

Poisoned Apples: An insider exposes the victims, abuse, politics, associated pain and
SOLUTIONS to our educational crisis

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In this book I am going to use auto/biography, auto/ethnography and narrative inquiry to expose the abuses that schooling administers on students, teachers, professors, and teaching assistants/sessionals. I am going to start by sharing my story with you to help you frame and understand what has led me to believe what I believe and think the way that I think. In his book titled *Auto/Biography and Auto/Ethnography: Praxis of Research Method* Roth (2005a) writes,

The stories ethnographers create are as much a reflection of their own cultural positioning as they are a description of the positioning of others. Making these historically constituted positions clear to the reader, that is, writing auto/biography and auto/ethnography is one way of understanding and incorporating our prejudices into our practices and into what we produce. Making sense and use of representations of some Other involves our own positioning in relation to what we are seeing as much as any meaning inherent in the images themselves; autobiography is one of the central means of making this position salient. (p. 14)

Roth (2005a) argues that we need to remain embodied and not become merely talking heads who disappear in our research in the name of pretentious claims for an illusive objectivity (p. 14).

Throughout, I will weave for you a narrative that knits my story with others' stories to create a tale of idiotic proportions, a tale of pain, suffering and injustice: a tale of schooling. I have lived schooling as a student and as a teacher. As a student, I was

trapped in the prison of schooling for at least 24 years: from junior kindergarten to elementary school to high school to college to university to graduate school. I now have a PhD and currently teach in a graduate program for a faculty of education where I struggle unsuccessfully, because of the policies of schooling, to offer a learner centered democratic education to my students. I will share more about this with you in the chapters to come, but for now suffice it to say that I continue to seek ways of making this a possibility even though I have not achieved it yet.

I gain support for the auto/biographical nature of my work from thinkers like Jack Miller, Wolff-Michael Roth, Jean Clandinin, Michael Connelly, Joe Kincheloe, Ursula Kelly, William Pinar, Carmen Shields, David Booth and Carl Leggo, who all write about the power of stories and about the value of inquiring through narratives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) share how “Stories lived and told educate the self and others, including the young and those such as researchers who are new to their communities” (p. xxvi). And Bateson (1994) says, “Our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories” (p. 11). These visionaries have helped legitimate stories and given me the confidence to share my story. For example, Leggo (2005) reminds us how although much research in education is empirical, we must ruminate on possibilities for research (pp. 443-4). Carl Leggo (2005) writes:

A significant part of my ongoing research program is autobiographical remembering and writing about my own experiences of years of study to be a teacher, and years of work as a teacher....I am convinced that by writing about our experiences, and ruminating on those experiences, and interpreting those

experiences, we can become more effective teachers, as well as teachers motivated by more joy and hope. (Leggo, p. 441)

Like Leggo, I am convinced that writing, ruminating and interpreting our experiences is a legitimate, valuable and necessary activity. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) add to the legitimating by emphasizing how “Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical (p. 121).

Shields (2005) writes, “There is also another important aspect in sharing stories that inform and connect us across time and place, and that involves restructuring stories from the past in the light of present knowledge” (p. 180).

For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (p. 20). Narrative inquiry needs to include argument, description and narrative (p. 155); however, there is flexibility. They say that, “It is always a matter of experimentation with narrative form (p. 166). And they go on to say the following:

As we tell our stories as inquirers, it is experience, not narrative, that is the driving impulse. We came to narrative inquiry as a way to study experience. For us, narrative inquiry is the closest we can come to experience. Because experience is our concern, we find ourselves trying to avoid strategies, tactics, rules, and techniques that flow out of theoretical considerations of narrative. Our guiding principle in an inquiry is to focus on experience and to follow where it leads. (p.188)

So, while I draw inspiration and support from these revolutionary thinkers I continue to explore my own possibilities. I will use critical methods along with subjectivity to “bring about a maximum of intersubjectivity, that is, understanding the Self to understand the

Other” (Roth, 2005a, p. 15) and to deal with the potential dangers of delusion and illusion (p. 19).

Accordingly, part of what you will read about in the next chapter is my own schooling experience as a student, my academic experience and my personal experience. As well, throughout the book you will be introduced to other people’s stories. Once I am done, my hope is to bring you to the point where I am now: It’s time that we seriously explore more democratic alternatives that truly put learners at the center of their own education and that respects those that are working in the field. Jerry Mintz (2004, July 28) defines learner centered education as, “an approach that is based on the interest of the student rather than curriculum driven, where someone else has the idea of what you ought to be learning” and he defines democratic education as, “education where students are actually empowered to make decisions about their own education and if they are in a school their own school.” Here he is talking about students but we can easily extend it to include those that are working in the field.

Part of critical pedagogy is about social activism, it is about theory and action. The point is that you do not just talk about issues, but you get out and do something about them. One of the things I am involved with is the court case challenging the government on standardized testing. I am part of a court case with the David Baker law firm who is generously donating a lot of their time for the cause. I was asked to be an affiant and so I submitted an affidavit. I actually got questioned by government lawyers for sharing my experiences as an EQAO marker (see chapter 5: Breaking the Silence). We think we live in a democracy where we are free to talk about and share whenever we find errors that we believe need correcting, think again. I marked EQAO testing and then

I shared my experience as an EQAO marker and so I was questioned for it by a government lawyer. I was brought into a room and questioned. I was scheduled to go to Africa on the day that I was being questioned. They brought me into a room and they questioned me on the paper that I wrote exposing my experiences as a marker. They challenged me because as a marker they had me sign a confidentiality clause. I will perhaps share more about this experience in a future paper, but for now my point remains that critical pedagogy insists that we act in an attempt to try and transform the world for the better.

Before writing the article outlining my experiences as a EQAO marker, I was discouraged from doing it by a number of people. They were afraid that I would lose my job and wondered whether in the end it would be worth it. Finally, the reason why I did it was because it was an election year and the then liberal Education opposition leader's office (Gerard Kennedy) (now leader) contacted me and asked if I had any research on standardized testing. This is the politics of how a lot of this works. We are told we are free and we think we have all of this academic freedom, but as critical pedagogy tries to get us to understand, there are systemic pressures that force us to follow certain guidelines. Herbert Kohl (2003) has a book titled *Stupidity and Tears*. And in it he urges us to stop being stupid. He takes the word stupid and gives it a theoretical definition. And being stupid essentially means doing a lot of the things that we do. Where you do things that actually go against what you actually know is wrong: Kohl writes, "...I want to concentrate on how systems apply pressure on idealistic and creative teachers to make them act stupidly and perform in the classroom in ways that are opposed to their conscience, knowledge, and experience" (p. 4). We are being stupid when we do things

that we know we shouldn't be doing. Herbert Kohl, and I along with him, urges us to stop being stupid and to start listening to ourselves and that is a tenet of holistic education. Holistic education is listening to me, to the voice within me. Holistic education is starting with me. And holistic education means understanding that I am the expert.

As well, people who work sessional are slaves to the university. They barely make minimum wage (see chapter 7). The university can hire a sessional to teach my courses for probably 30%-40% of my full-time salary. In some universities they pay instructors based on the number of students that have enrolled in the course. So, even though it is not the fault that only a few students signed up, they get paid a low amount for roughly the same amount of work they would have to do if they had a full class since they still have to prepare, lecture, attend the same number of class hours and so on. As a result, they get punished for what should be the universities problem – low enrollment. Why do people work under these conditions? It is the prestige that comes with working at a university and the hope of eventually working full-time.

Part of what we were fighting for when I was teaching as a sessional was some type of course guarantee. If I taught the course this year, next year the university would have to ask me first whether I wanted to teach the course again and if I refused then they could offer it to someone else. We were looking for some job protection for this particular course. Without the protection, if they do not agree with their marking then they just can let them go.

I want to turn to another example of how education is political. In chapter 9 I write about what I called the marking game. All institutional schools that grade play the marking game. At the university level, I interviewed professors to get a sense for how

they played the marking game. One professor shared with me how she gave students a bonus test that included a selection of multiple choice questions taken from other tests she had given them previously. So the students knew all of the questions and all of the correct answers before the test was given. Why did she do this? At the same time I was doing a study of the double cohort (Joong & Ricci, 2006). The double cohort is when the Ontario government eliminated the fifth OAC year of high school theoretically cutting high school to four years. When we analyzed the data from the registrar, it seemed that there was no change: That the grades were the same under the new system as they were under the old. But when we talked to the professors they felt that there was a definite change. For the first time they had to deal with classroom management and discipline issues. They would share how the grades were so low that for the first time they had to play with the marks – it's the marking game. Of course the marks that were sent to the registrar's office were the same because the professors are figuring out creative ways to make sure that the marks averaged where they were "suppose" to average.

The book is divided into ten chapters: the introduction offers reasons for the importance of sharing stories. Chapter two focuses on holistic education and critical pedagogy. These two theories, I believe, offers us possibilities to understand the problem and direct the solution. Chapters three through nine deals with specific examples of how educational stakeholders are victimized by institutional schooling: Chapter three is a personal look back in an attempt to better understand the victimization that I experiences; chapter four looks at how the definition of successful schools as defined by standardized test scores victimizes students; chapter five continues with the theme of standardized test scores and offers my personal experience as a marker; chapter six looks at how future

teachers are being victimized by teacher education programs at faculties of education; chapter seven looks at how part-time instructors in universities are victims; chapter eight looks at the peer review process and how it victimizes professors; chapter nine looks at how we are all victims of the marking game played within institutional schooling; and finally, chapter ten ends with where I believe the solution rests: with examples of alternative learner centered, democratic options.

Although the titles of each of the chapters suggest that the focus is on a particular group as victims, as you read them I hope it becomes clear that there are many victims in each chapter and, more importantly, that in a holistic sense we are all victimized by the poisoned apple. By offering a variety of stakeholders in a variety of levels institutional schooling, I hope you get a sense of how ubiquitous and ingrained victimization is.

Chapter 2 The Path Towards Democracy--Holistic Education and Critical Pedagogy

I teach a course in holistic education. When I started working at Nipissing University I introduced courses in holistic education, critical pedagogy most recently in alternative schooling. I formally went through the governance process and successfully had these courses added to the cycle of master's courses. Holistic education and critical pedagogy have really informed how I think about education. Holistic educators remind us that nobody reading this or anywhere else can predict anybody's future potentials. Bennett writes about how "no one can see the possibilities of another" (p. 66). I cannot do that, you cannot do that, nobody can do that. But yet predicting people's future possibilities is a big part of an educator's job within mainstream schooling.

There are alternatives out there, but people do not hear about them. And why don't people know about the alternative schools that are out there? I think this is a very important question and this is why I proposed a graduate course in alternative education. When I was doing research for the proposal I could not find another university in Ontario that offers a course in alternative schooling so that these alternatives can be explored in more detail.

Some argue that holistic education and critical pedagogy do not speak to each other because they are on different ends – one focuses on the individual and the other society. Others, including me, would argue that there are ways to try and get them to speak to each other. Critical pedagogy looks at how we need to work towards transforming the world we live in to make it a better place. Paulo Freire (1998) uses the concept right thinking and defines it as a rejection of "any and every form of

discrimination. Preconceptions of race, class, or sex offend the essence of human dignity and constitute a radical negation of democracy” (p. 41). By right thinking he means making the world less racist, less sexist, less classist, less abilist, less homophobic and so on.

We need to look at what are the social constraints within education. This is where Noam Chomsky (2000) rebukes teachers for being commissars to the system.

Those who exercise control over the educational apparatus should be referred to as a class of “commissars.” Commissars are the intellectuals who work primarily to reproduce, legitimate, and maintain the dominant social order from which they reap benefits. Real intellectuals have the obligation to seek and tell the truth about things that are important, things that matter. (p. 26)

Teachers perpetuate the injustices within our system by rewarding those who have been traditionally advantaged by the system and continuing to punish those that have been marginalized, largely by ignoring people’s lived experiences. For example, for the most part, students’ scores on a test are not contextualized by out of school factors that may have contributed to their score. In the end a 90 percent is a 90, and a 40 percent is a 40, and the student who receives a 90 is presumed to be “better” than a student who receives a 40. Forced schooling does not factor in out of schooling factors that may help explain the differences in scores. Gatto (2003) reminds us that for the Athenians “forced training was for slaves” (p. 12). In our world forced schooling is ingrained in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948, December 10) refers to how “Elementary education shall be compulsory.”

So, schools rank people and by doing so those who have traditionally been marginalized continue to be marginalized. Ranking is done through technologies like grading, marking and labeling people. To make the matter worse, in the ranking process schools ignore people's lived conditions: everyone is treated "equally" by being given, for example, the same standardized high stakes exit test and this is suppose to make it fair. At some level what critical pedagogy tries to do is demythologize a lot of these myths. Freire (1970) writes about problem posing education and says that it,

...sets itself the task of demythologizing... regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality... makes them critical thinkers... bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality...thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. (pp. 83-84)

An example of a myth would be grading can distinguish people's future potentials or capabilities. We know that this is not the case. This is why Harvard rejects 80% of the valedictorians that applied. This is a recognition that rightly devalues Grade Point Averages (GPA's). To emphasize this point, Gatto (2003) appeals to the following:

What I would never do is to argue that the damage to human potential is adequately caught in the rise or fall of SAT scores or any other standardized measure because these markers are too unreliable—besides being far too prone to strategic manipulation. The *New York Times* of March 9, 2003, reported in an article by Sara Rimer that Harvard rejects four valedictorians out of every five, quoting that school's director of admissions as saying: "To get in [Harvard], you

have to present some real distinction...” A distinction which, apparently, 80 percent of “top” students lack. (p. 306n. 3)

For more on the scoring of standardized tests, see chapter _____.

When I teach my courses at the faculty of education those in the room are often educators and students. This places those of us in the room in an interesting position since we get to see how the politics of the system still preys itself on us. I always knew that education was political, but when I started working in a university I really got to see the politics play itself out first hand. Some of the things that I have witnessed I am so ashamed of that I unfortunately cannot bring myself to share it with you; especially, at this stage of my career. Everything is about numbers and everything is about money. Behind the scenes, students are secondary to this. However, for marketing and financial reasons a lot of promoting is done to convince the public that students come first.

Recently we had meeting where we were told that we had to get rid of our three year program. What was the rationale? Why do we have to get rid of our three year programs? It is obvious once you understand that if students in an ordinary program are worth 1 funding unit, but students are in a four year program you are worth 1.25 funding units. And so, of course, we have to get rid of ordinary programs and encourage students to go into the four year program. It’s an economic decision not a pedagogical one. My wife graduated from a three year program and so did her sister. My wife has her Master’s of education and her sister has authored several books and is now a PhD candidate—they are not alone.

Heather Jane Robertson in a talk at OISE discussed how accountability means listening to other people. This is what the Ontario College of Teachers is all about. They

tell teachers what to do and by accrediting faculty of education programs control what pre-service teachers are taught. *Professionally Speaking* is a propaganda magazine and an insult to teachers. In the latest issue Ian Crysler (2005, June) photographed teacher candidates from Brock University for the cover with big smiles on their faces. It was insulting; the students were reportedly smiling because the Ontario Ministry of Education and the OCT together have now eliminated the teacher shortage. I do not know about you, but if I were somebody coming into a profession and they were now fewer jobs for me to apply for and get, I would not be coming out with a big smile on my face because of it. This is how they distort the truth, claiming that these students are happy because of it. Another example of how the OCT *Professionally Speaking* distorts reality is with their position on the use of the Ontario Curriculum Unit planner (hereafter referred to as the Planner). When I mention the Planner teachers that have tried it gasp and moan at its mention. When I was teaching teacher candidates, this was part of me being stupid, I had to get teachers to familiarize themselves with the Planner. Without exaggeration, students cried tears because of the Planner. The assignment was due in December, I would not get them until April in many cases. In short the Planner is an awful monstrosity that they have spent tons of money on. But if you read *Professionally Speaking*, a teacher was quoted as testifying how much of a time saver the Planner is. Gabrielle Barkany (2005, March) writes that, "The Curriculum Unit Planner is also a very popular program that teachers learn and then use in their own classrooms." She then quotes a teacher that says,

"It really helps me to plan lessons because it incorporates curriculum expectations for each unit," explains Ghaemi. "For example, being able to name organic components is one expectation for Grade 12 chemistry students. This software

gives me access to a list of assessment and teaching strategies such as group work, oral discussion or presentation. It saves me so much time. It used to take me six or seven hours to plan a unit. Now it takes me one hour.”

