Methodology: Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography refers to “studies which use a basically anthropological, qualitative, participant-observer methodology but which rely for their theoretical formulation on a body of theory deriving from critical sociology and philosophy” (Masemann 1982, 1). Ethnography is increasingly popular in educational research for its emphasis on approaching people’s understandings and actions within their cultural (or institutional) context (Goetz and LeCompte 1984). Spending extended amounts of time in a research setting, regularly talking with and observing participants, perhaps even experiencing some of their day-to-day routine, provides a depth of data-gathering unequaled by other any methodology. Robottom and Hart (1995) express concern at how research in environmental education has been almost exclusively quantitative and positivistic, seeking to test for knowledge acquisition or behavioral changes, yet do not outline an alternative research methodology for environmental education. The value of ethnography is recognized in Pamela Courtenay Hall’s (1997) recommendation that the development of a more transformative environmental education “lies in attending more closely to the fine grain of what actually does go on or can go on inside particular schools and particular classrooms, including inside teacher education and professional development programs” (367). Concerned not with broad-based trends, nor with testing for acquisition of knowledge, but hoping to gain an understanding of the perspectives, challenges, and actions of teachers and students *in their depth and complexity*, I feel ethnographic research methods allows me the greatest access to those meanings.

Given my political commitment to helping teachers, students, and myself become more effective change agents through the development of a socially-critical pedagogy, this project goes beyond the interpretation goals of conventional ethnography: it is *critical* ethnography, a research methodology and epistemological stance that enjoys a notable legacy in educational research. According to Lather (1986a), critical or emancipatory research finds its origins in three different intellectual streams: critical theory, feminism and Freirian pedagogy. All share a political commitment to emancipation and formulate a critique of the power relations inherent in and, explicitly or implicitly, supported by conventional research methodology. The full significance--and unresolved problematics--of critical social science can only be understood in relation to the other epistemological streams from which it has distinguished itself. Thus a brief review of the collapse of

positivism and the transition to the postpositivist era will precede the crucial discussion of what critical ethnography is and how its validity is established. I follow this theoretical discussion with an outline of the research sample and procedures adopted in this study.

Theoretical Underpinnings/Background

Positivism has held until recently its position as the dominant epistemological paradigm in educational research as well as the social and natural sciences generally. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide numerous definitions of positivism, emphasizing how it is premised on a mechanistic understanding of the world: assuming an external reality based on predictable, universal laws which can be discovered through experimentation by “objective” or detached observers on component parts which are generalizable to the whole. Validity was guaranteed by the rigour of the method; theories “are reduced to a logical apparatus necessary to the business of prediction” (Harre cited in Lincoln and Guba 1985, 23). While challenges to this paradigm have emerged from within the natural sciences, largely within quantum physics, it is within the social sciences that a revolution of epistemological paradigms has occurred. The reductionism of positivism was found to be inadequate to the task of describing and understanding human experiences; moreover, the assumption of predicability denies people their subjectivity and ability to make conscious decisions about their actions, and setting prediction of human behaviour as a goal for research is disturbingly anti-democratic.

In *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe a new paradigm, naturalism, in place of positivism, arguing that the assumptions upon which positivism was grounded had been problematized to the point of necessitating a paradigm shift to a postpositivistic era. They characterize naturalism in almost direct opposition to positivism:

...realities are multiple, constructed and holistic; knower and known are interactive, inseparable; only time-and context-bound working hypotheses are possible; all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects; and inquiry is value-bound. (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 37)

The idea of an objectively-knowable external reality is discredited since “what count as data are determined in the light of some theoretical interpretation” (Hesse cited in Lincoln and Guba 1985, 29). The implications for research methods involve a shift to qualitative, rather than quantitative methods, which emphasize gathering data “in the natural setting or context of the entity,” since “realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation

from their contexts" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 39). Traditional anthropological work has always aimed at understanding people in their cultural context and thus ethnography has gained prominence as one of the preferred qualitative methods with the transition to postpositivism.

In many ways though, the naturalistic paradigm did not reject enough of the positivist assumptions. Interpretive research, in practice, remains committed to understanding and describing social phenomena as "objects existing independently of the researcher" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 10). Furthermore, the values and pre-conceptions of the researcher are still considered to be "a source of distortion whose effects have to be guarded against to preserve objectivity" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 11). Critical researchers challenge these presumptions, arguing that since research is always affected by values, and always has political implications, researchers should take responsibility for their research, openly acknowledging their value commitments and seeking to ensure the result is empowerment of the oppressed (Lather 1986b). Critical social science problematizes interpretivist research by placing it in sociohistorical context, demonstrating how it serves, like positivistic science, to justify and rationalize maintenance of the status quo.

Critical educational research is built on a consciousness that teaching and curriculum are 1) *historically-located*, taking place against a specific social-historical background and projecting a view of the kind of future we hope to build; 2) a social activity with *social* consequences, not just a question of individual development; 3) intrinsically *political*, affecting distribution of students' future access to material well-being, employment opportunities, and social status; and 4) materially and ideologically influential on the life expectations and character of future citizens (Carr and Kemmis 1986, 39). Thus all aspects of education, its purpose, social situation, process, medium, or kind of knowledge produced, embody deeper ideas about and impact material relations in society. Some early examples of critical educational research include Bowles and Gintis' (1976) foundational *Schooling in Capitalist America* and Paul Willis' (1977) now-famous ethnography of working class lads in Britain. In response to these initial forays which appeared to overemphasize macro processes to the neglect of human agency, later developments in critical educational theory, such as the works of Henry Giroux and Michael Apple, incorporated theories of resistance into theories of social reproduction.

According to Anderson (1989), the concern about human agency prompted a return

to ethnography in critical research: putting people back into the discourses of class, patriarchy, and racism. Critical theory was seen to be overdeterministic, focusing on social structures to the point of obscuring or trivializing intentional human actions and thus in fact denying the potential of individuals to resist social norms and expectations and to contribute to counter-hegemonic social change. Phenomenological, or interpretive, research assumed fully rational action and constructed context solely out of the participants' perceptions of their situation. Critical ethnography attempts to combine the two approaches. Like interpretivist ethnographers, critical ethnographers aim to "generate insights, to explain events, and to seek understanding" however they also believe that the cultural informant's perceptions of social reality are themselves theoretical constructs not 'pure' experience (Anderson 1989, 253). Critical ethnographers "claim that informant reconstructions are often permeated with meanings that sustain powerlessness and that people's conscious models exist to perpetuate, as much as to explain, social phenomena" (Anderson 1989, 253). Or as Harvey (1990) elaborates:

What is important for critical ethnography, however, is that the probing of the subjects' meanings is not the end of the story. The group operates in a socio-historically specific milieu and is not independent of structural factors. Their meanings may appear to be group centred but are mediated by structural concerns. (12)

The task then of critical ethnographers is to "ensure that participants in research 'are not naively enthroned, but systematically and critically unveiled'" (Anderson 1989, 253).

Participatory research goes one step further than most critical research with its commitment to researching '*with*,' not '*on*' or '*for*,' people and for the purposes of actual, material social change. Feminists, in particular, have reacted to the 'voyeurism' of traditional, detached, male academic research and insist that research from the margins must be "honourable," based on overt relationships and direct communication (Kirby and McKenna 1989). Emerging from feminist theory and activism and Freirian "emancipatory" pedagogy, participatory research problematizes the power relation between researcher and researched maintained in critical theory-derived research. While critical research recognizes that "by treating people as objects to be counted, surveyed, predicted, and controlled, traditional research methods mirror oppressive social conditions which cause ordinary people to relinquish their capacity to make real choices and to be cut out of meaningful decision-making," it fails to restructure the research process accordingly (Maguire 1987, 37). The elitism captured in the following quote from one critical research

team contradicts the emancipatory political commitment of critical social science: "We would not expect the teachers interviewed to either agree with or necessarily understand the inferences which were made from their responses" (Bullough, Goldstein & Holt, cited in Lather 1986a, 76). On the contrary, as Carr and Kemmis (1986) argue, these theories should be "offered as interpretations which can only be validated in and by the *self-understandings* of practitioners under conditions of *free and open dialogue*" (31, emphasis in original).

Emancipatory researchers aim to fundamentally restructure the research method to what Carr and Kemmis (1986) term "an embodiment of democratic principles in research" (164). "Participatory" thus means sharing control and decision-making power over research question, data collection methods, and analysis of results with the "objects" of research, although the degree to which this happens varies greatly among projects. The second foundational element of participatory research is its interventionist nature, aiming, in the words of Marx, not merely to interpret reality, but to *change* it. Maguire (1987) outlines three levels of change that constitute an emancipatory project: the development of critical consciousness of both researcher and participants; the improvement of the lives of those involved in the research process; and the transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationships. She describes the process of participatory research as a combination of education, investigation and action, usually undertaken in response to a community need. Neo-Marxist critical research has tended to aim the research at intellectuals or those with the cultural authority to change policy, rather than the material conditions and critical consciousness of the participants themselves.

Although critical consciousness is one goal of the critical research process, critical social science emphasizes that social problems--and thus change agenda--do not lie primarily in individual understandings but in material constraints. False consciousness arises because part of the power of the dominant social group *is* their ability to shape common, as well as social science, knowledge. Here the role of researcher crosses over into educator as the researcher tries to link participants' individual interpretations to the broader context of structural conditions of social reality, not as an "academic who will enlighten" the masses, but as the initiation of a dialogue which should revise the theory substantially. Maguire (1987) concedes that emancipatory research begins with the assumption that people need enlightenment and empowerment, but insists this

assumption must be counterbalanced by the belief that “ordinary people, provided with tools and opportunities, are capable of critical reflection and analysis” (46). The approach remains premised on a rejection of the positivist paradigm of “I know; they don’t know” for a more collaborative “we both know some things; neither of us knows everything. Working together we will both know more, and we will both learn more about how to know” (Maguire 1987, 46).

Critical research spans a broad spectrum of mostly theoretical to truly emancipatory approaches. The critical nature of my research project emerges mainly from the questions asked and analysis adopted. Clearly it is important to start any educational programme at the point where people are in their understanding and commitments before moving towards changing practices, structures, and attitudes/ideas. Given the limited time, finances, and resources available for my research project, I aimed at no more than gaining an understanding of what was going on and why, although there is some potential for changed consciousness/practices within individual schools. Rather than conceptualizing of a project as critical or not, it may be better to think of “emancipatory moments” that emerge during the research process (Goldstein 1998). I tried to facilitate the emergence of as many such moments as possible, through discussion of ideas and by challenging assumptions, through suggestions and examples for action, through networking and sharing contacts with other clubs or environmental or social justice groups. I cannot say whether any material change resulted from my research. At least, I hope it provides some themes and issues to consider and address in further research and/or environmental projects.

Theoretical Issues in Design and Validity

In practice, participatory, critical research is still exploratory and tentative. Many problems or issues remain unresolved, including how to assume the monumental tasks of action, education, *and* investigation, how much should the researcher interfere, how to reconcile the reality that the researcher remains an outsider coming in to a community, and how to match one’s data to theory in a flexible, dialectical way. Lather (1986b) pronounces that the challenge ahead is to satisfy “the need for open, flexible theory-building grounded in a body of empirical work that is ceaselessly confronted with, and respectful of, the experiences of people in their daily lives” (261). Critical social science has problematized most aspects of the research process. Green et al. (1997) and Roberts

(1997) discuss the politics of transcription, pointing out there is no 'natural' or objective way in which talk can be written; Brodkey (1987) calls attention to the tendency towards third person, perceptual narratives in the writing of ethnography, which reverts to an ahistorical stance of "researcher as instrument rather than agent" (73). The researcher is challenged to be reflexive throughout the process, consciously reconstructing the rules of research in a critical way. Anderson (1989) concedes there is little practical advice available for doing critical ethnographic research, such as "how to write a reflective journal, how to negotiate outcomes with informants, how to gain and maintain site access when doing controversial research, and how to systematize reflexivity," all of which have implications for the validity and credibility of the research (263).

Additional issues revolve around the question of whether focussing on ordinary or oppressed people, rather than the power-holders, is appropriate and/or strategic. Susan George argues for a focus on the rich and powerful: "Let the poor study themselves. They already know what is wrong with their lives and if you truly want to help them, the best you can do is give them an idea of how their oppressors are working now and can be expected to work in the future" (cited in Kirby and McKenna 1989, 27). Kirby and McKenna (1989) respond that the marginalized have been structurally cut out from the process of "selecting, naming, disseminating and evaluating knowledge... By beginning with the experience and research needs of those who have been silenced, the process of knowledge production is transformed and the ideological power base is challenged" (28). Maguire (1987), however, warns against the research process itself being taken as a panacea for social change. A related concern is that the effort to link individual perceptions to sociohistorical relations in fact becomes ahistorical when policy (and thus immediate change) is neglected. Anderson (1989) stresses there is a need to recapture the historicity and specificity of the site, not just the broad social era: the focus on education's role in social and cultural reproduction has kept critical educational research from addressing/including/recognizing broad social transformations (globalization, post-industrialism) and social movements (feminism, environmentalism), and local institutional policies and practicalities which are not all reducible to race/ethnicity, class, or gender relations.

Highly significant for any research paradigm is its acceptance as *research* within the academic community and the public domain. Anderson (1989) states that validity is the single-most methodological challenge for critical ethnography. Not only is qualitative,

particularly ethnographic, research generally still lacking credibility in the field of educational research, critical ethnography is openly ideological, a seeming contradiction for most academics who maintain the positivist stance of researcher as detached observer. Brodkey (1987) notes how critical research must disassemble the boundary between advocacy and scholarship in order to gain credibility. So far, Lather (1986a) has provided the most considered articulation of how critical research could construct validity claims, building on the groundwork of naturalistic, qualitative research. She outlines four guidelines to protecting the credibility of data: triangulation of data sources, methods and analysis; face validity or member checks; systematized self-reflexivity; and catalytic validity. Member checks refers to the recycling of analysis back through a subsample of research participants and refining it according to their reactions. Self-reflexivity, or construct validity, should restrict the imposition of theory onto a social situation by an ongoing reflection of the researcher on her assumptions and how these are changed by the research process.

Catalytic validity is unique to critical and emancipatory research, addressing its concern with social change as overt and intended research outcome. Lather (1986a) defines catalytic validity as "some documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents" (78); or made some movement towards the three elements of change identified by Maguire (1987). She offers a radical reconceptualization of the purpose of research and how its trustworthiness is to be measured: whereas positivistic science aims for predictability and its validity is evaluated according to how well it does in fact predict and describe, and phenomenological research aims at contextualized interpretation and finds its credibility in its correspondence to participants' meanings, critical social science aims at change and thus could be evaluated by the degree to which it empowers, makes change, and furthers critique.

Research Sample and Procedures

Over the three-month period of March through May 1998, I made contact with, observed, participated in, interviewed, and eventually withdrew from four environment clubs in four different secondary schools in the Toronto & District Board of Education. The schools were chosen in consultation with the Environmental Education Officer at the Board of Education, the teachers advising the clubs, and the Research Review Committee

at the Board of Education. In the fall of 1997, I contacted the Environmental Education Officer and she gave me a list of twelve schools where she thought there were environment clubs. She acknowledged there may be more clubs in existence than she herself was aware of as no systematic records of the extra-curricular activities offered in each school exist. In January 1998, nearing approval of my research proposal by my thesis committee, I contacted the teachers advising the environment clubs in each of these schools to find out what the club was doing and how open they would be to working with a researcher. Also, I categorized these schools according to different student populations of class and ethnic background, based on the statistics available from the Board of Education, in an effort to ensure my research population could be somewhat reflective of the diversity of the Toronto student population. I then submitted my requirements to the Board, asking for diversity of student populations and club activities and listing my preferred schools. The decision remained fully with the Research Review Committee at the Board of Education. Approval from the Board only meant I was permitted to approach those schools for research; the final decision to participate remained up to the school principal, teacher, and students. Several of the schools' principals were concerned about time demands on their teachers, but none of the teachers or students showed any hesitation in agreeing to participate in the research.

The different natures of the clubs and the different amounts of time it took me to gain access to them means that I worked more closely and continuously with two out of the four schools. As a result, I do not have four case studies which can be compared and contrasted. Moreover, the rapport and interaction I established with each and thus the information I gathered from each was quite different. I prefer to conceive of this study as a pilot study which identifies emerging themes of interest to the researcher, but not a full critical ethnographic study. Time limitations restricted me from making the research very participatory and the dominance of the researcher's voice in this write-up reflects this situation. Further reflection on the research process will be considered in chapter 11; for now, I wish to emphasize how this was a learning process for the researcher, stimulating her to reflect on many of her assumptions and radically shift the nature of her analysis. It is this process that I wish to share.

The procedure involved regular participant observation with four secondary school environment clubs and individual interviews with the teachers advising the groups over a period of 12 weeks. While membership varied from week to week, each club had about

five to ten members and one or two staff advisors. The four groups included two Technical schools with primarily working class, new immigrant student populations; one Collegiate with a primarily middle class, second-generation Chinese-Canadian student population; and one Collegiate with a primarily upper middle class, white, Anglo-Canadian student population. All the schools are public high schools in the highly urbanized area of Metropolitan Toronto. I attended weekly club meetings (ranging from 45 minutes to 3 hours), observed additional school events organized by the clubs such as tree-planting days and school assemblies, and interviewed four teachers and one student separately during spares or during out-of-school time. Extensive field notes were written on all these activities and, when possible, the club meetings were also tape-recorded. All the interviews were tape-recorded. Interviews ranged in length from an hour to an hour and an half and followed an unstructured format, but each began with a similarly-phrased question asking the participant to share his or her "environmental autobiography" in order to elicit personal as well as professional perspectives and background information. I was able to informally chat with most of the students on a one-to-one or small group basis throughout the research period, although I was able to get to know some students much better than others. Two formal, tape-recorded discussions were held with two of the groups about their thoughts on their club, school, and environmentalism. Demographic profiles of the participating schools was used to further contextualize the case studies.

The combination of field observation and group interviews was chosen in order to provide some triangulation and increase the comprehensiveness of the data. Field observation is the technique of choice for in-depth research of a setting and group of people. This approach also placed most of the burden of the time commitment onto the researcher and avoided wasting participants' time with "filling me in." Observing and recording club meetings and events/activities on a regular basis provided an in-depth picture of a series of moments in the club process and the activities that were going on and revealed some of the subtleties of the process the participants did not appear to be aware of or did not themselves mention, which then generated ideas and topics for later discussion. While one might think the same information could be elicited through interviews, sometimes people have difficulty in articulating their beliefs and understandings or act on different presumptions than they think. Underlying conceptualizations are often revealed in the content of people's discussions, actions, and

decisions. For all their richness though, field observations need to be supplemented by and explored within the context of interviews when the participants' experiences and understandings of the setting/organization are a central research objective. The researcher can only guess at the meanings behind actions until they are confirmed, revised, or rejected through discussion with the actors themselves. I would have liked to individually interview all the participants, but was unable to due to constraints of time and resources. I thought it essential to conduct individual interviews with the teachers, feeling they might be hesitant to reveal some of their insights in the group setting and that they would have a qualitatively different perspective and experience than the students. These interviews and discussions were scheduled at the convenience of the clubs and occurred somewhat sporadically throughout the research period. The amount of time spent on discussion depended entirely on the interests and time availability of club members.

Several provisions were made to strengthen data credibility as well as to recognize the limited nature of the conclusions that can be drawn from such a study. A particular concern with ethnography, and qualitative research generally, is reactivity, or the influence of the researcher on the situation and responses of participants. The field research was not quite full participant observation, but more like observation with some limited participation; while the group interviewing was more like facilitation of group discussion than a researcher-guided interview. The prominence of the researcher in these situations likely impacted the situations and the participants' responses, which I tried to document as much as possible throughout the process and analysis. In addition, I tried to engage in on-going data and analysis checks with the participants to see if the data matched their understandings. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) emphasize how ethnographic research must be in-depth enough and provide sufficient detail to "communicate how dimensions of setting, circumstances, and participants affect and bias the study" (238). This ensures the accuracy of the data and analysis usually surpasses that gathered through quantitative, or less in-depth methods, although clearly reliability, or replicability, are weaknesses in this research because of the inherent uniqueness of any case study.

The provisions for feedback included the opportunity to continually provide tentative feedback and share my preliminary, emerging analysis during the on-going discussions with the clubs; a final group session--now planned for September--where I will present my results and test for face validity, i.e. does my interpretation match the

participants' understandings of what is going on; and a summary of the final thesis to be sent to all participating schools, with a copy of the thesis going to the Board of Education.

IV Profiles: Clubs, Schools and their Social Context

I lock my bike along the iron railing that surrounds the neat patriotic schoolyard--a war memorial, soldier shouldering rifle, dwarfs the students who gather out in the yard, spilling over benches and stairways, leaning against walls and fences. I feel both confident--thankful I am no longer some awkward adolescent trying to find a place to be during that long lunch hour of free time--and nervous--this is my first school, my first club, my first attempt at ethnographic research, and my masters degree rests on my success. While I have gone over in my mind how I will introduce myself, what I think I need to say, I really have no idea of what to expect when I enter the school. Clutching my bike helmet and backpack, I head into the schoolyard and ask a student where the main office is. She points across to a doorway crowded with students, smoking and chatting, and I head through the mass into the school. On the door reads a sign: "Entrance permitted for purposes consistent with the Education Act only."

Are my purposes consistent with the Education Act? What is the Education Act? I am sure the students are as unaware as I am of its contents. While I have no doubt that my presence at the school is legal, I am uncomfortable about how I will present--and have already presented to the many gatekeepers I have passed through, including my thesis committee, the Research Review committee at the Board of Education, the school principal and the teacher advising the club--the "critical" nature of this research. I have a socially-critical analysis of environmental problems that is likely not shared by those I will encounter and I have a commitment to furthering some emancipatory agenda, which I envision as a dialogue/praxis around environmental issues and their structural causes and the (constructed and potential) place of youth and schools in environmental discourse and politics. At the same time, I would like the research to be mutually participatory and this means I need to spend some time getting to know the participants and allowing them to know me before we can discuss a mutual agenda; moreover, I do not want to derail their projects through over-critique, nor to replace action with discussion. Already I had made the choice to state that my interest was in "environmental education," not "ecopolitical pedagogy," the designation I prefer. I did not want to scare off any teachers, I did not want my application refused by the Board of Education, perhaps I felt uncertain about my ability to defend and explain such a position. However much I might rationalize my actions, there were times throughout the research process when personal fears and

anxieties influenced my decisions. So here was another decision facing me. As I meet the students I would like to work with, how do I present myself? When even I keep re-thinking my research question, how do I explain it to them? Do I mention how I am concerned with structural relations of power within the school and society and how environmental issues interlock with power relations of race, ethnicity, class and gender? If so, what kind of language do I use? When they have not invited me to come, how do I go about making the research participatory in any authentic way?

In fact, I never get a chance to even introduce myself as the club jumps immediately into their meeting and I have less than two minutes at the end, with the end of lunch bell ringing and the students gathering up their lunch bags and backpacks, to explain my presence and to hand out consent letters to sign. Such, I learn, is the nature of researching clubs: unpredictable, fragmentary, dynamic and brief, requiring flexibility to continually re-adjust my goals and roles and spontaneity to seize moments of dialogue, insight and connection.

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a profile of each of the environment clubs that I conducted my research with and then sketch out what I believe to be the important policy and social contexts for the clubs. Very quickly, I learned that the context for my research and my analysis included, on the one hand, the Ontario curriculum in environmental education, the environmental policies and support structures of the Board of Education, and the environmental policies and activism occurring within Ontario and Toronto specifically; and, on the other hand, the power and identity dynamics of race/ethnicity and class within the city of Toronto, the policies and practices of streaming at the Board of Education, and the prevailing neoconservative political climate in the province of Ontario and its impact on educational policy. I scrambled to learn what was going on when I encountered unexpecteds, such as a “brown” school and a “white” school next to each other in the same neighbourhood. I talked with researchers and officers at the Board of Education, curriculum consultants, a student and teacher in another city who had started environment clubs, vice-principals, a parent active in a parents’ lobby group for environmental education, and representatives of environmental citizens groups. I also formally interviewed each of the teachers working with the clubs. In the effort to provide a sense of the immediate context as gathered through casual conversations and largely

unavailable in documentation, there may be errors and oversights which the passing of time and subsequent research may reveal; indeed, much of the information presented here raises pertinent issues which could not be addressed in my research, but demand further investigation. By including this information regardless, I hope both to explain what appeared to be the social and policy context and to reveal some of the perspectives and assumptions the researcher was working with.

*Devonshire Collegiate*¹¹

Devonshire Collegiate is a largely middle class collegiate with a large Chinese-Canadian population located near one of the city's Chinatowns. While Chinese is the home language for 41.3% of the students, only 19% were born in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan (Research & Assessment 1997). With only 20% of students coming from English-only home environments, a picture develops of a school populated with mostly second-generation Canadians of, in decreasing order, Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, Greek, Italian and Korean ethnic/national origins (Research & Assessment 1997). About 10% of the student population are Vietnamese immigrants and 20% of students are considered ESL (English Second Language) status. Indeed, there are students at the school from every region of the world, including Asia, Western and Eastern Europe, Central and South America, Central and West Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean, which is common in Toronto (Research & Assessment 1997). Most of the teachers in the school are white, Canadian-born, and of Anglo-European ethnic heritage. As a "Collegiate," as opposed to a Technical or Commercial school, the majority of the students are college and university-bound and most take courses in the advanced stream.

The environment club at Devonshire is supervised by a near-retirement, male Geography teacher who initiated and teaches the environmental studies course, but the students in the club run their own meetings and projects, turning to him largely for questions about school procedure and assistance with more technical aspects of their initiatives. There is a core group of five to eight students who meet on a weekly basis over the lunch hour. During my time with them, they were spending much of their time organizing an ambitious Earth Week programme to raise environmental awareness in the school involving a number of invited guests from citizen's groups and government. Events included a whole school assembly where a popular and dynamic environmental educator

¹¹ The names of all the schools, teachers, and students are pseudonyms.

presented an interactive slide show on the global dimensions of our environmental crisis; science displays and posters about environmental issues; a paper-making activity; a community bicycle network workshop; waste reduction and water efficiency presentations/workshops; drama workshopping on environmental, local economic, and labour-conscious consumer choices; and a media event launching solar panels donated by Ontario Hydro which the students of the Science and Society class installed themselves. In addition to Earth Week, their other projects included getting composters set up in the school, growing wetland plants for habitat regeneration with a local citizen's group (mainly in conjunction with the Ecology course), and planning a naturalization project. The naturalization remained largely in the planning stage.

While Devonshire Collegiate has had an environment club since 1991, the club has been re-created each September by the Geography teacher. The students in the current club all joined in September, but view their activities as on-going and long-term and have committed to continuing their involvement into the next few years. They have been much more active than previous years' clubs and seem to be generating a new model for the club. Four core members came every week, unless sick or away on a school trip. Another four came most times, but occasionally forgot or otherwise disassociated themselves from being fully active. Another four came once or twice, with their identification ranging from seeing themselves as members, as no longer members, or gradually becoming members. One other was mentioned occasionally, but I never met him in the three months I was visiting the school. When I describe the club, I refer to the eight usual members as they themselves identify themselves as the club. Seven of the eight members are female, ranging in grade from 10 to OAC. Six of the eight are Chinese-Canadian. The older students are all academic-achievers, taking courses such as OAC Latin and participating in science competitions. Many are involved in a number of different clubs and activities, such as AIDS awareness and Encounters Canada. Apparently over twenty (the teacher suggested 40) students signed up for the club in September, but attendance gradually dropped to the current number. Several of those who took on the roles of leaders, such as co-chairs and treasurers, were together in an Environmental Studies class the year before and had together talked about their ideas for the club at the end of their classes the year before.

My role with the group was largely as observer. I attended meetings on a weekly basis and went to three of the Earth Week events (I was unable to attend more as Earth

Week was a busy time in all the schools). Occasionally I was asked for or offered advice on different aspects of their planning process, as my experience with a number of community-based environmental organizations means I have both technical knowledge about things like naturalization, composting, and grant proposals, as well as contacts and resources. I believe I established a friendly rapport with the group, freely chatting with them in the times we had before meetings or during events. They would often include me in discussions or tell me about their university plans or about their weekends or about new environmental issues/information they came across--this was part of the normal social interaction of the club. Several of them asked what I was looking for in my research and volunteered why and how they had become involved and interested in the club. The busy nature of the meetings, however, prevented us from delving into these issues at any great length. I was able to set aside one club meeting for a discussion about the club to which two of the students came and I had an opportunity to talk in depth with one co-chair in the cafeteria for one lunch-hour. I tried to ensure our interaction was mutual, not wanting to overtake their agenda with my questions, which in the end meant I usually listened and helped them on their projects.

Wychwood Technical

... if you go to 'tech' school, [people believe] you're not smart enough to go to a regular school. People believe that at Wychwood Tech we don't have kids taking OAC courses, they don't think you can go to university. We have a reputation for being a tough school that, you know, there lots of gangs, fights and violence. Highland Collegiate, which is just down the block, is seen as the golden school, like, if you live in this district you don't want to go to Wychwood Tech, you want to go to Highland.
(Teacher at Wychwood Tech)

Wychwood Technical School has a reputation of being one of the worst in the Board, a school composed of students not accepted at, or kicked out of, other schools. While this is not actually the case, the school does have problems. Attendance is sporadic and low and the school has the highest turn-over of students in the Board, with just over half the students staying through an entire school year. Over 60% of the students at the school are male, attributed to the fact that most of its courses are in the general and basic streams (Research & Assessment 1997). Wychwood Tech has a strong ESL programme which attracts a large number of adults to enrol. In fact, 40% of its students are age 21 or over (Research & Assessment 1997). Classes are integrated with adults and adolescents in

the same classrooms. These conditions bring significant challenges to the teachers at Wychwood Tech, on top of the fact that over 50 languages are spoken in students' homes. Fully 50% of the student population immigrated to Canada since 1990, many as refugees from Sri Lanka, Somalia, and Ethiopia (Research & Assessment 1997). Wychwood Tech also has one of the highest populations of students from Africa and the Caribbean of any school in the Board.

The principals, teachers, and some students were quite concerned about this reputation that Wychwood Tech is, in the words of one vice-principal, "a school of toughies and basic students," and are actively trying to change it. Environmental education, in fact, is one of the ways in which the school is trying to make a name for itself. One of the science teachers advising the club and the vice-principal, who has a background in outdoor education, were planning on piloting a double-credit, all-afternoon experimental course in environmental science and outdoor leadership the next fall, taking advantage of the school's proximity to some natural habitat within the city. It would be the first of its kind within the Board. Another of the school's assets is housing one of the three Gifted Programmes in the Board. Other emphases lie in business and high-tech shop courses such as computer design and animation.

The environment club at Wychwood Tech was started by two young science teachers (one male and one female) about four years ago, when one of these teachers started at the school. From the outset, the club attracted the group of students in the Gifted programme to join and it has remained predominantly "gifted" ever since, often with younger siblings joining when they start at the school. At first, the club tried to set up and maintain a recycling programme, which it still does, to some extent. They found this boring and frustrating after some time and the teachers decided to start a naturalization project instead. Like at Devonshire Collegiate, the environmental club at Wychwood is predominantly female, with nine girls to two boys. Although a third male student appeared regularly at the end, he insisted he was only helping, not a "member." Eight of the students are Sri Lankan, although they constitute less than 4% of the student population at Wychwood, two are Asian, and two are white, Canadian-born. Several of them are related, with a set of sisters, and an aunt-niece relation, while the rest are mostly pairs of friends, which makes all their activities and gatherings very social. Most of the students are very active in a number of different activities, including softball, band, yearbook, art, and math clubs.

The club received grant money from a local bank branch to create an ecology garden, consisting of a grassland, wetland, and "forest" (probably no more than 6 trees). The group was into its second year of the project and was quite busy over the time-period I spent with them as they needed to complete the project before the grant period subsided in September and before the teachers left--both had their positions terminated in education cuts. By June 1998, the grassland was complete and the status of the remainder of the project was uncertain. Preparation of the garden required a lot of manual labour and substantial time commitment on the part of the teachers and students. The group was regularly working at the garden from 3pm to 6pm once a week and sometimes up to three or four days after school. First we took up the sod and dug out the wetland, then dug two and half tonnes of sand into the soil and planted four sets of indigenous plant species. The final stage involved digging out and laying stones in for a path through the garden. Students were divided into daily teams for watering which was required for the new plantings until the end of June. When I first began with the club in March, the group was holding brief weekly meetings, where they would water the plants in the greenhouse and discuss the garden project, fundraisers, and Earth Week. At this point in time, I primarily observed, finding it difficult to squeeze my voice into the discussions and conversations of the talkative bunch. When the weather warmed up and the club started its outdoor work, I joined in and helped out with all the manual labour--which was really needed some days after one teacher left to go on maternity leave.

Riverside Technical

Riverside draws its student population from some of the "rougher" downtown neighbourhoods and is primarily a lower and working class school. Many of the students at Riverside are older, returning to school to complete their high school credits or for ESL purposes. More than half the students are foreign-born, most coming from Vietnam, China, and Sri Lanka, although there are also significant Ethiopian, Somali, Caribbean, and Iranian populations (Research & Assessment 1997). It is a technical school, offering more general-level than advanced-level courses, and places an emphasis on computer skills. According to the teachers, it has the best computer equipment in the Board. Like most, perhaps all, schools in the Board, the teachers at this school are mostly white, Canadian-born. Discipline and attendance are on-going challenges for these teachers. There are not many successful extra-curricular activities at Riverside besides sports

teams. The only clubs that draw members are the ethnic-based clubs such as the Black Youth Club and the Vietnamese Club.

The environment club was organized each year by a male Special Education teacher at Riverside, but his annual experience was that the club could never maintain its energy through the year and it inevitably dissolved during the second term. When I contacted him for research, he offered to call a meeting of the students, so that together we could try to get the club active again. I agreed and was able to meet with students on four occasions before it was clear the effort was futile and we essentially gave up. In the fall semester, the club had been involved in a recycling initiative: the members met twice to collect all the paper to be recycled from the classrooms and deposited it in the collection bins. A few of them also went around to classrooms to explain the recycling process and eligible materials to students and teachers. There had been some discussion of arranging for boxes of one-sided paper to be collected from the computer labs and made available to students as scrap paper, but it did not happen.

The students who came to the first meeting I had with the club represented the core members according to the teacher, although at later meetings, many of them did not reappear and others showed up. All our meetings were brainstorming/discussion times with the purpose of coming up with some sort of project either for this or the next year, as a number of the students were graduating but wanted to see a successful environment club for the years to come. A number of projects were proposed, including an environmental audit, a school survey, and resuscitating a vegetable garden that had been created a previous year, but none actually took place. The core group included three white males, one black male, two South Asian females, and an Asian female. Later on, two South Asian males also showed up once. The black student was the head of the Black Youth Club and stated at the outset that he was keen to see the environment club become active, but he himself did not have much time to put into it. He never showed up a second time. It seems about half the students were very active in other activities, limiting the time they could put into the environment club; the other half appeared to be lonely and wanted something to do during lunch. Several of the students had part-time work in the school cafeteria and library. I assumed more of a quasi-teacher role with this group, trying to get ideas out, bring resources, and help get some action going, although, like the teacher himself, I failed in this attempt.

Central Collegiate

Central Collegiate enjoys a reputation of being an academic school and its students confirm this, some complaining that students are too academic and not involved enough in extra-curriculars. It draws an upper middle class, primarily white and Asian population (Research & Assessment 1997). Most students at Central Collegiate are college and university-bound and the teachers consider their students to be fairly advanced academically. The principal at this school was fairly reticent about allowing me to contact the club, apparently because she was unable to get confirmation of the approval of my research from the Board, and, as a result, I did not start researching with this club until mid-April. Due to numerous cancelled meetings, I only attended four club meetings and one tree-planting day with them before my research period ended. Moreover, many of the members did not start showing up until the last two meetings, making my presence and role somewhat awkward and particularly unnatural. While I was not able to get to know the Central club members well socially, I had a long and active discussion with most of the club members about their activities, the school, and environmentalism.

The club was started ten to fifteen years ago by the male Environmental Science teacher at Central Collegiate, but he let the students do whatever they want, meaning the club activity fluctuates with its student leadership. For many years, the club helped a former student of his grow wetland plants in their greenhouse which could later be transplanted in habitat restoration projects he was working on. They also did some field trips to outdoor education field centres and each year on Earth Day planted trees with a local Rotary Club and some other schools. The greenhouse planting project ended two years ago and the students set about planning some larger projects, which they began implementing this year. These included worm composting of paper towels in the girls' washroom, setting up a compost system with the cafeteria for post-lunch food scraps, and planning a roof-top garden which is currently stalled, awaiting technical information. The Environmental Education Officer at the Board of Education considered this club to be the most active of the environment clubs in the Board.