They had several different articles in that issue that mentioned in passing how wonderful the Planner is. I do not know where they got these teacher quotes from; they must have looked long and hard under stones or rocks to find somebody who has ever used the program. If you read that issue, it sounds like everybody is using it, when in reality I have not met a single teacher that uses the Planner, and I know and have asked this question to a lot of teachers. It’s awful. I have had to play with it because it was part of my job to teach people how to use it. Chalk one up to stupidity.

These are among the pressures that come down on educators and this is how they are made to be stupid. Holistic education comes back to this whole notion that externals, people from outside the system are telling me what I need to do in my own environment. In *Beginning with Ourselves: In Practice, Theory, and Human Affairs* David Hunt (1987) makes a case for the Inside-out approach as opposed to the Outside-in approach He writes, “...the Inside-out approach—practitioner-as-expert and theorist-as-practitioner--with the Out-side-in approach—theorist-as-expert and practitioner-as-consumer” (p.137). In our current climate with the Outside-in approach dominating, we are not professionals. Professionals are people who make their own decisions not people who get told what to do. When I taught at the faculty of education pre-service we take the students and change them (see chapter 6). This is the most unholistic thing you could imagine. First day of orientation, before school even starts, students come to the University for Orientation on mass, and we tell them what to wear, how to speak and how to act. Essentially, we tell

them that now that they are going to be teachers, they are no longer going to be themselves but a Teacher. The institutions job is to change them into Teachers. One of my former students teaches at a school down the street from where I live. On my bike ride I saw her and I had to take a second look. She has taken on a different look, her posture seems different. I got the eerie sense that she had become a Teacher.

The other thing I tried to do which is consistent with critical pedagogies emphasis on acting in the world is that I tried to start an alternative school in my local community. I had support from a trustee, Chris Bolton, who I know is supportive of alternative schools. I did not speak to my trustee because I was afraid that he would not be supportive. Chris and I met on a number of occasions and he was a wonderful support. Everything seemed to be going my way. Gerry Connelly (an alternative school supporter) replaced David Reid as director of the Toronto District School Board, Elizabeth Quan's (also supportive of alternative schools) secondment to the ministry was over and she returned to the board as principal of alternative schools. If I were to create a perfect scenario to start an alternative school, this would be it; unfortunately, I live in a conservative neighbourhood. The problem for me is that the Board seems supportive but it is the parents in my community who are against a more democratic, learner centered, holistic and critical pedagogical type of schooling. When I mention to some parents that the new program would include a no homework policy they are shocked. They would politely take my form and move on. People just do not understand. Believe it or not, they want their children to be pressured. They want their children to have more homework. They want their children to be tested – “how else will we know if our children are learning anything if you do not test them?” They want their children to be hurried. My

approach is clearly a different way of thinking. Testing does not lead to greater learning but it limits what students learn to what is going to be tested – this is the result of the backward planning model adopted by Ontario. So, there seems to be support at the board level and at the trustee level, but it's the parents that are the stumbling block. Getting enough parents to say that they want an alternative school is a challenge. Sadly, but this is what it is – parents want their children hurried and pressured. We live in a competitive world and the argument parents offer me is, “How else are children going to learn to deal with pressure as adults if we do not pressure them as children?” This argument clearly does not make any sense to me. Should we be putting all of this pressure on children?

I am still trying to do this. I do have a number of parents that are supportive. Another factor that would work to my advantage is the economic argument. If I could get 40 parents to agree to this that would mean a lot of money to the board. If we can say that either we have some say or we homeschool/unschool this would give us a lot of leverage; especially, in this time of increased declining enrollments at the Board.

Chapter 3—Me as a Schooling Victim

As a student I hated school. I actually did not get into university after high school, so I went to college first and then from there I got grades that they deemed high enough for me to be admitted into a university. I did my undergraduate studies at York University, where I earned a specialized honours in philosophy. I still remember this one moment: After being there a number of years, more than what a typical person would be required to spend doing an undergraduate degree (because of the increase in tuition rates since I attended university, this option would be prohibitive for me if I was working on my undergraduate degree today), I was where all great conversations take place: in a bathroom standing by the urinal. The professor, an older wise gentleman, who was teaching my philosophy class, was standing next to me and I shared with him how I felt that I had just wasted my time earning a philosophy degree. He just looked at me and said that one day I would realize that philosophy teaches us how to think. That was a pretty prophetic and profound statement that he made to me.

It may seem that my professor's profound statement about the value and philosophy contradict my distaste for schooling, but the truth is that most of the philosophy I learned during my undergraduate experience and in my life happened outside of formal schooling; largely, on my own.

After I completed my specialized honours in philosophy, I decided that I wanted to go into teaching. In order to be a teacher in Ontario, philosophy, which I believe should be valued, is not a recognized discipline for gaining people entrance into the teaching profession. So I went back and did a second degree where I majored in English and minored in psychology. My teachables are English and history. Again, strange but a

degree in psychology is among the degrees that are not on the list of degrees that make you eligible to get into a faculty of education teachers' program in Ontario. You would think that a knowledge of the discipline of psychology would be invaluable for teachers that either want to adopt or challenge its educational premises.

After I graduated from university with my undergraduate degree, I applied and was not accepted into a Master's of Philosophy program (which I was asked to apply for in a letter from the university because of my academic standing, I assume), nor was I accepted into the faculties of education that I had applied to. I was told that this was not because I did not qualify, but because the competition was so intense for those with English degrees that it diminished the process to a lottery. I then entered the world of corporate work and applied to a faculty the following year only to get another rejection letter. I called the University and as a result of my persistence I was placed on a waiting list. I continued to call and fortunately one of my calls was timely: I was told that a space had opened up and they offered me admission. I enthusiastically accepted. The time between my acceptance and the start of the school year was short and I had to scramble to go to London, Ontario from Toronto to find an apartment. I quit my job and went back to school. I completed my bachelor's of education at Althouse at the University of Western Ontario, graduating on the Dean's honour list.

As well, I wanted to share this story with you as an example of how if I did not persist and if luck was not on my side when I made that telephone call my future would have been dramatically changed. If the system was successful in barring me from entering their institutions what would have become of me? If I passively accepted their myth that I was not schooling material or if ultimately I refused to play by their rules or if

I did not persist I would not have the tickets that they dispense to allow me to do what I am doing. This would not mean that I would be less capable, or less able to do what I am doing but just not institutionally qualified. And, of course, being institutionally qualified and qualified are not the same things.

Finding a teaching job was also a challenge since full time jobs were limited. I supply taught for several month until I was finally given a full time position teaching English at a secondary school.

My High School Teachers

I often think about my high school teachers and how if they knew that my job has me professing in front of a group of educators at a faculty of education they would just about keel over – in some instances that would not make me too unhappy. Sometimes I have these dreams, these great fantasies where I am actually teaching my former teachers, because now I can, and they are in my class and so the tables are turned. I would get my chance at revenge and grade them, demean them and make them feel about themselves the same way they made me feel about myself, and for them I would reconsider my philosophy on grading – I do not believe in grading, but if I were teaching one of my former teachers I think I could be persuaded to all of a sudden selectively embrace it. I agree, for example, with Wendy Priesnitz's (1995a) comments on grading,

The concepts of passing and failing are really only relevant to a situation where children are coerced into learning via rewards, where education is thought of as a series of hurdles to be scaled. They have little meaning within a situation where learning is an open-ended and on-going experience with no artificial barriers or organizational framework. (p. 49)

And Gatto (2005a) expresses it more forcefully in *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, “Official favor, grades or other trinkets of subordination have no connection with education; they are the paraphernalia of servitude, not of freedom” (69). And in *The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and “Tougher Standards”* Kohn (1999) writes about the negative effects of grades on curriculum and instruction, on interest in learning, on quality of learning, on teachers’ relationship with students and so on (pp. 41-44).

My former teachers probably, like the characters in Dostoevsky’s (1960) novels, do not even remember the moments that have remained with me all these years where “I had been treated like a fly” (p. 42). I share Dostoevsky’s character’s sentiment. After being abused by the officer, the character laments,

I am not quite sure whether he recognizes me. I imagine not; I judge from certain signs. But I—I stared at him with spite and hatred and so it went on—for several years! My resentment even grew deeper with the years [...] One morning, though I had never tried to write anything before, it suddenly occurred to me to describe this officer in the form of an expose, in a satire, in a tale. I wrote the tale with relish. I did expose him. I slandered him; at first I so altered his name that it could easily be recognized but on second thought I changed it, and sent the story to the *Annals of the Fatherland*. But at the time such exposes were not yet the fashion and my story was not yet printed. (pp. 44-5)

This amusing account highlights how some people who have been negatively treated in life are so burdened by the experience while the perpetrators do not even remember the

moments of abuse, and it also highlights the difficulty and the importance of sharing stories.

While I was working full time teaching English at a secondary school, I started to work on my masters and my doctorate of philosophy in education. The reason I wanted to share this experience with you is because when I was a high school student I was deemed a failure by the system. As soon as I did not conform to their orders/dictates/directions/wishes/commands/absurdities then I become marginalized within the system. For instance, as a high school student I hated reading largely because I was forced to respond to a text in the way that the teacher fantasized was the correct reading. If I responded in a way that deviated from the external authority and if I genuinely engaged with the text in a way that was meaningful for me I was punished by getting low grades or by being belittled publicly because my response was different from what the teacher fantasized the correct response to be. So, I was completely turned off reading and I did not start feeling the overwhelming need to read until I hit university age. This is where I decided that I would read for myself and not for authority. It resulted in my addiction to reading. However, even in university I felt sad that I had to take these courses where they would tell me what to read because I wanted to read what I wanted to read. And so, I would quickly go through the prescribed reading that they would give me and then proceeded to read what I really felt compelled to read.

The result of being made to respond the way they wanted me to respond was that I was made to feel that my own thoughts and responses were “savage.” Freire (1987) writes about how the colonizers’ ghost whispers ““Your language is no good...it is savage”” (p. 119). This is where Freire helps in understanding the type of oppression that

students feel in school and the anger I have against those that have made people suffer and those that continue to make people suffer. And to do what Shields (2005) writes as, to learn “the art of protecting others that were less able to speak than I” (p. 181). Freire (1998) asks, “How can I be neutral in the face of a situation, whatever it be, in which the bodies and minds of men and women are turned into mere objects of murder and abuse?” (pp. 108-9). In his earlier work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) writes,

In their political activity, the dominant elites utilize the banking concept to encourage passivity in the oppressed, corresponding with the latter’s “submerged” state of consciousness, and take advantage of that passivity to “fill” that consciousness with slogans which create even more fear of freedom. (p. 95)

Freire wrote about those who were oppressed and how they can overcome their oppressors. I think in the world we live children are still oppressed. By controlling students in our schools and limiting their freedoms the way schools do, by forcing them to learn a standardized curriculum that is externally imposed, children are being oppressed. Llewellyn (1998) reminds children that,

Regardless of what the law or your teachers have to say about this, you are as human as anyone over the age of eighteen or twenty-one. Yet, “minors” are one of the most oppressed groups of people in the U.S. [and Canada], and certainly the most discriminated against legally.

It starts at home. Essentially, your parents can require you to do almost anything and forbid you to do almost anything. Fortunately, most parents try not to abuse this power. Yet, from a legal standpoint, the reason schools have so much tyrannical power over you is that they act in *loco parentis*—in place of the

parent. As legal parental substitutes, they can search your locker or purse, tell you to be quiet, read your mail (notes), sometimes hit or “spank” you, speak rudely to you, and commit other atrocities—things I hope your parents would not do with a clean conscience, and things no sensible adult would do to another adult, for fear of losing a job or ending a friendship. (p. 41)

Once I started my master’s it took me a year to complete it and a year to complete my PhD both at OISE/UT; however, there were some challenges that I will share later that lengthened this process. My PhD required me to complete coursework, comprehensive exams, a dissertation and my defense. Remember, I was working full time as a teacher. I get some satisfaction in narrating this story just because I believe my school teachers had me all wrong.

When I was ready to defend my dissertation after one year, I was refused on the grounds that it had only been a year. My supervisors agreed that I was ready, yet I was told that the chair suggested, without even reading my dissertation, that one year was too soon. I was told that they feared that people would question the reputation and the academic rigour of the program if they let me defend so soon. So, the following year I continued to pay my high fees, I did not take a course, nor make a change to my dissertation. After waiting a year I asked if I could defend now. Again, the response was negative. Fortunately, my supervisors stood their ground and were able to convince the university that I was ready to defend and I defended successfully. This is another example of how we are being victimized by institutional schooling.

How Important Is Schooling

Some people, like John Taylor Gatto (2005b, September/October), argue that we need much less schooling. He writes, “More school isn’t the answer... Too much school already is our problem (p. 15). At the AERO conference this summer in Troy New York Gatto (2005) and again in a magazine called *Life Learning: Providing the Freedom to Find Their Own Successes* (Gatto, 2005, September/October, pp. 14-17) magazine he shared how while in China he noticed that three large influential industries were creatively and imaginatively started by school dropouts. He noticed that there were three industries and businesses that were flourishing in China. The founders of these industries were all school dropouts. The people who created and imaginatively inspired these businesses are all dropouts. The first he said he noticed was the computer industry. Who would question the impact of computers? The founders and some of the biggest names in computers are dropouts.

Without dropouts like Bill Gates, America wouldn’t have a dominant global position in computers at all. We owe a great deal to dropouts.... Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft, was a dropout, too.... Steve Jobs, the big man behind Apple, dropped out of Reed college after one semester.... Steve Wozniak, co-founder of Apple, abandoned college and never looked back.... And whatever Michael Dell of Dell computers owes his dazzling success and his billions to, it isn’t college. He too, dropped out. Larry Ellison, CEO of Oracle... [Gatto’s ellipses] you guessed it! (pp. 14-15)

Bill Gates goes around talking about how important it is for people to get schooled, and yet he is a dropout. I think with his billions, if Gates really wanted to go back to school he could afford the cost of tuition. If he is so big on schooling why doesn’t he go back to

be schooled instead of preaching how everybody else should go through the school system that he dropped out of?

The second industry Gatto mentioned as being influential and founded by dropouts is fast food. Forget about college dropouts, the founders of fast food chains were elementary or high school dropouts: "...every single founder of every major fast-food chain is a dropout" (p.15).

The third industry that has had an impact in the world we live in is entertainment; again, overwhelmingly dropouts. Look at the impact that entertainers have, and a significant majority of them are dropouts.

A good example to help expose the disconnect between schooling and success is Chris Nash. In a *Globe and Mail* article Tim Lai (2005, August 15) writes, "Talk about sweet vindication: Chris Nash got a D+ in film class, but his big year-end assignment for the course will be screened at this year's Toronto International Film Festival" (A8). Success in school and success out of school are not the same things.

Yet, here we are promoting this myth that the way to education is through schooling. Critical pedagogy can contribute a lot to exposing this myth by examining who is benefiting from this. Why do we tell people that the way to education is through schooling? It comes back to money. Colleges (as distinguished from universities) are recent to our schooling history. The first college to open in Ontario was the Warden Woods campus of Centennial College. It was established in 1966. In 1965, Ontario Education Minister William Davis (1965) described the need for a community college that were different from high schools and universities and that prepared students for work:

In the present crisis, the need cannot be met simply by alterations or additions at the secondary school level; we must ...create a new kind of institution that will provide a type of training which universities are not designed to offer.

In a sense colleges were designed to get Canadians ready for work.