Four of the students in the club joined when they started at Central Collegiate and have continued with it to their grade 12 and OAC years respectively. Another student who regularly attended was in grade 10 and had joined just at the beginning of the year. I was not able to find out anything about two other regular members, nor about two other students, both in grade 10, who joined the first day I came. They attended the tree-

planting session and a meeting after that, but then disappeared. I would have liked to have talked to them about the experience, but their quitting is likely due to the self-acknowledged closed nature of the club which is mostly made up of friends. The seven members of the core group were all female and all white. It seems the club hasn't always been this way, as the group suggested at one time it was entirely Asian, but those students are now mostly in the science club. The two grade ten students who left were black and Asian. I do not know whether race was a factor in their exclusion as I never had a chance to explore these dynamics of membership.

Context 1: Schools, Streaming and Multicultural Populations

Multiculturalism became Canada's official policy on ethnic relations in 1971 with the expressed aim to recognize cultural and linguistic diversity in Canadian society. It marked both an acknowledgement of the diversity of the Canadian population and a new "pluralistic tolerance" approach to replace assimilationism. The challenges and contradictions of cultural, linguistic, and racial pluralism in a society structured by racism, classism, and sexism are perhaps no more evident and consequential than in the schools. The Toronto Board of Education reports that in 1991, 46% of its students were nonwhite, 45% had a mother tongue other than English, and 43% were born outside of Canada (Brown et al. 1992). Multiculturalism and racial diversity are the norm in both the city of Toronto and its schools. So, it seems, is structural inequality.

While Toronto high schools draw students from their local neighbourhoods, the racial/ethnic and class-based segregation already evident from my descriptions of the four schools I was involved with is not primarily neighbourhood-based. It is the result of the race, ethnicity, and class-influenced process of "streaming" students into different educational paths, either within or between schools. In Ontario, students are not "officially" streamed until grade 10 when they must enter either Basic, General, or Advanced Level courses and correspondingly Collegiates or Technical and Commercial schools. However, Curtis et al. (1992) document how overt and covert streaming begins as early as grade 1 as students are channelled into Special Education, French Immersion, and Gifted programmes, as students are informally distributed into classes according to "ability," and as teachers, often inadvertently, discriminate and treat differently students of different class, race, and ethnic backgrounds. Streaming has been a highly political and controversial policy in Ontario since its conception prior to WWI and, more recently,

since a report commissioned by the Liberal government of 1987 concluded that “the evidence is now overwhelming that streaming is a social injustice, a theoretical error and a practical failure” (Radwanski 1987). While efforts have been made to redress some of these injustices, such as the closing of vocational schools, the almost-complete termination of the Gifted stream, and the de-streaming of grade 9 in 1993, the 1991 data from the Toronto Board of Education reveal significant class, race, and ethnicity discrepancies between the academic streams. New immigrants, racial minorities, particularly black and aboriginal students, working class, and single-parented students are disproportionately located in Basic and General streams (Yau et al. 1992). Students enrolled in Advanced Level courses and aspiring for university are more likely to be white or Asian, living with two parents, and to come from families of high socioeconomic backgrounds (Cheng et al. 1992). The discrepancy is striking: 80% of white, English-speaking students are enrolled in Advanced courses, compared to 43% of black Caribbean students and 53% of Aboriginal students (Cheng et al. 1992). While only 25% of Toronto students immigrated to Canada after 1987, they represent 35% of General Level and 36% of Basic Level students (Yau et al. 1992). These numbers do not take into account drop-out rates which vary considerably between the streams. While 90% of Advanced Level students graduate, only 40% of General Level and 20% of Basic Level students stay in school long enough to get their high school diploma (Radwanski 1988).

Like in the United States and Britain, the disproportionate effects of streaming in Ontario lead many to suggest the school system is structured to best serve Canadian-born, English-speaking, white, middle class students (Curtis et al. 1992, Rezai-Rashti 1995, Huynh et al. 1994). While some offer conservative theories about innate difference and inferiority to explain this dramatic outcome, the process is likely a combination of institutional racism and classism, access to the “cultural capital” (such as knowledge and language and behavioral codes) required for success in white, Anglo-Canadian middle-class-biased schooling, and the role of the school within the structural relations of capitalism (McLaren 1989). The outcomes of streaming correspond to the nature of the Canadian workforce, where recent immigrants, often regardless of educational attainment (commonly not recognized by Canadian institutions and employers), fill the lowest ranks in the production hierarchy (Bennett and LeCompte 1991). The role of choice in this process is dubious, particularly when Yau et al. (1992) express the concern that “a significant number of students do not seem to understand the link between secondary

program level and post-secondary options" (10). They note that 15% of General students, and 26% of their parents, aspire to university and 36% of students in Basic level aspire to college and university, options to which their streams *do not lead*.

The Toronto Board of Education developed a race and ethnic relations policy in 1979. Implemented by one or two consultants and staff persons, teacher and student awareness of multiculturalism and anti-racism is promoted through staff development and student leadership camps. Framed by liberal multiculturalism, educational policy in this area emphasized sensitivity to cultural and linguistic difference through Heritage Language and enhanced English as a Second Language (ESL) programmes until the development of the Ontario Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy in 1993. Teachers often claimed--and many continue to claim--they adopt a "colour-blind" pedagogy that treats all children equally regardless of difference (Rezai-Rashti 1995). This pluralism masks power relations, "delimit[ing] a sanitized cultural sphere divorced from sociopolitical interests, in which culture is reified, fragmented, and homogenized, and... ethnic conflict [depicted] as predominantly the consequence of negative attitudes and ignorance" (Olneck, cited in Rezai-Rashti 1995, 5). The limitations of this approach led many to call for an anti-racism education which would concentrate on "studying and revealing the sites, institutions, and ways in which racism originates" and "examining the histories and practices that prejudice supports," including the educational system itself (Rezai-Rashti 1995, 6). Rezai-Rashti (1995) deems the more recent ventures into anti-racism approaches by the Toronto Board of Education and the Ontario Ministry of Education to be "meagre" and "abysmal," limited to one-shot voluntary staff development sessions. Of particular concern is the lack of representation of racial and ethnic minorities among the teaching profession and curriculum materials in Ontario (Dei, ed. 1994). In 1987, the most recent data I was able to obtain, the percentage of racial minority employees in the permanent work force of the Toronto Board of Education was 7.9%, unchanged from 1981 (Cheng 1987); whereas racial minority students comprised 46% of Toronto Board schools in 1991 (Brown et al. 1992).

Context 2: Provincial and Board Environmental Education Policy and Practice

While student environmental activism played a key role in creating a Canadian environmental movement in the late 1960s, with the creation of Pollution Probe and the Canadian Environmental Law Association in 1969 and 1970 respectively, the

mainstreaming of environmentalism has led away from student activism towards school-based environmental education (Macdonald 1991). Environmental awareness and concern peaked in Canada around 1989, a time when environmental concern was high in the public opinion polls, when environmental issues and disasters filled the media, and when Earth Day 1990 was marketed across North America (Macdonald 1991, Hart 1998). It was this same era when environmental education began to significantly enter into provincial curriculums and school activities, pushed largely by parents, teachers, and students. The first official steps towards including environmental courses or content in elementary and secondary curriculums began in 1989, but materials and professional development have always been scarce. The Toronto Board of Education was one of few--or perhaps the only Board in the province--to in fact employ an Environmental Education Officer.¹² Even so, the status of environmental education in this Board and in the province remains precarious: it is fragmentary, superficial, under-trained, underfunded, struggling against disincentives such as university and OAC prerequisites, dependent on the dedication and motivation of individual teachers, and currently quite vulnerable to cutbacks.

In 1990, prominent Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki spoke at the Federation Day of the elementary school teachers' union and prompted a number of teachers to demand help from the Board in developing environmental curriculum. The Board responded by appointing a facilitator, in the position of "community advisor," for an environmental network which had its first meeting in June 1990. In its first year, this network of parents, teachers, and students developed an Environmental Policy for the Board of Education. The student, parent, and teacher groups eventually splintered off by 1993 to create three networks which continue to lobby for environmental education, resources, professional development, and the greening of schools. The community advisor evolved into a position for an Environmental Education Officer who facilitates the activities of the networks and promotes implementation of the environmental policy. A significant aspect of this implementation tool, called the "Greening Our Schools Programme," is the recommendation that all schools create "Environment Teams" with representatives from school administration, teachers, caretakers, parents and students, to

¹² I use the past tense here as the Toronto Board of Education no longer exists and it was uncertain at the time of writing as to whether the new amalgamated board, created in January 1998 (see page 60 for further discussion), would maintain this position.

plan and oversee green actions plans, such as recycling programmes and energy conservation (Network for Environmental Education 1996). The Greening Our Schools Programme contains a checklist for schools to evaluate their "greenness," covering the areas of waste management and reduction, energy and water conservation, sustainable transportation, materials, schoolyard, nutrition and food, environmental attitudes and education. It does not provide funding for energy retrofitting or recycling, but rather encourages staff and students to "turn off lights and electrical equipment when not needed." Much of this promotion has been directed at elementary, not secondary schools. In many secondary schools, this idea of an "Environment Team" is perceived to be interchangeable with the idea of a student environment club, such that the recommendation is met by the attempted creation of a club or the existence of a club is perceived as sufficient to meet the recommendation.

Curricular opportunities for students to learn about environmental issues in the secondary school include "environmental" courses such as Environmental Science, Ecology, Environmental Studies, and Environment and Economy, and social issues courses such as World Issues. Environmental themes also creep into other areas of curriculum, such as Geography or Art, largely depending on the interest, commitment, and knowledge of teachers and/or demands of students. Environmental Science was first introduced to the Ontario curriculum as an experimental course in the mid- to late-1970s when it was taken up by a few schools immediately and gradually offered more widely as environmental issues gained prominence in mainstream media and discourse. The Environmental Studies and Environment and Economy courses have only been in existence since 1988. Few schools offer more than one of these environmental courses; many offer none. All of these courses are optional and tend to draw small class sizes of around ten to twelve students. While this may suggest a lack of interest, one teacher who had been teaching environmental science since the mid-1970s had noted a significant decline in enrolment in the course when OAC prerequisites were detailed in the late 1980s and environmental science could not be counted as a science prerequisite. Indeed, many of the students in the clubs complained that there was not an OAC level course; they felt that there was little environmental content in their high school education at all.

Few teachers have an academic background in environmental studies, due both to its relatively recent offering as a university programme and, more significantly, because it is not recognized by many Faculties of Education as an acceptable specialization for

entrance into Teachers College. As a result, the commitment required of teachers who would like to take on an environmental studies course, or to increase the environmental content in a relevant course they teach, is substantial. Teachers describe attending classes and workshops and spending innumerable hours networking and reading through resources to not only increase their knowledge level, but to create their own curriculum. Until the mid-1990s, there were few appropriate environmental studies textbooks available or affordable for secondary school use and teachers were known to trade and share (and sometimes hoard) photocopied binders of materials. The result seems to be a lot of repetition and overlap from year to year and among courses offered within the same year, as much due to departmental territorialism and fragmentation as to lack of available curriculum materials. Students will frequently get the same topics, such as depletion of the Brazilian rainforest, year after year because teachers look to the newspapers and magazines to keep their content "current." The limited number of textbooks in use and the absence of any common curriculum content across the schools prevented me from offering any critical analysis of the content of environmental studies courses. Only the curriculum consultants seem to have any idea of what the content across the Board might be.

The Student Environment Network (SEN) defines itself as "a coalition of Toronto high school students working to coordinate environmental initiatives and activities, as well as act as a liaison between student groups and the Toronto Board of Education" (Student Environmental Network 1993, 1). SEN plays an important role in communicating information on issues and events to the clubs in the high schools and was often mentioned during my research, although only one of the students out of the four clubs was currently attending its meetings; two others had attended in previous years at least once or twice. SEN organizes a big conference for high school students each year and has produced a guidebook for student organizing. The group also tackles more political issues, acting as a voice for students in environmental policy-making. For example, in April 1998, the group presented a letter to the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources regarding a controversial forestry policy the government has proposed. The number of students who are active in SEN is small, however, and their activities and information often trickle down only to the schools with representatives at the network. While this forestry policy was discussed at two of the other schools I researched, none of them was aware that SEN was taking some action on the issue. However, the SEN handbook provides a startling contrast with the

Board's "Greening Our Schools Programme" described earlier: the students stress knowledge about community and global environmental issues; contact with citizen's groups; and actions on the dual fronts of 1) lobbying the government, school administration, and Board of Education, and 2) implementing environmental projects such as supermarket tours, garbage audits, stream monitoring, presenting videos, and schoolyard naturalization (Student Environmental Network 1993). Militarism, industrial impact, government law and policy, and vegetarianism are a few of the areas the student guidebook explores but are neglected by the Board of Education (Student Environmental Network 1993; Network for Environmental Education 1996).

The Board has also had associations with several field centres which provided outdoor education opportunities for school classes, although funding to these programmes and centres was in the process of being cut at the time of writing. Students usually have at least one opportunity to go to a field centre in their four or five years in high school and these occasions were often mentioned by the students in the environment clubs as highly memorable experiences. Typically, it is the gifted or advanced students who get taken on extra trips as, according to some teachers and administrators, they pose less of a discipline problem. Environmental education also takes place through the national and provincial parks systems, although largely with an emphasis on nature interpretation and habitat conservation and available only to those who have an interest and means of accessing the parks system. A final avenue for youth or high school students to get involved in environmental activism and learn more about environmental issues is through local or national environmental NGOs. It seems however that there is little contact between environmental community groups and the schools, unless teachers or parents are involved in specific initiatives. Community groups do little to make their materials or events accessible for adolescents and have little knowledge about environmental curriculums in the school.

This story is rapidly changing with the re-writing of the Ontario curriculum under the Progressive Conservative government elected in 1995. At the time of writing, the outlook for environmental education in the province looked bleak. Field centres were being closed, parks privatized, and funding to NGOs and the provincial Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Natural Resources slashed. Environmental education was absent from the new elementary curriculum introduced in 1998 until parents and teachers demanded its inclusion, and no one is optimistic about the as-yet unreleased

secondary curriculum. Moreover, many of the initiatives described above are Toronto-specific. It is unknown how many schools outside of Toronto offer environmental studies and environmental science courses.

Context 3: Amalgamation and Upheaval

The school year 1997-1998 was a challenging one for many teachers in Ontario and the political background to my research project had a significant impact on the climate and atmosphere of the schools. In October 1997, the Progressive Conservative government introduced Bill 160, an act that in effect dissolved the collective agreements between the different teacher unions and their boards of education as part of its educational restructuring agenda. All five of the teacher unions in the province participated in a two and a half week work action which closed all of the schools in the province. Many students and parents were politicized by the struggle and joined teachers on the picket lines and in rallies. Bill 160 was followed by the amalgamation of school boards across the province, and five boards in Metro Toronto merged to become the Toronto & District Board of Education, coming into effect on January 1, 1998. Both government initiatives were driven by efforts to make the educational system more efficient and less costly and the final outcome of this goal was large-scale teacher lay-offs, displacements, and retirements. It had been suggested that as older teachers take advantage of the new early retirement package over the next five years, numerous jobs will open up again in the teaching profession, but this was little consolation for the individuals, mostly young teachers, who would be out of work and shuffled around the schools in part-time and supply positions in September 1998.

Perhaps the most significant effect of these political changes was the uncertainty weighing over teachers. At the time of writing, the Board restructuring was not complete and even staff at the Board did not know whether they would still have jobs or how things would work once the dust settles. Many felt the government's campaign against the autumn work action had demonized teachers and morale and attendance seemed to be at an all-time low. Mention of burn-out was common throughout my time at the schools and many teachers felt they could not take on supervision of any extra-curricular activities or sports the next year given the increase in their workload; some were considering the early retirement option. The government had mandated smaller class sizes without hiring more teachers, requiring current high school teachers to teach one more class per day.

Students in all the clubs were concerned they might not be able to complete their projects as they might not have a teacher able to advise them the following year and all clubs require teacher supervision. Such a climate is significant for environmental education and environment clubs for a number of reasons. Of primary concern is the likelihood that many teachers will no longer have the time, energy or motivation to implement and sustain environmental courses, clubs, and activities. Environmental education happens because individuals within the system believe in it, are willing to allocate time for it, and are tolerant of the ridicule and intransigence they sometimes receive from other teachers and the administration. Without these dedicated individuals, little would happen.

V Environmental (Service) Clubs: Moulding the Eco-citizen

An article entitled "Classrooms without Walls," in the magazine *Canadian Geographic*, features stories of high school environment clubs across the country, crowning them educational successes in empowering youth to "make a difference." "The challenge," according to author Dan Schneider, "is to give students the feeling they can do something. Many environmental issues are so big that they bring about a sense of helplessness" (1991, 67). But after perusing the different projects underway in Canadian schools, from recycling and clean-up campaigns, ecology gardens, and restocking streams with trout, to writing letters to politicians about water pollution and making videos of local environmental degradation and community projects, Schneider (1991) concludes:

There are certainly enough environmental problems to fill a barrel. But I felt more optimistic than ever. Out of Preston High's biology class and Centre Wellington's environmental science class will graduate future doctors, engineers, construction workers, politicians... people who will enter many walks of life. I sensed that the satisfaction students gained from helping the environment would instill in them a lifelong commitment. (69)

Any of the teachers I encountered advising environment clubs might have written that article and it would be the words they want to hear to justify and reward them for the work they do: all consistently framed their projects in terms of liberal notions of environmental awareness-raising, community service, and student-centred, experiential learning. In this chapter, I outline the archetypal environmental service club as described to me by the teachers and students involved in the four clubs. It is a simple story, featuring dedicated teachers and hard-working students and special moments of discovery; but it isn't the only story and in successive chapters I will attempt to crack through its common sense "good citizen" veneer to examine the social relations and political implications which undergird the environment club phenomenon.

*Teacher Perspectives*¹³

In most schools, a staff advisor is required for all extra-curricular activities. While

¹³ Although in later chapters, pseudonyms will be used for teachers, I have chosen to disguise which schools they represent in this chapter to ensure their anonymity. To indicate different voices, I use "T1," "T2" and so on, but the numbers do not represent a particular teacher. "T1" will be used to refer to all five of the teachers at various points in the text.

the role of the teacher should not be overestimated--clubs vary year to year with their student leadership--teachers do play an important role within clubs by providing resources, encouragement, varying degrees of leadership and guidance, and continuity from year to year. All four of the environment clubs in the research project were initiated by teachers, usually right from the start of their teaching career or from the start of their own growing awareness of environmental issues. While varying in age and career-stage from young to mid-career to about-to-retire teachers, all expressed their purpose and vision for the environment club as a combination of hoping to raise students' environmental consciousness and providing a participatory setting for meaningful action.

While none of the teachers described themselves as activists, nor did any participate themselves in any environmental or community organizations outside the school, their commitment to environmentalism was firm. They felt they tried to live their personal lives in a way consistent with environmental values and felt an obligation to share this with their students, through both courses and the club:

T: "... we will be talking about that soon in our formal class, as part of the course, part of the personal inventory of 'what can I do' sort of thing. ...We talk about protests and activists and how far are you willing to go and so on. Sometimes we might just be talking about reading food labels and being sure what chemicals go in your body, it really depends upon what interests they have because it's not really part of the course as it's written. So, I don't really have to do it and I don't have many specific things within it."

CL:¹⁴ "You try to get it in?"

T: "It's something I feel *obliged* to do. But, it's, there's so much to do and so little time to do it. And I take flak from the staff for being an environmentalist sometimes. ... As far as I'm concerned, my objective is to expose as many kids as I can to the environmental ideas... It's the *raison d'être* of the club as well. Reach some more people that way. ... It's something I have to do, I have to reach as many people as possible. ...I'm not really what you'd call an activist -- in the sense that I would go marching around in protests and so on. My idea of action is that you get information out and make sure that it's sound information and it's balanced. I try not to proselytise, I try to just let them reach their own conclusions." [emphasis in voice]

As another teacher explains,

"I think it's important that they, as individuals, become connected with nature in some way. I also feel it's important, in terms of our *world*, that we start taking these environmental messages that we've been spewing seriously. ...we can't just fool around with this stuff anymore. It's serious and we have to do something. I would suggest we haven't done that much in the last thirty years. And if it was at a

¹⁴ CL refers to the researcher.

crisis situation then, what is it now, thirty years later? ...I think environmental awareness must become a priority. And it must become a priority very quickly, both in terms of the preservation of our world [and] in terms of straightening our priorities. ...I always felt that education was a panacea and, frankly, I still believe it is. And I still believe it is. I just don't know how to reach a lot of people. I don't know." [emphasis in voice]

Congruency between their environmental concern and their behaviour and lifestyle was a concern for the teachers, and indeed the students, who were quick to point out teachers who failed to act according to what they taught, as this collection of quotes attests:

T1: "As a person, I do all my laundry by hand and I recycle everything that's recyclable and I avoid bulky containers and packaging and, you know, all those sorts of things. I'm committed to them. ...I practice all the things that I suggest to them."

S: "I was talking to Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Mitchell teaches World Issues and he says 'yeah, yeah, there's a unit on deforestation.' And I was like, 'OK, so you want a cover sheet [stretching words out really slowly]. Now do you realize the, like, there's a bit of a problem there?' But he's like, 'but you know, I just like cover sheets.' [Laughter]. It was like, what kind of justification is that? Like, I just feel like I need an extra piece of bleached white paper. Arghhh!!! [Laughter]."

T2: "I was sort of a bit of a, not a .. hippie, but [laugh] you know that sort of thing. And I used to lecture to my family about, you know, we're not throwing that out, we're not using that pesticide and [laugh] all those sorts of stuff."

T3: "If it matters to me, yes it is my responsibility. And I think that's one thing we honestly have to realize, not only in terms of the environment, but in terms of *everything* ... a powerful individual is not a good consumer and doesn't operate well in a mass society. And we need powerful, responsible, individual action .. for everything. And, you know, my personal goal is to get there." [emphasis in voice]

In their words and in their actions, these teachers demonstrate how they are ethically committed to environmental social change. Many felt they weren't doing enough with the club, their classes, or within the school to encourage environmental responsibility.

The teachers' commitment is further demonstrated by the efforts they put in to create environmental courses and to advise the club. One teacher described:

"In the beginning it was really difficult because there were no textbooks ...a lot of teachers around the system who were teaching environmental studies at that time -- and I don't think there were very many -- were creating their own information. [One school] put together a binder of, a type of environmental course and basically people just took bits and pieces and made up their own as they went along. ...in the beginning, I went to every workshop and course, just to get a background. ...I was taping just about every show PBS had just to find out what was going on..."

Similarly, an environmental science teacher describes his first experiences in creating a

course the first year it was permitted in the Ontario curriculum:

"We originally started this up as an experimental course way back in the seventies, we started the environmental science class. ...I've been through experimental courses before and the recording you have to do and the statistics you have to produce and you have to re-apply every year... it's just too much."

"... it was actually the Geography teacher that took the initiative, she wanted to have a go at it, so she recruited me and then carried on for a few years that way. ...The only disadvantage was that I didn't have any ecology background, so I trained myself in ecology."

Another teacher, currently in the process of creating a dual-credit integrated Environmental Science and Leadership programme, describes her experiences:

"I've been to different conferences and things and talked to people who've run these programmes ...we're modelling it on different things, but the actual nitty gritty of it right now is not worked out. It's been a bit of work, the tough part was getting it past the department heads..."

None of these teachers were content with ensuring an environmental courses was offered for students, but also put hours of their time into trying to "green" the school:

T: In the beginning too, we wanted to start a programme, a Blue Box programme and a litter programme...

CL: And 'we' in this sense is the Geography department or a few other teachers...?

T: No, me.

CL: You. [We laugh].

T: There were one or two other teachers [who later] supported and helped, but basically in the beginning...

CL: You were developing it on your own?

T: Well I was getting here at 7:30 in the morning to put the containers for the recycled cans out on the curb, so that they could get picked up for garbage and you know, whatever wasn't done had to be done.

...

T: I used to get calls, 'what do I do about used textbooks, how do we get rid of those?' You know, and that was on top of the club, the class, the Blue Box, the paper recycling and, you burn out...

Similarly, the Wychwood Tech club's garden project demanded up to ten hours a week at times for the teachers and students involved. The teachers expressed the strain they felt assuming this commitment on top of their courses, marking, and their own lives and families, but felt both the project and the experience it was giving the students were worth the sacrifice.

Since many of the teachers teach--and in fact have created, or are in the process of creating--environmental courses, the purpose behind forming a club was not merely to provide an avenue for students to learn about environmental issues, but specifically to

provide a participatory setting for them to act on their concerns. While none of them used the word “empowerment,” they made frequent references to “doing something,” with the presumption or hope that the experience would lead students to further community participation in the future.

T1: “Well I thought if we were going to have an environmental class, we should have a club, and initially there was all kinds of ideas about what the club would be capable of doing... the club [would be for those who] want to take positive action and, although many of the students in the class might think it’s a good idea, either they don’t have the time or the inclination to do that. ...initially in both the course and the club I wanted students to become more active. And activist in nature. [But] the course has become more academic and the club has become more activist.”

T2: “The other purpose, I think, is to get them to do something and to see that they can do it, as a group, work together. So that maybe they will, you know, when they’re living with a community, maybe get involved in the local community...”

Most felt strongly about letting the students do their own thing and providing a student-centred and student-directed environment, even if it meant the club did not accomplish significant goals. During my first discussion with one teacher about his club I asked whether it was primarily student-driven. His response was “that’s the whole point.” The purpose of the club is to provide students with leadership opportunities. Others expressed similar views:

T1: “It’s an initiative that I have tried to do in Riverside... because I really want student-centred and student-initiated programmes and initiatives. ...it was mandated that every school should have a recycling committee. And it was largely, if not wholly, a teacher initiative. ...when I got involved, I said this is nonsense. I want kids involved. Unfortunately, it has never successfully worked. ...I just didn’t see the point in the teachers doing it. I *did* see the point in getting kids involved, because it’s *something* and it was easy to get them involved in, relatively easy.” [emphasis in voice]

T2: “... each year the kids are different, you know, and I try to let them organize and run the club. ... I led the group on how you set up a meeting and how the chair operates and how you do an agenda and take the minutes of the meetings, you know, and the kids gradually took that over...”

T3: “[I] sort of leave it to the kids to pick because when I pick something it’s too, it flops, it’s too much like a class, so the kids come up with ideas like ‘let’s spend an hour or so trying to make paper’ and I [he laughs], I go ‘oh great’ [in a negative voice]. But, you know, the kids like to do that...”

T4: “... they were interested in doing *something* and we didn’t know where to start, so we started with recycling and that’s what we did. ...It’s new experiences for the kids, plus it’s challenging and learning to overcome difficulties and that sort of thing.” [emphasis in voice]

The emphasis is placed on activities which would, in the words of one teacher, "give the kids a taste of [a] sense of accomplishment."

T1: "...we did write letters and when we got replies back from, I don't even remember who we wrote to, but you know someone's aide and, you know, someone with an official name, some of these kids were like [with excitement] 'hey!' and then sometimes they just look at it and went 'oh, yeah right. This person didn't even read the letter.' But at least they went through the experience of actually having a reply sent back to something they wrote, seeing what it's like, you know. We probably should ...write to the *Toronto Star* or something and try to get ourselves in print, in the paper, and that I think would be something that would spark some kids. Like 'whoa! Somebody listens!'"

T2: "...students constantly say it's always doom and gloom. So, what we need to develop along with that are solutions and things that kids can do."

Discussing his club's failure, the teacher at Riverside expressed how he felt that "to allow them to work so hard and not see any results. I think it does them an injustice. I think it teaches them that there's no use in doing this." The club's purpose and rationale was to empower the students to become active environmental citizens and the process to empowerment was through experiential, participatory and student-driven activities.

These individuals have each channelled their environmental awareness and concerns into their teaching, shaping their pedagogical goals and practices around their ethical commitment and indeed making their activism their teaching by their beliefs in education as a mechanism for social change. Moreover, all articulated a liberal-humanistic perspective on the role of school clubs, seeing the function of the club to be as much about student empowerment as environmentalism. They were concerned to make the club fun, to draw a larger number of students, and to get them doing something, convinced an experiential approach to activism would help them develop the skills and the conviction that individuals need to, and are capable of, acting for social change.

*Student Experiences*¹⁵

Interviewed on video camera by some of her classmates, Manju talks about her

¹⁵ I recognize that comparing teacher "perspectives" with student "experiences" risks reinforcing the power relation between teacher as rational, articulate and mature, and students as emotional/hormonal, irrational and immature, capable only of experiencing not rationally carrying out and describing their activities. The difference though is largely a result of my research process where I spent most of my time with the students, assuming a semi-student role where I shared some of their experiences, and only gained access to the teachers' perspectives through individual interviews.

environment club's garden project. She explains it is important because it will make the school more "eco-friendly" and that it is something that not many schools have. She adds that with all the gardens at the houses across the street, it's nice for the school to have one too. Manju is a grade 12 student in the Gifted programme at Wychwood Tech, taking courses in the natural sciences as she is interested in becoming a chemical engineer. She is knowledgeable and conversant in environmental issues, but she did not refer to these when she describes and discusses the environment club. Manju was not the only one to do this--in fact most of the students in three of the clubs framed the purpose of their club in terms of community or school service projects rather than environmental activism.

At first I mistook this silence for ignorance, but was usually proved wrong whenever I probed students' knowledge of environmental issues. They could list off and discuss biodiversity, global warming, ozone depletion, pollution, deforestation, and so on, if I specifically asked, but these provided the justification and context for their club in the most abstract way. It seems that these clubs were primarily based around a forum for community service, attracting students and teachers with a sense of social responsibility, with the secondary factor being the establishment of a concern, such as "the environment," as a *social issue* in the public domain. Over and over again, students justified their projects as things which would improve or beautify the school, through either physical alterations such as a "nice" garden, changing the student atmosphere to being more environmentally-responsible, or "patriotic" projects which would enhance the school's reputation. And students joined the environment club at their school for all sorts of reasons, and combinations of reasons, such as having siblings already in the club, joining with a friend or group of friends or to meet friends, having an opportunity to garden, because it was one of the few clubs that was fun and active, to contribute meaningfully to the school, because it offered leadership opportunities, because it may "look good" on their resumes for admission to university programmes, and because it was a way to act upon their environmental awareness. In fact, the only factor common to all the students was a strong sense of social responsibility: "we are doing something for the society," "we want to help," or "I felt like I wanted to contribute to, you know, .. the environment."

An interconnected set of characteristics emerged in these clubs which provided the students with the meaning and motivation to join and stay in their environment club. These included a social atmosphere among peers, mentorship between adults and

students and between older and younger students, a fun yet demanding/engaging project, respect and appreciation from adults and school authorities, and a socially meaningful justification or purpose. The students frequently equated their environment club with other school clubs they were involved in, such as an art mural project to liven up some “dead space” within the school or yearbook or AIDS awareness. Environmental projects lend themselves to physical, outdoor work which can be a change of pace for many students and thus more fun than some other clubs. In essence, these clubs have emulated, or attempt to emulate, the citizenship ideology and the service club model of Little League, YMCA, or Boy Scouts, as described by Fine and Mechling (1993), providing the combined opportunity for fun and social engagement, individual personal growth and development, and socially-beneficial justification and purpose.

The interconnected nature of these various functions is revealed in the following set of field notes about a discussion I had with three girls, Manju, Saraswati, and Rebecca, in the environment club at Wychwood Tech. As they rinsed out bottles at the sink of the science lab, occasionally spraying each other with water and erupting in laughter, they demonstrated the social aspect of the club while telling me what they thought about the club.

Manju says how the club is an opportunity to really be “doing something” which few clubs do and which makes it more fun. Saraswati adds how it feels good to be “helpful” and Manju says she feels being a part of the club is “doing something to make our environment safer. There’s a pride in that.” Rebecca adds that teachers are always impressed when you say you are in the eco-club; it is seen as an important and meaningful social contribution. Saraswati suggests that by doing the gardening project, they are helping to “make our school look nice from the outside.” Rebecca and Saraswati stress how the garden is a mark they will leave behind; it will be here for their grandchildren to see or when they return for their 10 year reunion. Manju really stresses how much fun the gardening is--how it is doing something you can enjoy in and of itself. When I ask her to elaborate on her comment about other clubs, she says that it’s not that other clubs don’t “do” anything, but they’re not really getting out there, concretely doing things. The other girls disagree, pointing how they are involved in so many other clubs. Manju repeats how much fun she thinks it is.

The girls link accomplishment and social betterment with fun, as well as with the positive reinforcement they receive from their teachers and parents, and with school spirit and patriotism. While they clearly enjoy the physical aspect of gardening, it was really hard work and demanded a significant commitment of time and energy from all of them--and there were complaints, sore muscles, and apologies to parents for being late. The “fun” of gardening, which I will take up again in Chapter 9, was only a part of their motivation.

Environmental activism is explicitly stated as a service to community and school, in which they take pride; in fact, their identity as “good” and “helpful” students has caused them some peer harassment, with the “eco-club” being referred to as the “geeko-club.”

The support and appreciation they received from teachers and the school administration was evident and mentioned frequently. Some teachers and the school principal occasionally dropped by the garden and complimented the students on their work. The students frequently complain about needing more people out to help, but they acknowledge that “the adults and teachers think the garden is a really good idea, but many of them just don’t have the time to put in to help.” The frustration they felt due to disinterest on the part of their peers was offset by the encouragement they receive from the adults:

The girls all talk at once, joking about students tuning out when their announcements will be read over the P.A. system for Earth Week.

Ms. Shaw: “Actually, a lot of the teachers, you know it doesn’t seem to have a lot of impact on students, but you would be surprised how many teachers are supportive of what you do and they like to hear these ideas and things, ‘cause even they don’t know it...”

And the mentoring relationship that developed between these students and their two advisors was a crucial aspect of the experience for them, both in my observations and in their own accounts: “the nice thing about the club is that we can sit with teachers and laugh and make fun of other teachers, although Mr. White always threatens to get us in trouble.” The friendly banter and teasing exchanged between Mr. White and the students was such a natural and fundamental part of the experience that two of the girls offered to make him a tape of them teasing him as a good-bye present when he left the school. The following transcript of a club meeting at Wychwood Tech provides a good example of the friendly, joking atmosphere created among the club and with the advisors. They are discussing surveying the houses neighbouring the school to get people’s opinions and support for their garden project.

Gita: For the survey, don’t we already have the questions written down?

Ms. Shaw: Yeah [laughs], I don’t know where it is. It could be one of those papers we recycled.

Rebecca: So, what were the questions like? ‘Do you mind...?’

Ms. Shaw: No. More like, ‘we’re doing this and do you want to help?’

Mr. White: Yeah and get what they think about it as well.

Premala: So we’ll go around in pairs and ask...

Mr. White: Well, do you want to do it that way or, I was thinking instead we could give it to them and say please return it to the main office.

Premala: No, they won’t do that.

Saraswati: No, we'd have to go pick it up.

Gita: See if they kidnap us, it's your fault [laughter], but if they don't return it, we'll never know how they feel.

Mr. White: Well, then they don't care enough and we don't care.

Rebecca: OK.

Gita: They'll get a petition up and say they don't want it if you don't ask their permission. [Ms. Shaw is trying to calm the discussion down, with a look of "we are wasting our time."]

The students would talk back to the teachers, chastise them for being late or for forgetting to follow through on their promises, and bug them with questions about their personal lives. They always enjoyed it when the teachers bugged them back, calling them by their peer-created nicknames, or saying they will fail them in their classes next year. There were also more serious mentorship moments when the staff advisors would give directions or correct students' techniques in weeding, plant identification, how to wind up a hose, and so on.

The above transcript also reveals to a limited extent the social aspect of the club. While the teachers sometimes complained about this, "you know what we're like, we sit there and there's talking and chattering and it takes a long time to get anything concrete really done," many of the students had joined together as friends and clearly wanted and made the club time a social time. I found it difficult to turn the conversation even briefly around to environmental issues or the purpose of the club, or anything serious for that matter, and was worried throughout my research that I did not have enough "data" from this group. Similarly, at Central Collegiate, the girls took the opportunities they had while working with their vermicomposters in the greenhouse or designing posters or writing announcement sheets, to discuss and ridicule their teachers and complain about their classes, as well as talk about the prom, boys, smoking and drinking, and camping trips, usually waiting until their staff advisor was out of the room. It appeared that this was a "safe" time for younger students to reveal their ignorance and ask questions (I got asked to explain the difference between alcohol poisoning and being drunk) and be initiated into female adolescent culture. A comraderie was developed between the advisor and a few of the students in this club too, freely joking and chatting and sharing stories.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this social atmosphere created by the students, everyone put in a lot of hard work over the three months I observed the clubs. Some of my field notes reflect this:

Monday, April 20th, Wychwood Tech

...Mr. White returns with the shovel and we get to work taking up the sod. I don't

notice when the “documentary crew” from Manju’s English class leave. It is hard work and only Manju is willing to get her hands dirty (I was thinking ahead enough to bring gardening gloves). So Mr. White runs the machine, Saraswati cuts the lengths of sod with the shovel, Manju and I roll the sod and stack it and Rebecca mostly sits on the grass and rests after brief periods of rolling sod. We carry on, going through periods of chatting and joking and periods of silence when everyone is tired and working hard. I end up doing a lot of the carrying and stacking of sod as I am a little stronger than the girls (two of them are only in grade 10), but I know I’m going to feel sore tomorrow. After a while at this work, Rebecca says to me “I’ll bet this isn’t what you thought you would be doing.” ...I am the first to leave at 5:45 pm, while the rest plan to continue until 6 pm. [We started at 2:45].