The myth that is being perpetuated is that the way to apprenticeship is through college. Before 1966 people were getting skilled without schooling; yet now, schooling has once again encroached on education. Schooling continues to perpetuate the myth that the way to education is through school. Why are they so invested in promoting this myth? The reason is simple: because it means a lot of money.

Institutions of schooling are interested in their own financial survival and in creating a monopoly. There is a battle going on between community colleges and universities because it means a lot of money. Currently, some community colleges can offer degree programs. Universities are refusing to recognize these community college degrees as legitimate prerequisites for admitting students into higher university programs. Universities are trying to protect their turf. These community college degrees are accredited and so universities admitting these students into their programs should not be an issue. Furthermore, American colleges and universities recognize Canadian community college degrees as degrees. What this means is that a community college graduate can get into an American university program with their community college degree, but cannot do it locally. Again, the reason is that universities are trying to protect their turf. They do not want and cannot afford the competition.

As the line between community colleges and universities blur and their roles begin to change, partnerships are developing to help attract market share. Students can go

to college for two years and then apply to a university for one and end up with a university degree. In a *Globe and Mail* report Dianne Rinehart (2005, September 26) reveals the following:

Institutions and colleges are less expensive than universities, so it's better for the student, Mr. Brown points out. While college tuition can cost from \$1,100 to \$1,500 per year, university tuition ranges from \$3,000 to \$5,000. (p. E2)

Mr. Brown goes on to suggest that the cost of getting a degree through the community college route for two years and a university for one will be 50 to 75 per cent of the cost of getting a degree through the traditional route.

Regardless, together universities and colleges have to perpetuate this myth that the only way to become educated is to go to school and the more successful they are in ingraining this myth within our culture the more secure their financial viability will be.

Margaret Mead has a wonderful quote, "My grandmother wanted me to get a good education, so she kept me as far away from schools as possible." These people who tout the value of those who are schooled and the ignorance of those who are not are telling me that my mom and dad are worthless because he went to grade 8 and she to grade 5. Yet, they faired very well. In fact when I need guidance and direction, they are the first people that come into my mind; likely, because their wisdom has served me so well. Ironically, their shame at not having had much schooling is their blessing and strength. They made their path the way any fortunate person who had the opportunity to do: by walking. They learned what they needed when they needed, as they went along. It is to these unschoolers that I owe my love, my life, my admiration, my inspiration and my education.

As well, my father-in-law a very educated but unschooled man ran several businesses and amassed a small fortune. It is unbelievable how many people buy into this myth that the way to education is through schooling. Schooling has only been around for a short time in our history. If you look at the history of schooling, and you will have to look because most textbooks will not tell you this, you will find that when schools first opened some people had to go drag students in sometimes violent ways. People did not all embrace school in the way that some would have us believe. For example, in Ornstein and Hunkins (2004) book they talk about the history of education at great length, but nowhere do they mention that when schools first opened some people had to go drag students in sometimes violent ways. Gatto (2003) summarizes some examples of resistance in describing Bruce Curtis' Book:

Bruce Curtis' book *Building the Education State 1836-1871* documents the intense aversion to schooling which arose across North America, in Anglican Canada where leadership was uniform, as well as in the United States where leadership was more divided. Many schools were burned to the ground and teachers run out of town by angry mobs. When students were kept after school, parents often broke into school to free them. (p. 123)

People did not all embrace school and many people were willing to fight those who forced their children into institutional schooling. Unfortunately, they have convinced far too many of us that the way to education is through schooling. Even those who have been abused by the system support it. Recently, we hosted a diner with some very close friends that I have known all of my life. The topic of our schooling came up and we reminisced about how one friend would get the "shits" before every test and how another was

pounded over the head with the back of a guitar by a teacher for talking. One couple, she dropped out in grade 9 and he struggled and was labeled all the way through his schooling experience. They now have two daughters and although they recognize the abuse they experienced with anger and resentment, they insist that their daughters attend the same institutions that served them so poorly. This is the power of manufactured consent as theorized by Chomsky and Herman (1988).

The Ontario Ministry of Education has an archived collection of government records documenting the evolution of elementary and secondary education in Ontario from 1799 to the present day: *Lessons Learned: The Evolution of Education in Ontario* (2005). If you want to learn about schooling, it is revealing to look at what the people who started this technology that we call schooling had in mind when they conceived it. It helps us get a sense for how the machine works if we look at the history of the machine. Education was not for freedom, creativity, emancipation and learning, but schooling was created for the purposes of indoctrination (Gatto, 2003; Ron Miller 1997; Ornstein and Hunkins, 2004). Depending on whose history you read and what period they are focusing on educational historians trace schooling for religious indoctrination, moral indoctrination or industrial indoctrination; so, even though there may be some disagreement about indoctrination for what purpose, there is still agreement that schooling was for indoctrinating and controlling the population. So when they set up this system of schooling this is what they had in mind. They were thinking of ways to indoctrinate and control children. No wonder some parents were upset. And no wonder truancy officers had to go and violently force these people into compulsory schooling.

So if you believe that things are different now than they were then, in the curriculum section of *Lessons Learned: The Evolution of Education* the archive reads as follows: “There is little difference in the focus of education in schools today from what was taught in the early day of Ryerson’s educational system.”

Even today compulsory attendance is a part of our education statutes and regulations. In Ontario, part 2 of the education act deals with school attendance. Section 25. (1) reads, “every board shall appoint one or more school attendance counselors” (Brown, 2004, p. 30). Section 30. (1) talks about the liability of a “parent or guardian of a child of compulsory school age who neglects or refuses to cause the child to attend school is, unless the child is legally excused from attendance, guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine of not more than \$200” (Brown, 2004, p. 32). Section 30. (3) warns that, “a person who employs during school hours a child who is required to attend school under section 21 is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine of not more than \$200” (Brown, 2004, p. 32). These are just some examples of measures that schools are forced to resort to in order to keep children imprisoned within their institutions. Compulsory attendance is still part of the education act and you can still get fined if you do not send your children to school.

Chapter 4 – Students as victims

What makes for a successful school?

In our current climate the myth being promoted is that a successful school can be identified based on standardized test scores. Some powerful organizations, government and otherwise, continue to promote this myth. For example, the Fraser Institute, the Education and Quality Accountability Office [EQAO] and various boards all support and promote this false myth that EQAO standardized test scores can identify successful school. As we will see, this is an incorrect belief that is hurting children, communities and is resulting in harmful policy decisions. Equating school success as high standardized test scores victimizes students, for example, by narrowing the curriculum. By examining the flawed thinking in Ontario generalizations can be made around most of the world where, unfortunately, standardized testing is become the measure of a successful school.

The Fraser Institute

Peter Cowley and Stephen Easton on behalf of the Fraser Institute's Studies in Education Policy released a report titled Report Card on Ontario's Elementary Schools: 2005 Edition (hereafter, report card) (June 2005). The Fraser Institute describes its role as, "an independent Canadian economic and social research and educational organization. It has as its objective the redirection of public attention to the role of competitive markets in providing for the well-being of Canadians" (Cowley and Easton, p. 2). The authors describe how the purpose of the Report Card is that,

it collects a variety of relevant, objective indicators of school performance into one, easily accessible public document so that anyone can analyze and compare

the performance of individual schools. By doing so, the *Report Card* assists parents when they choose a school for their children and encourages and assists all those seeking to improve their schools. (p. 3)

Essentially, the Report Card ranks schools based on EQAO test scores. The authors do suggest that “the choice of a school should not be made solely on the basis of a single source of information” (p. 3), and that parents should visit websites maintained by EQAO, the ministry of education and local school boards for more information; nevertheless, despite this caution the Report Card continues to be written as if only the EQAO scores matter. They ignore their own warning. In fact the authors go on to argue that, “Nevertheless, the *Report Card* provides a detailed picture of each school that is not easily available elsewhere” (p.3). They even go on to claim that the rating and ranking of schools by the Report Card facilitates school improvement (p. 3). The Report Card argues that, “Effective schools produce good results regardless of the family background of their students” (p.9). This suggests that regardless of a child’s history, which may include horrible abuses and neglect, these out of school factors do not influence a schools academic rating. The report card defines school success as academic success to the exclusion of all other areas “The foundation of the *Report Card* is an overall rating of each school’s academic performance” (p.5). The authors are clearly not interested in defining a successful school in holistic terms that includes body, mind and spirit. Their definition of a successful school is based on academic performance only, and this narrow vision is further narrowed by defining academic performance as an EQAO test score. In fact their rating is based on the following 9 indicators:

- (1) average level of achievement on the grade-3

EQAO assessment in reading;

(2) average level of achievement on the grade-3

EQAO assessment in writing;

(3) average level of achievement on the grade-3

EQAO assessment in mathematics;

(4) average level of achievement on the grade-6

EQAO assessment in reading;

(5) average level of achievement on the grade-6

EQAO assessment in writing;

(6) average level of achievement on the grade-6

EQAO assessment in mathematics;

(7) the difference between male and female

students in their average levels of

achievement on the EQAO assessment in

grade-6 reading;

(8) the difference between male and female

students in their average levels of

achievement on the EQAO assessment in

grade-6 mathematics;

(9) the percentage of EQAO assessments that did

not meet the provincial standard. (p. 5)

According to the authors, How well or poorly a school performs is an indicator of effective teaching (p. 5). Again, the focus is on reading, writing and mathematics as

defined by EQAO testing. Everything else that schools do is ignored, as are every other obstacle that schools may be dealing with to the exclusion of EQAO test score that the author's argue are "objective" (p.3).

The Report Card is reported widely in the media and garners a lot of attention. The rating and ranking of schools are published in newspapers for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community at large to read. This snowballs the myth that EQAO scores is an indication of a successful school. To cite just one example, a school with a high English as a Second Language (ESL) population can score poorly on the test, while at the same time being a successful school.

EQAO

Of course there are other supporters of the myth. In a book written by David Johnson (March 2005) published by the C.D. Howe Institute he argues, "that a fair and useful ranking and comparison of Ontario's elementary schools is indeed possible" (p. 3).

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO, 2005a)

EQAO defines itself as follows:

EQAO ensures greater accountability and better quality in Ontario's publicly funded school system. An arm's-length agency of the provincial government, EQAO provides parents, teachers and the public with accurate and reliable information about student achievement. EQAO also makes recommendations for improvement that educators, parents, policy-makers and others in the education community can use to improve learning and teaching.

An important part of their description about themselves, for our purposes, is that they use the data to make recommendations to improve learning and teaching. Again, they suggest that they can use the EQAO test scores to help improve learning.

EQAO (EQAO, 2005b) has published a number of guides intended to assist school and school board administrators as they consider their data. For example, *Using Data to Promote Student Success: A Brief Guide to Assist School Administrators in Interpreting Their Data*. There is a version of the guide for the grade 3 and grade 6 assessments of reading, writing and mathematics (2005c, October), and for the grade 9 assessment of mathematics (EQAO, 2005d, October). These documents outline how EQAO test score data can be used to make schools more successful. On their website they have links that describe success stories, which are schools that have improved their EQAO test scores. So, although EQAO suggests that there is more to a good school than EQAO scores through their Education Quality Indicators Framework (EQAO, 2005e), ultimately a successful school is defined by increasing their test scores. “Through its Education Quality Indicators Framework, EQAO also regularly reports on a range of environmental factors at the school, board and provincial levels which may have an impact on student achievement.”

Ultimately, like the Fraser Institute, these quality indicators serve to take the blame for poor scores away from out of school and governmental factors and place the blame back in the hands of students, teachers and schools. There are four categories as outlined in *Completing the picture: The education quality indicators framework* (EQAO, 2005f). Under the category of context the indicators focus on enrolment, socio-economic status (being developed in collaboration with the ministry of education), Country of birth

and language background, Categories of special needs, Student mobility. Under the category of inputs the indicators focus on Student attendance, Support personnel, Teacher qualifications and experience, Accessibility and use of instructional materials, Accessibility and use of assessment materials, Use of computers in selected subjects. Under the category of processes the indicator is Teacher professional development, planning and collaboration. And finally, under the category of results the indicators are Student attitudes (Grades 3, 6, 9 and 10), Student achievement results.

Unlike the Fraser institute, EQAO recognizes that there are other indicators that affect test scores; unfortunately, as mentioned above, they promote their success stories as defined by increased scores which suggests that ultimately increased scores is what defines a successful school.

The indicators raise more questions than they answer. For example, under the category of inputs one indicator is teacher qualifications and experience. Could it be that less experienced teachers, who likely have less qualification, get more challenging classes because they have less of a voice in their schools simply by having less seniority within their schools? So, the reason that their classes perform less successfully on the EQAO test is not because the teachers are less capable but because they get more challenging classes. To cite another example, under inputs again, an indicator is use of computers in selected subjects. Could it be that it's not the computers that make a difference, but that those schools that have more computers, and students who have computers in the home also have other advantages that contribute to increased EQAO test scores? Similar arguments and questions can and should be asked of all the indicators and

with each of the categories to expose the complexity of the problem and the naivety of the Education Quality Indicators Framework.

Under the category of results one of the indicators is Student attitudes (Grades 3, 6, 9 and 10). Given the oppression experienced by students in schools, we need to qualify if it is reasonable to expect students to comply and show positive attitudes or should the appropriate attitudes be one of resistance? And if resistance is the appropriate attitude, how are students perceived who resist? Are they labeled as having an inappropriate attitude by the system? Howard Zinn (2001) argues that civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience (cited in Roddick, 2001, inside front cover). Ultimately, the question is who decides what a “proper” attitude is, and who benefits from this definition?

In the EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning: A Handbook for School and Board Leaders (hereafter, EQAO Guide) (EQAO, 2005g) the Fraser Institute’s assertion already quoted above that “Effective schools produce good results regardless of the family background of their students” is supported in a more cautious tone. The EQAO Guide argues that, “research indicates that, while factors such as socio-economic status and preparedness to learn affect student achievement, schools have a significant influence on student growth” (p. 2). EQAO clearly understands that out of school factors affect performance, yet they suggest that schools are at fault if they are not successful. This is clearly an unfair attempt to shift the blame to schools and away from government whose responsibility it should be to find solutions to the problems that lead to such an unjust situation. At a recent conference I attended, one of the speakers said that, in fact, schools contribute to only 20 per cent of student achievement. This is a small

influence and serves to disagree with EQAO's claim that schools have a significant influence on student growth.

Ministry of Education

So far we have seen how the Fraser Institute and EQAO both support and contribute to the myth that high EQAO scores translates into successful school. In this section we will look at how the ministry does this and in the next we will look at how boards do this.

Some of the ways that the ministry of education and the provincial government support the myth are financially, through policy, allocating staff, and press releases. Financially, the government pays for the operation of EQAO and for the cost of administering the EQAO tests. In a discussion paper on the provincial assessment policy the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (2002, March) titled *Weighing in: A discussion Paper on Provincial Assessment Policy* estimates the cost of running EQAO to be over \$50 million dollars a year (p. 3). Furthermore, they add that "However, the \$50 million a year does not begin to fathom the bottom line of the current government's investment in provincial assessment. Boards and schools are at least matching if not outstripping EQAO's spending on provincial assessment, though the full extent of their spending has not been systematically tracked" (p. 3). As well, the government targets funding to specific initiatives in reaction to EQAO test scores. On Friday, June 1st, 2001 the ministry had a press release *Early Reading Strategy Will Help Students Improve*.

In the press release the ministry announced the following:

To support the Strategy, the government will provide \$24 million in funding for:

- training for elementary principals and lead teachers on how to use target setting and assessment of students' reading skills to provide better instruction;
- additional resources for selected schools that need extra help. The government will set up school improvement teams of specialists to work with these selected schools so their students can succeed;
- purchases of student learning resources to support Early Reading.

All these changes are in reaction to EQAO test scores and in an attempt to create more successful schools which means schools with higher EQAO test scores.

In another press release dated Wednesday, November 10, 2004 captioned by the words, Positive Ontario Student Results a Welcome Change, clearly indicating that student success is defined by higher EQAO test scores. And one final example, in a press release dated Thursday, March 10, 2005 the McGuinty Government Confirms New Direction for EQAO “The Ontario government recognizes that strong literacy skills are the foundation for success in school and life.” Once again, strong literacy skills and the road to success are measured by EQAO test scores.

The president of the Ontario Teachers Federation, Jim McQueen (2004, October 27) shared his experience of a field trip he made to the ministry of education to attend a meeting:

My reason for going to the Ministry, was to attend a meeting of the Steering Committee for Turnaround Schools. I naively agreed to cover for the

Secretary-Treasurer of OTF at this meeting. I say naively because I thought this could be a very useful meeting. The opportunity to discuss why children fail: the effects of poverty on education; the troubles of lower socio/economic schools; the difficulty of teaching numerical and literacy skills to hungry children; newly designed reading and numeracy programs; the resources required for success; and a litany of other important questions.

What did we talk about? Testing, testing, EQAO and testing. We were asked how to select schools scientifically based on criteria of language and different school systems. We were exposed to discussions of diagnostic tools, schools as laboratories, accountability, identification, EQAO changes, success rates, percentages, improving test scores, uniformity, control groups and a compendium of other pseudo-scientific dialogue. We never spoke of the real problems confronting education or the resources necessary to confront these challenges.

Don't get me wrong. I am all for early identification of problems. But, this should be the beginning step for an educational system not an end in itself. Learning to pass a test does not necessarily create Literacy or Numeracy. Test scores don't make the contemporary social problems go away.

Out of fairness, this committee has been functioning for a year. Maybe it has creative programs to deal with children and students to help solve their problems, but it sure as hell doesn't talk about them. The whole meeting had as its rationale how to get kids to pass tests so as to meet the Liberal Government's election promise of a 75% success rate.

This testing mania is going to be the ruin of real education. One envisions a school system where every teacher teaches to the test at the same time with the same material on the same day. Teach the curriculum at nine. Review at ten. Test at one. No time for remediation because tomorrow is another day with another test. Where is the creativity, the civility, the joy of learning, the interpersonal relations, and yes the fun? Thank God my son will be out of school before the “testers” gain total control. In the future, we will all be accountable and everything will be accounted for but will we really have educated, well rounded, articulate, creative and socially aware students? I think not!

I quoted Jim McQueen at length because he helps shed light on the ministry’s focus on the EQAO testing myth, and helps identify some real problems that following the myth leads to.

Boards

The boards also contribute to myth by supporting EQAO testing. They spend money and create documents complying with EQAO directions and initiatives. Schools, teachers and other board employees also comply (some willingly and some not). For example, Brian Jamieson (2005, September) reports on the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) annual survey that, “As with previous surveys, teachers remain dead set against standardized testing. Seventy one per cent say that standardized testing is the least helpful education initiative. No other issue comes close” (p. 36). And Marilyn A. Laframboise (2005, September) Chair of the OCT in her remarks in the same issue says,

Ask what more can be done to improve learning and teachers have ready answers. More help for at-risk, immigrant and special students. More phys ed, music and art programs. Mentoring programs for new teachers. More specially trained literacy and numeracy teachers. And get rid of standardized testing – please!
(p.10)

Yet a large part of a teacher's job is training students to pass and be successful on the EQAO test.

The boards also have EQAO action plans. For example, Janet Killins (2003, April) wrote The District School Board of Niagara's document called the Executive Summary: Building Student Success Grades 1 to 12 EQAO Action Plan (for implementation in 2003/04). They also have a District School Board of Niagara EQAO action plan committee made up of 20 people ranging from consultants, superintendents, elementary and secondary school teachers, vice-principals, and principals. The document defines the indicator for success as "optimized student results on EQAO assessments" (p.15). The school literacy team uses EQAO results to help plan for students in their schools (p. 3), and "Administrators along with school staff are reviewing EQAO assessment information generated over the years to assist in planning" (p. 5). As well, "Many administrators provide professional development opportunities for staff new to EQAO" (p. 5). The Peel District's School Board document comes out of their Curriculum and Support Services department (2003) and is titled the Peel District School Board EQAO Planning: A Planning Process for 2003 and Beyond. The document aligns itself with EQAO goals and initiatives. The following statement sums it up: "Thus, from the outset [1996-97], the Peel District School Board has supported and contributed to the

goals of EQAO” (p.3). These documents are ostensible examples for the connection that boards place on EQAO testing and school success.

At a leadership address for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (2005, August 30) the director made the following remarks regarding EQAO and school success:

Minister Kennedy’s mantra since his election has been accountability – school boards must show results with the money government provides. The government will be reviewing EQAO results as one indicator of school and school district success as it provides money for staff training, for turn around teams, for literacy initiatives and for learning resources.

While there continues to be debate about EQAO testing, we must recognize that EQAO test results are increasingly a societal measure of school success. The media, parents and politicians are all holding us accountable for these results and through these results. As educators, we know that any form of standardized testing is only one way of many of measuring student achievement. Our goal is to improve student achievement. Our challenge is to positively influence EQAO results while improving student achievement. Our literacy coaches have been extremely helpful in engaging teachers in improving student achievement, and the increased number of coaches approved for the coming year will multiply the effect we have already had.

The emphasis placed by underlining the words “goal,” “challenge” and “while” suggests to me that the speaker recognizes that EQAO and achievement are not the same thing, but politically EQAO cannot be ignored.

Looking through the Success Stories touted by EQAO (2005h) on their website under News Releases, a similar point is manifested. For example, if we look at Lincoln M. Alexander Secondary School in Mississauga we will notice that the road to success is through intensive preparation and a narrowing of the curriculum by focusing on EQAO test preparation: Jerry Powidajko, the school principal is quoted as saying that, “We run a number of programs to provide remedial help as well as explicitly preparing students for the OSSLT.” And,

The school’s success strategy has focused on intensive student preparation for the OSSLT and the basic literacy skills required by the end of Grade 9. Preparatory lessons based on both OSSLT requirements and EQAO data are presented to students each year. In 2004, for example, students received a total of nine preparatory lessons over a nine-day period. The school’s approach revolves around a number of key success factors, including teachers’ modeling [sp] various reading and writing strategies for students through “think alouds,” consistent use of correct language by all teaching staff, the use of literacy specialist teachers and allowing students ample time to practise and demonstrate their understanding. Through intensive test training it is possible to raise test scores and yet by the efforts diminish education at the same time. Elliot Eisner (1998) summed it up in the following way: “it is perfectly possible for a schools faculty to raise test scores and at the same time to diminish the quality of education.” These measures victimize students.

EQAO and school closures

People for Education’s (2005, September) newsletter exposed how EQAO scores influenced school closing decisions. They shared how “in an unprecedented move, the

Minister of Education appointed two provincial facilitators to review school closing decisions in three boards.” In Ontario Education: Excellence for all/ Good Places to Learn: Renewing Ontario’s Schools the ministry outlined the following:

Where schools have not been closed yet for decisions made after December 2003, the ministry will automatically conduct a review through an independent facilitator to see if the spirit of the closure guidelines and capital planning process has been met. (p. 10)

The results of three independent facilitator’s reports have been released and the influence of EQAO is clear: Schools with higher scores are spared. David Cooke’s (2005, June) report for the Lakehead District School Board suggests that EQAO scores should play a role in deciding what schools should close:

However the school’s EQAO results are better than the board and provincial average and the school has strong community ties. The school itself is showing its age and it requires updating if it is to meet student needs. The school community wants to be involved in deciding the future of this school and I feel that rather than rushing to make a decision now, it would be in the best interest of the community to suspend the closure decision, and have the board reconsider the decision once new school closure policies are in place. I therefore recommend that Fort William Collegiate Institute should be reconsidered along with other schools scheduled for closure in 2007. (p. 6)

Joan Green (2005a,b, June) who wrote the report for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and for the C District School Board also lists EQAO as a factor in deciding whether schools should be closed. This is troubling if we consider that socio-economic

status (SES) and other out of school factors can influence EQAO test scores. A fact, as we saw earlier, readily admitted by EQAO. This means that schools with higher SES and fewer challenges with out of school factors can keep their schools open while others will close. This is a case of those who have traditionally been marginalized will continue to be marginalized and those who have traditionally been privileged will continue to be privileged. A frustration Jim McQueen exposed through his experience quoted above.

Criticisms of testing

In this section I will focus on some criticism and problems with this type of testing that has been leveled by some well respected scholars who argue that testing and successful schooling is not the same thing.

We can trace this obsessive and futile attempt at quantifying human behaviour to at least Thorndike: “Thorndike was a measurement-oriented psychologist who popularized the idea of a science of education based on the observation and numerical representation of behavior” (cited in Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, P. 22). It seems absurd to me that we believe we can translate something as complex as a school’s success into a number, but the myth serves to convince people that this is the case. The danger of this myth is the way that it affects people’s everyday experiences through school closings, loss of agency by being forced to teach to a test that you would rather see abolished and so on.

Some argue that there are schools that against all odds are numerically successful. William J. Mathis (2005, April) refers to this phenomenon as the fallacy of the successful example. I will quote his argument at length because he helps us understand both the fallacy of the argument and its implications:

The fallacy of the successful example. Countless profiles, filled with fine praise, have been written about successful schools. Typically, federal and state politicians stage a high-visibility media event to recognize a poor school that has registered high test scores despite the handicaps of poverty and inadequate facilities. (The norm is for the politician to be photographed reading to children of color.) The media message is that, because this school has achieved success through hard work, all similarly situated schools can do the same. Thus closing the achievement gap requires no additional resources. It is simply a matter of will and effort.

Certainly, there are thousands of teachers, aides, and principals across our land who are genuine heroes. They do miraculous work in impossible circumstances. However, more than likely, these photo ops are created by a statistical fluke.

As is well known, average test scores for schools tend to distribute themselves along a normal curve (even if they are from criterion-referenced or mastery tests). So it is simple for someone to look at the test scores of all low-income, high-minority schools, identify the school at the top of the test-score distribution, and use it as an example of how well the reforms are working.

The problem is that these improvements are most often merely random fluctuations. Walt Haney showed that “Medallion” schools identified in one year in Massachusetts actually fell backwards in the following cycle. Likewise, scores between fourth-graders this year and fourth-graders next year, in the same school, represent 70% test and cohort error and not learning effects.

Thus, while examples of success can always be found, they do not mean that the level of educational or social support is adequate. In fact, these successful examples hide disparities and offer false promise. (p. 591)

In Ontario, there are 2.1 million elementary and secondary students and a lot of schools to house them all; so, the probability of their being a statistical anomaly in a school's EQAO test scores is not unlikely. It is, however, a mistake to conclude that a school that is considered unlikely to score high on an EQAO test and does is a successful school. And is it even a graver mistake to have researchers and officials swarm the school for its recipe for success with the intention of replicating this non-existent formula somewhere else.

Stan Karp (2004), a teacher and an editor of the journal *Rethinking Schools* argues that,

Over reliance on testing diverts attention and resources from more promising school improvement strategies like smaller class sizes, creative curriculum reform, and collaborative professional development. High-stakes tests push struggling students out of school, and encourage schools to adopt developmentally inappropriate practices for younger children in an attempt to “get them ready for the tests.” Overuse of testing can also encourage cheating scandals and makes schools and students vulnerable to inaccurate and, at times, corrupt practices by commercial testing forms.

Tests alone do very little to increase the capacity of schools to deliver better educational services.

A Canadian Press (2005, September 2) article published in the Toronto Star reminds us of the crisis we are witnessing in education in Ontario: “The dropout rate now stands at about 30 per cent, up from 22 per cent before new high school curriculum was implemented in 1999.” Part of the new curriculum changes was the introduction of the EQAO high stakes test.

In criticizing the United State’s NO Child Left Behind (NCLB) focus on standardized testing Deborah Meier (2004) uses language that we can easily apply to the EQAO testing in Ontario. When reading the following quote, simply replace in your mind the acronym NCLB for EQAO:

...pitting every child against every other child to look good and get ahead, and every school against every other school, and it does so with a measurement tool that barely acknowledges anything but test scores as a measure of sound education. (p.70)

She goes on,

By relying on standardized tests as the only measure of school quality, NCLB usurps the right of local communities to define the attributes of a sound education. Districts are further encouraged to limit any local alternatives by having schools limit their curriculum time to what will prepare children for tests.... This will...dumb down decades of efforts to provide all children with what was once offered only to the rich—a genuinely challenging and engaging program of study.

By ignoring ample evidence that the psychometric tools of testing provide limited predictions of school success, above all when it comes to children outside

the mainstream (children of color, of the poor, those with handicaps or limited English proficiency), NCLB forces local districts to engage in one-size-fits all practices that ignore the needs of these children. (p. 71)

Alfie Kohn (2004) asks the question, “What have the results of high-stakes testing been to this point?” and answers it in the following way:

To the best of my knowledge, no positive effects have ever been demonstrated, unless you count higher scores on these same tests. More low-income and minority students are dropping out, more teachers (often the best ones) are leaving the profession, and more mind-numbing test preparation is displacing genuine instruction. (p. 86)

Alfie Kohn (2000) also has a book titled, *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools*. M. Gail Jones, Brett D. Jones, and Tracy Hargrove (2003) have a book titled *The Unintended Consequences of High Stakes Testing*. These thinkers have done a lot to shed light on the negative affects of testing that is similar to EQAO testing.

Alfie Kohn (2004) outlines some of the unintended consequences in the following passage:

Every few days there is fresh evidence of how teaching is being narrowed and dumbed down, standardized and scripted—with poor and minority students getting the worst of the deal as usual. I have an overstuffed file of evidence detailing what we’re sacrificing on the altar of accountability, from developmentally appropriate education for little children to rich, project-based learning for older ones, from music to field trips to class discussions. (pp. 91-2)

I would like to conclude this chapter with a personal example. The school where I use to teach is ranked as being a successful one by EQAO; yet, it is an awful place to work and for students. I still keep in touch with some of the teachers at the school and they continue to update me on how poisonous the environment is. One teacher left and has gone to another school cannot believe how much better she feels about working at her current school, which by EQAO standards is ranked less successful. I remember how tense and agitated I felt working there. How limited, anxious and frustrated I was at the rigidity and amount of time wasted on EQAO. I remember with shame at how I forced students to do useless EQAO test preparation activities, not because it benefited them but because it would result in raise test scores. I remember the boredom and ennui expressed by my students at the repetitive, constant test training that they were expected to endure. In talking to my former colleagues recently, they assure me that the situation has gotten worse. Is this discrepancy between EQAO scores defining a school as being successful and others within the community disagreeing an anomaly, a statistical fluke? My experience, suggests it is not. I have asked many teachers and administrators in and out of my graduate classes and the overwhelming consensus is that a successful school as defined by EQAO and a successful school as defined by those who have lived and embodied the school life are NOT the same thing.

Chapter 5 Breaking the Silence: An EQAO Marker Speaks Out Against Standardized Testing

I have decided to include this chapter as part of the book because it continues to build on the last chapter by outlining how arbitrary and flawed the marking process is, despite the assurances, from those who are benefiting most from standardized testing, that everything is fine. The truth is that this is a flawed process that victimizes students, teachers, parents, and administrators.

My first stint of marking for the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) took place in the summer of 1998. At that time EQAO was just beginning and the atmosphere was relatively relaxed, collegial, friendly -- but the marking process was flawed. When I was a teacher-marker in April 2002 the atmosphere had undergone a thorough change: it was tense, regimented, controlling. The marking process remained flawed. I am currently teaching at the Faculty of Education at Nipissing University. At the time of my most recent marking, I was teaching Secondary English. I asked for and was granted permission from my principal to take a week off teaching (8 April 2002 – 12 April 2002) to mark the grade-10 literacy test for EQAO.

The Facility

The Toronto Congress Centre is a fabulous building for trade shows; unfortunately, it is not a good place for EQAO marking. They needed to find a large and flexible space where they could feed over 1000 people lunch. On this point I need to say that unlike my first marking experience I found the breakfasts, lunches, and snacks to be very good; nevertheless, given the budget cuts in education, I question how the enormous

cost needed to feed all of these people directly benefits education. Another big expense: people are flown in or given money for mileage, housed in hotels, and given money for dinners. This adds up, particularly as they try to bring in people from different parts of the province to ensure fairness.