Monday, April 27th, Wychwood Tech

Mr. White is giving them instructions for the work that needs to be done in the garden over the next few weeks. Two and a half tonnes of sand will arrive on Thursday and he needs them to come immediately after school to help move it as the dump truck may end up leaving it on the sidewalk. The schedule is fairly intense: Thursday and next Monday after school they will be digging the sand into the soil as the first set of plants will be arriving a week Wednesday. Then they all need to be out there that Wednesday to plant or the plants will not survive. The girls are quite committed and ask about whether they should work on the weekend as well.

The garden project was not the only project which required manual labour. Recycling was described by many as “dirty work” and “disgusting” and even “hazardous” by one teacher, and involved collecting bins of paper and cans, sorting out the garbage from the recyclables, and transporting it to the disposal area of the school. Central Collegiate was involved in vermicomposting paper towels from one of the girls’ washrooms which involved messy and regular feeding schedules where the girls would rip up the towels then run them through the blender with water before mixing them into the soil for the worms. Also their trial cafeteria composting project required daily removal of the compost collection bin to the outside composters. In the past, several of the clubs had also been involved in waste audits, which are particularly smelly and dirty tasks. They took great pride in their willingness to do this “dirty work” as if their sweat was evidence of their commitment and service.

Fun and hard work often went together for the students in these clubs. For example, the girls at Central Collegiate pronounced the physical work of gardening the fun part of the club experience:

“And I joined because I wanted to play in the dirt [laughter]. And that’s what we did. Well, yeah, it was *so* fun because we used to hang out and just play in the dirt. And sort seeds and do stuff like that. And then Sandy joined too, so I guess that was, Sandy’s my best friend, so we got to play in the dirt together which is even

more fun.”

Similarly, the eco-club at Wychwood Tech agreed that one of the most fun days they had out in the garden was the time they pulled a municipal “No Dogs” sign out of the ground. Weighed down with about 4 feet of solid cement, this proved to be their most difficult task and they all stayed late one afternoon to get it out. It was a busy day, with the 10 members of the club scattered around the garden at a variety of tasks, some digging out the wetland area, some watering and re-rolling the sod, some weeding the already-planted garden, and two digging out the “No Dogs” sign. By 4 pm, most everyone was finished their chores except the girls digging out the sign. They still could not budge it even though they had dug out a large and deep hole all around it. Gradually, everyone came over to help and give it a try, pulling on it, hanging on it--all to no avail. Swept up in the spirit of the challenge, the whole group attacked the hole with new energy, digging it deeper and larger. When Mr. White returned from leaving a message at the main office, he found us having such fun that he chose not to call it a day. Rebecca, taking a break on the grass, calls out “Sir, I think they are having too much fun.” And then begins a running commentary on the process: “where’s the video camera? This is entertainment, never-seen-before, one-of-a-kind, not-to-miss entertainment.” To me she says, “this is the most fun we’ve had.” Cheers rise up as the sign is dislodged and even Rebecca joins in to try to pull it out. Tired, sweaty and sore, we persevere until we are able to lever it up out of the hole and roll it over to the side. As we returned to the school to drop off all the equipment, everyone was quite spirited and happy, satisfied, going over as a group, not in clusters of friends as they came.

Despite the teachers’ emphasis on environmental awareness and self and social empowerment, and the students’ emphasis on social interaction and fun, there is a notable consistency between the teachers’ perspectives and the students’ experiences of the club. The students too had a commitment to community service and improvement and were quite keen on making environmental issues their crusade, often getting literally upset when people used paper on only one side or when teachers refused to use their recycling bin. And indeed I think these clubs were “successful” implementations of the teachers’ goals. I think these sessions contributed to helping the students express themselves with ease; develop confidence in their physical as well as verbal and academic abilities and in their values and commitments; learn to remain open to making and admitting mistakes; and increase their comfort level with adults and authority figures.

The student-centred approach, the social, fun atmosphere, and the adult mentorship together created a cohesive and supportive setting for students to explore their abilities and identities. The socially-meaningful justification, the hard work involved, and the respect and appreciation the groups received from adults and school authorities affirmed their sense of social responsibility and encouraged them to maintain an ethical approach to their personal and community lives.

A Taste of Failure

The club at Riverside never achieved this atmosphere of collegiality. It never generated a group of committed students who met regularly; nor was it able to successfully implement any environmental projects. For nine years, Mr. Graham had attempted to get an active environment club going at Riverside and each year it seemed to fail. And yet the students expressed the same “community service” purpose shared by the students at other schools and their staff advisor defined his vision for the club in the same liberal-humanist, experiential education terms as the other teachers. The students and Mr. Graham alike felt that if they could just get a project going the club would be successful. They tried to do recycling and re-using and Earth Day announcements just like all the other clubs did but the result was continual frustration:

CL: You said you did a vegetable garden at one point in time...

Mr. Graham: Uh-huh.

CL: How did that happen?

Mr. Graham: Well, again, it was a couple of teachers who basically dug a vegetable garden and took a few kids from smaller classes outside to help them dig it.

CL: Yeah.

Mr. Graham: Now, unfortunately, vegetables grow over the summer and so we didn't see the fruits of our labours, so to speak. And, when we came back in September, it was largely grown over already.

CL: Yeah.

Mr. Graham: I don't know if the neighbours partook of it or not. Now this year a couple of kids have suggested to me, we build this vegetable garden and we go and tell neighbours about it in the neighbourhood so that they can come and use the veggies. Now, again, realistically, if you've ever had a garden, you know someone's got to weed it. Someone's got to pick the, uh, fruit so it doesn't rot, somebody has to water it, uh, between the two of us, I ain't gonna do it. Who is? So, should we go through the *motion* of having a veggie garden or not? I'm going to leave it up to Students' Council when we talk at the beginning of June. And if they want to, why not? Again, realistically speaking, will this really give the kids a taste of the sense of accomplishment, and how nice it is to get your hands in the ground and, and how nice it is to have the veggies fresh every day? No [laugh]. So, is there any sense to it? I don't know.

CL: Um-hum.

Mr. Graham: And keep in mind, this is the end of whatever it is, May now and they're burned out, I'm burned out, we're all burned out.

CL: Um-hum.

Mr. Graham: Um, so I really am at a loss. I don't know how to get these kids enthused and excited and interested. [emphasis in voice]

The students themselves usually went along with any suggestion Mr. Graham proposed, but when I really pushed them to name their goals for the club, they showed they had pretty much given up on accomplishing anything and suggested we aim to attract students to sign up for the following year, so the club might get off to a better start next time.

When I approached Mr. Graham about doing research with the club at Riverside, he was very up front about this situation and I agreed to try to help him get something going in return for calling the students together to talk to me. I met with them on four occasions to see if we could overcome their difficulties and we talked about doing a school audit, going on field trips, preparing information posters, planting trees, reducing packaging and waste in the cafeteria, setting up re-use boxes for computer paper, and encouraging staff and students to walk and bike to school. But soon I experienced the same frustration as Mr. Graham. From meeting to meeting the ideas seemed to be lost, the initiative was not pursued and I could never really determine what was the cause of it all. Mr. Graham alternated between blaming himself and blaming the students, but neither answer was quite right. It might have been nothing more than too few students, too many overcommitted students, or inadequate knowledge of environmental issues on the part of both the students and their staff advisor. But as I spent hours trying to come up with new ideas and figure out what was going on, more and more I became concerned with the approach itself. I found myself caught up in trying to make the club work on their terms, by finding some easy project with "results," although I did not even consider many of these "results" to be valuable, effective, or socially-critical environmental projects. What then was the point to all this activity?

I think the seemingly neutral elements of the liberal service club model point to a few mechanisms that serve to implicitly (and unintentionally) depoliticize the environmental activism of school clubs. First, while engaging in hands-on projects is certainly "fun" and gives a "sense of accomplishment," unless actively politicized, concrete activities tend to transpose the focus of activism from political actors onto biophysical change. Similarly, activities solely focussed in on the school block out the causes of environmental degradation and restrict potential solutions to attitude change and

superficial physical improvements such as turning off lights or provision of recycling or composting bins. I will save my analysis of the environmental implications of these club projects to Chapter 8, but clearly these practices do little to change production and consumption patterns, which are the points at which resource and energy conservation and waste reduction must begin. Even within the school, without a voice at the Board of Education or school administration where purchasing decisions and funding allotments are made, powerless students are even less able to actually make change. Moreover, all white, middle class professionals, four of the five teachers had no experience in activism (one was a Branch President of the union for many years) or community organizing, limiting the extent to which they could legitimately offer much guidance or serve as role models for helping students become “more activist” in nature. So what we have is the promotion of a false sense of empowerment led by a paternalistic belief that if students *feel and believe* what they are doing is helping society, then they will be responsible and active democratic citizens when they are adults.

Conclusions

The path to moulding the eco-citizen, as outlined by the liberal-humanist teachers in the four clubs and as dictated by most environmental education literature (see Greig, Pike, and Selby 1987; Smith 1998; van Matre 1972), follows the philosophy of child-centred, experiential citizenship education where students are taken out of the classroom, given opportunities to experience the satisfaction of planning and carrying out their own service project, and helped to develop leadership skills and humanist values in the process. For the few students who joined the clubs, they got to enjoy the disruption the club setting offers to the monotony of schooling: the club experience added fun, social time with friends, and meaningful work to their days, and made school a pleasant and rewarding place to be. Along with these personal and social benefits, these clubs and their individual members did indeed recycle and compost and reduce their impact on the environment in many other ways as the *Canadian Geographic* article announced. And, for the most part, the clubs were successful within the bounds of their liberal-humanist goals.

But before proclaiming them good eco-citizens, I ask: where are the issues? Where are the complexities and ambiguities and challenges and passion usually unavoidable in any environmental issue, much less a broad embrace of environmentalism? What has

been sacrificed in this effort to guarantee students experience tangible, “empowering” results in reward for a few hours a week work? In successive chapters, I will deconstruct each of the assumptions of this good citizenship approach: suggesting that relations of power and authority undergird the “mentoring” facade; that club membership is contingent on conformity to the culture of the school; that the ideology of “empowerment” contributes to the reproduction of social hierarchies and stereotypes; that these projects do more to deflect and suppress environmental criticism than to “make a difference;” and that environmental values and perspectives are not simply inculcated through positive nature and community service experiences, but are shaped by culture, class, and gender identities and relations.

VI Over-Achievers and the Construction of Student Apathy

In this chapter, I draw on the critical literatures of youth subcultures and school culture to consider the role of the club in constructing “good” versus “deviant” students and its relation to the formation of identity and institutional roles in the corporate hierarchy of student life. Student apathy featured prominently in students’ and teachers’ discourses as the most significant challenge they faced in greening their schools, supplanting political agents as the target of their environmental activism. They revealed a division exists between the “good kids” who participated in clubs and the Others, ranging from the apathetic masses in the Collegiates to the class skippers and drop-outs in the Technical schools. Attributed either to some natural ‘don’t care’ adolescent attitude or to broken families and parental neglect, student apathy is psychologized into personal failure while the do-good elite are rewarded in school culture as the over-achievers, leaving school with bright futures and social success. Following McLaren’s (1989) and Lewis’ (1993) attention to the political resistance embodied in silence, I ask how apathy may instead be read both as an indictment of the school for its failure to meet the needs of students and as resistance to its norms, albeit in an ultimately self-defeating way. In the next chapter, I consider the reverse situation: one club which did assume more of an activist format and the resulting conflict and contradictions which surfaced when students sought to gain the autonomy and access to authority which the liberal discourse of school clubs promises.

Up against the Wall of Apathy: Raising Awareness, Recruiting Bodies

Many of the environment clubs’ actions were awareness-raising efforts directed at their peers: Earth Day announcements, bulletin boards, surveys and classroom challenges, assemblies, posters, selling T-shirts and buttons, showing videos, and staff meeting and classroom visits. The purpose of all this awareness-raising was as much to recruit students to the club as to educate them about environmental issues. Ms. Shaw explained that the garden project at Wychwood Tech was invented to a large extent to attract more students:

“And I think, I don’t know, the potential for the club is great, there are so many things you could do [such as] build stuff, and that’s probably our biggest problem. I don’t feel we have enough bodies to make a lot of things. ...we don’t get a lot of new members, which is tough. ...I don’t know, if we did get into doing something that looked neat and cool, I’m sure we’d get more people. I think we need to be

more visible and that requires a lot more effort than what I think either [Mr. White] or I could give at the moment. I think the garden is part of it. We were really hoping that we could get lots more people interested in coming out just to plant the stuff, and to look at it, that sort of thing..."

A discussion with the students at Central Collegiate illustrates they too were looking for more creative projects which would attract more attention:

Sally: And I think the old club was more into awareness and just education and this year, we're, this club is...

Theresa: Is more into action.

Sally: Yeah.

Vivian: Yeah, we're trying to do some bigger projects.

CL: Why is that? Why the shift?

Theresa: It changed, Sandy...

Vivian: Sandy. Yeah, Sandy did it.

Theresa: Yeah, Sandy changed it last year.

Sally: I don't know how much people were listening.

[silent pause] ...

Theresa: Yeah, we've been trying to get this composting programme going. We think this is a step in the right direction to naturalizing the school. And I guess that's the main goal of the club, for now, is naturalizing the school. The idea of the roof-top garden, that was the same thing.

Wendy: I think that will be good when it gets going. I think it will educate a lot more people.

The Riverside group in fact defined their main goal to be attracting more members and we came up against this problem every time we met:

CL: What do you think the next step should be?

Vinod: First, more people should join the club.

Jing-wen: I was wondering if anyone wants to participate, like get involved, I would do it myself, but we need more than like three people. It's not enough for a club.

Vinod: Yeah.

While small membership prevented the Riverside club from ever getting off the ground, none of the clubs drew in large numbers of students and all settled into a steady size of five to ten students.

This focus on recruitment led teachers and students alike to frustrated discussions about the apathy of their peers. Over and over again the phrase "they just don't care" was mentioned during my interviews and discussions. The girls at Central Collegiate offered me this somewhat humorous story about student commitment to recycling to demonstrate their frustration:

Theresa: There's one blue bin in the cafeteria and there used to be one on the first floor, but all of a sudden it's disappeared. But people ...are total creatures of habit,

me and Sandy went by it just like last week, and the bin was gone from the corner.

Vivian: But there was a pile of cans...

Sally: Yeah!

Theresa: ...of cans!

Sally: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Theresa: People are like, 'it used to be here, I'll just try to recycle it into the wall.'

[Everyone is laughing hard.]

Sally: I mean, that's a really positive effort, I think. [laughter]

Theresa: I think it's a pretty lame effort. [laughter].

Wendy: At least they're .. aware.

In addition, the biggest complaint and question raised by students attending three high school environmental conferences I observed was how to motivate their peers. The problem faced was not lack of interest or commitment to *environmental* issues, as several students and teachers acknowledged there were other students in the school interested in environmentalism--and indeed the 50-odd students which originally signed up for the environment clubs in some of the schools attests to this--but rather student apathy. "A great frustration of mine is how to get students involved in these issues at this school. Now specifically how to get students involved in *anything* at this school is a major concern of mine," Mr. Graham reported. Student apathy was named as the most serious impediment to greening their schools.

The problem of apathy goes beyond these particular clubs to all clubs and school activities, to schoolwork generally, and to attending classes and dropping out of school. Teachers and students provided me with mountains of complaints and examples of student disengagement from school. The two Technical schools faced serious problems of attendance, vandalism, and drop-outs. Saraswati and Rebecca described the typical pattern at Wychwood Tech for me one day as we waited for Mr. White at the garden:

They explain only a core group of 4 or 5 students would go to class every day, so usually there were only a total of 10 or 12 out of 30 students on any given day halfway through or near the end of term. I ask if it is common for students to skip class and they say yes. Apparently, the students gather outside smoking and the teachers try to get them inside, but it never works. Students aren't allowed to smoke on school property, so teachers tell them to stop or go away, but five minutes later the students will be back.

Both Ms. Shaw and Mr. White confirmed this story and offered many more examples in voices of frustration:

We go on to talk about Mr. White's field trip to [a nearby city park] with his science class. They do limnology and water sampling in the creek... Mr. White then says that the problem was that no students showed up. I am surprised. He explains that two students showed up and then another three met them at the park, but he

had to send them back because the school didn't have their health card numbers. The school needs them handy in case anything happens. Then they took until the afternoon to return to the park by which time it was too late. When I ask if attendance is a serious problem, he brings up his business class from the year before:

Mr. White: Five who would come regularly. The others would be here but they would be in the halls or outside smoking.

Saraswati: Some days they would stand right below our classroom window and sometimes he would shout down at them [she laughs].

Mr. White: Well, they'll find it's not funny when they get a zero on this whole project for skipping. They'll learn once they hit the adult world.

Ms Shaw shared similar frustrations during our interview:

Ms. Shaw: Again, because the types of students we have also are tough, it's tough to get kids that come every day...

CL: Why, because...

Ms. Shaw: Well, [inaudible] excuses [said very quickly--the tone of voice shows a lot of frustration]. Um, well, lots of reasons [laugh]. ...it's such a big school that it's hard to, um, ...it's hard to keep track of attendance, with these kids and, uh, with over 2,000 kids it can be two or three days before someone realizes that you know this kid has been skipping class or whatever. And it's [hard] to track them down and to deal with it, so, [sigh], there's ways to get around the system.

Mr. Graham took me on a tour of Riverside Tech to point out where students were lounging in hallways skipping class, yelling in front of open doors, where a staircase permanently smelled of urine, where the students would go to smoke dope, and so forth. I had a taste of their vandalism problem when I asked for directions to the washroom one day while waiting for Mr. Graham to meet me:

I ask if there is a washroom nearby and he gives me directions and then a key. I find the door and it turns out to be a pretty rough-looking former boys washroom, with urinals along one wall. The stall doors are a grungy blue, scraped with graffiti and the whole thing is ultra-utilitarian, with no un-necessary fixtures. I don't even think there is a mirror, much less soap or paper towels. When I return the key, I ask why it is locked. "To keep it as a staff washroom?" I start. He says yes and that the kids would "rip the towel bars off" and otherwise vandalise it, if it was left open. This makes me wonder: I mean, obviously there must be unlocked student washrooms somewhere in the school. What are they like?

These teachers felt this was to be expected in a Tech school. Their references to Basic and General level students indicated they felt these students lacked any interest and motivation to being in class and teaching in the Collegiates would be substantially different:

Mr. White: It's not like in the Collegiates.

CL: Oh is there much difference?

Mr. White: Actually, let me qualify that, I've never taught anywhere else, so I can't

say from personal experience, but from talking with other teachers who have, they say there's a big difference. The students go to class and actually want to learn. Not everyone here is like that though. These girls are good. There's a select group that goes to classes and is involved.

Mr. Robinson at Devonshire Collegiate, however, described a similar divide between the select, active group and the rest:

Mr. Robinson: ...you have four or five kids in a class of twenty who are really keen and want to know and you end up teaching to them.

CL: Um-hum.

Mr. Robinson: But the others just don't do the work. ...You know, they only work to a certain point and then they don't make the effort anymore.

CL: [So] you're not working with the assumption that everyone wants to be there and learn the stuff?

Mr. Robinson: Yeah. And that gets frustrating at times.

While teachers in the Collegiates also worried about vandalism--often their first thoughts when the students proposed composters and gardens--they did not face the same type or degree of problems felt in the Technical schools.

Apathy rather than rebellion characterized the difficulties of the Collegiates. Whereas students at Wychwood and Riverside would actively leave classes, damage school property, talk back to teachers, and drop out of school, "tuning out" posed the greatest challenge for staff and students at Devonshire and Central. "For example," Andrea explained, "no one came out to support the green ribbon campaign in the fall. Everyone was talking about Bill 160, but when they made announcements about going outside to tie up ribbons, no one went." Dana commented:

"Overall, like, the club, I mean I know some of clubs there's, like, less than ten people because a lot of students, they just either they're too lazy to come or they just, you know, think it's only high school, five years, you know, I'll be gone, I won't, you know, I won't see these people ever again. So, you know clubs aren't that important to them."

Beth concurred:

"I think it's like the whole school atmosphere ...like, I don't know anything, so I don't care about the school. I think that's how a lot of people felt about it. So they don't care, so they trash it up, it's not my home, you know, so that's why our school's kind of, like, that's why I think teachers want us to, you know, clean up the school. ...right now they just don't care."

Mr. Robinson at Devonshire related his experiences with his environmental studies class:

"...we do a home survey where they monitor water use, amount of garbage, what goes into the blue box, what goes into the grey box and they're always surprised at how much water they use and I say, 'well, if you want to save money you can do

this and this and this' but then it sort of dies, you know. 'How many of you actually did this?' 'Well, I thought about it, but...'"

He concluded, "And that gets frustrating." Students go through the motions of attending class and doing minimal amounts of homework, but generally tune out until the day is over and they can leave.

Empathy, Excuses and Liberal Frustration

Calling attention to student apathy is certainly no news to educators, students, or indeed anyone who has ever spent any time in a school. While there was some recognition that material concerns, such as in-home or waged work after school, might prevent students from being more involved in clubs, more often it is students, or their family backgrounds, who were blamed for their lagging school spirit. One common accusation was that teenagers are "naturally" self-centred and self-absorbed and these remarkable exceptions who participate in clubs and community service were pegged as over-achievers.

CL: So, why do you think the gifted students...[predominate in the club]?

Ms. Shaw: I don't know, I really don't. I think some of it, uh, they're the kids that do everything, you know, like they're the same kids who are running the yearbook and are running student council and are, you know, *those types of kids*. They can handle the workload, plus they're outgoing, most, not all of them, but some of them are. And, they've got the support from home to get involved and do things. They're busy people, they can do the time management and that sort of thing. [emphasis added.]

Whereas "the kids we have in the club are ...very eager and they're keen and they'll do anything," most adolescents just "don't care."

Beth: "I think the school, I guess, it seemed like after elementary school, they don't care about the environment anymore. ...it seems like high school is a change, where you change from being, you know, kind of environmentally-friendly a bit to like, you know, 'you know, *it doesn't matter, I'm a teenager, it won't affect me.*' But, if, I think, if possible, we should work on that to think, to let them know that it comes back to you." [emphasis added]

Ms. Shaw: "...it's really hard to explain garbage to somebody who lives in an apartment building and sends it down the chute and .. who cares. And I think that's what we have to do, we have to relate things to the kids, so that they say 'hey, that has an impact on me!' And, unfortunately, it takes time to do that. ...And there's no real personal reward for it or anything and a lot of these kids, because they're at *that self-centred teenage stage*, you've got to sort of reach them that way." [emphasis added]

Dana: "High school, it's more about, I guess, where you fit in. *Everyone is more absorbed within themselves.* It's like school, your image, or, you know, something like that, and your future, I guess." [emphasis added]

By psychologizing student apathy as a natural state of adolescents, yet attributing success to individual traits of intelligence, hard work, and moral commitment, this discourse absolves the school itself of any role in producing apathy and rebellion and reinforces the notion that the school is a meritocracy with the most capable students filling leadership roles.

The situation can also be read as a polarization between "those types of kids" who adhere to the norms of the school and those who reject those norms. Most of the students in the environment clubs were academic-achievers and university-bound and were active in a number of school activities and clubs, such as band, mural projects, sports teams, math clubs, and yearbook. They were the "jocks" in Eckert's (1989) theoretical framework, committed to the school through good attendance, academic achievement, and extra-curricular involvement, and identified as such by their teachers:

Mr. Robinson: "Here you tend to find if kids are involved in one club they're involved in many clubs and activities. [At] lunch-time, you rarely see them in the cafeteria [laugh], they're all at their meetings."

Mr. White: "These girls are good. There's a select group that goes to classes and is involved."

Vice-principal, Wychwood Tech: "We need more gifted students to make it a more comprehensive school. ...these types of kids offer a lot in terms of leadership."

Mr. Albion: "Those kids yesterday [planting trees] were pretty much into what they were doing. They weren't taking a day off just to get out of the school for a day. In fact a lot of them were from my level 6 Science class and I don't think I've ever seen them stay away."

Mr. Graham: "...the only kids I get out to the environment club are kids who are deeply embroiled in every thing else happening in the school. ...they can spend ten minutes and then they're off to their next meeting."

Involvement in the environment club was part of a culture of involvement in school activities and adherence to school norms generally.

When considering the students on the opposite side of the scale, most of the teachers in the Technical schools fell back onto a liberal discourse of empathy for students coming from "broken homes."

CL: What do you think the reasons for [low attendance] are?

Mr. White: Socio-economic background. Parents. The parents don't really care if their kids are in school. You know, the most parents I've ever had for parent-teacher night is six and that's out of three full classes. And of course the ones who come are the parents of my students that are doing well, not the ones I need to talk to.

...Mr. White looks at the clock and it is three o'clock, so he says he's going down to his other office to call about the sand delivery we are waiting for. Natalie and Saraswati are now standing at the sink, playing with the tap.

CL: So what do you think about the attendance issue? Why don't the other students come?

Saraswati: Some students just don't care, they hang around outside.

CL: Do you think it is the students?

[pause]

CL: Their parents?

Saraswati: Students. Well, both.

Natalie: Many come from broken homes.

Ms. Shaw provided the same answer during our interview when I asked about the attendance problem:

"...lack of parental involvement, especially with our general level kids. Um, you call the parents to say the kid's not there and they go 'oh, I know.' And they don't want, they don't see it as a priority for students to be in class."

Mr. Graham, too, at Riverside, noted how "these kids are so hurt and so angry" and explains that he realizes "many of these people have other concerns. You know, the environmental issues, even the spiritual attainment is very very far from their list of needs." He is a committed and caring teacher, trying his best to offer these students help, while knowing his limitations. "Are we going to reach most of the kids? No. But if we can reach some of the kids, I think it's valuable," he offered:

"...when you approach them with an open hand and they respond with a 'FUCK YOU' [he yells it], it's really tough sometimes to keep that hand open and the arms extended. ...Ultimately, if they're not interested in what I have to give them, there's nothing I can give. Can I convince them that what I have to give is valuable? Uh, no. The reality is no. I can give them the message and hopefully they will come to the realization that what I'm saying is true. If they don't, there's nothing I can do. ...There *are* ways of connecting. In my humble opinion again, I see it very simplistically. Love is something that touches these kids and sometimes I'm capable of it, often I'm not, often my ego and frustrations and angers get in the way. I find they can be reached that way."

This approach may be compassionate, but it is ultimately frustrating, as these teachers themselves readily conceded. Mr. Graham did not fail to mention "burn-out" on any occasion we spoke or met.

Critical pedagogue Peter McLaren (1989) labels this discourse "liberal pity" and

argues it perpetuates institutional and social oppression through its “cultural deficit” model of pedagogy (232). I will quote from his book at length to demonstrate how, in a self-critical reflection on his own early teaching practices, he concurs with the values of compassion and equal opportunity espoused by liberal-humanism yet insists that without a critical analysis it can but fail to empower students:

Throughout my days in the classroom, I had unknowingly ascribed to the pedagogical mainstay of many liberal teachers: I felt sympathy and compassion for my students while employing a pedagogy geared to ‘compensate’ for the deficiencies of society’s young victims. Because mine was the ‘stronger and superior culture,’ I felt I could penetrate and give shape, meaning, and hope to the mystery of the deprived. My pedagogy was bourgeoisie populism spiced with a liberal dose of humanism; it rendered me ineffective in educating community members about how power relations in society work... (232)

...the most that I could accomplish was a liberal version of moral outrage at the injustices of the system, followed by a sympathetic embrace or reassuring pat on the shoulder that told the students I identified with their plight. Let me stress that the pedagogical position I am advocating does not prohibit students or teachers from acquiring a sense of outrage, or students and teachers from developing a sympathetic, affectionate, confidence-building relationship with each other; rather it emphasizes that *such sentiments and relationships need to be pursued within a pedagogical context in which the issue of self and social transformation is taken seriously*. (234-235, emphasis in original)

The liberal discourse acknowledges the difficulties students from poor, working class, and racial or ethnic minority backgrounds face in Canadian schools, but locates their subjectivities in some vague, un-named cloak of “social disadvantage.” But this construction of difference as deviance from the middle class norm--whether through liberal sympathizing or conservative moralizing--only reinforces class and racial social hierarchies. As McLaren (1989) concludes:

We need to ask what injustices may be perpetuated in the name of liberal pedagogy. The ability to articulate and change the real relationships of power and privilege was not part of my pedagogical repertoire; consequently, such relationships remained camouflaged in my language of moral outrage. (232)

Perhaps even more insidious is the silence maintained by the liberal discourse on relations of power and privilege and the projection of the school as neutral in the construction and reproduction of social inequalities. Both ensure neither teachers nor students who embrace school norms act to change these relations within the school and

within society: subordinate cultures are forgiven their “lackings” and “faults” as poverty and racial inequality are simultaneously normalized and mystified, accepted as “facts of life” which are as pitiable and unfortunate as they are unchangeable.

Schooling, Resistance and Critical Pedagogy

McLaren (1989) constructs a critical pedagogy by engaging with the experiences, knowledges and voices through which the students themselves make meaning of their lives. By considering the students as active agents rather than just helpless victims of circumstance or lazy adolescents, critical pedagogy listens for the oppositional voices the so-called “Burn-outs” express through their behaviour, style, language, and knowledge. McLaren (1989) draws on the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to argue that “ignorance is not a passive state but rather an active excluding from consciousness:” a refusal to allow--or acknowledge--our subjectivities to be constructed out of the information and social practices that surround us (189). As McLaren (1989) notes, “students reject the culture of classroom learning because, for the most part, it is delibidinized (eros-denying) and is infused with a cultural capital to which subordinate groups have little legitimate access” (188). The degree of social control exercised in schools and classrooms, the routinized, disembodied, and value-less work to which youth are subjected, and the cumulative overt and covert discouragement meted out to students not from white, middle class cultural/racial backgrounds represent the veritable colonization of students’ life-worlds--an act of symbolic violence to which many youth are not prepared to yield. As McLaren (1989) asks,

What is the range of identities available within a system of education designed to produce, regulate, and distribute character, govern gesture, dictate values, and police desire? To what extent does adherence to the norms of the school mean that students will have to give up the dignity and status maintained through psychosocial adaptations to life on the street? To what extent does compliance with the rituals and norms of school mean that students have to forfeit their identities as members of an ethnic group? (188)

Indications that these indeed were the dilemmas faced by the students at the four schools abounded. The prevalence of ethnically-based social groups and even ethnic/racial clubs in the schools hints at the struggle students faced between maintaining their ethnic/racial identities and adapting to school life. The de-libidinized nature of classroom learning was frequently bemoaned even by students in the clubs; indeed, part of the attraction of clubs

and manual work like gardening is the bodily and social pleasure they offer

The assertion of ethnic/racial identity played a prominent role within the schools. In several schools, students and teachers noted how social groups were ethnically-based and all four of the schools had ethnic/racial clubs such as the Vietnamese Club, Black Youth Club and Italian-Canadian Club. Mr. Graham conceded that the only clubs which were successful at Riverside Tech were the ethnic clubs:

“...aside from that, I would suggest that most of our clubs, certainly since I’ve been here for nine or ten years, have folded and fallen by the wayside. Because at a certain point, staff just gets very frustrated.”

Interestingly, each of the three successful environment clubs was close to being ethnically and culturally homogenous within heterogenous schools: most of the students in the Wychwood Club were Sri Lankan; most of the students in the Devonshire Club were Chinese-Canadian; and all of the students at the Central Club were white, Anglo-Canadian. Teachers’ narratives reveal this is more than some happy pluralism emerging in the schools. They expressed confusion and frustration with how cultural/racial diversity seemed to disrupt and subvert conventional notions of school spirit, school achievement and school norms, and how unequipped they were to deal with diversity.

Mr. Graham: We, by and large, our staff comes from a middle class, upper middle class background, our clientele does not.

CL: Um-hum.

Mr. Graham: It’s like we speak a different language. You know, I’ll give you an extreme, when I told a boy to take a book home on Friday because he was reading...

CL: Uh-huh.

Mr. Graham: ...and interested.

CL: Yeah.

Mr. Graham: His response was, ‘my father’ll call me a faggot if I take a book home.’ What do you do with that? I don’t know. You know, obviously I know that we can do what we can do and we give messages and hope that one day these messages sink in.

CL: Yeah.

Mr. Graham: What do you do, though? Took the subway to school the other day, three kids are standing on a subway platform. They’re nonchalantly spitting, you know, like [he imitates the noise and action], like *horking* on the platform. But not doing it looking around to see if [imitates looking to see if anyone is seeing/hiding the behaviour], you know. No, that’s what you do. It’s acceptable social behaviour. Go into the subway station itself and kids aren’t just leaning on this kiosk, their muddy feet are -- that day it was raining a lot -- their muddy feet are all over the glass, they’re talking in very loud voices with all sorts of ‘fuck’ and ‘shit’. This is acceptable social behaviour.

Conventional codes of academic achievement and social behaviour were clearly being

rejected by students from the subordinate class and cultural/racial backgrounds. But the teachers, while empathetic, had no way of expressing their interpretations of these actions except as transgressions of "Canadian" social norms. Similarly, the practice of ethnically-based social groups was interpreted by teachers as undermining school loyalty and spirit.

Ms. Shaw: "I grew up in a very typical Canadian culture, not a big melting pot, um, you had the different groups and stuff, kids that hung out, but here we actually have different cultural groups that hang out. And they have all different emphases in things. There are certain areas where the Vietnamese kids will be and certain areas where the Somalians [*sic*] are and that sort of thing, not that it's bad, it's just that we are still so segregated within this great big place and nobody really feels like it's theirs. I don't think. I don't think there's a sense of loyalty to Wychwood."

These narratives indicate both the importance of ethnic/racial identity and socializing to students and its seeming incompatibility with school norms in the eyes of teachers and perhaps students themselves.

My affiliation with and concentration on schools clubs precluded any access to the narratives of students who rejected school participation, but this emerging contradiction between ethnic/racial identity and school norms is consistent with critical studies of youth subcultures which consider how students from subordinate class and racial positions resist and reject school. McLaren (1989) notes how this is particularly so for ethnic/racial minorities, such as African-Americans, who face significant barriers to social advancement:

Specifically, blacks and similar minorities (e.g. American Indians) believe that in order for a minority person to succeed in school academically, he or she must learn to think and act white. Furthermore, in order to think and act white enough to be rewarded by whites or white institutions like the schools, a minority person must give up his or her own minority-group attitudes, ways of thinking, and behaving, and, of course, must give up or lose his or her own minority identity. That is, striving for academic success is a subtractive process: the individual black student following school standard practices that lead to academic success is perceived as adopting a white cultural frame of reference... as 'acting white' with the inevitable outcome of losing his or her black identity, abandoning black people and black causes... (Ogbu cited in McLaren 1989, 212)

Ethnic/racial minorities whose cultural images and experiences of success are consistent with mainstream school norms, such as Asian and South Asian immigrants who may come to North America well-educated and successful or in hope of a better life (Bennett and LeCompte 1990), may not experience the same contradictions and conflicts as those with a

history of racial oppression and economic disadvantage. McLaren (1989) argues that African-Americans have developed alternative measures of success and status which are not necessarily based on academic achievement and the heroization of black sports figures among black youth is one example of this phenomenon. Mr. Graham at Riverside offered another example where youth aspire to the slick-talking, crafty knowledge of the street rather than bookish academicism:

"You know I just look around this field, there's perfect examples walking all around here [some boys from his class in the computer lab are walking over to play basketball]. These guys are so bright, but in their culture, if you work hard, you're, what the fuck, you're giving to .. I don't know what you're doing, but it's certainly not a valuable .. a valued goal to think hard. It's much better to scam and jive and to talk your way out of things, right? Go figure. So, I've been trying to convince all kinds of students I have that it's very valuable to use your mind. They disagree. What can I do?"

School may be equated with an oppressive and biased culture, or judged to offer disadvantaged youth few valuable skills for the future options open to them, and consequently resisted through the disruption of school practices and norms in vandalism or talking back, through the creation of autonomous spaces within the school such as ethnic/racial peer groups and clubs, or by literally dropping out of the school culture.