The Congress Centre is a noisy environment, with rooms divided by makeshift partitions that are open at the top, contributing to the noise. The lighting is challenging (people wear baseball caps due to the glare on the screen of our Personal Digital Assistant that we use to score our booklets. The PDA, I'm sure, monitors when we log in, how many books we mark and so on). The support staff uses a wireless network to collect data. A huge warehouse accommodates the four booklets each of the 142,072 students uses — a total of over a half million booklets in all. There is a standard lunch hour--with guest speakers (another expense, presumably) -- because it would be even noisier if the breaks were staggered. There is security 24 hours a day, and all bags and coats are required to be checked to ensure that no booklet will be smuggled out of the building (an easy thing for any marker who decided to do so).

8 April 2002

On this the first day, we could sit anywhere and are asked to be comfortable. Over the noise from surrounding groups our group leader outlines specific rules about attendance, punctuality, no drinks, only tap water — and set a militant tone by asking one woman to get rid of her juice and waiting for her to throw out the full bottle. The rationale: student papers could be rendered illegible if smudged. We are then introduced

to each other, and the group leader assures us we are going to be a wonderful and productive group. Attendance is picked up every day by a runner at 10:00 a.m. If we arrive after 10:00 a.m. it is up to us to correct our attendance at the information desk.

If markers live more than 90 km away they are set up in a hotel room. One person is 2 km short of the 90 km limit and has to drive in everyday. Because of traffic the drive takes two hours.

The woman sitting next to me shared her feelings about the negative impact of standardized testing -- a feeling, I was later to find out, that many markers share. She told me that she knew about instances when teachers or schools were blamed when students performed poorly on the grade three EQAO test. She mentioned an instance where marks were skewed because four students were exempted from the test and all four would have likely scored a level four on the test.

Our group leader gives us binders that we cannot write in and for which we are responsible containing training papers and anchor papers, many of which we cannot read because of poor photocopying. We are given a form to record our document number, and “post it” notes to grade our training papers. We then share and discuss our assessment decisions with others and connect them to the EQAO expectations. We are told not to take breaks other than those scheduled. We are informed that as the regular bathrooms are always packed we would do better to use the portables.

The woman next to me shares a story about her experience marking the opinion piece for EQAO last year, where students were to write three paragraphs. By the end of the week markers were told that if students repeated/copied the question it was now to be counted as one of the three required paragraphs. Clearly, there are serious concerns about consistency between papers graded earlier and papers graded later. However, we are told that this is a *literacy test* and we are not to approach it as English teachers. (In fact, those marking the reading section do not have to be teachers. The rationale -- I believe -- is that the responses are rigid and therefore training as a teacher is not a requirement.) And because the papers have already been through the “holistic marking” stage, we are going to mark one out of every four booklets. But although our rubrics are different from last week’s markers, if there are substantial problems due to this evaluation technique the papers will be reexamined.

Students’ Task

Students have to write a summary, a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion, a news report, and an information paragraph. The summary is to be between 100-200 words, the opinion piece is to be a series of three paragraphs (introduction, body and conclusion), and the news report is to follow a newspaper format.

As one of our first tasks we are asked to summarize the same piece of writing that the students are asked to summarize. My quick and half-hearted attempt at writing the summary reads as follows:

73.7 million T-shirts are purchased each year. The average North American owns 25. T-shirts have gone from being used as underwear to outerwear. T-shirts are now used to support/advertise for manufacturers of t-shirts. This practice needs to stop. T-shirts need to be used as rags for washing our 1.7 million cars and not to help support manufacturers.

After rereading my clever summary I checked the EQAO instructions and am mortified to discover that I (a former English teacher, now with a PhD) did not fulfill the criteria as structured by EQAO. Still I remain convinced that my piece is an excellent summary. However, upon closer examination it becomes clear that in my summary I was non-compliant, too creative. EQAO expects the summaries to include the main idea (although what this is for any piece of writing is clearly debatable) and at least two important details to support it. I am informed that another flaw in my summary is that I did not say specifically that the article is about how we need to “get rid of the T-shirt” even though this point is clearly suggested by my last sentence. It is interesting to note that whether the student needed to explicitly say “get rid of the T-shirt” for full credit is, at points, unclear to us as markers, leading to lack of consistency in the marking process.

During my 15-minute break there are large lineups to the bathroom, and a shortage of food. It is crowded and chaotic. After the break I write another summary that conforms to EQAO standards. It is not better than my first attempt but it conforms. This experience reminds me of the impact of anxiety resulting from a timed test, and how some people need what Dr. Jack Miller at OISE/UT refers to as an incubation period: to

allow an idea to sit for awhile before they can write a good summary. This seems to encourage the following diagnosis: instead of recognizing that there are students who write half-heartedly (as I did) just to get the activity over with, because of the artificial test-taking conditions EQAO would consider these students non-literate. There is no opportunity to revise, penalizing those students who have learned that writing is about process.

Within our cohort some people clearly spent more time, took the task more seriously, while others rushed. Who is the better summary writer? So the question remains: does this task gage a student's ability to write or does it gage how much they care, or how anxious they are at having to write such a high stakes test?

As markers we are asked to mark only for the main idea, supporting detail, and spelling, but not knowing the student whose work you are marking makes you an unfair judge of his/her work. According to the EQAO the summary has to say get rid of the T-shirt, and uses as justification for this the "fact" messages on T-shirts are either unattractive or meaningless. If the student goes beyond the EQAO's main point and suggests people should boycott Indonesian manufacturer's goods, for example — a substantive and perfectly valid comment -- according to the EQAO's criteria that response would be inaccurate. If students decide that this piece is about the popularity of T-shirts (and according to the test directions support this main idea with two supporting points) their response is inaccurate because it does not correspond with the EQAO's

chosen main point. Likewise, if they talk about the history of the T-shirt they are also — according to the EQAO -- wrong.

There is, however, a contrary argument that students may use to support why we should keep the T-shirt. The article says that the T-shirt has been used as great democratic portable billboards, presumably urging others to resist injustices. I, for one, support a T-shirt urging a boycott and ban of EQAO and therefore, believe that we should not get rid of all T-shirts. This argument of course will result in my failure on this component of the rubric. In short, there is only one right way to summarize this article and EQAO has the answer; even though, clearly other readings, including oppositional ones, are possible.

One fellow marker makes a fundamental point about how we cannot avoid the subjectivity of the marker. In her last session, because of further reflection and a new perspective, the markers were asked to discard several anchor papers that were suddenly deemed inaccurate -- despite the assurances given by the director about the fairness and consistency of the process because of careful planning. Later, I would witness similar incidents: our group leader would instruct us to go into our binder, rip out a certain section that we had been using as a guide and throw it out.

During lunch I speak to some of the reading component markers who are incensed not only at the obvious bias in the test, but at having been instructed not to speak about their frustrations outside of the room. One question on the test is about various sports and

the answer is that basketball is the better sport because people in wheelchairs can play it. The suggestion is that people in wheelchairs cannot play other sports -- clearly a false and “ablest” assumption.

Consistency and fairness continue to be issues of concern. In our room, on several occasions we disagree about the accuracy of the anchor papers and my solution is to side in favour of the student. We also disagree with EQAO’s answers to some of the reliability and orientation papers. In many cases, one marker would consider the same paper as accurate, while another would mark it as inaccurate.

Other cohorts are using other rubrics to look at, for example, tone: did the student stick to the summary or put in some of his/her own thoughts? They also look at organization and the use of connecting words. We, once again, are only looking at main idea, supporting detail, and spelling. This means that the piece we mark is marked by another group looking for different things and using a different rubric. The process is very mechanical.

Over lunch another person is upset at the rigidity of the responses expected. She told me how a question asks why in the piece is there a short sentence that describes the weather. The answer that many students gave is that the sentence is short because details about the weather follow. This is an answer that many of the markers in her group agree should be accepted. EQAO says it is wrong, and that the sentence is short because by being short it adds emphasis.

As markers we do not know who passes and who fails, and only mark for a specific skill. Possibly this gives EQAO more flexibility in shifting the pass/fail as they see fit.

One purpose of the EQAO analytic marking is that if students fail they can get specific feedback. In theory, that is. Unfortunately, the format and timing of the test renders the information students do get about their results virtually useless. The students do not get to see their test, only a summary sheet that gives them statistical information. In many cases I would be hard pressed to rationalize to a parent or student why their son/daughter scored as they did with the test even if the test was in front of me. Often marking is just an intuitive decision. And in spite of the importance of immediate feedback, students receive their results months after writing the test.

9 April 2002

We are reprimanded because people are spending too much time talking (often trying to get consensus on a student's paper) and not enough time marking and are told to limit our talking — although we still have significant disagreement about how an answer should be marked.

To accommodate “special needs” students, they are given various modifications. For example, there are yellow booklets with black writing to aid students who had trouble reading black on white.

For some of the papers I am marking the students have the correct words copied down from the text, but it is questionable whether they understand the meaning of what they wrote because they simply copied the “relevant” pieces directly from the text. The impact of standardized testing is becoming evident. Students are scoring high on mechanics and low on creative and critical thinking. For example, spelling is high and main idea is low. I attribute this largely to the limited range of response that EQAO accepts as accurate.

In the afternoon we are given our reliability paper to score. (Every morning we score an orientation paper and every afternoon we score a reliability paper to see and measure how consistent our scoring is.)

10 April 2002

Today I had my newspaper confiscated, and although they suggest that it is for security reasons, but we know that they are worried about productivity.

It is sunny outside so the light shining in is making it very difficult to see the PDA screen. The markers are complaining about the rubric being flawed and how we need to rely on our intuition. Some yellow booklets were coming through with bigger writing: another modification. Some students typed and stapled their responses to their booklets. Many of the markers are frustrated about being forced to slot students into the limited options offered by the rubric. Left on their own, teachers could make better anecdotal comments.

The phenomenology of marking is becoming apparent. At a different time we would have scored some of these papers differently. If a parent or teacher asked me why I gave a particular student an “accurate” instead of a “supporting” often my response would have to be that it is an arbitrary choice.

At 11:30 on the Tuesday we are asked to change the way we mark, and what we are now able to score as original work. In some cases we are told that if rough notes are in sentence form we can now mark them -- this is yet another change in practice.

We are using “rubric B” (this rubric focuses on main idea, supporting detail and spelling). Another group is using “rubric A” (it focuses on tone, connecting words and so on). There is a gap in rubric B that is not in rubric A. For example, if there is insufficient evidence, rubric A allows the markers to categorize the student with “insufficient evidence.” whereas with rubric B if there is insufficient evidence we have to categorize it as “not from the original,” even if it happens to contain information from the original question, because we do not have a category for insufficient evidence. This is a serious flaw, and creates problems for the student feedback sheet. They will be told that their information is not from the original question when it is. What they should be told instead is that insufficient evidence is the problem. If the rubric is changed to reflect this flaw, what does it do to the goal of consistency from year to year?

We are now instructed to look at rough notes regardless of whether they are in sentence form and regardless of whether the student directs us to look there -- changed yet again.

Some people are still relying on the training papers we were given on the first day to make a decision on a particular student. Our group leader is concerned about the accuracy of doing this and suggested we do not rely on these but on our anchor papers.

Recently the government has introduced a grade 12 course that those who fail the EQAO literacy test can take, and if they pass it, it will count as part of their diploma requirement in place of the grade ten-test. To date (July 2003) well over 100,000 students have failed the EQAO grade-ten "high stakes" test, pressuring the government to offer an alternative. Since teachers will ultimately make the determination through this grade twelve course, why are we spending hundreds of millions of dollars (if we add up all the money and human resources spent to support EQAO and the money spent by boards of education and schools) on EQAO annually?

Analytic marking is done using a summary rubric, and holistic marking focuses on the whole piece of writing. A holistic marker may ask him/herself the following question: Do I understand what the students wrote? The piece may have flawless sentences but it lacks organization, so the whole is greater than the parts. With the analytic rubric, the student is informed that he/she has problems in for example, three areas: spelling, main idea, and tone.

The EQAO reading portion of the test is based on the curriculum expectations, it is analytically scored, and acts as a diagnostic tool since the students get information returned to them. The students are asked a series of multiple choice questions, discrete questions, and questions that require integration and assimilation. The questions are expensive to develop and so they are not given away but banked for future use.

11 April 2002

We are informed that they are pleased with our efficiency and productivity. We are told that there is a problem with how we are scoring in the area of supporting detail, so they are encouraging us to look at the anchor papers for guidance. We are expected to decide what the student has written as the main idea (often an arbitrary task) and to see if the student has two connecting details to go along with this. This is difficult to score because in some cases a student has the right main idea but no supporting details for it. At the same time, the student will have another main idea that is inaccurate according to EQAO but the student has correct supporting detail. So, in the first instance, the marker can choose to grade the student as accurate for main idea and no supporting detail or inaccurate for main idea but with supporting detail. What would benefit the student most? What did the student intend to do? This is yet another concern and flaw in the process and with rubrics.

12 April 2002

The tension is mounting. The group leader has clearly been instructed to ensure that we start marking earlier, and spend less time discussing our concerns, confusions, and inconsistent marking of the morning orientation paper. We are still having fundamental disagreements about whether a piece should be scored as accurate or inaccurate. It is now Friday, one more day left of marking, and there are still problems with how we score supporting detail.

I would love to have the students in front of me to ask them questions about their responses -- it would make the process so much easier and much fairer.

As we go along and discuss how we would score a piece, the subjectivity of the process becomes increasingly obvious. The group leader has each of us mark several papers with her to ensure that we are consistent; but through this process it becomes increasingly clear that the students' score is contingent on who is the marker. In almost every case when the group leader challenges a decision, the markers — some of who have taught for 30 years and who have marked for EQAO five times or more — must score according to her judgment, as if she is “correct” and the others are “incorrect.” This is such a farce. A false sense of objectivity is being mythologized and the public is being fooled. We are part of the machine.

We as markers are constantly being told different things. For example, sometimes we are told that if the student gets the gist of the main point (“get rid of the T-shirts”) then the student response is accurate; today we are told that it needs to be stated explicitly

to be accurate. This is Friday, marking ends Saturday, and we are still confused. As I increasingly see the pointlessness of the exercise, it is becoming harder and harder to mark. Fatigue is setting in and my concentration is waning. After reading and scoring over 600 booklets so far this week it's hard to focus, especially under these conditions.

And it becomes clear that there is no real respect for the judgment of the markers. EQAO decides the correct reading, and theoretically could keep sending the booklets through until the desired consensus is achieved. After all they go to great lengths to try and train us to mark in the same way — whichever way seems to be correct depending on which day it is.

Tensions are high. People are questioning, challenging, and are frustrated by the disagreements. In fact, the educational officer is coming into our room because of the anger people are feeling. People are visibly angry at the lack of consistency about how things are suppose to be marked. What the group leader is telling us to do is inconsistent with the anchor papers we are to use as our guide -- yet another flaw in the process. We get no straight answers about, for example, whether a blank should be scored as not from the original. Can we use the students' rough notes or not, or only when the students direct us to? What about when they have a partial thought? and on and on. The stress level is high.

We are told that they agree that the rubric is flawed but that it would be unfair to change it halfway through the process. But if they change it for next year can we compare

this year's results to next year's results? And if they do not change it, will it not remain flawed?

Whether or not they admit this rubric is flawed, the reality is that we are being trained to use this rubric — and it is limiting. In fact, EQAO's claim of statistical consistency virtually depends on this limitation: markers have only so many choices in which to slot students. And often it's not a question of the "right" choice, but of the *only* choice. We have been given an impossible job to try and fit over 140,000 students' writing into a limited and limiting rubric.

Some people are invited to return and continue marking for week 5. They chose only those who are considered productive and accurate, in other words, those that readily conformed to the EQAO expectations.