The construction of failure through tracking and ability groups also plays a significant role in youth disengagement from and rejection of school. Bennett and LeCompte (1990) note how studies show that even in schools where none of the students were really disadvantaged, "the lowest students--who might well have been the most advanced pupils in an inner city school--thought of themselves as 'dregs' and a 'circus,' adopting the antischool, rebellious attitudes usually attributed to lower and working class students" (99). Indeed, academic achievement is consistently associated with extra-curricular participation. Yau et al. (1992) indicate that, in the Toronto Board of Education, students in Advanced streams participate more frequently in extra-curricular activities than students in General or Basic Level streams, with 40% of Basic students never participating as compared to only 17% of Advanced. Shortchanged by the educational system and facing low status career options unconnected to the skills of leadership and sociability obtained in the club hierarchy, students in the lower academic tracks have little to gain materially or psychologically from affiliation with school norms and activities. The rewards of confidence-building status and encouragement from both school and family enjoyed by Anglo-Canadian, middle class youth from their participation in

clubs, sports, and other school activities are not as accessible to subordinate groups. When school success constitutes “cultural suicide,” when school labels you a failure, when school-learned skills will not help you find employment and break through job ceilings, participating in school can only be a contradictory, self-denigrating, and futile experience.

While students from subordinate class and cultural/racial backgrounds experience these contradictions most acutely, all students experience schooling as boring, self-denying, and useless at some time or another. The girls at Devonshire Collegiate were passionate in their condemnation of textbook-based learning despite their academic success:

CL.: Is there an actual environmental studies course here?

Andrea: Um-hum.

CL: Are any of you doing it?

Aung-Sun: I took it last year.

Beth: I'm not going to take it. I don't like the teacher. [laughter]

Gail: There's also ecology.

Beth: Yeah. I'm taking marine ecology.

CL: Hmm.

Aung-Sun: Mr. Robinson teaches environmental studies. He does a lot of notes, straight from the textbook and that kind of thing.

Andrea: Yeah.

Beth: I don't like that.

Gail: Yeah.

Aung-Sun: I HATE IT. I HATE IT. I really don't like textbook learning. [emphasis in voice]

When I asked Beth later why she would not take the course, she explained:

Beth: My friend, she kind of scared me out from it, from the class, the environmental class.

CL: What do you mean?

Beth: Because she was saying that, you know, it's not what you expect, it's kind of boring, it's not exactly you know really fun and you get to apply yourself to something whereas you have to sit and read the book. And I really hate doing that so that's why I didn't exactly take it [laugh].

Even successful students oppose the life-denying, routinized culture of schooling. They tend to negotiate between the drudgery of schooling and the consequences of dropping out by engaging in subtle resistance, such as sleeping, chatting, passing notes, tuning out, cutting classes, underachieving, and so on, but not quite dropping out. Bennett and LeCompte (1990) define negotiation as the “recognition that while the pay-offs for completing school may not be monumental, the consequences of not doing so are worse” (105). It is important to understand these acts not as signs of incompetence or inferiority

or passive apathy but as active resistance to schooling: strategies employed by individuals to mediate against the rationalization of their lives. However, while representing symbolic opposition, these acts of resistance do not necessarily contribute at all to *changing* these oppressive structures. They may even perpetuate them. In his study of working class lads, Willis (1977) found the lads were complicit in their own oppression as their rejection of school skills ensured they had no choice but to take up the same types of working class jobs their fathers had always held, jobs which turned out to be as meaningless and monotonous as schooling.

Disturbingly, whatever the rationale for student apathy, the consequences remain the same: unreflective and politically inactive citizens. As McLaren (1989) notes, ignorance and disengagement are ultimately self-defeating:

But we lack the critical constructs with which to recover that knowledge *which we choose not to know*. Unable to find meaningful knowledge 'out there' in the world of prepackaged commodities, students resort to random violence or an intellectual purple haze where anything more challenging than the late night news is met with retreat, or despair; and of course, it is the dominant culture that benefits from this epidemic of conceptual anesthesia. The fewer critical intellectuals around to challenge its ideals, the better. (189, emphasis in original)

On the other hand, those who accept and conform to school norms might be no more critical: politically illiterate, trained to obedience and rewarded with a false sense of empowerment. In a study of African-American high school drop-outs, ethnographer Michelle Fine found that "those who remained in school, when compared to dropouts, were significantly more depressed, less politically aware, less likely to be more assertive in the classroom if they were undergraded, and more conformist" (cited in McLaren 1989, 215). Apathy is but a symptom of larger problems of power, authority, and social control within the school and society.

From Apathy to Critical Consciousness

I would argue the climate of apathy which prevails in the schools indicates a need to approach the "empowerment" of students from a more critical and contextual perspective which directly engages with students' experiences, feelings, and voices. Rather than positioning students as unthinking kids who need their awareness raised and to be "empowered" through experiential projects, teachers need to look to how students are already expressing their opposition to how their subjectivities, their bodies, and their environment are being defined and controlled by others. This is not to say that students'

opinions and behaviours are to be unqualifiedly affirmed or legitimated. As McLaren (1989) cautions, "student experience arises from multiple discourses and subjectivities, some of which must be questioned more critically than others," but teachers' subjectivities and knowledges are similarly constructed and need to be continually re-examined for their underlying assumptions and implications. Similarly, the values and actions of the "good kids" are not to be dismissed as mere embodiments of the middle class norms of conformist and privileged youth. We do need socially-engaged, compassionate and committed people in our society. But just as in the classroom, the norms, values and beliefs embedded in club pedagogy may be as important as the content; and who is included and who is excluded important considerations in evaluating the outcome of the club experience. Lastly, I hesitate also to over-emphasize "resistance" as political activism lest it become a lesser--intuitive or instinctive rather than conscious and rational--form of political activism for which we excuse oppressed youth on account of their 'special' circumstances.

Emerging from difficult circumstances certainly does not preclude a student from becoming an academic achiever, school leader and active club participant, or a politically astute individual, but such experiences may position the student very differently from the ideological stance and community service approach of liberal-humanist teachers. Todd, a student in the environment club at Riverside Tech, serves as a salient example. He volunteered to be interviewed by me as he was quite busy during school hours and often did not make the club meetings. The environment club was one small part of his busy extra-curricular schedule which included many clubs, working part-time at the school library, volunteering at a local hospital and at the National Association of Japanese-Canadians, flute lessons, and rock-climbing. Todd may sound like the typical all-round good student, but he dropped out of school for several years and is just now completing his OACs at the age of 22. He was by far the most politically aware and radically-thinking student I encountered and the most committed environmentalist, in addition to being a practising vegan and self-defined socialist.

When we discussed the emergence of his environmental consciousness, he revealed how little a role the high school had played in his political education. His environmental awareness and knowledge was cultivated mainly through his circles of friends--many of whom are at university--and independent reading, not high school, an institution he berated for being insufficiently challenging, too authoritarian, and resistant

to change. He furthered offered that while he first became aware and interested in environmental issues around the age of 12, he postponed acting on this awareness due to other circumstances in his life:

Todd: ...there was a part of my life where I had a lot of problems, so that became something that was on the backburner. I couldn't prioritize it at the moment, um, so probably when I was about sixteen when I first lived on my own, I started taking control of all the things that I could and changing my ways, so I could start acting the way I wanted to.

CL: So you feel you had this consciousness, but you didn't have the control over your life...?

Todd: Right. I couldn't empower myself until I lived on my own. And then at that time, I had the, I had the ability to make the decisions on what I purchased, how I would use whatever I purchased. ...Sometimes I can't afford to eat as good as I [want to] and my family is not supportive of a lot of my decisions and criticisms, so there's some butting of heads as far as, the grocery, the grocery choices, so every once in a while I am forced to eat something that I wouldn't eat.

His ability to control the decisions affecting his life was crucial for him to become an activist and he demonstrates how he has re-entered the school with this confidence and empowerment:

Todd: I speak my mind, I speak up a lot, no matter how annoying it is to some students, who...

CL: You think it is?

Todd: Oh, it is. I don't think it is, *it is* annoying to other students... [emphasis in voice]

CL: OK.

Todd: ...because my hand is jutting up every five minutes because the teacher slipped and said something that was incorrect or inappropriate...

CL: And what do the other students do? do they react?

Todd: Oh, they would just rather 'let's get it on' and they're annoyed that I bring up these things. I have a strong stance in my values, in my views and I take full advantage of my education. I want to be challenged intellectually and if the teacher's not, if I find the teacher's not challenging me, then I'll push them against the wall, sort of. And if the students want to, a lot of students, I'm very unhappy to say are slackers, they would rather get by with regurgitating and, let's see, slowing the teacher down so that a unit will have to be omitted from the end of the semester or from the, a section that would be omitted from the test, so I, I don't share that attitude at all with a lot of students...

CL: How do the teachers respond?

Todd: ...World Issues was a very stressful class because a lot of people just wanted an easy credit and that is so, so typical though. So I wasn't surprised to be in that environment where people were shocked to hear a lot of things the teacher was saying and thought that it was the teacher who was trying to brainwash them, saying to follow her values. She admitted that she was vegetarian, [but] that had nothing to do with the fact that there was child labour occurring, even in Canada and she was bringing up a lot of different environmental issues... [the other students] really weren't really paying attention to what was being presented, so a

lot of people were just sort of, 'I don't know, I don't have a value about that,' 'so what? they're children on the other side of the world' or, let's see, or even about the meat industry, farming, forestry, problems that Canada is having with depletion of the forestry and the industry that is dependent on it. And fishing industry on both coasts, and people are quite oblivious to the extremities of situations that exist, and I think that a lot of the students want to live in their ignorance, because it was more cosy, because it was less stressful...

Todd was determined to go on to university, which was rare among Riverside Tech students, and refused to follow the route of ignorance and apathy.

"I really do wish I was a coach potato sometimes, just, you know. But then I could imagine that I would see so many problems around me, but I'd be clueless as to why and then I feel that I've actually got an advantage by being aware, 'cause that gives me the opportunity to change what I'm not happy with. ...if the house is on fire, putting your head under the pillow isn't going to make the fire go away. As painful as it may be to recognize and to accept reality, it needs to be accepted or it can't be changed. Um, that's it in a nutshell."

In the classroom, in his activism, and in his opinions, Todd is not the typical "good" student. He is sometimes seen as a threat by teachers and he reported how they attempted to discredit his criticisms by labelling him young, immature, and inexperienced. In fact, it seems the situation is just the opposite: he is much too mature to be controlled within the high school setting. Unlike the majority of students, he has chosen outspoken criticism as his path of resistance to the authority and hegemony of the school.

Even for critical teachers, the path from apathy to critical consciousness is not easy, particularly as teachers themselves are relatively powerless to change the overriding structures, curriculums, and cumulative impacts of schooling. McLaren (1989) and other critical pedagogues maintain that it is possible to create a democratic and critical classroom, but Ellsworth (1989) in particular has demonstrated the difficulties involved once one delves into practice. "By prescribing moral deliberation, engagement in the full range of views present, and critical reflection, the literature on critical pedagogy implies that students and teachers can and should engage each other in the classroom as fully rational subjects," but Ellsworth (1989) points out that students and teachers enter the classroom "with investments of privilege and struggle already made" (301). Opening up issues of power and privilege for discussion is not necessarily a route to empowerment. Mr. Graham provided me with an example of the frustrating challenge to educate around social issues in a climate of student resistance:

We pass a group of students, mostly black, sitting out by the front planters listening to music on a small ghettoblaster. Mr. Graham turns to me: "Did you

hear that?" I realize that he's referring to the lyrics, but as I am not all that familiar with rap and hip-hop, I couldn't even understand what was said. He quotes the line he heard: " 'Look at that bitch. Open up her legs' or something like that." He continues, "now what do I do when I see a guy coming down the hall go [here he pokes me in the shoulder] like this and say 'yo, bitch' to a young woman? Do I say, 'I don't think you should say that'? Do I say, 'I want you to respect this woman?' He'll say, 'but she's a bitch. Fuck you, man.' "

McLaren (1989) cites a similar example of a middle class female teacher shocked by her working class students' sexism and her frustration with their resistance to feminism. After showing them a feminist film, their sexism seems to be only furthered entrenched, not re-considered. McLaren (1989) somewhat simplistically accuses her of "simply telling them once again what to think--as middle-class/institutional authority so often does," but it is true that the courage and patience required to listen for the meanings and experiences behind these oppositional voices and to engage in an open and self-reflexive dialogue on justice, power, and knowledge is daunting (228). Power and privilege do not stop at the classroom door. Moreover, resistance to schooling and the values it upholds can easily be translated into a rejection of even those progressive values teachers and students like Todd may attempt to bring forward in their own disruption of the dominant hegemony.

Conclusions

The construction of environment clubs members as the "good" kids at the top of a social hierarchy of jocks and burn-outs naturalizes social inequalities within the school and demonizes opposition as apathy and failure. Apathy offers students a path to resist and mediate the bureaucratic rationalization of school culture by maintaining a stance of opposition to its norms and by sustaining a sense of personal dignity in the refusal to be compared to and shaped in the image of the ideal, good student. But the awareness-raising discourse of the clubs did not draw upon this subversive potential, instead reinforcing the meritocratic school hierarchy of socially-conscious, responsible school leaders organizing activities for a mass of apathetic, self-centred adolescents who just "don't care." It seems students are presented with a dichotomous choice between accepting the liberal-humanist, middle class norm of receptive, ambitious, obedient, and service-oriented students or being cut out from the rewards of meaningful and pleasurable activities, creative freedom, and mentorship granted to club participants and student leaders. Those whose cultural capital and expectations are most consistent with

the school norms more easily gravitate to such positions of privilege, while other students, such as poor or working class, and racial or ethnic minority youth, may face such contradictions, discouragement, and material barriers that they have little choice but to opt out, either literally by dropping out of school, or symbolically by tuning out and skipping classes. While not condoning this strategy of disengagement, a critical pedagogy insists on taking the opposition expressed through apathy seriously. As McLaren (1989) declares, “no emancipatory pedagogy will ever be built out of theories of behaviour which view students as lazy, defiant, lacking in ambition, or genetically inferior” (190).

VII Activism, Authority, and (De)Politicization

"At high school, we are supposed to learn how to think, but only so far. I have learned that."

Andrea, Devonshire Collegiate

Andrea is not being flippant; her "lesson" was suspension from school on account of political activism against what she thought was excessive police presence in her school. Her first encounter with activism was not an "empowering" experience which taught her she could 'make a difference,' but a poignant lesson in relations of power and authority. In this chapter, I tell a different story about the environment clubs, where teacher-student relations are exposed as power relations not mentorships, where constant surveillance creates a climate of secrecy and self-censorship, where ridicule and disrespect are normalized means of regulating appropriate behaviour, and where students are engaged in an exciting learning process of exploration, enthusiasm, fear, anger and confusion, community-building, and empowerment. Not substantially different from the service clubs described in Chapter 5, I suggest the "activist" club described here represents merely a different stage on a continuum of activism and as such reveals the contradictions between the liberal discourse of student-centred participatory action and the authoritarian hierarchy of schooling.

Organizing for Environmental Activism

"... people are living in this dream world in the future, in this bottled up world and they think 'ah, we live in such a beautiful world.' They have a window that's a beautiful photograph, but then a guy knocks it down and goes, 'oh god, is that what the world is really like?'"

[Sketch for a skit, Devonshire Collegiate]

This was the message the environment club at Devonshire Collegiate hoped to get across to their peers during Earth Week 1998: reminding them of the world "out there" by knocking down their walls to let in a little reality. The group planned an ambitious schedule of events for the school, addressing issues of transportation, energy and water conservation, waste reduction and recycling, local economic development, and global inequity. As the highlight of their year, Earth Week required hours of planning and organization, such as coordinating workshops and presentations by five local environmental organizations and speakers; writing and performing a skit for the entire school; soliciting student work from Science, Geography and English classes on

environmental themes to display in the hallways; and gaining bureaucratic approval for each initiative. Their goal was to begin filling the silence on environmental issues they experienced since coming to the school. The group was also involved in growing wetland plants for habitat restoration; getting several composters going in the school; installing solar panels donated by Ontario Hydro; and planning a garden of native species: projects which resembled the activities of the other clubs in my study. I maintain that there were some striking differences though. These included the students' motivations for creating the club, the collaborative process they adopted to fulfil their goals, their perception of their role within the school, their engagement of environmental issues, and their relations with school authority figures and structures.

Andrea, one of the club co-chairs, described how her process of consciousness-raising began when she decided to take the environmental studies course offered at the school.

"When I was little, there was always this buzz about environmental concerns ...even *Seventeen* magazine had articles on being environmentally-friendly. Gradually you knew it was there, but you know, it didn't really affect you. But after hearing about it 200 or 2,000 times, you finally reach the point where you feel it's something worth finding out more about. So, last year, I took environmental studies..."

So "disturbed and scared to death" by what she learned in the course, Andrea and a few others in the class began talking about some ideas for the environment club. None of them were members at the time, but they knew the club was not doing much and together they became the co-chairs and leaders for the club when it was resuscitated by the teacher in September. The others explained their motivation for joining in a similar way:

Beth: "I know why I joined. Because I've been so totally frustrated by environmental things, like seeing forests being cut down, and like being aware of it and not being able to do anything about it. So I just thought, so OK, you do stuff locally, you affect globally, right? So I could, I could, .. that's a dream..."

Dana: "I've always been interested in it. I don't know why ...well, I've always been pretty afraid of technology, I think, because it's advancing so quickly and it doesn't seem like people see how, ...well they see the prospects, but they don't understand the impact of it and that kind of scares me because I'd like to think that in the future I would have some green space... Last year, I'd been meaning to join the club, but I think the reason why I didn't was because there wasn't much going on and also all the students were like OACs and they don't have that really welcoming feeling."

A few suggested that environmental activism was just “logic,” something their “practical” families had always done or had been constantly stressed in elementary school, but the underlying theme to the club was this apocalyptic and almost angry or frustrated sense that something needed to be done. More so than in the other clubs, this group was formed by the joining together of environmentally-concerned students and maintained their primary focus on their political rather than social function.

They described their beginning as an “enthusiastic moment,” and although they felt they had lost some of that enthusiasm as they experienced all the challenges behind organizing ideas into concrete projects, a great deal of energy infused every meeting. At the beginning of their lunch-hour meetings, while they unpacked their lunches and waited for others to arrive, the students would share environmental information or news about upcoming events, gathered mainly from newspapers, the internet, or other groups they were involved with. Usually these discussions started with bursts of enthusiasm for some innovative programme, such as the City of Guelph’s wet/dry waste disposal system, or the ethical and ecological practices of the Body Shop plant, or the Stop the Seal Hunt campaign. Examples of alternative approaches were shared as motivational seeds of potential:

Dana: “I read last year, I don’t know where, but it was in this book, of this little town, I think in the States, where everyone who lives there is--the *whole town* is environmentally-friendly. Have you heard of that place? [I shake my head ‘no.’]. They have no cars, it’s like no cars running through it, everyone travels by bicycle, all their houses are run by solar panels, and everyone uses like, they have a compost in their backyard, they all share things. It’s a really tight neighbourhood and community...”

Several of them presented themselves as being in an ongoing process of learning and suggested their membership in the club helped. Beth tried to explain how she thought that club “indirectly kind of affected [her]:”

“...because like previous years I didn’t even know when Earth Week was on, until when it [was] done, and then [it was] like ‘oh, last week was, you know, Earth Day,’ but this year, I kind of realized it was on and what kind of activities they have in the City of Toronto, so I thought that was interesting. And somehow through this I also learned more about environmental issues, just by conversations and all that and that skit that came in... Yeah, like, if I wasn’t in this group, I might not have paid so much attention to it, [but] because I’m in this group, I feel, you know, I feel like there is an obligation for me to know a bit more than others so that I can inform them.”

Andrea described how she thinks environmental consciousness comes to one slowly, “as

little moments,” and how it is a long process of learning: “I had a friend tell me about using a hankie instead of Kleenex and at first I was disgusted, ‘that’s dirty!’ Now I think it’s something I’m going to start trying to do.” She added she also now uses “Many Moons” cloth menstrual pads instead of disposable ones and asked if I was familiar with them. Another time, one student came in at the end of a meeting to share her excitement about attending a large gardening show.

[Cathy enters here, interrupts and talks quickly, excitedly.]

Cathy: I wanted to tell you guys a few things. I just, OK, I .. Wednesday before the March Break, I went to the Garden Show and I found a lot of environmental info, information about the earth, pollution, gardens, and all kinds of information on earth and on land and on water. So, I was going to bring it in, ... I was just thinking ...I mean it’s a lot of info and stuff, it could go on the bulletin board.

Andrea: Great.

Aung-Sun: How was it?

Cathy: Good, very good. A lot of information, I didn’t have enough bags for it all [laughter]. Yeah, two floors of it and all stuffed with information. I only took half of it ‘cause I only had one bag [laugh]. I could have taken three or four bags, but that’s not fair to the other people. [laughter].

With tact and skill, the co-chairs, all senior students, suggested she work with another grade 10 student on putting up all the information on the environment club’s bulletin board, giving them their own project and independence. In the weeks after, the two girls spent the club meeting times working on the bulletin board, identifying this as their institutional role within the club, their enthusiasm directed into action.

Process was important to the students, and their efforts at being fully collaborative and open were probably what enabled and sustained this sharing, learning atmosphere. They actively tried to share work and information, keeping everyone up-to-date and always making decisions as a group. This was not done formally, but rather in a considerate way. I noticed a few times when one or two students would be concerned the co-chairs were taking on too much and would offer to lighten their loads or when tasks were distributed out even when they might have been done more efficiently by one person. When they discussed the club with me, several of the students on different occasions immediately mentioned the importance of group process and how much they had learned about teamwork. One of the successes of Earth Week, according to Andrea, was that everyone was able to make some contribution in pulling off the event. Dana described her feelings on the process:

“Well, we had to develop a plan. We had some members in the group and so we sort of divided the group members up, so each of us would go take on a task and

have set deadlines and have it done by then. And that took a lot, but we actually did it as a club, and that's what, I guess it's teamwork, and we pulled that off, I think, really well. That's really important."

In particular, they wanted everyone to have a role in the club and, on reflecting back over the year, felt that they lost a lot of people in the beginning because they were too slow to organize and give people a role to play:

Beth: ...then after the first meeting actually got started, people dropped and no one showed up anymore. So, it's kind of sad.

Dana: I think it's because we were late in actually organizing what we wanted to do. And some of the people didn't feel that they were of any help just being here.

Beth: And I think we didn't assign them, like, an exact task to do, so they didn't know where to start and then, so, they kind of sit around and then they kind of realize 'OK, I'm not doing anything.' Yeah.

Despite their concerns, they tended to draw more people into the group over the months I was with them. They would solicit help from different classmates for assistance with writing the skit or setting up the stage for the school assembly and these students then stayed around with the club and came to subsequent meetings.

Also distinctive about this club was their perception of their role within the school. Unlike the other clubs, the Devonshire group did not narrow in on the school but actively sought out community contacts and participated in environmental education programmes or organizing outside the school, a strategy both reflective of their commitment to the issue and indicative of how they were able to maintain a critical distance from the norms and regulations of the school. Andrea was an active member of the Board-wide Student Environment Network through which she organized a student conference and initiated a petition letter presented in person to an aide of the provincial Minister of Natural Resources. Beth, Dana, and Aung-Sun attended different workshops at the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto on water, waste, and energy conservation and later returned as volunteers with elementary school children. Flo attended classes at an alternative school and participated in Outward Bound, an outdoor adventure-based leadership training programme. The students reported quite positively on these experiences, sharing bits and pieces during their meetings. They called upon many of these contacts and experiences when organizing events for the school audience, seeing themselves in a liaison role, letting in a bit of reality.

Drawing on their growing experiences and knowledge, the club sought to educate and politicize the school. Like the other clubs, they were quite concerned with the apathy

of other students and the depoliticized student atmosphere of high school, but also with the absence of environmental content within the formal curriculum and official school policy generally. The club was disturbed about the attitude that “high school is more about where you fit in” and felt a lot of their efforts were directed at changing other students’ perspectives and, indeed, the “image of cool” within the school.

“We’ve mainly been focused on making the school aware of some things and about us, about our club. We just mainly want the school to be more into these issues, like we are and perhaps let them know what they can do, as well, instead of just sitting back and knowing that this problem exists. ...if we as a club maintain or encourage [being] green, then I guess that gives us an image. And so probably new students will come in [and] they’ll, they should be able to respect that.”

But the students felt the issue went deeper than just what is popular and not. They also targeted teachers in their projects, particularly through asking them to cover environmental content within their courses so as to be able to contribute students’ posters and displays for Earth Week. Their ability to get a few teachers to participate was counted as another of their Earth Week successes. The environmental studies course itself had been an important catalyst for the three students who had taken it and they took up many of its themes into their analysis and projects. But they still felt the school could do so much more:

“I find that there’s not much about it in school, we don’t learn enough about it. ...But with something like environmental studies as a course, you have the opportunity to actually learn about it and it was a really--I found it really interesting--‘cause it was something I liked and I wanted to learn about it, um, yeah and I think I did learn a lot. Um, see in Science we’d expect something from it, but we don’t. I don’t think we’re, it’s too isolated, everything is from the textbook, you’re not really out there...”

Dana took the environmental studies course in grade 12 and said she wished there was an OAC course to follow it up. “Knowledge is power,” the club announced to open their Earth Week assembly and they were determined to do what they could to empower their peers with an analysis of our environmental reality. In fact, students at both Devonshire Collegiate and Central Collegiate named taking their environmental studies courses as part of their activism.

Even more significant than curriculum, perhaps, is the overall climate and ideology of the school. Andrea explained that “it is difficult to talk about political things in high school.” Students “don’t care” or are “scared of it” and teachers don’t feel school is an appropriate place for politics. She could not quite put her finger on it, but insisted it was

the whole school atmosphere, and submitted “it’s much easier to talk about waste reduction than the seal hunt.” Beth noted how business is talked about so much more than environment now and wondered if it is connected to the current political climate. When I tried to explore this issue about “school atmosphere,” the students conceded that their choice of projects was influenced by an attempt to avoid controversy.

Dana: But, um, everything else [besides recycling and litter campaigns], it’s a lot of like, interpreting. You have to really not go too deep and not say anything offensive if you want something. But you also have to be sure you...

CL: Who do you have to be careful about?

Dana: Oh, I think the politics, and um...

CL: In that you can’t raise something controversial within the school?

Dana: The school, yeah, that too.

CL: Because of students?

Dana: Um...

CL: Because of teachers?

Dana: I think teachers, yeah teachers.

Beth: Yeah.

CL: They don’t want you taking sides? [They had made reference to not wanting students to take sides earlier in the discussion.]

Dana: Yeah.

Beth: And I don’t think the teachers want to get involved. That’s why they don’t want us to take sides, because once we do then you know teachers have to, you know, support us somehow like, some teachers will start supporting us and then some don’t and then it gets into this whole thing. I think that’s why they didn’t want it.

...

CL: So do you think that that shaped in some way what issues you have taken up and gone with, to avoid...?

Dana: Um, yeah, yeah.

Beth: Because, I don’t know, too, we’re, to me, this is like the first year that the environment club has actually you know done something, so...

CL: You wanted it to work smoothly?

Beth: Yeah. We wanted it to have a good start because if we have a really rocky start then later on we won’t know what will happen, you know, the club may disappear or whatever, because we’re creating like so much stress in the school. So, you know, I think we should start off slowly and then maybe later on maybe we can get into, like, other issues, like bigger issues.

The students were actively censoring themselves, quite aware of some need--and not only within the *school*, it seems--to avoid controversy and conflict. Indeed, Andrea felt the key lesson she had learned from her suspension was to be more cautious and circumspect in approaching controversial issues. While her first act of politicization was to poster the school with her objections, this year she ensured the club had official approval before it proceeded with any initiative. The students at Central Collegiate similarly explained that

they too chose their activities to avoid controversy: "We just have to make sure that we don't get too much in anyone else's way."

Regulation and Authority

"It is June 3rd, the year 2028, the warmest year on record and 5 degrees warmer than the same day thirty years ago in 1998...' The voice continues, listing emigrations and natural disaster in Indonesia and Bangladesh; global sunlight curfews and government regulated gas masks; dried out prairie land, and intravenous food rations. "To move to our economic report, the GNP has expanded and the global economy is booming...' Click.

Actor 1: Why did you turn it off?

Actor 2: It's too depressing.

Actor 1: What do you mean depressing? Didn't you hear? The GNP expanded. Our quality of life is improving."

[Environment Club skit, Earth Week Festival, Devonshire Collegiate]

While the students admitted they had expressly adjusted--depoliticized--their goals and discourse in order to avoid controversy within the school, I was able to identify a few mechanisms by this message was passed on to the students. Much of this process was subtle, and teachers will no doubt contest my interpretations of events, but I argue the interactions between the students and their teachers reveal how the school structure and ideology functioned to silence and restrain the efforts of the club. Despite the principal's apparent support for the environment club and the approvals she gave to most of their activities, the school atmosphere of surveillance and regulation drove the students to continual self-censoring and swallowed most of their time in negotiating for bureaucratic approval. The content of and contacts for the club activities were carefully monitored by the teaching staff and school principal and direct or indirect interference in students' activities was common. The result was that here the teacher-student relations were exposed as power relations, no matter how much the teachers tried to merely be mentors and advisors. I argue that the school's approval system seeped deeper than a process of proposals and approvals/refusals into a culture of surveillance, hierarchy, restraint and conformity, enforced and reinforced through openly confrontational, subtly demeaning, and continually defensive interactions with their teachers. What is missing here is an understanding of the institutional demands and restraints placed on the teachers which may have placed them in such positions and roles. This absence is likely a result of my research method which focused more on the experiences of students and on my social interaction with the teachers, structured in several cases by a significant age gap. In at

least one interview, a teacher downplayed and avoided discussing the conflict and controversy he had faced in his school from administration and colleagues; I was unaware of this until I was told the story second-hand.

From the beginning, I noticed how the staff advisor for the Devonshire environment club was being discouraging--while attempting to be practical--in his relations with the students. As the students discussed their plans, all gathered around a table eating their lunches, he would interject from the other side of the room: "this is a lot to do" or "be careful not to take on too much " or "all you have now is ideas, nothing on paper, no one confirmed." His comments were offered in a paternal, helpful, "I care" kind of way, but the students were clearly bothered by his attitude, looking down and not responding when he spoke or looking at each other and continuing their discussion as if he were not speaking. After one series of such comments, Andrea at last responded with a well-articulated summary of all the tasks they had to do and when they would be done, assuming a stance of defense, edged with a tone of defiance. They did not trust that they had their advisor's support, asking him one day quite pointedly whether he would be willing to participate in the environment fair they were planning. They had been discussing the opposition to their idea voiced at the science department meeting when Mr. Robinson entered:

[Mr. Robinson enters and goes over to a far table and sits down.]

Andrea: Mr. Robinson, Mr. Robinson, do you think there would be teachers in the Geography department who'd be interested in doing projects? for the fair?

Erin: Mr. Robinson, *you* should be interested in... [emphasis in voice]

Andrea: Yeah. [laughter].

Mr. Robinson: I would say .. they're not doing courses around or specifically on environmental issues.

Andrea: Um-hum, well neither are our science teachers.

[faint dialogue among club members]

Mr. Robinson: I can ask, but I would be surprised.

Andrea: OK, would, are you interested? Are YOU interested? So, would you like us to hold this fair?

Mr. Robinson: Well, the environmental club [inaudible over the faint dialogue among club members].

Andrea: Well, the thing is, we, we still, we have to, .. Right now, I think we just have to plan it with this, with getting, finding out whether or not teachers are open to the idea, and the question is still mainly in the hands of the teachers, or if they want to do this, how they feel it would be best to incorporate it .. into their class. Like, we don't, we don't want to rewrite anyone's curriculum, or like .. We don't want to take over their classtime or anything. Um, what we are really looking for is people who would be open to, uh, doing this.

Mr. Robinson: OK, that's fine, but I think [inaudible]...

[Through-out this exchange there is clear tension between Mr. Robinson and the

students, expressed in their voices and body motions such as by looking down or away. While Andrea talks to Mr. Robinson, the other girls smile at each other and make small talk.]

The tension and mistrust expressed in this interaction and the pattern of teacher-interrogator and student-defender were common. Over time, it seemed to me that it was not solely the negativity of Mr. Robinson that bothered the students--in fact, they were highly confident of their abilities and aware of their limitations--but the surveillance.

Their staff advisor routinely grilled them on the status of their projects and the interaction was invariably tense and defensive. The students were very well-organized and seemed to be handling the task of organizing quite well, asking for assistance whenever they felt they needed it, and thus were resentful of the supervision and 'check-ups' of their staff advisor. This brief interaction was typical:

Dana and Aung-Sun work their way through the list of activities and tasks for people to do, starting with the morning announcements, lunch-time activities in the mall, fundraising, and an afternoon bicycle workshop. Mr. Robinson returns with a list of department heads for them. He listens to their discussion, then cuts in: "I thought the play was part of the overall programme." Aung-Sun turns to him and explains the difference between the play and the assembly. Mr. Robinson tells her to get permission from the principal and to maybe ask only for the grade 9s and 10s. He then asks how long the play is going to be, and who the drama group is, whether it is a professional troupe or not, so Aung-Sun hands him the fax from "Just Earth" to which he gives his approval. Aung-Sun says she will go speak to the principal and talk to the department heads. Mr. Robinson hands her his list, saying he didn't put the Math or the Computer Science departments on it.

Dana: "So, what's going on during the week?"

Aung-Sun: "Oh, OK, yeah."

[The girls turn around and resume their discussion, literally turning their backs to Mr. Robinson without a word.]

Sometimes these 'question-periods' verged on hostile, yet civility was always maintained by the students as they held back their criticisms and complaints:

Mr. Robinson: Let me just ask: do you have a guest speaker?

Andrea: Yes.

Mr. Robinson: OK. Who?

Andrea: [a well-known local environmental educator employed by the Board.]

Mr. Robinson: Alright.

Andrea: Yeah.

Mr. Robinson: OK. Now, did you determine a day?

Andrea: Yup. The 16th.

Mr. Robinson: Did you run this by [the principal]?

Andrea: Yup. [She goes on to list all the events for which they have received permission].

Mr. Robinson: I didn't even know that you'd had a date.

[all at the same time]. Andrea: [defensively] Well, yeah, we went to...
 Beth: You told us to...
 Mr. Robinson: Yeah, I know...
 Beth: [sharply] You didn't... OK. [smiles and doesn't pursue her sentence.]
 Andrea: ...we went to talk to [the principal] yesterday . . .
 Mr. Robinson: OK.
 Beth: I need to go because...
 [Commotion and dialogue as Beth gathers her binders and thermos to leave.]
 Mr. Robinson: How long is that going to take?
 Andrea: The assembly? [The principal] said try to get it under an hour...
 Mr. Robinson: Now, is this open to the whole school?
 Andrea: Yes, or at least that's how it stands right now.
 Mr. Robinson: You can't fit thirteen hundred people in the auditorium.
 Andrea: Don't they have whole school assemblies, though?
 Mr. Robinson: Yes, but normally a large percentage don't show up, especially OACs.
 Andrea: We could make it, like, just junior grades or just senior grades, if we want to, or we could make it both.
 Dana: Actually, I mean, if you want it an hour, can't we have, like, the junior first and then after have the seniors?
 Andrea: That would mean we would have to do it twice. That would take too long.
 Mr. Robinson: Now you're asking for two hours of [the guest speaker].
 Andrea: Yeah. Well, . . .
 Dana: No, I think having, like, the whole school would be fine because, well a lot of people are going to skip anyways.
 Mr. Robinson: Did [the principal] say anything about [having] just one assembly or a whole school assembly?
 Andrea: No.

More than merely rigidly and accusingly checking up on the students, this dialogue seems to suggest that the teacher was deliberately trying to find fault with and obstacles to the students' plans--to the point of creating the imaginary obstruction of the limited capacity of the assembly hall. Mr. Robinson already knows this is not really a problem because a significant proportion of students skip assemblies, yet he presents them with a problem they are powerless to change and uses the discouragement of "you can't" language to do so. The way he explained himself, however, was that he wanted the club to be successful, and the efforts he put into creating and developing both the club and the environmental studies course testify to this commitment. He was concerned that the students had "too many ideas" and would not be able to follow through on them. He hoped his questions will make them aware of the work involved and help identify blind spots they may have missed in their organizing.

The students, however, reacted to him like teenagers to an overbearing parent, keeping their heads down and eyes averted, offering short one or two-word responses,

and returning to their own agenda as soon as he let off the questions. He became increasingly frustrated for trying to help yet being cut out, while they would avoid him except when they needed help with technical information, such as the names of department heads. At other times, the students actively ignored and shut Mr. Robinson out of their planning and conversations. When the students mentioned how they would need environmental displays to participate in a City of Toronto event, Mr. Robinson started looking for some, laying them out across the tables in the room as he found them. None of the club members paid any attention and eventually he put them away. This episode was repeated when the club discussed selling environmental T-shirts for a fundraiser during Earth Week. The students were not very enthusiastic about the idea, more interested in the hands-on work they were doing themselves and concerned that students did not have "that kind of money," but Mr. Robinson had done it each year before with previous clubs and unpacked all the promotional T-shirts, pinning them up around the room, again to be ignored. On another occasion, when a student stopped by to offer the club some free composters, the club members asked me for advice, ignoring Mr. Robinson who had already begun to speak. This pattern suggested that the students were resistant to Mr. Robinson's supervision and interrogation and disapproval, but chose to express this in nonconfrontational ways, such as body language and tone.

More interestingly, time showed that the students were routinely subjected to this kind of opposition, surveillance, and disrespect by their teachers. Their idea of the environmental fair provides a salient example. Early in March, when beginning to organize for Earth Week, the students were informed of--or perhaps overheard--some opposition being voiced to the environment fair idea at a science department meeting. They were never able to get the full story of what happened or why, but rather had merely bits of information passed along to them by teachers and students.

Aung-Sun: "I think he said it was mostly positive feedback. There were some people who thought well [look at the] school and garbage and all that and they thought it was filthy, so they got really upset and went 'oh, why doesn't the environment club just clean up the cafeteria or something, you know, aren't they going to be wasting paper making posters.'"

Dana: "I overheard teachers saying about Earth Week, they said that we should, you know, do something about cleaning up the school, instead of doing what we did, like the whole environment issue."

More than just a refusal to participate, or a rejection of their proposal, this response represents a diversion of the club's projects into other areas--from curriculum and

awareness-raising into school beautification--and a dismissive critique: their efforts would be a 'waste of paper' in both the literal and symbolic sense. Rather than offer a rationale for not being able, or willing to, participate, the teachers created an almost inescapable problem for the students: how were the students to communicate with their peers if they were not to use paper? As it is, the students insisted they only used paper with recycled-content and they made their poster out of magazine clippings and used white paper--taking the criticism quite seriously. But the tone and nature of the criticism suggest that wasting paper was not the central issue at all, particularly when teachers generate much more paper than students do. It seemed the underlying message was that the students had no right interfering with the way they organize and run their classes: they should be targeting the school grounds rather than teachers and curriculums. Unable or unwilling to say this directly, the message was expressed through this show of power where the teachers not only refused to participate, they ridiculed and deflected the students' agenda, redirecting them to less political forums, such as cleaning up the litter in the school. The students dealt with this trivialization and discouragement remarkably well, persevering and approaching the department again, and remaining sensitive to the teachers' predicaments, as the following quote shows.

Andrea: "Right now, I think we just have to plan it with this, finding out whether or not teachers are open to the idea, and the question is still mainly in the hands of the teachers, or if they want to do this, how they feel it would be best to incorporate it .. into their class. Like, we don't, we don't want to rewrite anyone's curriculum, or like .. We don't want to take over their classtime or anything. What we are really looking for is people who would be open to doing this."

In the end, only two teachers from the Science department participated in the environment fair and the incident remained sharp in the students' memories, mentioned several times in the remaining months.

I never met the principal of the school, but her authority and influence was present at all the club's meetings. Every idea was followed by a trip to the principal. Meetings started with reports from the principal's office and the first question late-comers to meetings often asked was "Did you talk to [the principal]?" or they were greeted with "We talked to [the principal] and she has OKed our plans so far." Despite her apparent support for the environment club, the rigid approval process and tight surveillance kept them fearful of inappropriate gaffs and they cautiously regulated their own proposals according to what they perceived was acceptable. Significantly more time was spent negotiating the bureaucratic process than discussing environmental issues themselves.

They had to find out how to approach department heads and the school newsletter and often arranged to meet in groups to approach certain teachers with their questions. Documentation was often necessary to validate and legitimize their requests, either through formal letters to the different departments--typed on the overbooked school computers--or from the external guests they were inviting. Most of their guests were as mainstream and respectable as they could get: representatives from the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto "MetroWorks" programme; representatives from the crown corporation Ontario Hydro; an environmental educator working in the Toronto Board; and the Community Bicycle Network, a community organization which had a history of contact with the school. The one exception, a theatre troupe from the Multiracial Network on Environmental Justice which I had recommended to them, was scrutinized by their staff advisor: "is it a professional troupe?" While it was not, the students were able to claim it was on the evidence of a "professional-looking" fax from the organization.

Accurately locating the key sources of power and validity in the school structure, the students had aimed for access to formal and official channels, such as sending a mailout with report cards, holding a school assembly, inviting academic departments to participate in an environment fair, and making announcements over the P.A. system. This approach brought them into more contact--and conflict--with the administration and teaching staff than the student-aimed activities (such as picking up litter) of the other clubs, but it served to increase their profile and impact dramatically. The response and audience they had for the whole school assembly overwhelmed the rest of the Earth Week workshops and events which only attracted about a dozen interested students. Their teachers and peers congratulated them on their success, saying how interesting and informative the session had been--the best assembly of the year, according to one teacher. The students measured their success in another way:

Andrea: "I'm just happy that no one left. Whenever we have an assembly, if they run like 5 minutes over, people are always standing up to go, but I was watching the audience like a hawk and I didn't see anyone stand up to go..."

I, too, was watching the audience, as well as the club and the teachers, like a hawk. Andrea's observations were quite accurate, not only did students not leave early or clamour to go when the assembly ran ten minutes over time, more than a dozen students crowded the club and speaker at the end, asking questions and expressing interest in the club's proposal for a garden. What Andrea failed to mention was the actions and attitudes of the teachers that I noted in these field notes:

The auditorium is a classical, Greek/academia-referenced room, with spiral columns and fake statues in white trim on yellow walls. Large Canadian and Ontario flags are hung on either side of the stage. Portraits of men in academic gowns line the walls, along with lists of university scholarship recipients. A balcony extends up the back, with seating on three sides of the auditorium.

More and more students are coming in. The girls stop practising their skit and instead go behind a large screen on the stage to finish up. The noise level increases with the rush of students. Teachers come in and gather at the entrance. They call commands down the rows: 'move down to the end,' 'fill it up.' Students try to get seats together: 'how many seats do you have over there?' The room is getting close to full. The teachers stand by the door, watching. Some stand on the other side by the other door and a few line the walls up in the balcony--they remind me of security personnel, lining the walls and guarding the exits and entrances. One young teacher in front of me, wearing sandals and shorts, swings her keys back and forth into her hand. It even makes me uncomfortable, each whack, whack as she catches them in her hand. None sit down, even though there is an empty seat next to me and elsewhere next to students.

Here the teachers both refused to take on a 'student' position, talking amongst themselves on the sidelines rather than attending to the presentation, and assumed the role of security and surveillance personnel, embodying the culture of intimidation which reigned in the school.

Concurrent with their preparations for Earth Week, the students had been considering planning a roof-top garden at the school which they announced in principle at the school assembly to invite more student involvement. Before they had their first planning meeting, however, one of the science teachers came to their club meeting, apparently on the invitation of one of the not-so regular attenders who did not show up. The entire saga was a demonstration of the unequal power relations between students and teachers and I would argue it undermines the liberal rhetoric of student empowerment expounded by the teachers. When Mr. Scott enters the room, Mr. Robinson and I are arranging an interview time. Taking me for a student, I presume, Mr. Scott interrupts the conversation to announce he has been invited to the club meeting, but only has half the lunch-hour available:

Mr. Scott: "Do these meetings last the full lunch hour?"

Mr. Robinson looks at me and together we say "pretty much."

Mr. Scott: "Maybe today we'll make it half the lunch."

Mr. Robinson: "I just let the students go and do what they want to do. I don't run the meetings."

Mr. Scott: "Oh. Do they usually come on time?"

Again, Mr. Robinson looks to me as he answers "yes."

We resume our conversation and the students wander in and begin to chat and wait for the others to arrive, a little more relaxed this time as it is the week after Earth Week. They have planned to discuss how they feel the Earth Week Festival went, but Mr. Scott interrupts and explains he is "sort of a guest speaker" and doesn't have time to wait any longer. He informs them that the teachers have been discussing their rooftop garden proposal in the staffroom and he has come to tell them he has a better idea: to locate the garden in the school yard on the site of the portable which is about to be removed. As he elaborates on all the benefits and possibilities associated with the garden, such as getting senior citizens and other community members involved, Aung-Sun interjects that they had "already thought of that." Mr. Scott, referring to his authority as department head, continues that he is aware of things going on and knows they would not be able to get approval for their rooftop garden--"No one has told you this because you haven't yet submitted an official proposal asking to do this, but there has been a lot of talk"--but he has already run *his* idea by the principal and she thinks it is "pretty good."

The students, taken aback and insulted by this appropriation of their project, reply quite stiffly that they have already prepared a few alternative plans to the rooftop, all of which will be shared in their meeting with the principal on the following day.

Mr. Scott: "Oh you have? Well, now you have another option to consider."

Mr. Scott then carefully says how he would appreciate it if they didn't go around saying that he told them all this information: "I just wanted to take this creative energy and redirect it in a positive way. I didn't want to see it get stifled."

Andrea: "Well, thanks, I'll pass the information along to Flo [the student who had apparently invited him.]"

In many ways, Mr. Scott had violated the principles of group process which the club has established and Andrea's response both brushed him off as not important to their current meeting and reaffirmed their integrity by refusing to take Flo's project away from her, like Mr. Scott had just done to them. For all the apparent "support" of the teachers for the idea, they seem to have had little respect for the individual students themselves. And the contrast between Mr. Scott's invasion of their space and the extensive preparations they went through to approach him about Earth Week demonstrate their inequality. Each time they had to see him, they would find an afternoon when they all could meet, plan to catch him at his class right after school--"don't go to your lockers first" were their instructions--and have a written proposal to present. They joked about bringing chocolate and finding him in a good mood.

His points made, Mr. Scott continues to offer his opinions on the garden, such as

whether or not vandalism will be a problem--"I've been thinking about it and while people might monkey around with it, over time they should get tired of it and think of it as that dumb garden"--and only when he has run through his own perspective on the whole thing, does he ask the club about their views.

Mr. Scott: "Now I wanted to know, what sort of garden were you thinking of? Benches and a cute leisure park or a vegetable garden? Because if it was going to be a vegetable garden you'd have problems with it being raided .. well, have you any idea?"

Despite his statement that he was there in support of their idea, he ridiculed what that might be, "cute leisure park" and "dumb garden," and presumed they have given it less thought than he has, "have you any idea?" With this, Mr. Scott announced he was busy and must go and the club returned to their meeting. Dana asks Andrea to relate what happened on her trip the previous day to present the petition and letter to the provincial Minister of Natural Resources, and then they move on to their original agenda and evaluate their Earth Week festival. Mr. Scott appears again the following week, a time we have set aside for a discussion for my research. Dana asks him if he is here about the garden and when he says "yes," she mouths quietly to me "I guess there are two meetings going on." Again, the students expressed their resistance to this intrusion and interference in subtle, nonconfrontational ways which seem to go almost unnoticed by the teachers.

When the club met for their scheduled meeting to discuss the garden project, they decided to proceed cautiously as they had not had enough time to research the options and process yet. They agreed to submit a proposal to the principal asking the Board to hold off re-sodding the land when the portable is removed, so that the club would have enough time to consider whether they want to propose a garden for the site or not. They peppered me with questions about the amount of time, money, and work that would be involved, and sources of resources, information, and funding when I volunteered that I had some experience with naturalization projects. They were concerned about the long-term viability of the project and whether they would have a staff advisor to supervise it, knowing that their club advisor would be retiring at the end of the next year. Mr. Scott was not mentioned as an alternative, nor did they presume their project would get approval on account of his talk with the principal.

Certainly this teacher was exceptionally rude. Beyond his behaviour though, the situation revealed a great deal about the power relations and channels of approval within

the school. When the topic came up in the staffroom and teachers were supportive, why did none of them approach the club and ask how could they help? Or offer their encouragement? Why did the club need to be kept in the dark about the technical, logistical and administrative barriers to their proposal? Are all student requests to the principal similarly prefaced by teacher intervention? Rather than facilitate the students' ambitions and analysis, the teachers appeared to work against them and in secrecy from them. The students wanted the privacy and independence to plan their own projects, yet at times required and asked for the technical support and influence of the teachers. The teachers, by contrast, interfered with the content and process of the projects while assuming a stand-offish approach to official and public backing and support, such as Mr. Scott's request for anonymity.

The students at Central Collegiate complained about a similar dynamic with their club advisor. Their project for a rooftop garden was at a stalemate because they could not get the Board architect to return their call and wanted their staff advisor, Mr. Albion, who was great for letting them do what they want to do, to throw some weight behind their phone calls to the Board of Education.

CL: How is he as a staff advisor?

Vivian: Mellow.

Sally: Yeah [laughter].

Theresa: Well, he's sort of, eenh, whatever. He's really good for 'whatever you want to do' but . . .

Vivian: Yeah.

Theresa: But he's not good at initiating stuff.

Sally: Oh yeah, not at all.

Vivian: He's not there really . . .

Theresa: Yeah. Or like helping us like, get ahold of the architect. Because we're students and we don't have pull at the Board and we know that [laugh]. So call the Board for us, get the name of the architect for us, things like that.

Sally: And it's not like we're . . .

Theresa: We're not lazy [loudly], we just . . .

Sally: Yeah.

Theresa: . . .we need help.

Sally: Yeah.

Theresa: And we keep hitting brick walls when we try to get it.

So what lesson is being taught when teachers, in the name of "empowerment" and "student-centred pedagogy," stand aside so that students can experience the frustration of a bureaucratic hierarchy of power? Are they really teaching that "you can make a difference" or that "we will allow you to make a certain kind of 'difference' if you submit to our rules and procedures"? Or that, when the initiative fails, it is the students--who

apparently lack commitment, perseverance, and leadership skills (some of the complaints voiced by the clubs' advisors)--who failed to make it happen? When the isolated events at Devonshire Collegiate are added together--interrogation by the staff advisor, opposition and insults from a departmental meeting, ridicule and interference from a 'supportive' teacher--a disturbing picture of the school emerges. Behind the scenes of the liberal-humanist service club described in chapter 5 we find a culture of surveillance and control in which teachers are complicit.

I argue these students are experiencing the contradiction between the participatory, student-centred rhetoric of high school clubs and the structure and function of the school as a coercive institution which aims to sustain and legitimate the status quo. The emphasis on avoiding conflict and controversy, evident not only at Devonshire, but also Central Collegiate and explicitly stated by the Environmental Education Officer at the Board of Education as one of her objectives, is antithetical to learning and acting for social change. More than that, the subtle nature of much of this control, coupled with the normalization of surveillance and regulation, makes it difficult for the students and teachers themselves to identify and name. But as the students took the possibility of activism seriously, as they aimed to have a significant impact on school attitudes, practices, and culture, they were "disciplined" and taught their appropriate place. For the "good" students in the environment club, this punishment came in the way of surveillance, ridicule, and discouragement rather than explicit force or restraint. And, as "good" students, they quietly--strategically--assumed their appropriate place. None of these incidents blew up into conflict; in each case, the students learned how to appropriately negotiate between their goals for independence and environmental change and what the administration and teachers indicated were acceptable boundaries, becoming more and more cautious--and politically astute--over time. To refer again to Eckert's (1989) parallel between school clubs and the corporate workplace, this process of internalization of norms reflects the social relations which govern upper-level white collar work where employees are given a certain degree of autonomy and control over their work and expected to "regulate their own behaviour." I do not know what would have happened if they had not censored and moderated their activism; they may well have been working from an accurate estimation of the threat they faced. Andrea, at least, was acting under the perception that the authority of the school was backed up by the authority of the police. Perhaps more than an education in environmental issues and action, the students

were receiving an education in 'insider' political work: learning the strategies for achieving one's political goals within mainstream institutions and bureaucracies.

Conclusions

In the enthusiasm of the Devonshire Collegiate environment club, I thought I saw and felt the first steps of politicization, of activism, of organizing for change. What I cannot explain is why the students at Devonshire Collegiate pushed the boundaries of authority when the other clubs in my study did not. I can only speculate that these students came together at a time when each was open to questioning and caring and doing, and together they created an exceptional, exciting moment of learning which, at least so far, they are convinced will stay with them as they pursue their "vision" and agenda into the next school year and join environmental activist groups in university. Perhaps such moments have occurred at the other schools, but have been lost as students graduated or as the bureaucracy wore them down. The teacher claimed this was the first time this particular school had spawned such an "active" club. When and how it will happen again, I cannot predict. More predictable perhaps is the reaction of the school bureaucracy to the freshness of genuine student activism. Giroux (1983) states that "domination and power represent a 'silent' motif of school life" (66). As the students began to challenge the lack of environmental courses and practices within the school and to create their own counter-pedagogy, these relations were exposed as relations of power and authority. While I was disturbed to observe how the students mediated the regulatory structures and interventions by submission and accommodation, it seems this strategy was effective in achieving their goals. The school ethic of avoiding conflict and controversy was gradually adopted by the students who became cautious about taking up complex issues for fear of students taking sides. At the same time, the students' encounter with authority seemed to further politicize them, strengthening their resolve to remain active in environmental concerns in university and making them much more aware of institutional resistance to change.

VIII "How to Save the Earth:" Earth Day, Recycling and Liberal Guilt

"I get offended by cover sheets."
Vivian, Central Collegiate

Consistently, environmentally-conscious teachers and students and high school environment clubs set up and maintain recycling programmes in their schools. Wasting paper was considered one of the most serious environmental problems within the four environment clubs--a veritable sin--and recycling the foundational step to a greener school. Why has this one action, out of so many possible directions a club could take, assumed such prominence? Whose interests and experiences does the recycling agenda serve and reflect? To what kind of social, political and cultural changes does it contribute? In this chapter, I discuss the environmental discourses and politics which emerged in the clubs, considering their political ideologies and effectiveness as well as the different cultural and class dimensions which shaped them. I explore how the recycling phenomenon is consistent with the mainstream liberal discourse of environmentalism, prevalent in newspapers, pop environmental books, children's TV shows, and government educational materials, and I argue this discourse, marked by moral pronouncements and simple solutions, claims to "save the earth" while maintaining the social status quo.

Recycling makes every day "Earth Day" in the school...

Earth Day 1970 has been plugged as the origin of contemporary environmentalism, though at the time it was dismissed by civil rights, antiwar, and environmental radicals as reformist and perhaps even a ploy to distract political attention from class inequities, racial conflict, and the Vietnam War (Darnovsky 1992; Dowie 1995). But as an awareness-raising spectacle, the original Earth Day was spectacularly successful, prompting an unprecedented 20 million people to gather at rallies and teach-ins in what Dowie (1995) terms "the largest one-day outpouring of public support for any social cause in American history" (24). And it was followed by an impressive era of legislative reform in both the United States and Canada, bitterly opposed and countered by resource companies, corporate managers, and government bureaucrats, until practically halted with the rise of neo-conservatism. A state- and corporate-funded, nonconfrontational, public relations opportunity from the outset, Earth Day has become

more and more commercialized over time, with Earth Day 1990 commonly condemned as a corporate greenwash (Darnovsky 1992; Dowie 1995; Luke 1997). Yet its popular image looms large in mainstream consciousness, remembered long after the Brundtland Report and the Rio Summit lie forgotten, ritualized as a children's celebration: Boy Scouts planting trees for a green future (Coleman 1994).

Recycling enjoys a similar prominence within mainstream consciousness and practice. Recycling was first attempted in the late 1960s, but most initiatives failed by the mid-1970s due to lack of government support and lack of a market for used materials (Macdonald 1991). Macdonald (1991) repeats a truism of the environmental movement when he states that recycling was only a small part of the environmental agenda on waste, "eliminating the production of waste in the first place--reduction--was always the top priority, followed by re-use" (208). But somewhere along the line, recycling, clearly the least significant of these steps towards eliminating massive consumption and material waste, became the most prominent. Macdonald (1991) painstakingly traces this history in Ontario to the aluminum industry's successful lobby to remove hard-won legislation regulating re-use in favour of recycling. Offering to heavily subsidize a curbside Blue Box programme,¹⁶ the aluminum industry gained access to the soft drink market and the Ontario government lifted the requirement on refillable glass bottles: image won out over substance. While almost a religion in middle class suburbia, the environmental benefits of recycling are hotly contested among environmentalists. Macdonald (1991) documents that 2 million Ontario households had blue boxes by 1990 which cumulatively diverted 2% of the province's waste from landfills, while using more energy, producing more pollution, and generating more waste in the process. Most importantly, while the recycling of post-consumer waste is usually--though not unequivocally--a better option than not, it "does nothing to alter the fundamentally antiecological qualities of production in contemporary capitalist society" (Luke 1997, 135). Indeed Luke (1997) suggests recycling provides "the symbolic and substantive means to rationalize resource use and cloak consumerism in the appearance of ecological activism" (134).

Schools, in particular, seem to have been quick to jump onto the recycling and Earth Day bandwagons, pulled into eco-service by concerned parents and teachers,

¹⁶ Largely unnoticed by the Ontario population is the industry's pull-out from subsidization, sanctioned by the Harris government in 1996, which threatens to end many curbside recycling programmes in the province as the full costs are downloaded onto municipalities (CIELAP 1996).

zealous kids, and, in Toronto, an increasingly sympathetic school board. The creation of environmental studies curriculum, the Toronto Board's environmental network, and the environment clubs all date to the period 1988-1990 when recycling and Earth Day, as well as myriad environmental disasters and scientific revelations, soared into popular consciousness. Most schools attempt to celebrate Earth Day, at a minimum making announcements of eco-tips each morning over the school P.A. system (this was discussed in all four clubs), sometimes organizing tree planting or recycling sessions, or other awareness-raising or community service activities. The history of many environmental clubs and indeed, three of the four in my study, begins with a recycling programme. In the fourth school, a teacher other than the club advisor had arranged for the administration to run a recycling programme and so I am not sure whether this began before, after, or concurrently with the creation of the club.

"In the beginning too, we wanted to start a Blue Box programme and a litter programme. ...And the first couple of years, the environmental class actually went around and emptied the Blue Boxes once a week. ...We've got new types of containers now and the caretakers look after that. Initially we did paper recycling [too], where we separated the coloured, the white, the newsprint and everything else and we had bins for that which the kids would empty into once a week. And, we still keep up with that, there's one person who [is] elected or chosen per class and they're responsible for bringing the material down once a week and disposing of it." (Teacher at Devonshire Collegiate)

"They were interested in doing *something* and we didn't know where to start, so we started with recycling and that's what we did." [emphasis in voice]
(Teacher at Wychwood Tech)

"...it was more to do something with the recycling, you know, at least to start something. The problem was the first year we did it, that's all we did. And everybody saw us as recyclers. We went around from floor to floor and picked up. Everybody left their bins out in the hall and we went through all the bins. ...It was fun at the beginning, you know, it was doing something and all that sort of stuff, but then it sort of became pretty old, fast. ...And it's frustrating too because ...everybody's attitudes towards actually using the recycling bins is very different. We did lots of work trying to get, making sure everybody had green bins and then you'd find them being used to cart home stuff and, er, you know, full of something they're not supposed to be full of." (Teacher at Wychwood Tech)

CL: When did Riverside first have an environment club?

T: Eight, nine, years ago. ...Recycling became the bandwagon of the Board and dammit, we were going to have vibrant recycling programmes and it was mandated that every school should have a recycling committee. And it was largely, if not wholly, a teacher initiative. ...Frankly I don't remember if it started with me or not. But certainly when I got involved, I said this is nonsense. I want kids involved. ...I don't believe in the recycling programme. I believe it's a scam. ...[But] I did see the

point in getting kids involved, because it's something and it was easy to get them involved in, relatively easy. Um, just hasn't been effective.
(Teacher at Riverside Tech)

The rationale for taking on recycling as a school project fits very nicely with the liberal "individual empowerment" goal of school clubs. Over and over, the teachers mentioned how recycling was easy to do and something workable to start with so that the club would be "doing something." Not mentioned by the teachers explicitly, but a significant aspect of the "ease" of recycling is the lack of controversy surrounding recycling. While some teachers, administrative staff and students might be "lazy" or "not care enough" to participate, few people would dispute the merits of recycling. The teacher at Riverside was alone in his critique and in fact was frustrated that the students in his club wanted to do recycling regardless.

I first came across the recycling phenomenon at three student environmental conferences organized in the Toronto area in 1997 and 1998, prior to starting my research. In roundtable sessions, students shared their frustrations at getting recycling up and running and insisted that it was most important to get recycling going before starting any other projects, such as fundraising or naturalization. Recycling was not approached by the students--and maybe not even the teachers--as just one of many environmental actions which could be taken, nor was it presented as a practice which should be discussed or debated because of its dubious environmental (not to say political) benefits. Rather, the environmental value of recycling was taken as truth; it was considered foundational to environmental action and an indicator of the "greenness" of the school. Both the students and teachers' ideal green school was framed around recycling, litter and Earth Day, the mainstays of liberal apolitical environmentalism:

"My ideal would be to see every room with recycling as second nature, every time there's Earth Week and Wildlife week and all that stuff, it's a school-wide thing that not just eight people in the eco-club are trying to get through to 8,000 [exaggeration]. It's more that, you know, people are involved that way. I'd like to see events where students are out there like cleaning up the grounds and actually looking after the flowerbeds"
(Teacher at Wychwood Tech)

"We wanted to even some day in the future have a Devonshire clean-up day, I guess, so we could all go out and pick up garbage, but we haven't gotten there. We thought more in terms of what we would do for Earth Week because, or Earth Day, that was our highlight of the year, I guess."
(Student at Devonshire Collegiate)

The Earth Day and recycling trends have not only been picked up because they are easy hands-on projects for a group of students to take on, but have come to represent and, in some cases, replace, environmental issues broadly. For example, when I asked the students and teachers about environmental issues generally, most immediately started to talk about recycling or litter:

CL: So you think, you're saying not a lot of people were listening? What's the general atmosphere do you think in the school towards environmental stuff?

Wendy: Ignorance.

Theresa: Oh, I don't know. We have a paper, a fine paper recycling programme every Friday. It's a schoolwide thing, with every classroom.

Sally: Yeah, but I mean walk through the halls at lunchtime, walk outside and, you know, the paper and things . . .

Wendy: The fields are totally disgusting.

Theresa: Oh yeah, people don't understand the concept of not littering.

Wendy: You know what I've actually seen, like someone, and even my science teacher was talking about it this morning, like someone is drinking a can of pop or whatever and there's like a recycling bin over there maybe 10 feet away, [but] nobody walks over. It goes in the garbage can. I don't think people understand. I don't know.

Some students did not seem to be able to identify any other environmental issues. During a failed brainstorming session at Riverside Tech, I tried repeatedly to move the conversation away from recycling to other environmental issues.

CL: If you came to the school [just as] next year students will come, and there was an active environment club, what do you think it would be doing?

Vinod: They would put white paper into the white basket and coloured paper into the coloured... [laughter], you know they have yellow coloured paper and knowing that you have to put in this one, they put it in the other bin and they you recycle the stuff and sort it out.

In the fragment of dialogue below, we had just been talking at length about their recycling efforts and the possibility of collecting paper from the computer rooms that has only been used on one side:

CL: What about any other issues? Maybe either within the school or outside the school, just because you needn't only focus on what's happening here.

[pause]

Vinod: Well, the main issue I think is, uh, the wastage of paper.

CL: Um-hum.

Vinod: As we already said, in the computer rooms . . .

CL: Yeah.

Vinod: . . . that, that's a big issue. I think we should do it.

Again, when I tried to explore other possibilities, they returned their attention to recycling:

CL: What about field trips, would you like to go see some places, to see what's going on in the city, whether it's problematic for the city or good environmental initiatives? The Body Shop, for example, has an amazing eco-plant. They use this kind of marsh as a way of treating all the waste they produce and they do regular tours of the plant. Or there are . .

Jing-wen: I think I would like to see the recycling centre.

CL: Yeah.

Jing-wen: And actually see how they recycle.

Finally I realized I was missing their points completely and that they had very little knowledge about environmental issues at all. Recycling was literally the extent of their familiarity with environmental activism.

At one level, this trend may be sad but not surprising given the effort industry, municipal government, and the schools have put into promoting recycling and Earth Day. Indeed, members of all the clubs made frequent references to elementary school and home curbside recycling as key influences on their environmentalism.

"...most of the stuff comes natural to me because, like, ever since elementary school, ...like they've kind of been, like they pound us with all that stuff, so it's like, it's you know, to me it's logic, but to some people who have never been exposed to those things then you think it's really new. But to me, I don't know, when you think about it, it's really logic, like you don't have to do, have to do that much work to, you know, help the environment." (Student at Devonshire Collegiate)

This discussion at Central Collegiate brought out the common experiences the students had shared in their different elementary schools:

Sally: I remember it being, it was so, it permeated everything.

Vivian: It was ingrained, yeah.

Sally: I don't know if it was just that ten years when things started happening, but...

Vivian: ...like I was in grade, in junior school and...

CL: 'It' meaning?

Sally: Yeah, I was gonna elaborate I just can't think of the word...

Theresa: ...environmental consciousness.

Sally: Yeah. In school they started talking about...

Vivian: Yeah.

Sally: ...the ozone layer. I knew what the ozone layer was before I knew what...

Theresa: Like in grade three, like grade 2.

Vivian: Yeah.

Sally: And I was part of recyclers at my Junior School.

Theresa: The recyclers?

Sally: Yup, that's what we were. And we planted gardens and naturalized the school, and, even in grade 8, in grade 7 and 8, in my junior school, we had paper recycling.

Theresa: Oh yeah, we had that.

Sally: We were really into that, and we celebrated Earth Day.

Theresa: We weren't *allowed* to recycle a piece of paper that wasn't used on both sides. It was, like, a *rule*. [emphasis in voice]

Sally: You're kidding!

Theresa: Yeah.

Sally: That's great.

Theresa: It was a *rule* in the school and that's why when I came to Central and all the teachers were like 'you have to write on one side of the paper and nothing else' [mimicking a strict voice], I was like [in a feeble tone] 'I can't, I can't do it' [laughter]. It's going against everything [laughter].

Sally: Wow! That's a good story.

Theresa: Yeah, I was really offended.

One of the teachers concurred:

"...some of the stuff has been done to death, like, in public schools they've been lectured to about recycling and stuff like that..."

The symbolic language of violence and authority--rules, "pound us," "ingrained," "lectured to"--is likely significant as students have felt pressured and moralized into eco-friendly behaviour and indicates some uneasiness with and awareness of the marketing and evangelism of "environmental education." And yet the students often assumed the same tone of moral authority and instrumentalized encouragement when re-presenting environmentalism to their peers.

Closely linked to the discourse of recycling were references to guilt, litter, habit, and moral judgements as the following exchange reveals.

Beth: I think you just and you get used to it; it's part of who you are and you can't really change it. I mean, it's almost like a habit, you just do it, like, you don't even think about it, like you know, like recycling in Toronto. A lot of people would try to hold on to it [i.e. a can or bottle] until, you know, they see a recycling bin, because it's a habit. They know it's bad to just throw it away.

Dana: It's subconscious. It's like guilt [she laughs].

Beth: Yeah.

Dana: Everyone will be on your back.

Beth: Yeah.

Dana: I think recycling in Toronto is pretty successful.

Beth: Yeah.

Dana: We're pretty clean.

As well as suggesting that environmental problems have simple, easy solutions whose success rely on more and more people getting into the "habit," this discourse moralizes "environmental" behaviour into "good" and "bad" practices monitored and judged by the popular majority, "everyone," if not by one's own conscience. Just as this morality is "pounded" into them in elementary school, they saw their role as environment club as the

school's eco-police, though carefully couched in "awareness-raising" language of "encouraging" people to adopt the right habits:

Vivian:... you know, like, going around guilting people is not really a solution. I think that's like, that's really, I think sometimes that's used too often.

Sally: Yeah.

Vivian: It's really the way we have to change things is...

Sally: Showing how easy things can really be.

Theresa: Yeah.

Vivian: Like if people get used to it, they get used to just doing it, then...

Theresa: People get involved.

Sally: Yeah.

Vivian: You can't expect everyone to be an activist, you can't expect everybody to care.

Sally: But if you stick it in someone's head, you know, just as a habit.

Vivian: But if you do it the nice easy, subtle way.

Sally: Just do it! [laugh] Nike, right? [laughter].

...

Sally: I think the main reason I'm into this kind of stuff is out of habit, seriously.

Theresa: Oh, yeah.

Sally: Like it's sad, but it's true. Cause that's just how I was raised.

Theresa: Yeah, I was involved when I was little and I think I grew up in a school atmosphere where, uh, recycling, and everything else...

Remarkably disempowering in its admonition to "stick it in" people's heads, the reference to moral authority could be read both as a radical reversal of the values underlying the antiecological status quo and as the reconfiguration of environmentalism as a dominant hegemony, not social movement.

I argue that the continued references to cleanliness and litter are not an indication of confusion and incomplete knowledge, but demonstrate how the clubs' environmentalism is framed in the moral terms of "clean" and "dirty." Students and teachers alike often equated the importance of recycling with cleaning up litter. Similarly, one student used "cleanliness" and "green" interchangeably:

"Yeah, I guess we, as a club, we can maintain or encourage that clean, cleanliness of the school and that we're green."

Yet when asked about environmental issues, most could speak cogently about the need for resource conservation and waste reduction; even the group I felt were least knowledgeable linked the need for recycling to the rationale, "because we don't want to cut down any trees, right?" The references to litter and cleanliness were almost unconscious slips used when talking about the club and the focus of their environmentalism generally, not around specific issues, and are remarkably consistent with mainstream

environmental discourse. In her analysis of how environmentalism is marketed to children, King (1995) notes how children's environmental books come in two genres: middle class morality tales and simple solutions for saving the planet. Drawing on King's (1995) critical analysis of liberal environmental discourse, I argue that there is more to the recycling-Earth Week phenomenon than just excessive promotion and popularity. First, the 1990s manifestations of Earth Day and recycling are emblems of the pseudo-empowerment discourse of "personal lifestyle environmentalism," also known as green consumerism,¹⁷ which has marked the mainstreaming of environmentalism. Second, the morality tale places an emphasis on guilt which diffuses responsibility into "everyone's and no one's 'real' fault" (King 1995, 51). Lastly, the tendency for recycling to be equated with litter clean-ups hints at how mainstream environmentalism is, above all, a discourse of cleanliness and good order: the neat rows of suburban lawns sporting matching blue boxes jammed full of glass, plastics and paper become the revised--eco-friendly--middle class norm.

The Simplest of Solutions: Green Consumerism

Luke (1997) refers to Earth Day as the "holiday" of green consumerism and recycling its most pervasive "environmental action." Their common premise is elaborated in the introduction to the best-selling *50 Simple Things You Can Do To Save the Earth*, one of many green how-to manual which rose to prominence during the marketing of Earth Day 1990:

Like few books in this decade have ever done, *50 Simple Things* empowers the individual to get up and do something about global environmental problems. No point in letting the news reports and magazine coverage drive you to despair, even the most intractable environmental solutions march toward a solution when everyday people get involved. (EarthWorks Group 1989, 6)

The eco-friendly lifestyle "movement" argues that our personal actions and lifestyles have environmental implications and by assuming responsibility for our choices in the grocery store, in the kitchen, and at the curbside, we can "make a difference." By recycling our

¹⁷ I prefer to refer to this trend as "lifestyle activism" rather than green consumerism to acknowledge the good (though misguided) intentions behind this approach and narrow the use of the "green consumerism" label to actions specifically targeting consumer practices (which technically does not include recycling or composting), though I agree in principle that the entire approach constitutes green consumerism.

pop cans, composting kitchen scraps, turning off lights, and using baking soda instead of toxic household cleaners, and another 46 or 96 or 996 other simple, easy, little actions in our daily lives, we can live lighter on the Earth. Appealing to the ordinary person, concerned yet busy and overextended, ecolifestyle activism presents itself as a grassroots revival of popular democracy--"democracy" packaged for convenience in a convenience society.

On one hand, the attention to connections between personal lifestyle and political structures reflects the feminist insight that the "personal is political" and could expose how extensively economic rationalization structures the personal lives of individuals in a capitalist society:

The ways that material wealth is produced, distributed, and consumed all represent the outcome of innumerable depoliticized technical decisions made by product designers, industrial engineers, corporate managers, public administrators, and marketing executives, all striving to attain the most rational solutions to their respective technical challenges for the economy's abstract machines. ...Larger cultural trends, then, in global economic and social rationalization tend to proceed apace without any popular representation in the processes of their instrumental or substantive determination. (Luke 1997, 115)

Ecolifestyle activism, however, does not pretend to an analysis of power relations, but limits its goals to re-adjusting consumer tastes to the responsible and frugal lifestyles of yesteryears, implicitly acknowledging the real powerlessness of consumers. While the recipe list of eco-friendly cleaners and composting techniques are regularly followed by the disclaimer that personal actions are "not enough," Killingsworth and Palmer (1992) point out how such other steps are never elaborated. The green how-to manual "limits its goals to developing a protopolitical ethos within its readership, a nebulous or malleable consciousness of the need for political action, the exact nature of which is not yet as clear as the need for personal actions" (Killingsworth and Palmer 1992, 394).