13 April 2002

One significant problem that I see in marking the summary section of the test is that EQAO has a limited view of writing; namely that there is only one main idea per piece of writing. It is Saturday now and we find it hard to keep our productivity and reliability up. I also felt like a victim of double speak – EQAO insists that reliability and accuracy is high, but I question how this is the case when we in the room disagree constantly. At first I thought that this is an anomaly, but later I learned that this is a common complaint in all rooms. The trouble is that this process is informed by a

structural approach to reading and writing that assumes that there is one way to read a piece; rather, than a *post-structural* approach that assumes multiple readings.

The phenomenology of test-taking also needs to be considered. If you give a student the same test at a different time the students could perform in a different way, so it is unfair to have such a high stakes test attached to such an unbelievably flawed process. We cannot ignore the context and the baggage that students may be bringing with them. For example, when my wife was in university a professor forced her to write an exam the day her mother died. At that time, being a nineteen-year-old in a weakened state she complied. How could this experience not have an impact on her test-taking competency?

Ultimately, EQAO is part of a process that streams people into career choices. If you want to be a hairstylist or an electrician and fail to pass the EQAO test (or now the proposed grade 12 course), you do not get a high school diploma and therefore cannot become a hairdresser – in spite of performing well in other subjects--a job at which you might be quite skilled. Likewise, if you are extremely intelligent but do not have a command of the English language or writing and therefore cannot pass the EQAO grade-ten test, you are prevented from pursuing many career options.

Note: This chapter was previously published as Ricci, C. (2004, Winter). Breaking the silence; a marker speaks out against standardized testing. *Our Schools/Our Selves*, 13(2), (#74), 75-88.

Chapter 6—Teacher Candidates as Victim--Rewarding the obedient: What is really being taught at the faculties of education? An experiential account

This chapter is written as a qualitative theoretical piece that explores how I believe many faculties teach their students misinformation. As well, it includes a list of messages that are taught at many faculties of education that work counter to a democratic objective. It concludes with the message that wanting the best for our children requires confident, competent, professionals that can think critically and creatively, and who are not obedient fearful automatons.

I would like to offer an explanation of the spirit in which the paper will be written. As well, I will offer a brief connection of how my work fits in with both holistic theories of education and critical pedagogy. The spirit that informs this piece is captured by a message that John Holt shares in one of his letters that appeared in a book edited by Susannah Sheffer (1990):

This is indeed part of what I am trying to tell teachers – that the things they learn or feel they are learning from their direct contact with and observation of children are more important and what is even more important more to be trusted than what the theoreticians may tell them. This is a heretical view, I know, but it is my own.
(p. 55)

I would like to make this view my own as well. I offer an experiential account informed by my direct observation, rather than a position couched in theoretical jargon. Having said that, there are those that are not comfortable with this view and do not trust

themselves, and who need the affirmation of a theoretical tradition. They need a canonical voice to assure and ease their uneasiness. For them, I offer the following support from a holistic and then a critical perspective.

David Hunt (1987) points out the importance of beginning with ourselves: “Your common sense ideas and your unexpressed theories, growing out of your own personal experience, provide enormously rich sources of knowledge about human affairs” (p. 1). In this chapter I incorporate their thinking. I write this chapter by beginning with myself, and I urge faculties to allow their students to do the same. Faculties should avoid trying to turn out trained teachers that have access to recipes of teaching; instead, they should allow students to unfold. Jack Miller (2002) writes about how Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott are prophets for holistic learning: “Unlike many educators of the time who focused on controlling children, these three thinkers advised teachers to respect the intuitive wisdom of children (p. 201). Likewise, faculties of education should avoid trying to control teacher candidates and instead respect their intuitive wisdom.

Joe Kincheloe (1998), a critical pedagogue, writes about how, “Post-formal thinking provides the concrete grounding necessary for teacher self-direction, teacher empowerment” (p. 11). He describes post-formalism as one that, “engages a form of self-reflection and cognitive self-monitoring” (p. 10). He argues that,

The implicit message of older paradigmatic teacher education, the positivistic research that often grounds it, and the state and provincial reform movements that share the same epistemological assumptions is that teachers must do what they are told, what they are authorized to do, and that they must be careful about thinking for themselves. Such caution eventually turns into apathy as teachers lose interest

in the creative aspects of pedagogy that originally attracted them to the profession. (p. 8)

My experiential account is informed by my experience as a student and now a teacher in a faculty of education. We must break away from the positivistic assumptions that Kincheloe warns us about and embrace a more holistic and post-formalist position when delivering teacher education.

In April 2004, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel to Cameroon with a wonderful group of people. The group included eight student teacher candidates from a faculty of education and four faculty members. One of the most educationally meaningful results of traveling abroad is that you gain a much clearer and deeper sense of your home country's practices and theoretical assumptions. Among the many experiences we encountered, the candidates had an opportunity to practice teach abroad in an environment that, at first, seemed very different from our own.

While we were in a small village of about 5,000 people, we all stayed in the same home. At night, we all gathered in a large, mostly square-shaped, greeting room that had chairs and couches along the periphery, and a huge open space in the centre. This room was where we gathered, and where the candidates busily and impressively prepared their lesson plans and completed their work for the next school day. The rich exchange of dialogue among our group members was impressively fertile.

During one exchange, a candidate who was responsible for teaching the push/pull factors that lead to urban sprawl developed a lesson that was truly inspiring, to say the least. The lesson was one that would engage the local Cameroonian students in a pedagogically sound educational experience that they would likely never forget. The

lesson included a variety of teaching and learning strategies, and student interaction that would have made for an intense learning experience for all of the students. The next morning, armed with this pedagogical work of genius, the candidate walked to school. As became customary, the faculty members would visit the schools to assist and support our highly capable candidates in any way we could. For me, each trip I took to the schools was an enlightening learning experience, and therefore, the trips were one of the many daily highlights.

As I walked by the school that morning I noticed that the candidate and the associate teacher (the teacher whose class the candidate takes over to practice teach) were in the library (the inside of the school library is visible to those walking outside). The candidate looked a little deflated, while the associate teacher looked to be in good spirits and cheerful. Two of the faculty members on this trip had been to Cameroon before, and had forewarned me of the didactic teacher-centered approach to teaching that dominates the schools. Armed with this forewarning, I quickly assessed the situation and concluded that the associate teacher did not like the candidate's highly inspiring lesson (which would account for the candidate's deflated look), and that the associate teacher was coaching the candidate in best practices (which would account for his cheerful look). Once I approached the candidate and the associate, we talked and my assessment of the situation was confirmed.

At this point, I had a mix of emotions. Along with the candidate, I felt deflated, but I also felt laughter. Not a humorous laughter, but a laughter that Foucault (1998) characterizes as one that shatters (p. 377). In Foucault's case, the laughter is directed at the exotic charm of another system of thought that the fable in this "certain Chinese

encyclopedia” reveals. Foucault reveals how, among the categories that the animals are divided into are, belonging to the Emperor, having just broken a water pitcher, and that from a long way off look like flies. The reason that Foucault’s laughter is one that shattered is that this glimpse into what he describes as an exotic system of thought manifests the limitation of our own system of classification (p. 377). Order, Foucault points out, manifests itself in language as if it is already there, and science and philosophy try to justify why this order has been adopted rather than another. However, “these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones” (p. 381). In my case, what was shattered was the belief that this would never happen in our practices at home. It shattered this belief in at least two ways: First, by reminding me that the lack of agency and lack of empowerment the candidate faced in a small village in Cameroon is similar to what candidates experience at home, despite our belief or hope to the contrary. The second requires a bit more information in order to clarify. Part of what the associate teacher was sharing with the candidate was that the candidate needed to teach only what is in the text, and the best way to teach what is in the text is, essentially, to read out the text to the students (the teacher has the text and the students do not). One argument made in the text was that there are more people in the cities than in rural communities because women are more fertile in the cities. The candidate felt that this was misinformation and that he should not be made to share this misinformation with his students. The dilemma, of course, which we later discussed as a group, is that the students are required to pass a series of standardized tests before they can graduate. If the students do not have this information, and it appears on the test, have we then failed the students by not sharing this with them? This is a very puzzling dilemma.

To summarize the second point alluded to above, it is clear to most of us that in this example the associate teacher and the text are expecting the candidate to transmit false information to the students. The question then becomes, in our faculties of education are we playing the same game with our candidates? Are we transmitting information that we believe to be true, albeit well intentioned, but that in actuality may be false? Are we masking our biases behind the face of objectivity and truth? Are we teaching them what we believe to be best practices, but that may not be? Are we, in our own way, teaching them that there are more people in cities than in rural areas because women are more fertile in the cities? Are Piaget, Bloom, Kohlberg, and Gardner, for example, correct? Do we know the criticisms leveled at these theorists' works by critical pedagogues and holistic educators that, in part, argue that their positions are largely Eurocentric, male dominated, and culturally blind? For example, in, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* Carol Gilligan critiques Lawrence Kolberg, and in a book edited by Joe Kincheloe (2004), *Multiple Intelligences Reconsidered*, the writers challenge Howard Gardner. Do we share these oppositional voices with our teacher candidates?

The Medium Is the Message

Now that I have established the likelihood that in both the dictatorially run country of Cameroon's system of education, and in our own, candidates are disempowered and taught misinformation, let's explore what other messages candidates get by being enrolled to our faculties of education. Marshall McLuhan helped us understand that the medium is the message. Therefore, we need to ask what message is being taught to candidates who enter a faculty of education? Alternatively, after attending

the medium of a faculty of education, with what message do the candidates graduate?

The response from those of us who value a meaningful democracy, I am afraid, is bleak.

Chomsky (2000) defines a meaningful democracy as, “involving opportunities for people to manage their own collective and individual affairs” (p. 136). Below, I will offer a list of messages that I believe are taught at many faculties of education that work counter to this laudable democratic objective and that serve to victimize teacher candidates:

Conforming to the herd leads to good teaching. From the moment of first contact between the student teacher candidates and those who run the education program, candidates begin the processes of replacing their sense of personal self with a teacher self. Candidates are directed in how to act, how to behave, how to dress and so on. If they do not already conform to the ideal of what it means to be a teacher, they are forced to conform through peer pressure and fear of failure. The pressure is to have students replace “Self” for a teacher self.

Experts know what is best for students, candidates do not. By bombarding candidates with names, theories and rules of best practice, candidates are made to feel overwhelmed and anxious about how little they know, and how little they will likely ever know. Instead of being led to feel internally confident and empowered by how much they know, and taught that experience and contemplation will guide them through the complex process and art of teaching, they are taught that relying on external information provided to them by experts that have discovered these scientific truths is what will make them good teachers.

To be a good teacher, it is necessary to perform boring and meaningless work.
This point will resonate with those who believe that school skills are transferred to the

work environment. They might argue that the most important skill candidates will gain in preparing themselves to become teachers is to replicate this asset by participating in boring meaningless work while at the faculties. Students often complain about the meaningless tasks that they are forced to complete.

What you are asked to do is not what you need to do to be a successful teacher, but you need to do it anyway. At the faculty, candidates are asked to create endless detailed lesson plans and to stick to their plans as closely as possible. Instead, it would be best to have candidates practice reacting to spontaneity and the unexpected. By having them do things and then revealing to them that most teachers do not teach in this way, but yet, it is essential for them as beginning teachers to do it, we are preparing them for the task of doing what you are told even if it does not contribute to making them a more successful teacher.

Curriculum is important, people are not. Candidates are taught that what they believe and what they are interested in is unimportant. Likewise, they are taught that what students believe to be important and what they are interested in is even less of a concern. Candidates are taught that experts have painstakingly laid out the curriculum for them and that they should capitulate to this expertise. When they plan their lessons, they need to ensure that their lessons are connected to the curriculum documents developed by the experts. If they or the students disagree then the faculties need to end their opposition.

Take orders, listen, and do as they are told. This message is one that reigns supreme in many training systems, and comes through clearly at the faculty. Candidates often complain to me that their year at the faculty is one where they need to continue with

what has made them successful throughout their schooling. They need to jump through the hoops by doing what they are told.

Don't question. Among themselves, teacher candidates constantly question the message, authority or content of what is going on at the faculty; however, rarely do they have a forum to do so openly in their formal classroom setting. In my classes I try to create an environment where candidates feel compelled to challenge and question substantive issues and points raised in class. They often complain sadly to me that they agree that the education system is flawed, but if they are fortunate enough to get a job they are going to continue doing what they learned at the faculty: to be silent. They argue that they need and want to work, they do not want to get fired, and therefore they feel the pressure and need to obey and not to question.

Authority judges how well you are doing. With the emphasis on marks and grading, candidates are made to feel that they cannot judge their own performance, but that a teacher or authority needs to appreciate or disparage their work.

The way to succeed is to comply. I often share, with my candidates, a frightening possibility: What if we are here not because we are the cream of the crop, the brightest and the best, but because we listen, we conform, we are willing to obey and therefore we have been rewarded? We are here because we are willing to accept whatever they tell us. We are willing to reiterate the information they have trained us to repeat back to them on an exam, for instance. We have proved that we can carry out orders, follow directions and not challenge the system. Those that do not are punished with failure and the threat of a less affluent future. We can be trusted. Of course, they often agree but feel that they are the exception to this state of affairs. In an article written on October 3, 2005 for the

Virginian-Pilot titled *Ex-military often make better teachers* reveals how, “Overwhelmingly, the principals favored the teachers who came from the service.” The reason, we find out later in the article, is that, “And, no surprise, these teachers follow the rules – a pleasure for principals.”

Complying increases your chances of getting a job. Candidates are often threatened with the unthinkable: If they do not comply, they will never get a job. They need to complete all that they are told, because if they do not, no principal will ever hire them. The fear that they will lose their livelihood after so many years of schooling and such hard work is one that works well as a threat.

In conclusion, just as in all complex systems, there are those who comply and those that resist. I am in no way trying to argue that all educators in Cameroon follow this model, nor am I trying to argue that all teachers in my schooling system comply. The point is to raise the issue and have us think about this personally: Where do you stand as an educator? Is our system much different than the one in the dictatorially run Cameroon? I sincerely hope that I am wrong about the messages I believe candidates are receiving at the faculties of education. My motivation for writing this is that I want the best for our children. To accomplish this, I believe we need confident, competent, professionals that can think critically and creatively, and who are not obedient fearful automatons.

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Chapter 7—Part-time faculty as Victims-- Exploited by universities: Markers, teaching assistants, and sessionals

By Ellie D. Berger and Carlo Ricci

The imposition of managerial practices that have re-organized or at least subdued workers in other spheres is being attempted in education, in part through re-designing work to attract more part-time and contract employees who have less invested, professionally or financially, in the soul of the institution. (Robertson, 2002 cited in Froese-Germain, 2003, 24)

Before we started working for universities we admit to having the naïve notion that universities are socially just institutions interested in academic excellence and student success. The more familiar we are becoming with the workings of the institutions, the more we are recognizing that universities are part of the big business corporate ideology. Part of this ideology is the focus on worker exploitation and victimization in the name of efficiency and increased profits. Increasingly, universities are relying on part-time faculty, teaching assistants, and markers to accomplish this. According to a Statistics Canada report on the hiring of part-time faculty, between 1990-1991 and 1997-1998, the use of part-time university faculty increased in Canadian universities by 10% (Omiecinski, 2003, p. 10). In Ontario, while the use of part-time

faculty increased in 1997-1998, it decreased from 1990-1991 to 1996-1997. However, this decline in part-time faculty needs to be considered in relation to the 13% drop in full-time faculty during that same period (Omiecinski, 2003, p.10). To add to the connection with the corporate ideology, this reduction in part-time and full-time faculty was coupled by an increase of over 1% in student enrolment during this same period (Omiecinski, 2003, p.10). We have tried to get more updated information from 1998 until the present; unfortunately, due to budget cuts the Centre for Education Statistics at Statistics Canada has suspended the Annual Part-Time University and College Academic Staff Survey which gathers information on part-time teaching staff. So the most recent information we have is from 1998. However, we do have anecdotal evidence from several university administrators that indeed the hiring of part-time staff is on the increase.