Ignored, forgotten, obscured is the history and power of mass marketing: "how corporate capital, big government, and professional experts pushed the practices of the throwaway affluent society on consumers after 1945 as a political strategy to sustain economic growth, forestall mass discontent, and empower scientific authority" (Luke 1997, 128). "People did choose to live this way," Luke (1997) concedes, "but their choices were made from a very narrow array of alternatives presented to them as rigidly structured, prepackaged menus of very limited options" (128). While it is true that "every aspect of our lives has some environmental impact," ecolifestyle activism diffuses responsibility, in

the great tradition of liberal pluralism, to “everyone.” Agency is obscured as generic people, each in their daily routine, are seen to be cumulatively causing environmental crisis. Social ecologist Murray Bookchin (1990) rages his contempt for this discourse in the following anecdote:

I decided to ask him [a Californian Green] a blunt question: “what do you think is the cause of the present ecological crisis?” His answer was very emphatic: “Human beings! *People* are responsible for the ecological crisis!”

“Do you mean that people such as blacks, women, and the oppressed are causing ecological imbalances--not corporations, agribusiness, ruling elites, and the State?” I asked with complete astonishment.

“Yes, people!” he answered even more heatedly. “*Everyone!* They overpopulate the earth, they pollute the planet, they devour its resources, they are greedy.” (9, emphasis in original)

Luke (1997) provides a more considered critique: the shift in rhetoric to individual “empowerment” cloaks the parallel shift in focus from production to consumption, releasing big business and the state from their “ecological enemies” labels and easing the pressure on environmental legislative reform. These “unbelievably easy” solutions speak more to soothing middle class guilt than transforming social, political, and economic structures (Luke 1997, 119).

The reduction of complex, institutional and structural problems with social, economic, and ecological dimensions to simple, easy individual solutions is a depoliticization of environmental issues to technical problems and of democratic citizens to consumers. Referred to as “environmental citizenship” on an Environment Canada website, the government presents an ecolifestyle/green consumerism slant to environmental activism:

As Canadians, it is our responsibility to care for the environment. It's also in our best interest. Many Canadians have already put their concern about the environment into action: recycling is a good example. But we need to do much more, and get everyone involved.

The challenge of learning about and protecting the environment may at first seem overwhelming [as] environmental issues are often complex. But there are simple things that everyone can do to benefit the planet and themselves. The key is to start small and go from there!

Begin with your personal life... (Environment Canada 1998)

In the age of the Atlantic cod moratorium, the Clayquot Sound logging protests, Pacific salmon disputes, native land claims fought through protests and boycotts, negligence and corruption in the nuclear industry, multinational trade agreements, and widespread

environmental deregulation, the invitation to “begin with your personal life” appears disturbingly antidemocratic. For Environment Canada, the ideal “environmental citizen” is not a politically-astute, knowledgeable, actively-engaged individual who attends public hearings, participates in citizens’ groups, traces environmental consequences to individual, corporate, and government agency, and writes regular letters to her member of parliament, but someone who “keep[s] water in the fridge instead of letting the tap run to let it get cold,” “take[s] short showers and use[s] a low-flow showerhead” and diligently performs the other equally banal items on the ten-point quiz of good citizenship. What better tactic to divert criticism from government policy than to re-construct the problem as the collective fault of all Canadians and to download the responsibility onto individuals, not the government. And yet this discourse of individual blame and responsibility finds resonance in middle class sensibilities, where it has been taken up as a moral crusade in support of a cause--when abstracted from agency and consequences--no caring person could oppose. Who could be against “the environment” or, even worse, “Mother Earth”?

The environment clubs proved to be excellent examples of this tendency, often mimicking and modelling their awareness-raising agendas on the green how-to manuals and repeating slogans of individual empowerment. This student, for example, saw the goal of her club in terms of passing on the green consumerism message:

“I think the, uh, like, a part for us is to try to show them, those who aren’t really, who are narrow-minded and are stubborn, to show them how easy it is to actually make a difference, or a slight difference, you know, just by recycling or something. It doesn’t take all that much and that’s just all we have to show, to be an example to them, I think that’s important.”

They assumed the guilt of eco-irresponsibility:

“I feel bad, that you know, there is stuff just, like there’s such easy stuff we could do and then, but then it just doesn’t end up being done. Like making it clear where the bottles and the cans are supposed to, can be recycled, because I know that I didn’t even know that there was a place.”

The following passages taken almost verbatim from the book, *50 Simple Things Kids Can Do To Save the Earth*, were part of a quick discussion at Wychwood Tech to plan their Earth Week morning announcements:

Ms. Shaw: OK. So, alright, Rebecca, tell them what you have.

Rebecca: OK. Um, one of them is, um, [reading from a small wire notebook] we use over 65 billion aluminum cans every day and we should recycle every one of them. Um, we use a billion, a billion of feet of paper towel every year. That’s a lot of trees. Believe it or not, worms can help solve our trash problem, by turning our garbage into mulch. Now we churn out 28 billion bottles and jars every year. Um,

Americans buy 500 million disposable lighters every year. That's a million pounds of plastic made by factories. Just so grown-ups can throw them away. Americans use 2.5 billion plastic bottles every hour, can you believe it?

...

Ms. Shaw: And then ...there's suggestions you can use at home. Composting kitchen scraps and yard waste. Take your own shopping bag to the grocery store, right? Make notes on the back of scrap paper, um, re-use, use re-usable razors instead of disposable ones. Go to garage sales for household needs instead of buying new. Use a thermos rather than drinking boxes or pop bottles. Take a lunch box or bag instead of plastic, um plastic containers sort of thing. Recycle fine paper and when you buy fruits and vegetables, instead of using the little bags, bring your own bags. So there are different ideas like that. So, maybe we should have an announcement and then a handy hint or something.

Not only are all of these suggestions personal rather than political actions, the instrumental "we should" language reduces activism to appropriate habit-formation which again raises the question of how such actions could be "empowering." The assumption that those who do not participate are "narrow-minded" and "stubborn" or need simple, "how-to" instructions is a common response to citizen and adolescent apathy. This patronizing tone and moral rhetoric of good and bad eco-citizens undermines the liberal rhetoric of empowerment, revealing it to be but a code of appropriate eco-behaviour which people are "empowered" to emulate. As Killingsworth and Palmer (1992) point out, instrumental discourse "raises the spectre of social control and manipulative politics," by obscuring the agent giving instruction, the rationale behind the action, and possible alternatives to that particular action (390).

I would not suggest that the teachers and students in the environment clubs did not have a more sophisticated environmental analysis. Indeed I could offer an equal number of quotes which reveal concerns about technology and big business and government inaction. However, green consumerism was unquestionably the most common and most comfortable discourse adopted. Most other analyses were offered in private conversation, when specifically prompted by my questions, or with some form of hesitancy. An example here is the following dialogue where the students slipped in and out of the green consumerism discourse:

Wendy: ...like even planting trees. I went out planting trees and that was, I felt like I really did something.

Vivian: [inaudible].

Wendy: Yeah, so, and it was fun too, like, different from school. Yeah, it's just from, just seeing all the things that are happening and I'm not going to say the government [drops her voice here so that it's almost inaudible], but [loudly] THINGS AREN'T BEING DONE about it, you know, I thought maybe, yeah,

putting some paper towels in a composter will do something about it [she is sort of laughing, almost like she is dismissing her own enthusiasm and hope], you know, like, I mean, it's something.

Theresa: And it helps a little, for sure.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah.

Wendy starts by affirming the empowerment aspect of environmental activism--planting trees on Earth Day with the local Rotary Club made her feel good about her contribution to ecological social change. But then when she considers the impact of composting the paper towels, she seems to question or undermine her own hope, realizing the gap between this small action and the larger issues under the control of the government. She falters with the half-belief "it's something" and is re-affirmed by another club member that yes, these small actions all help, reinforcing the mainstays of liberal environmentalism. Her explicit avoidance of naming political agency and responsibility, both in the phrase "I'm not going to say" and the drop in her voice demonstrates her awareness of some, internalized or enforced, guidelines which contain this discourse to abstract "things" rather than (ir)responsible institutions and individuals.

Liberal Guilt: An Environmental Morality Tale

"It's too much guilt to carry around with you and remember 'yeah, in grade 8, I used to throw my wrappers on the ground.'"

Sally, Central Collegiate

This seemingly ridiculous comment is mirrored in a children's environmental storybook titled *Just a Dream*. King (1995) describes the story as a "cautionary tale with an environmental moral" where "a boy who thoughtlessly tosses a waxed paper doughnut wrapper on the ground [learns] to regret the dire consequences of this wanton act of ecological destruction" (31). The little white, middle class, suburban protagonist, Walter, is tormented in his sleep by images of "toasters and toilets and big bags of garbage bury[ing] his neighbourhood in a mountain of trash" until he resolves to pick up his litter, allowing him future nights of peaceful, pastoral dreams (King 1995, 32). According to King (1995), *Just a Dream* is typical of an entire genre of children's literature, the environmental morality tale. King (1995) maintains that the essence of the liberal morality tale is the contradictory embrace of the need to "save the earth" while continuing to support the social and economic status quo, which serves to mythologize the causes of

environmental crisis into a moral, rather than political issue.¹⁸ The “save the earth” rhetoric of environment clubs is as much a discourse of morality as it is of consumerism and deserves similar deconstruction.

Children are one of the environmental movement’s most poignant symbols: the quality of our children’s future is regularly invoked for moral persuasion to the environmental cause. More insidiously, the child--transformed into target audience--has also become central to green consumerism, as cartoons, children’s books and games appropriate environmental themes and messages in the guise of “education.” As King (1995) points out, telling “*children*, a social category by definition powerless in myriad ways, ...to save the planet seemed utterly contradictory, yet everywhere I looked the message was going out to kids that their job is to solve environmental crisis” (2). Underlying the exploitation of children and environmentalism in the consumerist discourse is the displacement of responsibility for the future from current policy makers and citizens onto the shoulders of children and their mothers. As King (1995) notes, the most racist elements of this discourse are the mass depictions of African children facing civil war or famine as symbols of Third World overpopulation: they are constructed as the literal embodiment of the environmental crisis. *Just a Dream*, of course, never leaves the security of the middle class North American suburb and the story ends with the “happy” ending of a more secure middle class home, surrounded by green grass and tall, mature trees.

The liberal morality tale not only exploits the image of the vulnerable child, but distorts the political message of environmentalism in an ironic twist which depicts the child as villain--dropping a piece of litter--who must learn what is good and bad eco-behaviour. It is an easy lesson passed along to and taken up by children:

“I remember in elementary school, everyone talks about you know if an adult

¹⁸ By critiquing moralized environmentalism, I do not wish to suggest that there is no ethical dimension to environmental issues. Indeed, the instrumentalism, or economic rationalization, of late industrial capitalism and the modern bureaucratic nation-state which separates ethics from science, technology, and economics underlies the anti-ecological basis of our present social, political and economic structures, as numerous theorists point out (see social critics, philosophers, and environmental thinkers as diverse as Marcuse and the Frankfurt School’s critique of the Enlightenment, Heidegger, Neil Evernden, Langdon Winner, Arne Naess, and ecofeminists such as Carolyn Merchant and Susan Griffin). Liberal environmentalism, however, merely names “people” as the source of this ethical dilemma in a revived version of humanity’s “tragic flaw.”

throws a can into the garbage can, we would like, you know, pick it up and put it in the right place because we've been brought up that way."
(Student at Devonshire Collegiate)

While defended as an "empowering" discourse which aims to offset the emotionally overwhelming and depressing discourse of environmental apocalypse, liberal environmentalism is caught in its own paradox (King 1995). It is only because the causes and agents of environmental degradation are abstracted, universalized, and mystified in the liberal discourse that a sense of powerlessness follows the steady list of acid rain, desertification, global warming, rainforest depletion, species extinction, thinning ozone layer, and other environmental problems. I am not proposing some conspiracy theory of global capitalism lies at the root of all these problems; indeed environmental problems tend to be the most complex social issues of our time, with myriad social, ecological, economic, and political dimensions. But naive liberalism, based on concern and compassion but not social criticism, inevitably turns environmental education into a "blame and burden the children" rhetoric, as children's ignorance, lack of "connection with nature," or uncaring and irresponsible attitudes are identified as the "problem" to be exorcized and set right, through the cultivation of a strict regime of appropriate eco-habits, before they grow up and further degrade the environment. Robottom and Hart (1995) have bemoaned the moralized, individualized, and behaviourist ideology which informs most research in environmental education. But, as the environment club members demonstrate, it is the discourse most compatible with the culture of schooling.

I was able to ask one group directly about the place of morality in environmental discourse and their response was revealing of a number of issues and contradictions:

CL: Do you think sometimes, though, that the way these things are presented, the cleaning up the school or the recycling, they are moralized in a way that prevents them from being political? that gets away from the political side to environmental things?

Beth: Um. Hmmm.

Dana: Yeah, like the trees [government's 'Lands for Life' policy] and stuff?

CL: Like, once you start talking about *those* issues, it gets very controversial and political, right?

Dana: Yeah.

Beth: Um, I think students will start to take sides.

Dana: You know what though, it's, the way they talk about recycling nowadays is also around that business sense, like to recycle, it's not just to recycle to for the, just for the goodness of nature, it's 'recycle and you can get ten cents back on the aluminum that you've just recycled,' or you know. It's about that. ...I think that if our economy is so into that money thing then that's the only way to go for now. ...Um, but yeah, I think yeah garbage, like recycling is, does go around to morals,

like, it's not really controversial.

Beth: No.

Dana: Just because, just littering anything is just you know, increasing on your guilt trip.

Beth: Yeah.

Dana: But, um, everything else, it's a lot of like, uh, interpreting. You have to really not go too deep and not say anything offensive if you want something.

While Beth adopts a strategy of avoiding conflict and controversy, Dana points out that the rhetoric of economic rationalization is as prevalent as the "moral" approach to environmentalism and demonstrates how strategy is an important part of the discourse which she chooses to employ. For some issues, the moral argument precludes any need for discussion; for others, one needs to be much more cautious and strategic in approach: some issues are clearly easier to broach than others, and certain discourses are more acceptable than others. The girls even went so far to say that they were not sure whether it would be appropriate to promote local-based economics:

Dana: For example, the thing about shopping at local markets and like major corporations, that's like, sometimes it makes sense, but then when you really think about that, it can be really controversial too.

CL: Um-hum.

Dana: Because we are in a school where things are run by, like everything is business and jobs and if you just shop at your local market, like what's going to happen to the economy? And I think the, the teachers would be afraid of that for us, kind of.

CL: So do you think that that shaped in some way what issues you have taken up and gone with, to avoid . . . ?

Dana: Um, yeah, yeah.

Mainstream discourses and mainstream institutions of power tend to support and structure the substance of that discourse.

By pointing out the dangers of the discourse of morality, I do not mean to suggest the students and teachers lacked the ability to think critically, and merely followed and obeyed the dictates of eco-moral behaviour. In fact, despite the pervasiveness of morality in the environment clubs' discourse, the students and teachers alike regularly showed some uncomfortability with its instrumental language, sometimes explicitly such as this student's comment that "...you know, like, going around guilting people is not really a solution. I think that's like, that's really, I think sometimes that's used too often." Sometimes this discomfort was expressed through laughter or through word choice, like the references to "pound us" and "rules" noted above. At one time a teacher may define the purpose of the club as:

"I think it's, a lot of it is the personal habits, like adapting things, like learning a little bit then sort of taking it on as something they're going to carry on in their lives,"

but then also insist that

"I think hopefully, sometimes when we talk about things is to sort of make them go 'hmm,' you know, and question a little bit about why things are going wrong."

The moral crusade has not been picked up rigidly or mechanically, though perhaps somewhat uncritically. Most importantly, the response to liberal environmentalism cannot be the acceptance of the conservative discourse which suggests "children are not able to deal with global environmental problems when they are still grappling with personal hygiene" and directs educators not to "overburden them with political problems when they're still learning to solve their own" (Hicks cited in King 1995, 20). Suppression of knowledge is the most effective means of disempowerment and, as the following quote shows, students are not only capable and knowledgable, they are aware of their political power:

"I think, as a club, we can try to get to the big guys, the politicians, like our MPs and stuff. Write letters and tell them, make them aware that *we* know what's going on and that we should be part of the decision, especially when it comes to the economy because you know it's all business and it's like they don't, they probably do think about us, but not much. So, since we're there, if we do write, just tell them that we know and we want to change it and to make it more sustainable. ...I think we're pretty powerful." [emphasis in voice]
(Dana, Devonshire Collegiate)

The discourse of morality is intermingled with an awareness of its contradictions or, at least, limitations.

The rhetoric of morality is also linked to a domestication of the environmental discourse into one of cleanliness and order, which transfers attention from male domains of production, military defense, and public policy to women's domains of consumption, family health, and household management, and projects the tidy and secure middle class neighbourhood as the ecological ideal. As King (1995) points out the actions most often promoted in popular environmental media, "keep your lawn clean, sort out the trash, plant a tree in your backyard, buy 'environmentally friendly' products," have more to do with "middle-class morals" than ecological sustainability, much less social change. The frequent references the clubs make to litter and cleaning up the school echo the "Make America Beautiful" litter campaigns of the late 50s and repeated waves of middle class moral crusades against slums, working class mothers, idle youth, and drunks in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth century: compassionately converting the masses to middle class norms (Nicholson [1980] 1994; Wilson 1991). While the concern and intentions of the students and teachers and numerous liberal activists may be genuine, the implications of this discourse are a re-affirmation of the middle class consumer society and norms and the burdening of women and mothers with new ecological responsibilities, such as sorting the garbage, composting, spending time sewing, mending and washing clothes and household items instead of purchasing new, and so on. In the environmental morality tale, "the whole ecological crisis ultimately is reinterpreted as a series of bad household and/or personal buying decisions" (Luke 1997, 120). And little Walter in *Just a Dream* finds his ecological future in the same secure suburban home, just with larger trees.

Finally, the reference to morality, rather than the concrete problems which drive the environmental justice movement, is indicative of how liberal environmentalists are spatially removed from the real impacts of environmental degradation and how this abstraction serves to obscure the fundamental contradictions within the liberal discourse. Abstracted representations of the "environment" project the crisis into the future, while current economic and political structures already locate environmental consequences in poor and other politically disenfranchised neighbourhoods. Lois Gibbs, former resident of Love Canal and founder of the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, is fully cognisant of how economic rationalization, bureaucratic detachment, and the disempowerment of citizens through government and corporate suppression of information, procedural stalling, and exploitation of citizens' limited economic, educational, and time resources underlie environmental degradation and catastrophe (Di Chiro 1992). She and others leading the environmental justice movement know the social and political status quo is not compatible with ecological, and consequently, human, health and security. Gloating in their altruistic superiority to 'self-interested' NIMBYites (Not In My BackYard), liberal environmentalists perpetuate destructive social stereotypes and, in many ways, miss the point. "These kids have so many other things to worry about..." was a common refrain the teachers used to excuse working class and immigrant students from a lack of interest in environmental issues, but these "other issues" would be read as *environmental* problems by environmental justice movement (Di Chiro 1992). King (1995) sums up the ideological impasse presented by the liberal morality tale:

Liberals worry about childhood burnout and emotional distress when they bombard children with images of environmental disaster and recruit children to environmental campaigns to save the earth. Conservatives

charge that children are used as political pawns to advance the radical agendas of environmental activists... (21)

Meanwhile, poor children, children of colour, and third world children continue to suffer the immediate effects of a degraded environment: lead poisoning and brain damage, skyrocketing cancer rates, asthma, shortages of food, water, firewood and other fuel sources, unsanitary and aesthetically bleak surroundings, homelessness/environmental refugees, and unemployment.

Conclusions

As the students and teachers negotiated the direction of their environmental activism, they slip in and out of various environmental discourses which predominate in mainstream media. The green consumerist strategy of empowerment through simple, easy actions is an appealing message, all-too compatible with the culture of schools and clubs, and the social, economic, and institutional status quo. While at times doubting the real value of these actions, the students and teachers alike wanted to believe they were making a difference, that "it's something," and the messages all around them confirm that it is: in books, TV and the popular press, in spatial and mental distancing from the most serious consequences of environmental degradation, in the separation of agents and causes from environmental problems and the label environment from health problems like cancer. Compelled into action by the force and poignancy of the environmental morality tale, the students and teachers constructed their own eco-lifestyles and, hesitatingly and strategically, adopted the discourses of morality and instrumentalism to convert others to the cause. But the reduction of huge, complex, structural and institutional social, economic and political problems, caused by a matrix of multinational corporate, military/industrial, and nation-state practices of production, consumption and disposal, to bad individuals who throw litter on the ground is a remarkable evasion strategy. And, as King (1995) concludes, it "serves corporate interests much more effectively than it does children, who are willingly accepting responsibility for stewardship of a planet that is, in most ways, not under their control" (177). Liberal guilt does not undo the fundamental contradiction of trying to save the earth while maintaining the social, economic, and political status quo.

IX The Garden and the Wilderness: Culture, Class and Nature

After recycling, the second most common environmental project undertaken by the environment clubs was a garden or naturalization project. All four of the clubs had either worked on a garden in the past, were currently working on one, or were in the process of preparing a proposal for a garden. Like the recycling phenomenon, the emphasis on naturalization is not surprising given the proliferation of environmental education books and organizations promoting schoolyard naturalizations.¹⁹ Also, like the recycling phenomenon, naturalization projects can obscure the political nature of environmental problems by focusing on biophysical change. But rather than take up another political analysis, this chapter will explore the race/ethnicity, class, and gender dimensions of the clubs' experiences and representations of "nature," which revolve around images of the garden and the wilderness. Lynch (1993) argues that images of landscape and nature are closely intertwined with ethnicity and nationalism, serving as focal points around which ethnicity is defined, particularly through the social and political processes of migration and colonialism. Ecofeminists such as Griffin (1978) and Merchant (1980) have explored the significance of the feminization of nature for the intersection of patriarchy and environmental degradation. And advocates of environmental justice have contested the class and race biases of the wilderness fetish of the contemporary environmental movement. Thus heeding Wilson's (1991) invocation that "the culture of nature--the ways we think, teach, talk about, and construct the natural world--is as important a terrain for struggle as the land itself," I ask how does "nature" fit into how environment club members negotiate and construct their identities (87).

Wychwood Tech: Memory and Identity in the Garden

On my third visit to the Wychwood club, Manju commented to me that she was going to start planting her garden soon. She was watering the plants in the biology greenhouse--a task the girls loved to do, often reminding their teachers about it--while we talked, checking each plant, feeling its soil, filling and refilling a small jar with water as she walked up and down the pathway. It was still March, although the weather was

¹⁹ Examples include the British organization Learning Through Landscapes and the Canadian Evergreen Foundation. In addition, municipal, provincial and federal funding agencies, such as the Toronto Atmospheric Fund, Canada Trust and the Ontario Environmental Youth Corps, seem quite supportive of naturalization projects.

exceptionally warm, and I responded about how there's usually still frost until mid-May. But the year was an exception and by early May the Wychwood club and gardeners throughout Toronto were getting their gardens in. At school they planted Coreopsis, Gayfeather, Cup-plants, and Bluestem Grasses, while Manju planted potatoes, beets, and lettuce in her garden at home. Natalie too had a vegetable garden at home and was planning on studying agriculture in university. For Manju and Natalie, and it turned out for many of the other students, the garden, more than any abstract commitment to environmental change, was their motivation for being in the environment club. "Gardening is fun" and something "you can enjoy in and of itself," Manju had stressed the first time I asked them about why they were in the club. Similarly, Samir and Jenny both referred first to the pleasure of gardening when I asked why they were in the club. While the ecology garden the club was working on was the teachers' idea, its resonance with the personal interests and experiences of the students clearly contributed to the success of the project.

Some of the students revealed that their gardening experiences were closely linked to their family and cultural backgrounds. Samir explained how he used to garden with his aunt and grandmother in Sri Lanka before they emigrated. Now they live in an apartment building and do not have a garden. Saraswati says her family used to live on a farm in Sri Lanka, but she immigrated to Canada in grade 5 and now has little experience and familiarity with plants and soil. Manju's family places a great deal of importance on their garden: while they do not have a car, her father took two weeks off work the previous summer to work on the garden. Manju and her sister have carried on this tradition through their involvement in the environment club; Manju even brought her own shovel from home to help with the school garden one day. While Gita and Premala spent little time working on the garden due to Gita's allergies to pollen, they too took great pride in the garden and were extremely disappointed when the teachers cancelled the club's involvement in Community Day at the school. Several times, they pleaded to be able to do something for Community Day, even if just putting up a sign to direct people to the garden or to be working in it that day. Moreover, Premala is Manju's aunt, so it is likely they share a similar family association with gardening. Saraswati, Manju, and Samir all peppered their peer dialogues with mentions of Sri Lanka, frequently comparing Canada's climate to home where it is "always sunny and hot with no snow"--but "not this hot" they qualify one humid day--discussing visits to relatives, and carefully

steering clear of politics, indicating how significant a role their cultural background plays in the construction of their identities.²⁰

Lynch (1993) suggests the environmental perspectives of immigrants are formed at “the juxtaposition of landscapes of memory with the concrete landscapes of immigrant life” (113). Urban gardening informs the immigrant experience in cities around the world. Indeed, the Toronto neighbourhood of “Cabbagetown” carries the memory of immigrant families and their gardens within its name, once a derogatory label named for the cabbages Irish immigrants grew in their yards. As Lynch (1993) points out, these gardens are often about much more than sustenance, but nostalgic re-creations of home and small spaces of freedom and beauty opened up within a hostile (social and ecological) environment. She quotes an immigrant to New York City from the Dominican Republic who explained why he planted corn on an abandoned lot: “All I saw was bottles, old newspapers, garbage and weeds. I took a large garbage bag and cleared the land. I planted with the idea that this is my own little contribution, my own little Cibao [the verdant agricultural heartland of the Dominican Republic]” (108, explanatory note in original). Images of the idealized landscapes of home, or precolonization, are invoked to maintain ethnic identity and community within new landscapes and to inspire social movements by “provid[ing] a commentary on the economic processes that impelled the diaspora as well as the inadequacies of the built environment in the new land” (Lynch 1993, 113). For the students, the garden--both at home and perhaps even more significantly at school--could represent both a commitment to the new ideals of Canadian society such as environmentalism (Saraswati told me matter-of-factly one day that since there was a civil war going on, the environment was not something they were concerned about in Sri Lanka and she only began to hear about these issues when she came to Canada), and also a reaffirmation and reconstruction of homeland and ethnic identity.

The gendered nature of gardening was revealed during an informal discussion I had with Manju, Saraswati, and Rebecca in the Biology classroom. While we talked, John, one of their male classmates, was playing on one of the computers and frequently interrupted our discussion. When I asked the girls why the club was mostly composed of

²⁰ Not all the students in the club were Sir Lankan immigrants, but as the other students did not talk very much about their family and cultural backgrounds, I have no hints as to the significance of the garden for any of them. Natalie and Jenny are both ethnically Asian, and Rebecca is white, but all they shared with me was that none of them had grown up in Toronto.

girls, they responded that there was no such pattern; it was just coincidence. John, however, thought otherwise. He explained that he did not like going into the greenhouse; he would rather go camping and plant trees, implying that their activities were trivial and “sissy.” When the girls insisted that they were planting trees and in fact a whole garden, he challenged the value of their claim in two ways, first by not believing them and secondly, by dismissing their project as being inconsequential in comparison to the 3,000 trees his Scout camp planted last year. The girls were forced to call upon the authority of their teacher to back up their claim that they were in fact planting trees and that it required a lot of manual work. Interestingly, this division between greenhouse and outside work was paralleled in the division of labour between the male and female club advisors. Ms. Shaw was in charge of the greenhouse and club meetings, while Mr. White coordinated the garden project. He even commented at one point when the girls asked about watering the greenhouse plants, that “that was [Ms. Shaw]’s area, I have too many other things to worry about.” More male students appeared to help out as the group got into the manual work, suggesting they were more comfortable with the work setting than the social setting of the club.

Devonshire Collegiate: Gardening by the Book

It was the inspiration of their Environmental Studies and Ecology classes which spurred the Devonshire Club to propose a garden for their school. None of them had much first-hand experience with gardening and they carefully followed a set of written instructions for growing and transplanting their wetland plants, as this dialogue demonstrates:

Dana: How are the wetland plants doing?

Aung-Sun: They’re doing pretty good. Some are like just growing now, like, tiny ones, and then some of them are quite a good size.

...

Dana: Do we have to take out the ones, the shoots that aren’t doing very well?

Aung-Sun: Um, it doesn’t say to do that, but to, um, like, if there’s two growing in one pot, then to move it to another. And I’ve done that already.

Dana: OK. Just wondering.

Aung-Sun: I haven’t read through it thoroughly, but I will, soon.

One of the girls mentioned her mother did some flower gardening, and another attended a local garden show, but for the most part, gardening was not a part of their background experiences. While they were keen to get composters into the school to divert organic materials from the waste stream, none of them had any experience with how a composter

worked and they asked me for my opinion and knowledge on the subject. Unlike the Wychwood group who relied on their family experiences and the guidance of their teachers in learning the skills of gardening, these students were referring to books.

In addition, many of them felt they had little contact with “nature” at all because of their urban setting and lifestyles. While these students indicated in their conversations that they had more disposable income than the students at the two Tech schools, they rarely had opportunities to venture outside of the city, as this student made clear:

“In grade 9, our school does encourage nature somewhat. Most [students] have an opportunity to go to the Boyne River [a field centre used by the Toronto Board]. ...that is usually really memorable, but it's only for a week. And I guess when you come back, you always remember it and the good times. That's the closest connection to nature I think you can have when you live in the city. When you have opportunities to go on trips like that.”

Chatting with another student about the long weekend at Easter, she told me how excited she was to have been able to get out of Toronto to visit relatives in Scarborough, where she had never been before, and also “up North” by which it turned out she meant Richmond Hill, both cities within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). While the Wychwood students found themselves in a highly urbanized environment when they moved to Canada, locating “nature” in their memories and cultural practices, the Devonshire students largely grew up within the city and located “nature” outside and in opposition to that city. Nature for them was more of an abstract vision: “I'd like to think that in the future I would have some green space, something about nature...”

Some of this pattern may be attributable to the class positions and ethnic/cultural identities of these students as middle class, second generation Chinese-Canadians.²¹ As little seems to have been written on Chinese-Canadian cultural symbols of “nature” or environmentalism--aside from references to the materialism, or what Pon (1998) terms “hyper-consumerism,” of Hong Kong immigrants--I have augmented the students' narratives with those of a few individuals who were able to speak to me more freely about the connections between their Chinese cultural backgrounds, Canadian childhoods,

²¹ By using the phrase Chinese-Canadian, I recognize there is a danger of over-generalization as Chinese-Canadians come from a variety of nations, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaysia, have immigrated at various stages throughout the history of Canada, experience/ed very different forms of racism, and range from poor to upper class. The students, however, refer to themselves as “Chinese” or “Oriental,” or more commonly “Canadian,” and I can be no more specific than what they shared with me.

and "nature." One of my own close friends, herself second generation middle class, suburban Chinese-Canadian, responded to some of my writings on my rural background in this way: "I must say, that reading your descriptions of nature (birds/plants/rural landscape) is so alien to my experiences--I truly feel wistful/wondrous about such seemingly not uncommon living things/surroundings." A young Chinese-Canadian woman formerly involved in an environment club at her high school in Calgary explains how her family reacted when she purchased an acre of the Brazilian rainforest through the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF):

"My grandfather thought that I wasted my money on nothing, and other family members asked whether they could build a house on it. They thought that WWF would just go out there and mark out my one acre with my name on it. ...This just gave me another opportunity to lecture them on the biodiversity of the rainforest and the dangers of deforestation - they've learned not to touch that topic during dinner time."

These two individuals indicated that growing up Chinese-Canadian did not offer many opportunities for, or valuations of, "nature" experiences.

This is not to suggest that there were no family or cultural connections to the club members' interest in environmental issues; indeed Beth and Dana frequently mentioned how their families had always practiced waste-reducing and economical habits, such as re-using containers or conserving water and energy. During a discussion about giving a guest speaker one of their wetland plants as a gift, they discovered they all had stashes of used yoghurt containers at their homes which they re-use for other things and which could be transformed into eco-friendly plant pots. These stories are echoed in Di Chiro's (1992) account of an American Chinatown activist who explained, "if you go to my mother-in-law's, everything is washed and hanging to dry, she probably has every styrofoam container that she ever had from any restaurant, and you'll find that in all these communities" (97). At the same time, some of the students experienced conflicts or discontinuities between their family and cultural backgrounds and their environmental activism, which was again corroborated by the stories told me by other second-generation Chinese-Canadians. Dana explained,

"It was kind of hard for my Dad. I don't, he doesn't really understand why I'm going through all this, um, he's like 'you won't have a job in that field' and all this, so he wants to me to go into health and I like health also. So, yeah, health and environment, I can do that."

Beth described conflicts between an interest in a business career and her ecological

values. And the young woman from Calgary, now studying environmental science at university after being active in her environment club, shared a similar story:

“An oriental family usually prefers their children to have professional careers i.e. doctor, lawyer, etc. They were sceptical that I'd be unemployed and collecting welfare if I was interested in environmental science.”

She has not thrown off all practicality though, carefully researching her career options and aiming to become a teacher:

“I told them that a good economy goes hand-in-hand with a healthy environment. Besides, half of the jobs we find in the future are as yet nonexistent (we create our own jobs). Of course, they were not very convinced until I got a Co-op placement at GM. I understand that this field is unstable, but this is not my only field of interest. I also love the teaching profession...”

I hesitate to make too many claims here as these students were reticent about discussing their family backgrounds in comparison to students at Central Collegiate, and even Wychwood Tech. None of them ever mentioned what their parents occupations' were, for example, and they seemed to know little about each others' home lives. My intention is not to draw conclusions, but to rather suggest the possibility that different class and cultural backgrounds orient students differently to nature, environmental issues, and activism.

Central Collegiate: Tomboys Go Camping

The interconnectedness of (ethnic, class, and gender) identity and environmental activism was most obviously demonstrated by the upper middle class white girls in the Central Collegiate environment club. Drawing on their camping experiences, the girls developed an outdoorsy/tomboyish style which contrasted significantly with the other students I saw wandering the hallways. Mountain Equipment Co-op shorts, backpacks, fleece pants, jackets and vests, and sandals were the “uniform” worn by four or five of the core club members, complemented by unshaven legs, swiss army knives, and the occasional bandanna or bike helmet and seat. In contrast, their female peers wore platform heels, tight jeans, clingy shirts and sweaters, and make-up; the guys wore name-brand Nike and Addidas and Tommy Hilfiger athletic gear. Not many OAC students would likely say they like to “play in dirt,” but these girls made it their mission, frequently displaying their comfortability with picking up worms and getting dirty. A demonstration of the vermicomposter was not complete without scooping up a handful of worms. We walked through the hallways carrying bags of manure, and they returned dirty because

the girls felt it necessary to break up the chunks of soil with their hands. When the greenhouse was flooded due to a blocked drain, the core girls jumped into the slime feeling around and clearing out the leaves and dirt that covered the hole. Again during tree-planting, when some of the other students used plastic biology gloves to avoid "getting germs" from touching the dirt, the club members were down in the creek supervising the elementary school boys, braving the smell and the mud and getting wet and dirty. They traded camping stories and discussed the canoeing trips they would take in the summer, clearly making their brand of environmentalism a significant aspect of their individual and group identities.

In our discussions, the girls revealed how their experiences in the outdoors and environmental commitment stemmed from their family backgrounds. Wendy mentioned her father was a naturalist; Sally said her sister had long been an environmental activist, her father was on some composting committee and her family had always had a composter and been energy efficient. Vivian mentioned how her father subscribed to an internet biking club. Theresa suggested she was the only one in her family that was an "environmental activist," yet disclosed her mother worked at some sort of environmental school or educational programme and she spoke with pride about their camping trips. Sandy's mother was politically active in lobbying for environmental education at the Board of Education. Perhaps even more interesting than their common histories, was the assumption that they shared this outdoorsy background. When I asked them if they had been involved in other sorts of environmental activism beyond the club, Theresa initiated a discussion about camping:

Theresa: But the other thing we practice, is all summer, you guys go camping and I go camping, and we practice no-trace camping.

Sally: But I just started that.

Theresa: ...low-impact and no trace.

Wendy: Totally bringing everything out with you.

Theresa: Yeah, and bringing other people's shit.

Vivian: Well the thing is, we use firewood though, so... So, we're bad. I don't know.

Theresa: The other thing, um...

Vivian: I agree with the firewood rule if you're like, in the middle of the Northwest Territories, like, yeah, bring a few pieces with you, I don't know.

...

Wendy: Yeah, like we go canoeing every summer, we volunteer cleaning up camp sites, and because I'm a scuba diver, we clean out reefs in the oceans.

Theresa: Oh, wow.