As well, in a recent article published in York University's student newspaper, *Excalibur*, Bohr (2005) cites that over two thirds of university faculty are part-time. He goes on to discuss a shortage of tenure-track or full-time professors and relates this to the corporatization of the university; increasing numbers of students lead to decreasing academic integrity, thus, the increase in part-time faculty is not pedagogical but economic. The Toronto Star similarly reported that universities and colleges are increasingly hiring part-time faculty instead of full-time faculty in order to balance their budgets (Kalinowski, 2005). Ontario ranks lowest in per student government funding among the universities in Canada. In order for universities to operate, administrators need to think of creative ways to save money. Since salaries are such a large expense, it makes sense from a numerical perspective to try and find ways to reduce them. For example, if someone were hired to teach our full-time course loads on a part-time basis, the

university would save over 50% in salary. What follows is a personal qualitative research piece where Berger will share her personal experience working as a marker, teaching assistant, and part-time instructor and Ricci will share his experience as a part-time instructor. Berger will also share her experience as a full-time faculty member supervising markers and a teaching assistant. Ricci will discuss his experience as a full-time faculty member supervising a marker. In doing this, we are hoping that these personal narratives will lead to a better understanding of how universities are exploiting workers, and that it will result in mobilization and ultimately transformation. Part-time workers should not be viewed as cheap labour, but human beings that need to be treated with dignity and respect. They need to be fairly compensated for their work. The status quo may make economic sense in a sick and practical way, but it does not make compassionate sense.

Markers

Berger: In 1994-1995 and 1995-1996, when I was in my third and fourth years of undergraduate university, I and a fellow student were hired as markers for a first year course. After being offered these marking positions, I recall how my classmate and I discussed feeling excited and honoured; furthermore, I recall how anxious we were to share this news with family and friends. In fact, I remember thinking that even if the position came without any pay, I would still have accepted it because of the prestige connected to being a university marker. At the time, because I was so excited and honoured, and because of the status connected to working for a university in a position as a “privileged” marker, I did not feel exploited.

As full-time faculty looking back on our experience, we are now in a better position to understand the level of exploitation we and others endure.

Currently, Berger and Ricci have hired markers to help with their workload. Berger has hired four markers and Ricci has hired one. At the institution where we teach, the markers are entitled to \$7.56 an hour for less complex marking (e.g. marking multiple choice and short answer exams) and \$10.56 an hour for more complex marking (e.g. marking essays).

Ricci: In my faculty, professors are each given a certain amount of money that they can use to pay for student markers. Not all faculty members hire markers, so the money is pooled and whatever money is left can be given to those who need it.

Berger: In my faculty, I was told to estimate how many marking hours I would need for my classes (depending on class size and assignment complexity) and was allocated a budget accordingly. However, the number of hours that the marker takes to mark may not correspond with the original estimate. For example, last year I initially underestimated the number of hours and applied for more marking money, and since there was more money in the department's marking budget, I was allocated additional funds.

When there are no additional funds, either the marker marks for less or the professor takes on the marking and thereby increases his or her workload. We have heard of cases where workers work significantly beyond what is expected based on their pay.

Marking is a very time-consuming, tedious, and strenuous task. The compensation that the markers receive for this is tokenistic to say the least.

Ricci: *My marker works as a teacher during the day. Since she is not on campus she has to make frequent trips to the university to drop off and pick up assignments.*

Berger: *One of my markers is a fourth year student at the university. Two other markers are students in the faculty of education who had previously taken classes with me. The fourth marker supply teaches and works at the university as a research assistant, teaching assistant, and marker for several professors to supplement her income. She is a single parent supporting three dependants.*

Teaching Assistants

Berger: *As mentioned above, one of my markers, who is also my teaching assistant, is a single mother with three dependants who works at the university to supplement her income. Many students are unaware of how little monetary remuneration she gets as a teaching assistant. They assume that because she is working in a university she must be earning a decent salary. Many are shocked to find out that as a tutorial leader she only earns \$10.56 an hour. When she leads the tutorial for my class, she has to pay bus fare to and from campus in order to teach for one hour. This expense further diminishes her income.*

At the school where I was doing my graduate work, most students are given a position as a paid teaching assistant or research assistant. Once they start in the program, students are matched up with professors teaching courses in the student's area of interest. Teaching assistants and research assistants get paid a set amount of money for the academic year (\$6000 in 1999-2000). By the end of the school year, students are expected to work what averages out to 10 hours a week. There are several conditions tied

to this university position. One condition is that students are not permitted to work more than 10 hours a week both inside and outside of the university. This forces students who, for financial reasons needed to work outside of the university, to keep it a secret from others. Even in cases where students were gaining valuable experience in research or teaching positions, they had to exclude this information from their CV's for fear that they might lose their funding. Eventually, these stipulations were amended and teaching assistants were able to work either outside of the university, or they were able to apply for permission to work more than the 10 hours inside the university. For example, during one year of my PhD, while working as a research assistant inside of the university, I was also teaching a course outside of the university at another institution. I was then offered a position to teach a course in the university where I was doing my graduate work. However, in order to teach this course, I needed to apply for special permission to work on top of the 10 hours I was already working inside the university as a research assistant. I did so and was granted this special permission with the condition that I do not work outside of the university. To complicate things, by the time I was granted this permission, the semester had already started and I had started teaching both courses; as a result, I felt forced to hide my work outside of the university. This was a common occurrence among fellow graduate students.

Ricci: I also had to work while completing my graduate work. I was newly married and I and my partner had a mortgage, tuition fees, and other expenses to pay. So, while working full-time as a teacher during the day I would also work on my graduate studies in the evening and over the summer. As with many universities, PhD students are not allowed to enroll part-time, so I had to pay full-time fees.

These practices could result in unfairly excluding many who have to work. As well, paying people so little and denying them the opportunity to supplement their income, forces people to hide their work and results in unnecessary stress and hardships. As well, controlling how much people can work and therefore earn, unfairly positions those who are less wealthy. The university needs to rethink their mistaken belief that students cannot sufficiently complete graduate work if they have to work – it is ideal in theory, but not an option for many in practice.

Part-Time Faculty

Both Ricci and Berger have experienced teaching as part-time faculty or sessionals.

Ricci: I taught a course at a university where the part-time faculty were not unionized. While I was there, a movement was started to unionize the workers. One of the conditions we were seeking was job protection. What that meant was that if a professor taught a course one year it would be guaranteed that he or she would be asked to teach the course the next time the opportunity arose, and that before anyone else taught the course she or he would have to turn it down. As mentioned, my current workload could be replaced by a part-time staff member for less than 50% of the cost the university is paying for us. While working full-time as a teacher and completing my PhD, I was also teaching as a sessional in the evenings. In my case, since sessional workers had no tenure and no job guarantee, the university could simply not rehire me: Because of this, I felt anxious and pressured to conform and follow all of the university's requirements, even if I disagreed with the policies. For example, if I did not follow

their norm-referenced, bell-curved marking policy, the university could choose to not hire me again (Ricci, Marking Game). Since my course was in the evening there was little opportunity to interact with other faculty because none of them would be at school during those times. Sessionals make little money and get little support in comparison to full-time staff. As a sessional, I earned about \$5,000. This is a fraction of what full-time faculty earn.

Berger: I have also experienced teaching courses part-time and have had many similar experiences with respect to low wages, job insecurity, and lack of support. In addition, I taught two courses online as a sessional instructor. At the university I taught at, the policy for teaching online courses caused instructors to be punished through no fault of our own. For example, when the university was not able to recruit enough students for the course I would have to take a salary cut. If there were fewer than 16 students registered in the course I no longer received the standard sessional rate of approximately \$3500, but instead would receive a \$500 flat rate plus \$100 per student enrolled in the course. If there were only eight students registered in the course, as was the case for me in one instance, the instructor would only receive \$1300 for teaching a course. Similar to my first experience as a marker, I was happy to be gaining valuable work experience and thus I accepted this job irrespective of the low wages. However, it soon became clear that having fewer students is not automatically equated with having a correspondingly reduced workload. I still had to prepare readings, class notes, discussion questions, and assignments for the class whether there was one student or 20 students. Perhaps I spent less time marking for the class, but that does not make up for the amount of money that I lost out on, again through no fault of my own. In addition to

course preparation and marking, as an online sessional, I was also told that I needed to check my course email on a daily basis, including weekends. Further, it was my responsibility to ensure that I responded to student emails within 24 hours. In many ways, the demands of teaching online are even more than traditional classroom teaching, yet the financial compensation, particularly for sessional instructors could be substantially less.

One part-time worker we spoke with shared the following narrative: In 2002 I started off as a sessional instructor where I taught just a couple of classes. My preparation time was so monstrous compared to the salary I earned. It took a long time before I even found out what the pay would be, and was shocked at how low it was when I finally found out. I accepted the position hoping that it would be an entry point into the university for me. I moved my family which was a large financial expense. As well, I was making over \$100,000 before accepting this position and so it cost a lot – financially and emotionally – for me to be here. Despite the expense and uncertainty, I was motivated by wanting to work in a university. Now, three years later, I am currently approaching the end of another one year appointment, and I am getting ready to compete for my job. It is now only two months before my contract is up and I am still unsure of where I will be next year.

This narrative clearly highlights the stress and sacrifices that people do and are willing to make.

Ageism

We recognize that part-time teaching is not only dominated by new instructors, but some may choose to or are forced to work part-time throughout their teaching career. Interestingly, retired faculty members find themselves in similar situations. In fact, the use of mandatory retirement in universities across Ontario forces many faculty to retire at their 65th birthday. Then, those who want or need to work, can do so part-time earning a sessional instructor's rate (between \$9,000 and \$10,000 per course at one university) and being forced to relocate to small offices in inconvenient locations (Ferguson, 2005; Tamburri, 2003). This sessional rate is only a small fraction of their pre-retirement income.

One recently retired professor that we spoke to explained her feelings after being forced to retire: *I didn't begin my academic career until my late 30s. Perhaps because I got a late start, I was at best ambivalent about retiring. I wasn't fully ready to leave academia at age 65. More precisely, I was ready to leave - or seriously reduce - teaching and administrative work, but not research. Ideally, I would have liked to have a choice as to whether to retire, or to move to a reduced load, rather than being forced to retire. I have been able to keep my office so far but having an office in the future is far from certain. This concerns me because it would be hard to maintain an active research program without an office. Being retired but remaining active in the university is a somewhat ambiguous status. As a result, the rights and obligations that go with that status are also ambiguous. If "academically active retiree" is a role, I feel I'm making it up as I go along. (That's not necessarily bad, of course, as it leaves lots of room for shaping things as I like). I think my status would be a bit more clear if I had a paid connection to the institution through teaching. Teaching, however, is something I can*

comfortably leave behind. It takes a lot of time (and there are lots of other demands on my time at this point in my life) and the pay hardly compensates. I think the pay issue is not specific to retirees. Everyone who does sessional teaching gets paid the same low rate per course. I don't think retirees should be paid more than non-retirees, but I do think the pay is too low for the work involved.

The McGuinty government plans to end mandatory retirement this year and certain universities, such as The University of Toronto, have already committed to ending this practice. That this ageist practice has been allowed to occur for decades and has only recently been altered, likely due to the impending university labour shortage and the power of the baby boomers (not issues of human rights), speaks to the corporatization of the university system. While the exploitation of retired faculty may be somewhat rectified with the elimination of mandatory retirement, there are many faculty who may choose to retire and then decide to re-enter the workforce years later for personal or financial reasons. Having given up their tenure-track positions, these faculty members would now return to sessional teaching. As a consequence, this exploitation would continue.

In sharing these personal narratives, our intention is to contribute to a better understanding of how universities are exploiting their academic workers. We hope that this will result in mobilization, and ultimately transformation. Part-time workers should not be viewed as cheap labour, but human beings that need to be treated with dignity and respect. They need to be fairly compensated for their work. The status quo may make economic sense in a sick and practical way, but it does not make compassionate sense. Universities should be spaces of social justice. They should be taking the lead in

championing the fight against exploitation and for fair wages for all its employees.

Instead, they are joining the mass exploitation, abuse, and victimization of workers.

Chapter 8—Professors as Victim—The Poor Review Process

I have experience with the peer review process as both an author and an editor. As an author, I have suffered the “(a) anxiety, pain, knots in the stomach, and insecurities each time a rejection letter arrives in the mail or (b) the exhilaration elation, excitement, and self worth that comes with letters of acceptance” (Roth, 2002, p. 232). Is the peer review process utilized in academia a process of quality assurance or is it a process of thought control that victimizes its unwilling participants who have little choice but to partake? My experience with the process suggests that it is largely the latter. While writing this chapter, I am also in the middle of preparing a curriculum vitae for the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies. This process highlights the control that the peer review process has in shaping our thoughts and research. Professors are lauded for having academic freedom, but in reality what we have is academic constraint. The peer review process is not a bias free process, but it is one that ensures that those in positions of power control the methods, content, format and type of research done. If you do not conform and comply, getting a job, tenure, promotion, in short, your career is in jeopardy.

In a paper by Pereira, Settelmaier, & Taylor (2005), Taylor asks a question that we should all ask ourselves, “Am I perhaps fearful about contesting the hegemony of the conventional scientific genre? Could it be that I am reluctant to deal with imagined editorial or peer review disapproval?” (p. 51). As well, we need to ask ourselves and those in positions of power, “Whose interests are being served by the voices you support and whose interests are being silenced by the minority voices that are being ignored?”

Roth (2005b) writes about how Walcott (1999) “...repeatedly admitted to the pressure in academe to publish or perish – in contrast to many other places in this world,

North American universities make careers and salary progress dependent on “productivity,” which is measured in part by counting publications (and sometimes even page numbers)” (p. 146).

Roth (2005b) goes on to reveal the role that social capital plays in getting a piece published (p. 145). He defines social capital as “the sum of resources (actual or virtual) that accrues to individual and groups due to the network of formal and informal relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 145). A piece can get published not on its merits but based on who you know. The importance of knowing the publisher (Roth, 2005b, p. 150) facilitates the publication of some manuscripts. Social capital combined with cultural capital can also ensure that your voice and perspective gets heard while others are silenced. He defines cultural capital as “the non-economic forces such as family background, varying investments and commitments to education, social class, and other cultural resources (language, theories, beliefs)” (p. 145).

Journals tie academics hands by limiting knowledge and experimentation to what has been done rather than encourage creativity to explore what could and should be done. For example, in support of qualitative research Barone (1992) refers to Dickens’ novels *Hard Times* and *The Life and Times of Nicholas Nickleby*. These novels persuaded Dicken’s countrymen to adopt his “redescriptions of life in the north Yorkshire boarding schools” (Barone 34). As this example makes clear, even though Dickens is not using “objective” scientific findings, his text is critically useful because, as Barone tells us, it appeals to both experience and a desire to lessen the humiliation of other human beings (p. 34). As was mentioned earlier, what constitutes legitimate educational inquiry and research is based on politics. In the past, Barone tells us, that Dickens’ masterpieces

would not have sufficed as a doctoral dissertation. Once again, the point needs to be stressed that qualitative research is a legitimate research and inquiry methodology and must be so recognized. This is important to keep in mind given Roth's (2005c) warning about how he has noticed a bias for experimental designs and against qualitative and ethnographic research designs (p. 322). And again Seipel (2003) echoes the same sentiment that empirical work is seen to be more valuable than non-empirical work (p. 85).

Tobin (2005) writes, "What is apparent as I enter a phase of my career when it is safe to deviate from traditional ways of writing, is that alternative writing genres not only allow researchers to present different aspects of what has been learned from research, but also facilitate additional learning for the researcher" (p. 202).