Sally: You're a scuba diver?

Theresa: That's cool.

Wendy: So, well, I did it once and I felt so great...

Theresa started her comment with the universal assumption that “we all” do this, although clearly they did not all have the same kinds of experiences, nor did they already know how much of this cultural story they shared. Moreover, low-impact and no-trace camping was more than an assumption, it was presented as a kind of standard or status which they were expected to meet and emulate, and which club membership reinforced.

The more active of these students, Theresa and Wendy, were augmenting their eco-adventure backgrounds through ecotourism. Here they describe their experiences in Costa Rica:

Theresa: When I was in grade 11, I went to Costa Rica with--oh god my memory--it was called View and it was an environment, like an ecotourism group, almost.

CL: Um-hum.

Theresa: And they take, but they take groups of people volunteers out to actually work on an environmental project. It's not just see the pretty rainforest and blah blah blah. And I went to Costa Rica to the [inaudible] Forest for two weeks, volunteered to do trail maintenance on the tourist part and we basically, we were taking like tree limbs and stuff and putting them on the trails for people to walk on, and putting chicken wire onto, nailing it on or whatever and dumping volcanic sands onto the trails too [the others are talking about the poster and not listening to Theresa]. Just to support and keep up the maintenance of the tourist part of the park so the rest of the rainforest could run. So, I've done that.

CL: Um-hum.

Wendy: Can you remember what forest? Because I went there a little while ago.

Theresa: To [inaudible]?

Wendy: Yeah.

Theresa: 'Cause that was where I went.

Wendy: And it was really nice there.

Theresa: Oh, it's really beautiful and, um I guess I learned a lot about the rainforest there and the stuff they were doing, the staff who was fighting to keep it open, um, they gave us a brochure when we first got there telling us about all the wildlife and there was a golden frog on it and since this, since the brochure had been put out, the...

Wendy: Oh no.

Theresa: The golden frog had become extinct within the forest. And I guess within the world basically. [Sighs of sympathy].

These interests and activities are strikingly similar to those of the main American environmental organizations, with the emphasis on endangered species, outdoor recreation, such as hiking, canoeing, cycling, and nature appreciation, and wilderness conservation (Darnovsky 1992). Their focus is largely on the exotic--the Northwest Territories, Costa Rica--constructed as peopleless places, although like the Devonshire club, they were working on a proposal for a school rooftop garden. As this project was temporarily stalled, the only aspect of gardening they discussed was composting. On this

topic, they seemed somewhat elusive about their knowledge level. While they indicated their families composted and recycled at home, the students were not always sure what could and could not go into the compost bin and how it worked, suggesting to me that they are not likely active in gardening at home. Gardening and composting were approached for their ecological benefits, not for food production, pleasure, or maintaining images and practices of home and culture in a new city and nation, like for the Wychwood students.

The idea of wilderness looms large in the North American imagination, closely intertwined with political ideals of freedom and prosperity (the "New World," the land of opportunity); masculine feats of solitary adventure (climbing the highest mountain peak, shooting the rapids, hunting wild game); and environmentalism. Access to this wilderness, though, has largely been restricted to the wealthy as even many native North American peoples have been confined to reserves. It is also, as numerous critics have pointed out, a largely white, Anglo-European experience and one which, despite its Romanticism, perpetuates the separation of humans from nature. Gough (1990) cites these lines from a song written by an Australian Aboriginal band which critiques how Western approaches to nature reduce the landscape to "just another cultural space to be colonised:"

Where the awe-inspiring power of time
Leaves some fearful, some sublime
White man finds his progress prime
Black man feels no urge to climb
(Gondwanaland, cited in Gough 1990, 13)

By espousing the white man's "urge to climb," the Central girls may be drawing on the symbols and experiences of their class and cultural backgrounds, but at the same time they have appropriated the masculinist wilderness discourse to construct non-traditional gender identities. Their environmentalism provides them with the space to reject the codes of beauty which dominate high school social relations. Their refusal of makeup, smoothly shaved legs, and fashion-conscious, sexually-appealing clothes is not a rejection of consumerism, however as they literally buy into the burgeoning wilderness recreation market.

Riverside Tech: Inhabiting the Urban Wilderness?

The garden at Riverside Tech had long subsided back into the ground by the time I was doing my research, another failed initiative attempted by Mr. Graham, the staff

advisor. When we talked about the challenges of stimulating interest in environmental issues at Riverside, Mr. Graham suggested that the students had very little experience with non-urban environments, making it difficult for them to relate to environmentalism.

Mr. Graham: I believe that a *connection*, a real *connection* with nature is vital if you want to be a healthy human being. I believe that we as a people have lost touch with the importance of that connection. I believe that the students of an inner city school, most of whom have never experienced nature, do not have that connection. I will give you two examples.

CL: Um-hum.

Mr. Graham: Number one, in a Geography class we're talking about ecosystems and I said, 'what happens when you put a spade into the earth and you dig up a shovel of dirt, what do you see?' And there were blank faces, because I realized that these kids had never had the opportunity to put a shovel in the ground and pick up a shovel full of dirt and look at it.

CL: Um-hum.

Mr. Graham: When I was in the Rouge Valley, ...I told these kids to take a deep breath and tell me if what they smelled was the same or different than what they normally smell around their homes, which is ...downtown Toronto. And they said, 'yup, it's different.' I ask them which they preferred and they obviously preferred that which they know. So they preferred the pollution and the smog and the smell of the city and that frenetic energy which is part of the central experience. Because that's what they know.

A third example he offered was the sight of some black and South Asian male students smoking up by a shed not far from where we sat in a park behind the school:

"I just do want to mention that in terms of how disconnected these guys are, again just put on tape what I mentioned before. The area that these kids smoke dope, I'm sitting here, staring at it now. We're in the middle of this beautiful, little park with trees all around. Instead of sitting under a tree to smoke their dope, they sit on a paved sidewalk against this little hut of some sort which is right beside the alley which is an alley between the field and the houses. But again that's their comfort zone."

While my brief discussions with the students in the club also indicated they too may not be interested in "nature" experiences, their lack of enthusiasm might have had as much to do with our awkward brainstorming session and their reaction to me:

CL: Now you [to Vinod] mentioned planting trees before, is there a lot of land on the school property? for planting trees?

Vinod: It was an idea suggested by Mr. Graham at one of the meetings, planting trees.

CL: Um-hum.

Vinod: Things like that. I don't know.

CL: Do you think you'd, well, would you want to do it on the school or elsewhere, or .. there's a lot of other environmental groups active and around. You could join with them when they do a tree-planting day or something like that. Do you think many people would want to go out to that or would it take too much extra time?

Jing-wen: Yeah, we could ask them to.

[long pause]

CL: Was there much interest from others in the club for planting trees, or .. you just sort of remember that it was suggested.

Vinod: Yeah, it was just suggested [he sighs].

Another discussion though evoked a similar reluctance:

Jing-wen comes in here and I ask her if she would be interested in joining in with plantings and walks of other groups, such as the Friends of the Don. She is hesitant at first, asks a few questions, and says maybe, says its like when her class went to Boyne. I finally coax her into saying she wouldn't want to do it. When she finds how acceptable it is for her to disagree, she laughs and smiles with what seems to be relief.

Jing-wen and Vinod showed much greater interest in recycling and visiting the recycling facilities, than going into the ravines or planting trees. This does not necessarily make them "urban-identified" however.

Unlike the other clubs, the Riverside club, if it could really be considered a club given its shifting membership, was highly multiracial and multicultural. I do not think either the teacher nor myself could possibly generalize about "these kids" and what it is "they know." One student directly made a link between his ethnic identity, representations of nature and his environmental activism. Notably he was also the only student I interviewed individually, which might suggest that the others could have similar insights, but were not so willing to speak about issues of identity and family background within the larger groups. A senior student at Riverside, Todd was exploring his partial Japanese-Canadian heritage through volunteering with the National Association of Japanese-Canadians (NAJC). He found Japanese culture offered him a counter-hegemonic story of nature which did not follow the western model of progress:

"I've always been fascinated by Japanese culture, [and] one of the things that I've picked up on was a reverence for environmental harmony... I found that in comparison to western culture--in school it was even mentioned by one teacher--the obsession with progress, you know, there was no real definition of what progress was, but as long as, you know, someone thought we were moving ahead, no one really decided what was ahead, what was superior, what was more civilized, so I saw contradictions in that sense and I became very critical, cynical..."

For Todd, finding an environmental consciousness within his Japanese heritage was an empowering experience, affirming both his environmental activism and his ethnic identity.

Many of the students Mr. Graham was referring to in his examples--the inner city

kids--were black Caribbean students who live in subsidized housing units in downtown Toronto, most of whom would have immigrated to Canada since starting school (Henry 1994). While Mr. Graham excuses their lack of interest in environmental issues, conceding "many of these people have other concerns.... You know, the environmental issues, even the spiritual attainment is very very far from their list of needs," he does not question his urban stereotyping or the role the urban might play in the construction of these students' identities. Henry (1994) suggests that immigrants of Caribbean-origin often see their homeplaces as more natural and connected to the land than "materialistic" North America (252). She quotes one woman as reminiscing, "It's so great just thinking about the sunshine, the food, and the people. It was so natural. Canada is artificial, plastic, compared to Jamaica" (253). Henry (1994) concludes that "for many Caribbean people living in Toronto, cultural identity becomes a trade-off--one sacrifices the warm and natural environment for the benefits of jobs and material goods" (252). Part of the expectation of youth who come to Toronto with, or to join, their parents is that of a rich, urban life, a "pampered luxury, like the cars and the clothes, the jewellery and hair products, TV," which they may not find, or at least comes with the challenges of racism, under/unemployment, and family separation (Henry 1994, 253-4). Embracing the urban, as the Riverside students who participated in the "B-Boy" subculture²² did, might be one way of living out this materialistic fantasy and creating their own safe territory, or what Philip et al. (1997) term "fortress," within a foreign and racist land (Breitbart 1998).

Racism, as much as pride in ethnic identity, can shape the relation between land, nature, and identity. As Philip et al. (1997) explain, "immigrants do not take advantage of this wilderness that all Canadians share ...because a particular gaze already seems to own it" (23). The different mythologies or symbolisms of nature constructed by different cultures are not just pluralist differences, but connected to historic and on-going discourses and relations of power, such as colonialism and racism:

...[Consider] the Judeo-Christian imaging of utopian nature-spaces as

²² Mallouh (1995) describes the B-Boys as one of Toronto's most visible and identifiable youth subcultures, composed mostly of Caribbean youth, marked by their style of wearing "oversized, saggy outfits worn in combination with a hooded jacket and ball cap," sometimes combined with civil rights or Rastafarian symbols and political messages, and listening to the music of rap and hip hop (12). The style predominates among the black and South Asian male students in the school and the music is so popular at Riverside that the school organized a whole-school assembly on jazz and the history of hip-hop.

"Edens" -- Eden meaning pristine, clean and protected...[but also] Eden is a very controlled space; there are particular rules to be followed for it to be enjoyed. ...If you get rid of nature in the city and take it out of there, you make it accessible only to a particular people,...[and] you can only desire nature in a certain way, which requires a certain lifestyle.

...Further we can't afford to underestimate the role of movies, of Hollywood, in bringing us to the rural area as an area where rednecks live, who will shoot you, lynch you, who will be riding shotgun. However, I do believe that Hollywood has let the urban rednecks off the hook. And why is that? So when you're thinking of space and wilderness we need to understand how some of our resistance to rural areas has been indeed carefully nurtured. (Philip et al. 1997, 23)

The escape from the city out to the countryside is a highly class and raced practice. Philip et al. (1997) note how middle class blacks may move out to the suburbs, but do not take up the very "Canadian" practice of cottage ownership. Popular discourses simultaneously present the city as a dangerous place for whites and the countryside as dangerous place for nonwhites, serving to contain "pollution" to the cities and to maintain the "purity" of the countryside and wilderness in a "nature" discourse with racist undertones. Although, as Wallace (1994) points out, it is "especially young men of colour who live under the greatest and most constant threat" in cities (180).

Conclusions

While the students in all the clubs shared a common environmental discourse, centred on the practices of recycling and naturalization, the differences between them are also striking. While I have located these differences in their respective cultural and class positions, I do not suggest that students' identities and perspectives are somehow ascribed or limited by them. All the students were actively engaged in constructing their understandings and approaches to nature by variably drawing on, rejecting and reformulating their cultural backgrounds in relation to the popular discourses of mainstream Canadian society: turning economic frugality, pragmatism, and prosperity into environmental pragmatism; adopting the new values of environmentalism by sustaining the memory of family gardens and gardening experiences; appropriating a masculinist story of wilderness to crack the hegemony of female beauty myths; or reclaiming ethnic identity as a critical distance from western structures and discourses of exploitation. Representations and symbolism of "nature" are interwoven with our (multiple and changing) constructions of gender, class and ethnicity and these identities,

in term, shape our understandings/values of and experiences in “nature.”

Schools influence these constructions in a number of ways. Even without attending classes, I was able to get a sense of how the school curriculum projected class, race, and gender relations onto certain landscapes and nature experiences. On display at Devonshire Collegiate outside the Geography classroom was a bulletin board of students' work on Caribbean tourism: a collage of photos and maps pieced together with paragraphs of information. All the photos have white people in them: white people on lounge chairs, white people holding hands on the beach, white people on a cruiseboat. The people of the Caribbean islands--their work, their political struggles, their poverty, their celebrations, families, children, dreams, lovers, fights, history, memory--have been erased in this reconstruction of the landscape as playground, as desire, as curiosity. How do the 16 students from the Caribbean who attend this school feel about the representation of their homeland as tourist destination? As a Geography project, why were the environmental impacts of tourism not explored, why was the neo-colonialism of such tourism not exposed? Academic streaming within the schools also contributes to how different students are given different opportunities for different kinds of nature experiences. The teachers frequently admitted that, within their schools, the gifted or advanced students were given more opportunities to go to field centres and on field trips. More pronounced variation was noticeable between the schools: while the environmental science class at Wychwood Tech managed to get out to a nearby city park once or twice a year, the class at Central Collegiate enjoyed three overnight visits--one session lasting all week--to field centres outside of the city. Parents' ability to subsidize class trips, teachers' perceptions of students' ability to behave “appropriately,” and the culture and traditions of the school all contribute to what sorts of nature/urban experiences are offered and available to students.

Perhaps most significant, however, is the cultural experiences which frame teachers' approach to nature and environmental issues. When nature experiences are assumed to be unmediated and culturally-neutral, teachers may be blind to the biases they hold. Mr. Graham, at Riverside Tech, is a well-intentioned, caring teacher; but his own background of growing up in a small Ontario town with lots of opportunities to roam about the river and woods was the foundation for his environmental analysis that western society lacks a “connection to nature.” His views resemble those of deep ecologists, find popular expression in New Age spirituality, and in fact reflect the commitments of most

environmental and outdoor educators (Lewis and James 1993); and they are indeed radical, challenging the ethics which undergird our social and economic systems. However, by locating the "problem" in disconnection to nature, the problem became transposed onto the inner city students whom he taught so that their lack of connection to nature--which they apparently "choose"--was the reason for both their disenchantment with mainstream society and our increasing environmental ills. I argue their hyper-urban style might be read instead as a parody of North American materialism and an unmasking of the false promise of the (empty and free) "land of opportunity."

As Darnovsky (1992), Di Chiro (1992), and Lynch (1993) have argued, popular representations of nature, most notably the image of wilderness, have been largely defined and shaped by the dominant class, culture, and gender. However, "nature" figures prominently--indeed inherently--in most cultural stories and practices, and frequently serves as the idealized homeland or promised land, a symbol of resistance, hope and community. The role of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in shaping students' social positions and prospects, desires and identities also informs how they approach and experience "nature." By denying this diversity exists, by only representing the discourses and practices of the dominant culture, and by imposing normal/abnormal or ecofriendly/materialist judgements according to these seemingly universal representations, environmental education reinforces the dominant hegemony and disables any opportunity for building a diverse and broad-based environmental movement. McLaren (1989) asks, "to what extent does adherence to the norms of the school mean that ...students have to forfeit their identities as members of an ethnic group?" (30). This might be rephrased to ask, to what extent does commitment to environmentalism challenge students to forfeit or reject their ethnic identities and how might resistance to such colonization become resistance to environmentalism?

X Locating Women in Schools, Clubs, and Nature

Young women predominate in high school environment clubs. This is substantiated by my experiences with youth environmental conferences, teachers' recollections of their experiences, and the fact that 25 of the 33 students I encountered in the four environment clubs were female. In this chapter, I probe the significance of this phenomenon, considering not only the obvious question of what attracts these young women to join environment clubs, but also how might gender play into the shape the clubs take and the ways in which their activism is received by teachers and other students? How might participation in the environment club shape the gender identities of these young women? I draw on a range of feminist and ecofeminist literature to consider the gender aspects of both the club and school experience and the girls' environmental activism. Education feminists consider how gender is shaped in schools through the curriculum and teacher-student contact and their research provides often damning exposures of how classroom relations treat and evaluate boys and girls differently, imposing a middle class gender code of docility, silence, and underachievement on girls (Bennett and LeCompte 1990). Schools are not the only site of socialization though, and school knowledge and practices must be understood in context of relations and meanings produced outside schools in other institutions and informal settings. Feminist subcultural theorists, for example, point to the importance of peer relations and the sexualization of adolescent women through popular culture in forums such as magazines, romance novels, TV, and popular music in the representation and regulation of women's bodies (Roman and Christian-Smith 1988). The value of these cultural works is to better understand how women negotiate social structures to produce their lives, identities and desires since the social construction of gender is neither prescribed nor simple, but composed of contradictory narratives which shift with and, in turn, shape social relations of race/ethnicity and class.

Nature, Caring and Women?

Seager (1993), Rocheleau et al. (1996), and Di Chiro (1992) all note how women comprise by far the majority of grassroots environmental activists. They represent from 60 to 80% of the membership of mainstream environmental organizations and likely even more in the environmental justice movement (Seager 1993). While some ecofeminists posit an inherent connection between women and nature, suggesting that through child-

bearing and menstrual cycles women are more in tune with natural cycles, most theorists attribute women's environmental activism to women's socio-cultural positions as caregivers and sustenance-providers in North American, and indeed many other, societies (Di Chiro 1992; Rocheleau et al. 1996; Seager 1993; Shiva 1994). Another approach expands Carol Gilligan's work on women's relational, as opposed to rights-based, ethics to consider how women are more inclined to assume responsibility for family, community and ecological health and to include relations to animals and ecology in their moral orientation (Diamond and Orenstein 1990; King 1983; Merchant 1995). Still others highlight the symbolism of children under ecological threat as a key motivating principle in women's activism (Di Chiro 1992, Rocheleau et al. 1996).

Di Chiro (1992) differentiates between middle class and working class women's environmental activism, suggesting the ecofeminist invocation of compassion, spirituality and the interconnectedness of life appeals to middle class, white women, while working class and women of colour tend to ground their activism in issues of health, livelihood, and protection of their children. The former is characterised by large-scale symbolic demonstrations; the latter by community-based, issue-driven networking. Rocheleau et al. (1996) substantiate this claim through a variety of case studies from around the world based mostly on women in third world, working class, and/or nonwhite communities. They note that the women activists in their case studies use arguments which "reflect their concerns about livelihood security, health, and life-threatening circumstances. Only secondarily do they couch their concerns in more broad environmental and economic arguments" (303). Skogen's (1996) quantitative research on young environmentalists in Norway finds girls assign greater importance to protecting nature than boys, but discovers an even more significant difference in environmental orientation between "humanistic-intellectual" middle class girls and working class girls.

Where do I locate the young women in the environment clubs in this complex matrix? They come from a range of class, ethnic, and national backgrounds and they did not share the potentially unifying concern for children or family well-being as most have yet to assume the social roles of mothers and caregivers. They did not use the language of family health or children or survival to explain their activism--nor might I add that of abstract, spiritual ecofeminism--but variously referred to community service and moral responsibility; abstract, scientific ecological and economic principles of sustainability; and the pleasure of gardening and dirt. I suggest what we need to consider is their shared

commonality of schooling, which places an emphasis on scientific knowledge and rational principles, and the socialization of women, through schools and other social institutions such as family, church, and media, to be sensitive to and compassionate about the needs of others and to assume a stance of moral responsibility to the community/world.

Gilligan's (1982) work on moral development most clearly illustrates the role of gender in the construction of identity. Whereas individual achievement and individuation characterizes development of male identity, female identity centres on relationship and empathy. Where rule-based competition denotes male organization and play, their female counterparts are structured on cooperation, pragmatism, and care for the feelings of others. Where the moral judgement of adult men rests on abstract principles of justice, women refer to relations and responsibility in a contextual ethic of care (Gilligan [1979] 1994). Gilligan ([1979] 1994) concludes that for women, "the moral dilemma changes from how to exercise one's rights without interfering with the rights of others to how 'to lead a moral life which includes obligations to myself and my family and people in general' " (38). The essentialism and universalism of Gilligan's work has been criticized and reworked in the last decade in response to the concern that she mistakenly attributes her analysis to all women, just as earlier developmental psychologists universalized their research on white men to everyone. Nonetheless, numerous women and feminist theorists claim a relational ethic of caring as important, indeed essential, for family welfare, social harmony, and environmental well-being, whether it be defined as a women's way of knowing or a counter-hegemonic value system (French 1995, Martin 1994, Noddings 1984). Indeed, it is the archetypal (able-bodied white, middle class, North American) "independent woman"--and corporate male--who dismisses and rejects her responsibility to others and their well-being.

Another approach to the construction of women as guardians of morality and embodiments of emotionality lies in the separation of private and public spheres during industrialization. Nicholson ([1980] 1994) describes how this shift in relations of production and social organization led to increased stress on the differences between the genders: "the home during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became progressively viewed as the realm of privacy and subjectivity, the only place where the expression of feeling and emotion were appropriate. It also became viewed as not only an emotional but also a moral refuge" (77). Concurrent with the connection of middle class American women to home and morality was a redefinition of women's tasks to be consumption-

oriented and a construction of “femininity” as frail, silly, decorative and sentimental. This binary gender code of men as individual, competitive, active, rational in opposition to dependent/relational, cooperative, passive, emotional women stands as the assumption and representation which structure(d) the gendered organization of modern western society and the regulation of middle class life, and persists in our subconscious and intentional representations, discourses, practices, and structures. Notably these domains of household management, consumption, emotion, and morality are also those which characterize the mainstream environmental discourse of green consumerism discussed in chapter 8.

The young women in the environment clubs were consistent with this feminine ethic of care and moral orientation when they described their motivation/purpose as one of “helping society” and “making the world a better place.” However, they did not consider it a gendered discourse and expressed confusion at why their male peers did not share their concerns. A conversation I had with a group of five male students from an all-male Catholic school at a high school environmental conference²³ sheds some light on how environmental concern/activism seems to carry a gendered signifier for boys, even if invisible to--or denied by--girls. Half the sixty conference participants were male students from this one school; the other half were mostly girls representing a variety of schools. Many of the boys were not voluntary participants in the conference, having come primarily to avoid a test, and expressed their rejection of the conference values through minor acts of resistance throughout the day: refusing to participate in ice-breakers and activities; talking amongst friends and not paying attention to organizers; sitting with jackets on, arms-crossed, and legs stretched out in a pose of detachment and disengagement; talking back during facilitation (“Yeah, right!” or “No kidding!”); gathering on the outside of discussion circles and even out of sight behind a pillar in a corner; and skipping some of the sessions. By contrast, all the female students were actively participating in, or at least listening to, speakers and activities. I approached the most “rebellious” boys group during a brainstorming session on barriers students might face in implementing environmental projects in their schools. They were sitting in silence, so I tried to provoke discussion on the topic. They revealed the biggest barrier would be

²³ As I was asked to write an article on the conference and desired some practice at taking field notes for my about-to-begin ethnographic research, I wrote extensive notes on this event.

getting other students to participate. It was not that they themselves were opposed to environmentalism, but they felt it carried the stigma of being "sissy." "Guys are lazy, they won't do stuff like that," was the consensus of the five boys. It seemed it was the demonstration of commitment to school activities and improvement as much as environmental concerns which were undesirable. They even suggested that if they were a co-ed school, or if they joined in partnership with their "sister school," the girls would get the project going and the guys would come out to meet and impress them, in an interesting reversal of gender roles in leadership.

There were a few male students in some of the environment clubs I researched, but several of them made efforts to disassociate and distance themselves from the club. Andy, the only male student in the Devonshire Collegiate club, physically distanced himself from the club by sitting at a separate table during club meetings. On various occasions, the girls would invite him to join them, but he would respond that "I can hear you from here." When he discussed the club, he referred to it as "you" not "we" like the girls did, locating himself outside the group. Dennis at Wychwood Tech used a similar strategy, while Samir insisted to me that he was not a member of the club, but "just a volunteer." Some of the girls teased him about this, saying he came more often now than some other "members," but he refused to identify himself as part of the environment club. Praveen, the third male student at the Wychwood Tech club rarely spoke to any of the others, including me. Indeed, the upshot of this distancing meant that these male students also distanced themselves from me and I was unable to find out much about them at all. There were no male students in the club at Central Collegiate. Todd, the male student I interviewed at Riverside Tech, had an active interest in feminism and "men's liberation," even asking me for references, which suggests again a compatibility between female-oriented identity and environmental activism and concerns. While I was not able to find out whether the boys felt gender was the reason for their actions, the pattern is illuminating when placed in the context of the comments from the boys at the conference and from the male student at Wychwood Tech who dismissed the club's gardening as feminine easywork in comparison to his own hard work planting trees with his Boy Scout troop.

Without more research, I can only speculate about which elements of environmental discourse are problematic to masculine identity. It may be that the boys were reluctant to demonstrate that they "cared:" cared about improving the school, cared

about the environment, cared about their futures, or cared about anything in an adolescent climate of disengagement. Alternatively, the emphasis on what are commonly seen as women's domains of children, consumption, and household management in mainstream environmental discourse might simply not interest male youth or pose an identity conflict between masculinity and environmental activism. The social construction of masculinity as aggressive or physically tough, competitive, individual achievement-oriented, active/productive, and rational/logical is not very compatible with green consumerism or emotional appeals for children's protection. Skogen (1996) posits a similar analysis, although based on class not gender, of why some youth might reject environmental values:

Protecting wilderness is one side of environmentalism, guarding humans against health hazards is another. In the production-oriented culture the ability to endure physical hardship and danger has traditionally been valued highly. ...If tackling physical danger is a virtue and the people pointing most ardently at environmental hazards belong to categories given to airy theorizing, then the environmental movement's hazard scenario will not generate unanimous response. (468)

Skogen (1996) concedes there is no research supporting this suggestion that working class people reject environmentalism out of an anti-intellectualism, but I would suggest this association of environmentalism with "softness" might be salient for male youth concerned with proving and constructing their masculine identities. Skogen (1996) fails to take up the construction of masculinity in his consideration of gender, implicitly reading "gender" as women, just as ethnicity is often read as "nonwhite," reinforcing their Otherness in comparison to some invisible (white, male) norm (Wallace 1994).

While showing concern for the environment might be threatening to the identities of male youth, this does not mean it constrains young women into traditional gender roles/identities of emotional, compassionate, future wives and mothers. On the contrary, the girls showed how they tried to merge their caring/moral orientation to environmentalism with distinctly unfeminine interests, career ambitions, and styles, perhaps even transforming these domains in the process. The Central girls' camping gear/tomboy style might be the most obvious transgression of conventional codes of femininity, but it is not the only one exhibited by the girls in the clubs. More than half of the female students were studying the sciences and many aspired to careers in science and

engineering; a few others were interested in business.²⁴ This was observed across the clubs. Many saw the science route as a way to pursue their environmental values and activism through their careers, refusing any trade-off between work and ethics often against, or as a compromise with, their parents' interests.²⁵ Such parental conflicts were most often mentioned by the Chinese-Canadian students, but the desire to integrate values and career was common to all the girls. While compassion and moral responsibility provided their motivation for environmental activism, science was unquestionably their ammunition and they were comfortable referring to ecology and economics to argue about specific environmental issues, such as the need for naturalization or recycling. Thus we might consider the place of the environment club in helping female youth reconcile nontraditional gender career opportunities and aspirations with feminine ethics and responsibilities.

The girls themselves attributed the predominance of young women in the clubs to their own exclusionary practices, such as only notifying their friends, unintentionally creating an intimidating environment for male students, or choosing issues to which boys do not relate. At first, the girls at Central Collegiate even denied there was any such pattern, although their teacher had previously told me the club had been predominantly female ever since he started it over ten years before:

CL: So why is it only girls?

Theresa: It's not.

Vivian: It didn't used to be.

Theresa: It didn't used to be.

Sally: It didn't at all, when it first started.

Theresa: No. I think it would be more co-ed, a lot of it is because the meetings aren't advertised as much. I'm involved in *so* much stuff this year and I take full responsibility for the fact that the meetings have not been announced in the [school bulletin], so it's sort of whoever I see in the hall, I tell them 'hey, there's a meeting tonight.' I know they're whatever, into the environmental science club to start. That's my fault. I admit it.

Similarly, the girls at Wychwood Tech denied there was any significance to the pattern,

²⁴ The number may in fact be higher as the younger students in grades 9 and 10 had not yet identified their streams of interest.

²⁵ I lack direct quotes to substantiate these points because discussions about university and career choices often took place before or after meetings when I informally chatted with students one-on-one. They usually raised the topic, either to ask me questions, or as something currently on their minds as the senior students neared the end of the school year.

although at first they joked that “*we think*.” At Devonshire, they took the question more seriously, but still could offer little explanation:

Dana: I was saying that, yeah, there were several guys in our class before and when we started off with this club there was like a couple of guys, I think, I remember, recall, um, but I think it's, so you don't feel, they might not feel as connected with the environment.... Maybe if we like found an issue that concerned them more. I don't know what that would be though.

Beth: Yeah, I think the issue part. I don't know, we have to find an issue that they can relate to.

CL: Why would *you* guys be able to relate to, say,

Dana: Right.

CL: ...waste reduction

Beth: Oh, that's...

CL: ...or transportation...

Beth: That's just personal interest.

...

Dana: I thought that the bicycle thing, that would attract more guys, I thought.

...

Beth: I don't know. It's just recently, like, just looking at the SAC, the student council elections, it was run mainly by girls, I don't know if there's anything connecting, but a lot of the clubs that I go to, it seems like the guys aren't as involved anymore as they are in sports, like these clubs where you know you have to sit down and start talking and then really get into details where you know, it seems like, I'm not trying to make this like a sexist comment or anything, but this just what I've been seeing. I don't know. I don't know exactly what's happening.

I will take up Beth's observation that the gender divide extends beyond the environment club and might have more to do with the culture of the school than environmental concerns per se in the next section. For now, I wish to point out how none of these answers really provided any explanation for the situation, particularly as a commonality across many schools and clubs. Moreover, the students seemed most concerned about being accused of reverse sexism. The girls at Central Collegiate seemed to want to avoid the suggestion that their club appealed only, or mostly, to female students. They did not acknowledge the comfort and familiarity which seemed to thrive in the all-female setting, but named it abnormal and undesirable instead. The absence of all-female groups in popular representations of middle class gender relations--women are most often depicted as best friend pairs or heterosexual couples--and the construction of women's social groups as feminine, trivial, and conformist (Lesko 1996) might lead the upper middle class girls, in particular, to downplay, not see, or not know how to interpret an all-female club.

Sports are for Boys, Clubs are for Girls...

While the teachers and students alike were unable to provide any explanation for the predominance of girls in the environment clubs, several did make the observation that the male students were more involved in sports. The statistics from the Board of Education do not differentiate between sports, student councils, and clubs when they consider participation in extra-curricular activities according to gender, but there does seem to be a trend for boys to go into sports and girls into clubs. Eckert (1989) associated schools' extra-curricular culture with middle class students' initiation into the social relations of corporate structures of hierarchy, but she failed to integrate a gender analysis into her class analysis. The "sports are for boys" phenomenon harkens back to a long tradition in high school mythology where male students achieved their status from their individual achievement in athletic prowess and student leadership--football hero, class president--and female students through their social relations--such as prom queen and girlfriend--based on personality, beauty and appearance, and morality (Bennet and LeCompte 1990). The role of the school club must be understood in terms of the gender relations of both formal schooling and peer relations.

Nicholson ([1980] 1994) locates the nineteenth century school as the bridge between the newly constructed private and public realms, serving to socialize young people--mostly boys--"out of the family and into the public world" (78). Numerous feminist scholars have pointed out how schools, and indeed the definition of an educated person, have been biased towards those characteristics associated with masculinity, namely, rational thought, individual achievement, competitiveness, and action/production (Martin 1994). This has meant that women--and women of colour especially--have always been to some extent "out of place" within the school and must continually negotiate between the contradictory positions of becoming feminine and being educated. Horner's (1971) work on female students' "dread of success" is frequently cited as an obvious example: girls may fear and actively avoid academic success because of its implication that one is a failure as a woman. Such contradictions are actively perpetuated through school relations. Walkerdine ([1987] 1994), for example, explores how the message for girls to exhibit "good behaviour, neatness, and rule-following exists *covertly* alongside overt messages... concerning activity, exploration, openness and so forth, derived from the child-centred pedagogy" in the elementary classroom (63).

The ways in which women live out these contradictions vary considerably according

to race/ethnicity and class, and are no doubt changing as feminism and feminist backlash are taken up in popular representations and discourse. The phenomenal success of upper middle class women in breaking through barriers to women's participation in the labour force, although not necessarily marked by a parallel increase in advances for racial/ethnic minority, poor and working class women, and single mothers, has no doubt changed the gender codes and expectations for these women. Arnot ([1982] 1994) and McRobbie (1978) have suggested that working class girls may celebrate their femininity as a rejection of the masculine knowledge and culture of schools, just as working class boys resist school culture through the development of "coarse" language and style. Walkerdine ([1987] 1994) offers "a woman academic who after giving an academic paper has to flirt with men" as an example of a strategy employed by women who accept and succeed at school--or corporate--norms, reaffirming their femininity to offset their decidedly unfeminine performances (67). Lesko (1988) argues for understanding the importance of the body in women's identity construction and analyzes how middle class and working class girls develop their style, appearance, and sexuality in relation to the idealization, commodification and control of women's bodies by schools, families, media representations and other cultural arenas. Subtle resistance can be expressed through a woman's use of dark make-up to undermine otherwise "nice girl" behaviour, or army boots to subvert the femininity of a dress.

Lesko's (1988) ethnographic research within a Catholic high school revealed the girls active in organizing school activities and clubs "sought power and status in an organization that demanded modesty and controlled voices and opinions. They acquiesced with decorous behaviour, 'niceness,' and little-girl looks" (133). She contrasted their softness, niceness, and efforts at interpersonal relations to the working class burn-outs:

The burn-outs did not smile in agreement and excitement when a teacher proposed a new idea; these girls did not 'act' enthusiastically to please someone else, as I saw rich and popular girls do with staff members. ...They had no notion that they should be trying to get along with everyone, a trait which appears to be part of middle class girls' repertoire. (134-5).

Their attitude and physical appearance was characterized as "hard" and their deviancy sexualized into reputations for promiscuity. Most significantly, Lesko's (1988) characterization of successful school girls--nice, pleasant, modest, helpful--does not correspond to the traits by which successful school boys are valued and celebrated: leadership and individual achievement, originality/creativity, and intelligence. Moreover,

as Walkerdine ([1987] 1994) notes in a study of mathematics classroom, girls' hard work and helpfulness are often counted against them as indications of a lack of creativity, individuality and intelligence. The values which are accorded to femininity--and actively nurtured in women--are denigrated in the progressive school.

In Chapter 5, I defined environment clubs as primarily social, community service-type groups. With the exception of upper middle class Central Collegiate, none seemed to exhibit the qualities of "corporate" organization that Eckert (1989) suggested: no competition, little control over information, membership or activities, and no status among their peer groups. Service-oriented rather than status-seeking, they reflected the typical volunteer organization, which commonly draws a predominantly female membership. Most dressed modestly and tidily, in sweaters and jeans, hair tied back with barrettes and elastics. They were described and treated as model students: polite, clean, respectful, and socially-responsible. One aspect of their nice and polite demeanours was the strategic expression of criticism and resistance in non-threatening and non-confrontational ways. The girls at Wychwood were quite bold and upfront with their criticisms, questions, and comments, but this was always either delivered or received by teachers as friendly "teasing," which could be laughed off and not taken seriously. At Devonshire, resistance was expressed more in the refusal to make eye contact and engage, a sort of "grit your teeth until he's gone" approach, rather than direct confrontation. Through these acts of self-censorship, the girls showed themselves to be hard-working, helpful, and responsible adolescents, concerned about their impact on their world and committed to making a difference.

Indeed their "good behaviour" garnered criticism from their teachers who accused them of wasting time with "chatter" and having no effective leadership skills, characteristics often associated negatively with women in contrast to the productiveness and individuality of men. While studies show male students speak more often and louder than female students, teachers regularly suggest female students talk and socialize too much (Bennett and LeCompte 1990). Ms. Shaw at Wychwood Tech frequently bemoaned how the girls just wanted to talk:

"you know what we're like, we sit there and there's talking and chattering and it takes a long time to get anything concrete really done."

Similarly, Mr. Robinson at Devonshire Collegiate again and again would chastise the girls--during their meetings and to me privately--for having "too many ideas" and not

being capable of actually implementing them.

"This is a lot to do...be careful not to take on too much... all you have now is ideas, nothing on paper, no one confirmed."

"...they either they don't realize the amount of commitment that's required or the work ethic that's required or they have the ideas, but when they find out how much work is involved to get that idea completed, then a lot of them tend to lose interest."

"I don't know how they are going to do all the things they said they would do."

He would follow this up with the suggestion that they lacked effective leadership, a judgement which was echoed by the adult advisor of the Student Environment Network. She described her group, which included a student from Devonshire, as "some of the nicest kids" who were very cooperative, but had no leadership skills. By contrast, the students at Devonshire were actively trying to create and sustain a collective and collaborative group. The "teamwork" they fought so hard to achieve was not even recognized by their teacher because they seemed to lack a prominent individual leader. The privileging of the autonomous individual, historically associated with middle class white males, works against women's relational and empathetic ways of organizing, which emphasize accommodating the needs and concerns of everyone, and dismisses the emphasis placed on social connection as trivial, akin to "women's gossip" perhaps, and a lack of action/productivity.

Central Collegiate was an exception in a number of ways, which might point to the class-specific nature of these pressures. Unlike the other clubs and other students in their school, the Central club members actively rejected stereotyped symbols of femininity, such as makeup, shaven legs, and attractive clothing, and could be said to identify with and appropriate masculine models of corporate organization in addition to the masculine model of wilderness adventure. However, they also placed inordinate efforts on "sucking up" and being pleasant and nice with their teachers, practices Lesko (1988) describes as the trademark of the "rich and popular girls" in her ethnography. While I observed a very friendly rapport between the staff advisor and Theresa, the club president, she was highly critical of him in private:

Theresa: ...the architect, that's what we're waiting on right now. And the fact that we don't have the name of the architect, because [sigh] we can't get one. Yup [laughter]. Because [slowly] it's in the bottom of someone's briefcase and he won't get it out [laughter]. [Sigh.] Not that I'm bitter. Nnooo.

CL: How is he as a staff advisor?

Vivian: Mellow.

Sally: Yeah [laughter].

Theresa: Well, he's sort of, eenh, whatever. He's really good for 'whatever you want to do' but ...

Vivian: Yeah.

Theresa: But he's not good at initiating stuff.

Sally: Oh yeah, not at all.

Vivian: He's not there really...

Another time, I observed Vivian "charm" a teacher into unlocking a door for the club.

I arrive and find Sally and two girls I have never seen sitting at the classroom door. Sally tells me the door is locked and demonstrates by trying the doorknob. ...a women teacher comes by. Vivian addresses her by name and asks her very politely if she would open the door for their club meeting. At first the teacher says that she is supposed to be in a meeting now, but then Vivian keeps pushing her to open the door, saying in a sugary voice: "you wouldn't want us running the halls and destroying school property, would you?" I don't really think this extra sweetness/threat was necessary as she seemed to be responding to Vivian as a reasonable and mature good student, but afterwards Vivian jokes about how charming she is to teachers.

Later in the room, the students spend twenty minutes making fun of some of their teachers. Theresa and Vivian both are quite aware of the performances they put on and seem to feel them necessary for getting what they want, although they contradict the 'down to earth' message of their outdoorsy, undecorated style. I would speculate that this inconsistency belies the pressure placed on these girls to become polite, charming hostesses and wives, while at the same being encouraged to aim for and develop the appropriate skills to handle the high status jobs now open to upper middle class women. However, as environmental issues and school, not gender, were the topic of our discussions, I did not have an opportunity to elicit the girls' explanations for their chosen style and behaviour. Moreover, as Valentine et al. (1998) note, there is a silence within feminist cultural studies on girls who reject femininity: "what there was little space for in such studies were the girls who did not do these things, who were what might be termed 'tomboys'" (17).

A final relation to consider might be that between the mostly male club advisors and mostly female club members. It is hardly coincidental that the teachers advising high school environment clubs are male. Male teachers outnumber female teachers in high school science and social studies departments from which most environment club advisors emerge (Bennett and LeCompte 1990); moreover, familiarity in the outdoors seems to be a common trait among the teachers leading environment clubs, again a formative

experience generally more accessible to boys than girls. Mr. Albion at Central Collegiate mentioned some simple problems this situation generated, such as his inability to take the club to field centres for overnight trips anymore because he lacked a female supervisor for the girls' dorm. But a simple exchange which occurred between Mr. White and a few of the students at Wychwood Tech about feminism provoked many questions in my mind about what kind of role models or mentors these girls may be lacking without female leaders.

Premala runs over to Gita and says something about the women having more power because they have the shovels.

Gita: Oh, Premala, shut up with your feminism.

Premala: Women *do* have more power.

Mr. White: [in a teasing voice] But male birds are more beautiful.

[silence, everyone returns to work.]

Young women might feel more comfortable raising or receive a more serious and considered response when raising questions of femininity, gender roles, and feminism with female teachers. The club members at Devonshire Collegiate demonstrated they were much more comfortable talking with and relating to me than their male teacher, although whether this is due to gender, youth, or my lack of authoritative status I cannot say. But one student did tell me on my first visit that: "It's a good thing you're a girl. Girls are easier to talk to."

Conclusions

While the young women in the environment clubs did not attribute their actions or motivations to their gendered sociocultural positions, a pattern clearly informs the feminization of environment clubs. The combination of women's socialization as care-oriented, moral agents and an environmental discourse directed towards women's domains of consumption, household management, health, protection of children, and moral responsibility, seemed to attract female youth to environmental activism and correspondingly led their male peers to reject it. The gendered nature of environmental activism may be amplified by a school culture which streams boys into sports and girls into clubs, reproducing binary gender relations of active, individuated, competitive men and passive, social, helpful women. The club members, however, challenged these stereotypes in a number of ways, constructing identities by appealing both to feminine ethics of caring and to ambitions for careers in science and business, or to an anti-feminine appearance while maintaining the social graces of a sweet young girl. Their teachers,

however, interpreted the importance the girls give to teamwork and social connections as a lack of leadership in the eyes of the masculine norm of the autonomous individual privileged in the school. As a result, they tended to belittle the girls' achievements and remained deaf to the ways by which the girls moderated their voices of opposition and dissent.

XI Conclusions: Representations and Recommendations

During Earth Week, the environment club at Devonshire Collegiate organized daily workshops on water and energy conservation and waste reduction. Overbooked with research commitments that week, I was able to attend only a few of their events. And so it was not until Friday that I actually hung out in the cafeteria over lunch hour watching a volunteer from the Municipality's "MetroWorks" programme trying in futile to interest the talking, working, eating, card-playing cafeteria crowd in the etiquette of recycling. As I sat with my notebook and scribbling pen on a small bench in the middle of the room, Andrea, one of the club co-chairs, approached and joined me. She asked me what I thought of the club and everything that was going on and I asked her how she felt about their Earth Week events and somehow in that noisy, chaotic space we embarked on an intimate, honest, exciting exchange of our experiences, stories, and thoughts.

She shared how her environmental awareness had grown and developed over the last few years; I shared my story of growing up rural and reclaiming that identity through my environmentalism. I came out of the ecopolitical closet and shared my analysis of environmental issues with her, but lay open my questions and confusions and ambiguities. She explained how her more political ambitions for the club had been set aside in the interests of "not rocking the boat." She revealed she had been suspended from school and could not show me the "offensive" posters she had put up under threat of being sued. So we talked about what a club could do and I said I did not know, but I described my on-going experiences with organizing a women's caucus at a college in the university and the institutional and individual resistance and backlash we received. The bell rang so suddenly, interrupting our moment of connection, and we quickly finished our conversation, gathered up our books and backpacks and pushed our way to the door. We thanked each other and then it was over. I left the school, unlocked my bike, and headed home to write up my field notes.

This conversation with Andrea was my most exciting moment in the entire research process. The mutuality of the exchange, the insights revealed, and the closeness we established seemed to represent the ideal tone I aspired to for critical ethnographic research. It was but a moment though, amidst weeks of awkwardness, hesitancy, doubt and disappointment. Some days I dreaded to go to the schools, so intimidated by the uncomfortable social relations of being outsider, observer, researcher. Other days, I

would return reinvigorated after a spontaneous game of hacky sac or a hilarious discussion of the state of the girls' washrooms in the school. Once in awhile, I made personal connections with my participants, such as sharing recipes and baking stories after I brought a batch of cookies, or exposing my vulnerabilities and shortcomings in a frank discussion of the failing Riverside club. As much as I tried to be as beneficial and nonintrusive as possible, ethnographic research is inherently an intervention in and reconstitution of social relations between people. I was unquestionably affected by the research process and I was continually aware of the impact I must have been having on the students and teachers I observed and spoke with, although these remained for the most part unarticulated and unaddressed. Did Andrea feel the same excitement I did during our conversation? Did she carry thoughts of it with her as she entered her next class? Did she think, as I did, that we had broken through some barrier and that from then on the research relations would be different? Did they even think of me when they reflected on club meetings, chatted in the hallways, or met at each others' houses? When they neglected to inform me of cancelled club meetings was it because they forgot about me, or were they intimidated to call me personally despite my insistence to do so, or were they resisting my presence, showing me how I was not fully integrated and accepted into their lives and activities?

These nagging questions which I never seem able to set quietly aside raise concerns about the ethics of my research, about the politics and unequal relations of my research and representations, and about the credibility of the research results/analysis I have presented. Despite the coherency of the story I have attempted to weave, it is but my own construction and partial telling--partial in the sense of being incomplete and partial in the sense of being biased. And so just as I have considered the social and political relations which shape and define the discourses and practices taken up within environment clubs, I need to consider the relations which shape this particular text.

Power and Privilege in Research

Social relations of race/ethnicity, class, and gender are as present in the research process as in the groups under study and are often amplified by the unequal power relations between researcher and researched. My position within the schools was somewhat ambiguous. As a young, female graduate student, I was often ignored, mocked, or placed on the defensive at various times in the research process, most especially in my

relations with the Board of Education and school administration. But the catcalls and 'hey baby!'s which greeted me as I entered some schools or the male teacher who commented, as I left a message and my phone number for my contact, "16, 18, isn't that your age?," also contributed to making me feel uncomfortable in these settings. I was frequently mistaken for a high school student by teachers and students, and this both helped me relate to the students and hindered my contact with administrative staff and teachers. I experienced the same stone-walled faces at the main office that the students complained to me about during their meetings. On the other hand, I am sure that some of my difficulties at the Riverside club were due to my inability to cross over some of the language, cultural, and ethnic/racial barriers which existed due to my white, Anglo-Canadian position of privilege. Reading back over the transcripts, I can see where I sometimes misinterpreted students' statements and did not give them enough credit due largely to linguistic style, vocabulary, the manner in which they spoke, and the awkward pauses I wanted to fill. Interestingly, I, in turn, felt snubbed and intimidated in the competitive climate of upper middle class Central Collegiate, never feeling I was able to establish any sort of connection or friendship with the club members. Both situations also speak to the difficulty in establishing social relations in a short period of time.

At other times, the authority I held as a "researcher" and/or teacher-equivalent was made very clear to me. During interviews and friendly chats, students and teachers both would throw in the occasional "but don't let that get in there" or "but you can't tell" comment which alerted me to how they perceived me as intruder and potential threat and felt a need to remain somewhat guarded. A few times, I was encouraged--even by a staff member within the Board of Education--to "make sure that gets in" with the hope that the authority I carried as researcher would put more weight behind the point. Since some of those statements were not relevant to my research interests--or within my capacity to be making claims about--I included them in my discussion of the context for the research in chapter 5. Most startlingly was a third-hand response I received to my research process: near the end of the research, I had a long discussion about my tentative results with the environmental education officer of the Board of Education who then mentioned my study during a meeting with a local non-profit environmental group concerned about communicating with new immigrants on environmental hazards. She explained that she mentioned I would be presenting a paper on my work at a conference in the United States to give her reference to me "more credibility," but to which they replied, "Atlanta? Why

not here? We would like to hear her present.” Already, I had been pegged as a career-aspiring academic not giving my results back to the community. In addition to sharing my results with the school board and participating schools, I would very much like to discuss my results with local community groups and I will be seeking out such opportunities over the next year.

Such situations reinforce how we all negotiate our personal and institutional roles and identities within social relations of power and privilege: there is no impartial stance from which a researcher can “objectively” enter into and re-present cultural groups and social relations. While many of these circumstances are unavoidable, I might have been able to design the research process in more egalitarian and participatory ways. In particular, approaching students with the consent of the Board, principals and teachers already secured and within the setting of a peer group characterized by status and friendships places a great deal of pressure on them to participate. As Alderson (1995) points out, it is much more ethical to give youth the opportunity to “opt in” rather than force them to “opt out.” Of course, the policies of schools boards prevents outsiders from approaching its students without such consent, leaving the researcher in a bit of a double bind. More significantly, the students did not participate in the defining of the research question, data, and analysis, leaving them in the role of subjects of research not active participants in the creation of meaning about their lives. I would have liked to do this differently, but I did not see any other option given the short time frame: I did not know enough about what was going on to even begin to propose a collaboration. Moreover, the students and teachers had little time for, interest in, or conception of doing research. Some initial contact was necessary for me to establish what research could offer them--much less the academic community--at all. In future, I would deal with this by allocating more time for the ethnographic study, taking longer to enter the research sites, and to establish the terms of research.

Stacey (1991) argues that inequality, betrayal, and exploitation are endemic to ethnographic research and it is true I harbour within me guilt for letting some students down, for deflecting their questions about my research when I felt unready to answer, for leaving abruptly without a chance to say good-bye to everyone. Despite the safeguards of confidentiality and transparency which ensure academic research is ethical, there is no sure-fire method for always making the right personal/social decisions. I tried to actively make my presence positive by helping out wherever I could, by contributing my manual

labour, by lending students books and other resources, by offering information, contacts and advice, and by helping to organize, facilitate or supervise activities, but the clubs were less willing to draw on me as a resource than I had anticipated. These minimal acts of goodwill might facilitate a positive research relationship, but they do not offset the unequal relations of the research process.

Credibility, Validity and Partial Tellings

All research accounts, whether provided by a 17 year old gang member or a middle aged businessman, are just that--'accounts,' which are mediated by the tellers' experiences, by their perceptions of the researcher and of the research context, and by their own agendas. Thus all research accounts are equally likely to be a cocktail of the 'experienced,' the 'perceived,' and the 'imagined.' (Valentine et al. 1998, 22)

The ethnographic text is representation: a re-presentation of the stories and experiences of others as understood, perceived, and told by the researcher. I have framed the words, stories and actions of the students and teachers in my study with theoretical constructs from feminism, critical pedagogy, and environmental thought to tell a particular story about environment clubs. And, as I noted in Chapter 5, this is not the story which the teachers themselves would tell. My research question and my analysis are driven by my own interests in ecopolitical pedagogies, and I am likely asking questions which may not appear to be relevant to the participants. Balancing between these theoretical/political interests, emergent data, and the representation of others in their complex relations is a juggling act with political and methodological significance. In the end, this story is just a story, and one of many which could have been told. But accepting the ethnography is partial and partisan does not mean its results are fabricated or methodologically unsound. I have tried to maintain a degree of methodological rigour through a system of triangulation, face checks, and critical self-reflection.

The regularity and frequency of my visits with the environment clubs allowed me to identify patterns and issues which arose again and again and which were not always visible to the participants themselves, while interviews provided opportunities for participants to raise which issues they found to be significant. The ability to make comparisons across clubs was essential for the development of my analysis and provided for further checks on the meaning and significance of different themes. In addition, I drew on my experiences with youth environment conferences and discussions with others who were involved in environment clubs as students and as advisors as another source of data

and corroboration. All of these steps helped triangulate my data sources and methods. From hindsight, I can see that spending time with participants outside of the club context and in the school beyond club meetings and conducting individual interviews with all of the students would have provided even more data and clarification of data from the club settings. Also, a broader empirical study of environmental education and clubs in the province would have helped clarify the representativeness of the clubs used in this study. Triangulation of analysis was attempted by drawing on a wide range of literatures from critical pedagogy, critical subcultural theory, feminist theory, ecofeminism, and environmental thought, but could have been even further enhanced through a more collaborative research process.

A second level of validation can be achieved by checking with the participants themselves for their response to the data and analysis. Face checks were conducted in an on-going, informal sort of way throughout the research. As my thoughts developed on what appeared to be an emerging theme, I would ask the students and teachers about it. For example, I asked all of the groups what they thought about the gendered nature of the clubs. More often, I was able to raise a theme with one or two individuals but not all the clubs, as they did not have time for group discussions. For example, I had an in-depth discussion with the teacher at Riverside about class and cultural differences in the classroom and environmental education and with three of the girls at Devonshire about mainstream environmental discourses and the depoliticization of their club's goals and activities. One individual himself raised the interconnection between his ethnic identity and environmentalism. Other themes were sometimes more difficult to articulate, particularly issues about school life, although I also wonder if it might be just that the school culture of discipline and authority is so normalized the students had difficulty identifying some aspects of it as problematic. Despite these efforts, the face checks were not performed as systematically as I would have liked, primarily due to a shortage of time. I have tried to point out where my analysis differs from those offered by the teachers and students throughout the text, but there are places where I have no confirmation of the relative validity of the analysis I have constructed. I plan to visit each group when school re-convenes in September and go over these results when I present them with a summary of my thesis. Unfortunately their responses will come too late for inclusion in the thesis itself. Ideally, a final chapter would follow this set of conclusions, including the comments and response from the participating students and teachers, and the analysis

presented might shift substantially in light of these responses. Their absence represents a weakness of this thesis

A third demonstration of the trustworthiness of critical research comes from catalytic validity, or evidence that the research has contributed to furthering social change in practice not just in theory. I was constantly troubled with how I could accomplish such a formidable task over the course of my short research project, particularly when I discovered I would have little time with the clubs for discussion at all. The clubs were busy working towards implementing their own agendas and it seemed that any unsolicited intervention--even time taken away for discussion--might derail or undermine their projects. As I anxiously pondered my quandary, I realized that Lather's (1986a) demand for "the research process [to lead] to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents" presumes the participants are not already engaged in activism and locates the researcher at the centre of the consciousness-raising activity. The idea that I could "catalyze" the clubs into a more critical awareness and action was both premature and presumptuous and any attempt to do so would have undermined the participatory tone I hoped to achieve. I chose instead to do whatever I could to help them achieve the goals they had already established and postponed any interventions on my part until a more appropriate time. But now, with the analysis complete, I remain concerned with how much does/can my research specifically and directly help the participants themselves. One student's half-joking comment, "that lady's taking notes on us. She's not here for the eco-club, but to study us" made me wince with the implications of how I was exploiting them. And I was disappointed not have been able to help the Riverside club, even though experiencing its failure provided me with invaluable insights for my analysis. In the next sections, I try to consider the implications of my analysis and how I might bring it back to the groups in a constructive, dialogical, and possibly "catalytic" manner.

The key lesson here is that the commitments required of a critical ethnographer, particularly face and catalytic validity, demand a significant commitment of time and responsibility to the participants and their projects. Three months does not provide a researcher with enough time to establish social relations with a group, to negotiate participatory terms of research, to gain an understanding of what is going on, to discuss and revise analysis and results, and to identify and enact projects and practices for change. In future, I would designate a much longer period of time for entering the research site as well as for conducting research and I would work in a research team, both so that the

biases of the researcher in data collection and analysis can be checked more thoroughly and so that multiple stories can be gathered--i.e., the teachers' stories will not be lost when attention is paid to students or when a young researcher enters the school, as was the case in my study. While I do believe that my three-month study was valuable and has raised a number of themes and issues crucial for environmental education, it was not sufficiently rigorous for making generalizable claims about environment clubs or environmental activism within schools.

Analysis and Argument

The environment clubs were characterized by a liberal-humanist community service ethic. Earth Day awareness-raising, recycling and composting programmes, and schoolyard naturalizations exemplified the noncontroversial and nonconfrontational approach to environmental issues consistently adopted by clubs. To ensure students could help "make a difference," the teachers organized, suggested or facilitated simple, easy, school-centred projects for students to take on in the name of empowerment, leadership-skill development and morally appropriate behaviour. At the heart of this experience, it was hoped, lay the seeds of a lifelong commitment to environmental sensitivity and citizen participation--clearly the sort of youth we need for a sustainable tomorrow. The logic is common-sensical and reinforced by a slew of empirical environmental education research which identifies knowledge, "locus of control" or a sense of empowerment, and familiarity with action strategies as the key ingredients for moulding eco-citizenship behaviour (Hungerford and Volk 1990).

Despite its apparent logic, or perhaps to establish the logic of the liberal-humanist approach, the boundaries of the clubs' discourse, practice and membership were carefully regulated by the schools, through explicit rules and procedures and a culture of surveillance, boredom, and social hierarchies. Critical pedagogue Henry Giroux (1983) states that "domination and power represent a 'silent' motif of school life" and this was undeniably evident at Devonshire Collegiate (66). When club members targeted official school channels and power structures rather than student apathy in their environmental organizing--when they trespassed into the territory of teachers' courses and curriculums, school assemblies, and capital projects--they were silenced and redirected into less political forums, overtly and implicitly reminded to avoid conflict and controversy at all costs. Projects for an environmental fair would be a waste of paper, they were told;

cleaning up the litter around the school would do more than holding a school assembly and lunch-time workshops. Despite the principal's apparent support for the environment club, constant surveillance and interrogation, subtle discouragement, and dismissive ridicule drove the students to continual self-censoring and swallowed most of their time in negotiating for bureaucratic approval. The excitement of sharing environmental information and discussing current issues was marginalized to the few minutes they had before their meetings began. One student's comment that "it's much easier to talk about waste reduction than the seal hunt" bears witness to how the school was anything but a forum for free expression and active political debate, exposing the contradiction between the liberal rhetoric of empowerment and the structure and function of the school as a coercive institution which aims to sustain and legitimate the status quo.

Although the club members at Devonshire Collegiate usually responded to these regulatory structures and interventions with submission and renewed caution, students disrupted and resisted the dominant hegemony of the school and liberal-humanist environmental discourses in a number of ways. I argue the most prevalent strategy of resistance was apathy or tuning out, which can be read as an active rejection of school norms and culture. Apathy allows students to mediate the bureaucratic rationalization of their lives and subjectivities embodied in schooling by maintaining a sense of personal dignity in the refusal to be compared to and shaped in the image of the ideal, good student, or perhaps the "eco-citizen." While it is true that apathy is ultimately a self-defeating strategy, I suggest it is shaped not from laziness but resistance, and should be engaged as social critique not dismissed or chastised as failure as the environmentally-active teachers and students tended to do. The construction of student disengagement from school as some "natural" adolescent state of self-absorption and rebellion, or vandalism, class-skipping and dropping out as the inevitable legacy of broken families and impoverished backgrounds serves to normalize a social hierarchy within the school and legitimize the meritocracy. The "good kids" in the environment clubs--like those in the sports teams and student council--were rewarded with prestige among and authority over their peers, fun activities, creative freedom, and teacher mentorship. In return, they demonstrated acceptance and internalization of the middle class, corporate norms of competitive success, institutional identity, and hierarchical obedience promoted and enforced within the school. Those whose cultural capital and expectations are most consistent with the school norms more easily gravitate to such positions of privilege, while

other students, such as poor or working class and racial or ethnic minority youth, may face such contradictions, discouragement, and material barriers that they have little choice but to opt out, either literally by dropping out of school, or symbolically by tuning out and skipping classes. Unfortunately, resistance to schooling, the values it upholds, and dominant class it represents can easily be translated into a rejection of even those progressive values teachers and students may attempt to bring forward in their own disruption of the dominant hegemony and environmentalism is no doubt a case in point.

The mainstream discourse of environmentalism, as evident in newspapers, pop environmental books, children's TV shows, government educational materials, corporate advertising, and mass mailings from national and multinational environmental groups, has achieved its own status as a pervasive ideology almost accepted as common sense, revolving around the triad of recycling, Earth Day, and the scenic wilderness (or vulnerable animal) image. Schools in particular have been quick to jump onto the recycling and Earth Day bandwagons, guided by the empowering messages of the new genre of "How to Save the Earth" books, and many an environment club takes its first fleeting steps with the implementation of a school recycling programme. And it is here where the apathy of students was cursed most: whereas in elementary school it seemed that recycling was part of the culture of the school, high school students are somehow too lazy to walk over to the recycling bin with their empty pop can. For "good kids," not holding onto their can or dropping a piece of litter was cause for *guilt*: one indication of how the recycling phenomenon represents a domestication of environmentalism into a discourse of morality, cleanliness and order. Shifting the focus of environmental activism from production to consumption, from public policy to household management, from the domains controlled by men to the responsibilities of women (and now children), and from specific social and political actors to a rhetoric of universal blame, mainstream liberal environmentalism amounts to a depoliticized assuagement of middle class guilt with no change to the social, economic or ecological status quo. Timothy Luke, author of *Ecocritique*, sums this up quite nicely when he writes, recycling provides "the symbolic and substantive means to rationalize resource use and cloak consumerism in the appearance of ecological activism" (134). It is this appearance of "making a difference," coupled with its uncontested moral rightness, which made recycling the dream project in the liberal self-empowerment model of high school clubs, in the process reducing environmentalism to a set of impotent, eco-correct behaviours all-too compatible with the

culture of schools and the social and economic status quo.

While their projects may seem quite typical and even indistinguishable, the students actively constructed their own environmental stories and meanings as they negotiated between these mainstream environmental messages and the politics of identity. Representations of nature and environmentalism are inseparable from social relations of race, ethnicity, class and gender, as the environmental justice movement is visibly making clear. Each of the clubs positioned themselves differently in relation to the nature as nonurban, wilderness norm which continues to dominate the mainstream representation of environmentalism and the environmental agendas of the largest North American and British environmental groups. The image of the garden played a pivotal role in creating a space for memories of home within Canadian definitions of school and environmentalism for the largely South Asian new immigrant club members at Wychwood Tech. The guidance of books and theory was the link to the land for the middle class, second generation Chinese-Canadian students in the club at Devonshire Collegiate, their environmentalism constructed at the interface of urban practices of waste-reducing, economical pragmatism, the science of ecology, and the cultural value placed on professional careers. The upper middle class white girls at Central Collegiate appropriated the masculinist discourse of rugged camping and wilderness travel as both their environmentalism and their style: their athletic shorts, fleece vests, Swiss army knives, and unshaven legs contrasting sharply with the feminine codes of fashion followed by their female peers.

The assumption of some teachers that nature experiences are unmediated and culturally-neutral can serve to reinforce the dominant hegemony of upper/middle class, white, male Anglo-North American definitions of nature and "harmonious" human-nature practices and relations, while blinding educators to the biases they hold. Unable to comprehend why a class of inner city, black Caribbean males said they preferred the downtown experience over a nature field trip from working class Riverside Tech, their teacher resorted to a "savages in the urban wilderness" explanation for their inability to, in his words, "connect with nature." But the exploitation and neo-colonialism embodied in white ways of connecting with nature, exemplified by a Geography class display on cruiseboat tourism, projecting white bodies and white desire onto Caribbean landscapes, was left uncriticized, legitimated by the authority of the school, the curriculum, and the teacher, as well as the normalization of white tourism in popular representations.

Racism, as much as pride in ethnic identity, plays a significant role in shaping the relation--both physical and symbolic--between nature and identity. The students' constructions of environmentalism were not merely pluralist differences, but located in particular historical and political contexts; discourses which are unequally heard, represented and celebrated within schools, popular media and even academic disciplines such as the field of environmental education.

It was in the feminization of environment clubs where the politics of identity most clearly intersected with definitions of environmentalism as mediated by the culture of schooling. The combination of women's socialization as care-oriented, moral agents and a mainstream environmental discourse directed towards women's domains of consumption, household management, health, protection of children, and moral responsibility might explain why environmental activism seemed much more attractive to young women than to their male peers. While this is fully consistent with the predominance of women in grassroots environmental organizing generally, the culture of schooling did seem to amplify the gendered nature of environmental activism by streaming boys into sports and girls into clubs. The community service goals, cooperative structure and discourse of morality adopted by the environment clubs may reflect conventional attributes of femininity and middle class women's volunteerism, but the girls actively merged this ethic with distinctly unfeminine career ambitions in science, engineering, and business, or a tomboyish camping style. At the same time, they faced contradictory pressures from their teachers to show more leadership, individuality, and productivity, yet maintain a sweet, helpful, and nonconfrontational demeanour. The girls' efforts at collaborative teamwork, compromise, and cautious avoidance of conflict were interpreted as a lack of leadership skills and a waste of time spent on talking and socializing, rather than strategic choices. These gender relations within the school reflect, and likely reproduce, women's roles as volunteers and behind-the-scenes workers within the mainstream environmental movement.

The social relations and discourses legitimated within the schools are not static nor prescribed; students, teachers, parents, and administrators engage in on-going struggles of definition which shape the curriculum and culture of schools. And the long-standing liberal tradition which mandates schools to nurture knowledgeable, active, and caring citizens may be under siege, but still holds currency with many people and many teachers. Despite the evidence that schools tend to reproduce social relations of

inequality and to de-politicize and suppress student activism and opposition, the school also plays a role as--and can be *reclaimed* to act as--a site of potential emancipation. Many students listed taking an environmental studies course as part of their activism and the power of such knowledge in furthering and legitimizing students' understandings and social critique and activism should not be underestimated. By providing access to knowledge and other people, both adults and peers, with similar concerns, and the space to organize as a group, the schools did indeed support the political empowerment of students and teachers. Moreover, the depoliticized nature of the environmental discourses taken up by the clubs does not erase the fact that the mere existence of environment clubs alone was a political statement criticizing the lack of attention to environmental issues and opportunities for environmental actions within their schools. The challenge faced by educators and club advisors is how to further this potential.

Implications and Potentialities

In my introduction, I phrased my research question as a hope as much as a question when I asked: what kind of space might an environment club open up for counter-hegemonic practices within the school and within society? And how might we create such moments? There are no easy solutions on 'how-to' do this, indeed the instrumental language belies the manipulative politics inherent in such a strategy and ideal. Many within environmental education have argued that modern schooling is incompatible with ecological sustainability and advocate a massive overhaul of school structures, even deschooling (Orr 1992; Stevenson 1987; Weston 1996). Teachers too may have larger visions beyond the actions taken by their clubs and classes, but alone they lack the political influence to enact many of these radical changes and it is both unfair and disempowering to place the burden and blame for political and institutional resistance onto their shoulders. Thus I will attempt to sketch out a few recommendations which I feel are within the capacity of teachers like those I worked with, and indeed some of which are being pursued by those very teachers. These will no doubt be easier to say from the theoretical distance of the academy than to implement in the frenetic immediacy of the classroom, as I myself experienced at Riverside Tech. A more constructive conclusion to this project would be the initiation of a collaborative project with several teachers and students, deconstructing and reconstituting this analysis in the practice of everyday school life.

First, a school climate which suppresses conflict, subjects students to continual surveillance and interrogation and breeds apathy works more to suppress than to support students' tentative forays into activism. Teachers can attempt to alleviate and disrupt this culture in a number of ways. Clearly, teachers can play a significant role in lifting the blanket of artificial consensus which prevails in the schools by actively engaging controversial issues and supporting and facilitating their students to do so as well. A key strategy towards de-centring and dismantling the dominant hegemony is to heed the multiplicity of voices which speak from the margins and to always consider the effects of power and privilege, recognizing that what differentiates students and teachers is not so much levels of knowledge and experience, but relative positions of power. Rather than using that position to keep an eye on and a finger in the plans of students, teachers can respect the dignity and privacy of students but invoke their relative authority and influence when students need to deal with higher bodies of authority such as the principal and the school board and external groups. But even those voices which may be the most difficult to hear and understand, such as the opposition expressed in vandalism and apathy and talking back, need to be respected and engaged. As long as teachers maintain a paternalistic assumption that they know what and how students should learn, they block out dissenting voices and often fall back on class, race, or gender-based stereotypes when they are unable to comprehend their students' actions. This requires the courage to be self-critical, to acknowledge one's own biases and limitations and what one does not know, to be open to learning and legitimizing the different knowledges and experiences students bring with them to school, and perhaps to lose control of the classroom and curriculum.

Second, the cultural politics inherent in all curriculums need to be recognized, interrogated, and made explicit. By locating different discourses in the context of their historical construction and the sociopolitical interests they represent, teachers demonstrate that knowledge is to be contested, not just taken in and memorized as an objective body of facts. The representations of nature, animals, environmentalism and people of different classes, ethnicities, races, genders, sexual orientations, and abilities, the explanations of social reality and what is omitted from those explanations, and the strategies and histories of critique and opposition which comprise an environmental studies or environmental science or English or business curriculum all emerge from particular historical constructions and hold political messages. Similarly, the scholastic

ideal by which students are judged privileges certain kinds of cultural capital, language styles, and social behaviour which have nothing to do with intellectual abilities. Teachers need to be aware of the sociopolitical interests behind the norms they uphold. Even a commitment to social justice and equality can entrap teachers--and many others--into a pedagogy of ideological correctness rather than a dialogue between equals about power and privilege. The mainstream discourse of lifestyle environmentalism has assumed a status of moral goodness which deflects critique and silences other environmental positions, such as environmental justice. But this common sense veneer of personal lifestyle environmentalism can be unsettled by pointing out the contradictions in the use of consumerism as a strategy of environmental activism or the targeting of children and youth, rather than political agents, in environmental advertising. Considering how different representations and discourses distort social reality can be the starting point to working with students to understand social reality and the social relations, such as racism, sexism, heterosexism and capitalism, which shape our lives and identities.

Third, environmental educators in particular need to acknowledge how our understandings of nature are embedded in culture. Popular representations of nature, such as science or the concept of wilderness, are construed as universal norms and categories, but have been largely defined and shaped by the dominant class, culture and gender. The standard stories of nature and environment which predominate in popular media and the environmental studies and environmental science classroom can be de-centred by providing students with the space to share perspectives and understandings of nature based on their own class and cultural backgrounds, including those that may seem to be exploitative or mythological or absent, and by exposing students to different representations of nature found in classical and contemporary literature from different cultures and nations. Moreover, teachers need to be sensitive to the different images of environmentalism students may bring with them to school and how their backgrounds and experiences may position them differently within environmentalist discourses. This may require shifting one's environmental focus from biodiversity to urban housing conditions or one's rhetoric from liberal altruism to economic pragmatism. Placing students' own experiences and knowledges at the centre of a critical and emancipatory pedagogy does not mean that students' opinions and behaviours are to be unqualifiedly affirmed, but rather taken seriously as valid perspectives.

Lastly, environmental activism within the school should be approached and

understood in the context of the larger social movement. By this I mean that teachers and students should actively forge links with groups outside of the school and that environmental education be expressly committed to social change. Experience with a variety of environmental groups can broaden students' knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and strategies substantially and provide both teachers and students with valuable allies for making change within the school. The concerns within the field of environmental education that it remain "education not ideology" (Jickling 1993; McClaren 1991) ignore how education is always affected by values, and always has political implications. Critical educators argue not that education be ideological, but for educators to openly acknowledge their value commitments and ensure their goal be the analysis and rejection of oppression, injustice, authoritarian power structures, and destructive practices. Without such a commitment and focus, the target of environmental education becomes students and youth who need to change their consciousness and behaviour to conform with some pre-conceived norm. Not surprisingly, it will be those youth whose cultural capital does not place much value on liberal-humanist environmentalism which will appear most intransigent and resistant to learning. Lastly, by taking up the environmental movement itself as a topic of study, considering its multiple histories and representations, and examining the theoretical and sociopolitical underpinnings of its various discourses, teachers can help students understand the forces which have influenced their activism and perspectives and the implications of their subsequent decisions. Theorizing and critique are as much a part of building a movement as meetings, proposals, and protests.

Conclusions

The conclusion of this research brought me part relief, part disbelief, and part sadness. I feel it is incomplete in many ways, prematurely brought to a close with the end of the school year and deadlines for a master degree, with many discussions left unpursued, many questions unasked, and many explanations unspoken. The research has offered me extraordinary insight into the diverse voices, values, and structures which shape environmental activism within schools and a practical context from which to explore, clarify, and bring to life theoretical constructs I have struggled with in abstraction; what it offers my research participants and other teachers and students and environmental educators is less certain. I certainly hope to ensure that I was more than a

fleeting face, intrusive and inquisitive, which passed in and out of their lives. If nothing else, I hope to have contributed to the emergent dialogue on the intersection of social relations of class, race, ethnicity, and gender and environmental justice, as seen from within the context of the school and the environment club.

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