Roth (2005d) asks, "How do I act to bring about change?" (p. 279) He responds by asking that we "begin by doing and writing institutional critiques" (p. 279). Breuer and Roth (2005) warn of the difficulty and risk involved in doing auto/biographical or auto/ethnographical research: "It also requires the willingness and ambition to expose oneself (biography, personal experiences, thoughts) to an –in principle—unlimited public and to represent and even reveal oneself" (p. 427). Should we share our experiences and expose the truth about the chicanery of the whole process, or should we sit silently and continue to fool the public and maybe even ourselves? The road to resisting our victimization depends on how we respond to this question. But as Eisenhart (2005) shares about how their book took shape, she and Finkel "experienced how social pressures, historical precedent, and economic power can work to constrain authors' liberty (or

agency) to publish their findings (p. 289). Revealing oneself and the injustices that one has been subjected to is easier said than done.

Roth (2005c) exposes from an insider's perspective the flawed workings of the peer review process that he witnessed at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). He looks at "its processes, the vagaries and politics included (p. 301). He reveals how, "Not receiving funding is a failure, even if it was the result of injustice, sloppy work, or bias and prejudice" (p. 303). He goes on to ask, "Does the peer review system guarantee that every proposal is fairly evaluated?" (p. 303). Later he responds by summarizing his arguments in *Editorial Power/ Authorial Suffering* (Roth 2002):

But, as I have argued elsewhere, the very structure of peer review, especially blind and double-blind review processes lends itself to heinous attacks on the part of reviewers (even editors) against which the author of the reviewed piece has no recourse; it also gives some individuals, those that are placed in special nodes of the network such as editors in journals, enormous power over what and who gets published and who does not. (Roth, 2005c, p. 309)

I applaud Roth's bravery and willingness to share his experiences despite the repercussions and ostracism he might face as a result. He writes,

I have become quite disillusioned with the peer review process after an experience with one of the highest ranked journals in education...I had submitted an article that was returned, after a lengthy period, with two recommendations for "rejection." I took the article, gave it a new title but changed nothing in the body of the text and then submitted it to the same journal. This time it came back

highly rated with one “accept as is” and one “accept with minor changes.” (p. 310)

I had a similar experience, except with two different journals. One is an established journal and the other an online start-up. The on-line start up sent my piece back with a ridiculous amount of changes and suggestions, so I sent it to the established journal where it was accepted as it was.

Roth (2005c) shares how, “A friend serving as the editor of an international journal told me repeatedly that it is not difficult to get specific results in the review process. It all depends who he selects as reviewers to get a proposal rejected or accepted, and thereby bias the process in favor or against a particular article or proposal” (p. 311).

In Breuer and Roth (2005) Franz Breuer writes,

The institutional pressure on social scientists with career ambitions to publish in research journals that have high rejection rates does not necessarily encourage new forms of writing and representing. Such mechanisms lead to conformity rather than to thinking outside the box. (p. 426)

By making publishing in peer reviewed journals such a high stakes activity in an academic’s life, ensures that the business of peer journals continues to flourish. In my own psyche I often debate whether I should follow my heart or my career. Following my heart would entail writing what I want, how I want, and for whom I want. Writing for my career is writing what I believe they want, how I believe they want it, and for whom I believe would have the greatest positive impact on my career. Like Dr. Faustus, I find myself often trading in my soul for the sake of my career. Had I not done this, I currently would not have the position I currently have. For me to teach at the graduate program, I

had to have a certain number of peer reviewed publications. The bizarre thing is that even if I had published the same articles but in non-peer reviewed publications that have a wider readership, I would have been punished for doing so by not being considered “qualified” to teach in the program in which I teach.

Editors influence the intellectual landscape and by changing our manuscripts to conform to editors wants we contribute to editorial power (Roth, 2002, p. 224) and to their role as gatekeepers (Roth, 2002, p. 226). We have to remember that editors and the peer review process is not an accurate, reliable or valid guarantee of a papers worth or value to our community. For example, Roth (2002) shares how one of his rejected articles, when it was eventually published, led to a snowballing of research: “Not only was the article eventually published, it led to a fruitful research agenda leading to many articles on the topic and several books” (p. 231).

By not having to reveal reviewers the double-blind review process favours editors (Roth, 2002, p. 232). Editors can virtually guarantee who gets published and who does not. As an editor, I can send a paper out to some reviewer and be almost assured that the recommendation would be to publish; conversely, I can send the paper out to other reviewers where I can be almost assured that the recommendation would be to reject. The peer review process is an inaccurate, subjective obstacle that guarantees nothing but frustration. As well, the turn around time in many cases is unacceptably long and pathetic. As an author, I have waited for over one year for a ten page paper to be reviewed.

Despite all of the obvious flaws with the process, there are those who offer academics heartfelt advice and evidence on the importance of writing for peer reviewed journals. For instance, Seipel (2003) writes,

This study is not meant to create an objective standard for evaluating publication for tenure consideration. Rather, it is a compilation of the opinions of current social work educators involved in the tenure process. Because standards and expectations for tenure vary from school to school, a universal and objective standard is not feasible. However, an assessment of the values placed on the publication record of tenure candidates can prove helpful to everyone who is involved in the process.

By not addressing the flaws, he deepens the power surrounding the process. In fact, he points out the overwhelming support behind the process. “Overall, respondents expressed a belief that all scholarly writing should be critically reviewed by peers and that generally this peer-reviewed work should be given the greatest weight for tenure consideration (Seipel, 2003, p. 82). He cites how Bloom & Klein (1995); Boyer (1990); & Fraser (1994) all acknowledge the peer-review process as the foremost means for quality research (Seipel, 2003, p. 82). His advice is that, “Non-peer-reviewed work, unpublished reports, and other such projects should have a low priority or should be pursued later in one’s career” (p. 82). The priority placed on the peer-review process and the importance placed on it by the scholarly community both contribute to control what scholars do. The paper that I wrote that has had the greatest impact to date is one that was placed in a non-peer reviewed journal. *Our Schools/Our Selves* is a highly respected journal run by an editorial board and published by the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives. Because of

that publication, I was on the second page of the Toronto Star (it has the highest circulation numbers of any newspaper in Toronto) and in the front page of many smaller publications and newspapers. I was also asked to be an affiant in a lawsuit against the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test and so on. Had this article been published in a peer-reviewed journal, its form would likely have had to change to make it more scholarly and less reader friendly. As well, by making it less reader friendly the number of readers that would have been exposed to this piece would have been fewer and so its impact less. So, on the one hand if I had sent this piece to a peer-reviewed journal I believe its communal impact would have been less, yet selfishly and professionally it would have counted as a peer-reviewed piece on my curriculum vitae. I confess that the more I learn about the stakes attached to the peer-review process, the more conscious I am about sending my work to a peer reviewed journal rather than a mainstream one. I rationalize it by telling myself that after spending so much time writing a piece, I want it to “count.” So, even though I am aware of the victimization, I still find myself, at times, allowing myself to play into their control.

Seipel’s (2003) study also confirms what we all know through experience: The weight given to single author publication is greater than the weight given to first author publication which is greater than the weight given to collaborative publications (p. 83). Again, being fully aware of this still does not prevent me from complying; actually, to my frustration, it compels me to comply. Again, being aware of this alters what I would otherwise do. I like to write with others, but limit myself because it is worth more if I write alone. Sometimes I feel like I am taking my “subjects” information and so feel an obligation to them to include them as an author. If I am writing it and it is their story,

their name should be on the piece if they chose. Writing with others offers an engaging opportunity for people to co-create a piece through the dialogical process; yes, just like in schools we discourage community and participation and encourage individuality even though a participatory model would likely yield a more productive result. When students work together they often get punished for cheating, and by extension when scholars work together they get punished through an arbitrary hierarchical rule. It seems that what we should focus on is getting better results regardless of whether they are done in collaboration and not simply encouraging individual results to satisfy an arbitrary fantasy.

Claire Polster (2005) writes about the negative implications of the increasing pressure for scholars working in universities to “provide or perish”: “Indeed, so crucial is academic grantsmanship becoming that the longstanding imperative to ‘publish or perish’ may soon be displaced by another, namely to ‘provide or perish’” (p. 109). What she argues is happening with the provide or perish obsession is similar to what is experienced in its predecessor: publish or perish. She argues that,

In order to enhance their granting records academics are, among other things, switching their research topic to well-funded areas in which they often have lesser interest and/or expertise; changing their research approach, methodology, and/or partners in order to increase the amount of funding for which they may apply; getting involved in as many funded research projects as is possible; and lending and/or borrowing “big research names” not to work on research projects, but only to enhance the likely success of grant applications. (p. 112)

She goes on to argue that by reducing academics' available time, commitment, skill, and interest in their research, these strategies may diminish the quality of their work and its value to the general public (p. 112).

Suggested Solutions:

First, we need editors that are willing to challenge the status quo and to encourage new contributors to their journals to be creative and exploratory in their writing and research. We need editors that support the increasing of possibilities. Roth (2002) says that, "Some editors may choose to innovate and change the community. Others (perhaps most) contribute to stabilise the existing network and to reify the status quo" (p. 222). Second, the anonymity needs to be removed from the process. Journals that do have an open review process are not inferior and in many ways are superior (Roth, 2002, P, 232). Third, some journals have authors chose who they want to review their work from a list of experts on their review/editorial boards (Roth, 2002, p. 232). Fourth, if the review/editorial board does not have a suitable reviewer, then the author should be allowed to recommend someone in her field that would be suitable (Roth, 2002, p. 232). Fifth, reviewers should sign their reviews and be willing to commit to assisting the author in revising the manuscript so that it can get published. Roth (2002), for instance, shares how, "Rather than hiding behind the anonymity that blind and double-blind review guarantees the reviewer, and makes it easy to write scathing reviews, I sign my reviews. Furthermore, ... I offered to assist the author in the process of reworking the piece such that it was eventually published (p. 236). I have also identified myself as a reviewer and

shared a piece I have written with the author on a similar topic with the hope that the paper will eventually be published. I find that this networking is mutually beneficial. It connects people and enriches the depth of discussion and understanding around a topic. Although, I recommended that the paper be published with minor revision, the other reviewers decided to reject it and so it was rejected. Sixth, peer reviewed papers should not have the weight that they currently do for tenure, promotion, the accreditation of university programs and so on.

Chapter 9—We are all victims: The Marking Game

The marking game: How universities cheat students

By Carlo Ricci

I have taught at two universities and both of them have a marking policy. I have yet to meet a professor who, when I asked about a marking policy at their university, said that they did not have one. Unbeknownst to most students, no matter how hard students work and how high a grade they deserve, their grades in a course are, in an important sense, predetermined before they even enter the course. The same is true for students with lower scores, but to a lesser degree. Professors have to present marks that fit a preset pattern, and therefore the marks they submit can neither be too low nor too high, as we will see.

As a high school teacher, I constantly witnessed the marking game being played. Let's face it, anyone can create a test where all of the students pass or create a test where all of the students fail. After all, as the author Charles Caleb Colton (1780-1832) expressed so eloquently, "Examinations are formidable even to the best prepared, for the greatest fool may ask more than the wisest man can answer." At our school, we were expected to fill out a sheet outlining our final median marks. If they were not within the predetermined range, we would have to meet with the department chair. In order to avoid this hassle, many felt it easier, safer and less stressful to make sure they complied. The tests and assignments are not based on what is pedagogically best for students, but on what will generate the expected grades.

Several high school teachers that I have talked to shared with me how they mark students based on what the students received in the past. Several teachers go as far as giving students a general survey asking for the grades the students previously received in specific subjects. This information is then used to guide their grading. The teachers would do this, in part, to ensure that the grades the students received would be consistent with the grades students received in the past. In fact, some teachers have been called into the principal's office to explain to the principal why the grade a student received this year differs from the grade the student received in years past. Again, to avoid this grilling, some teachers often make sure that students' marks conform. With the increasing sophistication of technology, universities are phasing in systems that will allow individual professors to look up a student's profile: grades are a part of this. The danger is that, like some high school teachers, some professors might use this information to look at students' past grades, and then use the information to grade the student "consistently." This form of the marking game results in students receiving grades based on past judgments.

As a high school teacher, I knew that students' marks were adjusted either explicitly or through the marking game, but I had the naïve notion that once I taught at a university there would be none of this nonsense within these pure institutions of higher learning. I define the marking game as the skillful constructing of tests or the altering of grades to get students to fall within a predetermined set of grades.

It did not take me long to find out how wrong I was about the purity of universities; in fact, it was while teaching my first university course. It was an undergraduate course offered by the Division of Humanities titled Philosophy of

Education. What better place than in a philosophy of education course for a new professor to discover for himself such an important insight? Since then, I have been observing and paying attention to this issue with great curiosity. When students, professors or administrators talk about this topic the world becomes silent except for the voices sharing their narratives on the marking game.

I taught the course twice. When I was asked to teach the course again, along with the offer, I received a formal letter from the chair of the department asking me if I was aware of their marking policy, notifying me that they had one, outlining what it was and threatening me to follow it. Part of the letter reads as follows:

I am taking the unusual step of adding this letter because of the grades that you submitted when you taught in our program last summer. There were 29 students in the class, of whom 28 received As or Bs and one received a C. You argued that this was an exceptional class and I approved the grades at that time.

I am asking you this year to be prepared to make wider distinctions among the students. Be sure that your assignments are of the kind that can differentiate among excellent, good and average students. In a class of that size we would normally expect an average of C+ or B-. I will not be prepared to submit grades that are wildly out of line with those expectations.

Please read the enclosed grading practices policy carefully and construct your assignments in order to meet the policy expectations. (Acting Chair, personal communication, April 3, 2003).

The letter is ordering me to play the marking game. My job is not to try and ensure students are successful, but that they are artificially ranked into predetermined grades. To me, this is clearly unethical and deceitful.

Despite my glowing course evaluations, I taught the course one more time and never heard from them again. I am not sure if it was my grading they disliked; the content of my course which helped students understand the marking game and other things about how the education game is played that those in positions of power want so desperately to conceal; or if it was my participation in trying to start a union for part-timers. I believe they did not like that I was weighing down the boat and they were afraid that it might sink, and so they lightened the load by getting rid of me.

Along with the letter, I received a copy of their grading practices. This was at least the fourth copy I had received from them. The grading scales were outlined as follows:

Grade	Grade Point Value	Percentage Equivalent	Definition
A+	4.0	90-100	
A	4.0	85-89	Excellent
A-	3.7	80-84	
B+	3.3	77-79	
B	3.0	73-76	Good
B-	2.7	70-72	
C+	2.3	67-69	
C	2.0	63-66	Adequate

C-	1.7	60-62	
D+	1.3	57-59	
D	1.0	53-56	Marginal
D-	0.7	50-52	
F	0.0	0-49	Inadequate
CR		No Value	Credit in a Credit/No-credit course
NCR	0.0	No Value	No credit in a Credit/No credit course

The section of their grading policy under College Review reads as follows:

- a) The Sub-committee on Marks Review will review all grades submitted by the Division.
- b) The Sub-committee on Marks Review may seek clarification of the evaluation methods used and of apparent anomalies in the lists of grades
The college Sub-committee on Marks Review may seek clarification of the evaluation methods used for courses which meet one or more of the following criteria:

Less than 5% A's

More than 25% A's

More than 75% A's & B's combined

More than 90% B's & C's combined

More than 75% C's & D's combined

More than 50% D's & F's combined

More than 25% F's

- c) Where necessary, the Office of the Principal and Dean may require that the grades, as submitted, be reconsidered. The Office of the Principal and Dean has the final responsibility for assigning the official course grades.
- d) The criterion that the Office of the Principal and Dean shall employ in its evaluation is whether the instructor has followed the University Grading Practices Policy. The Office of the Principal and Dean shall not normally adjust grades unless consequences of allowing the grades to stand would be injurious to the standards of the University or to the class in general.
- e) Where grades are adjusted, the students as well as the instructor shall be informed. On request, the students or the instructor shall be given the reason for the adjustment of grades, a description of the methodology used to adjust the grades, and a description of the appeal procedure.
- f) Where class grades have been changed, or when the Office of the Principal and Dean had reservations about the grades, the issue will be taken up with the instructor by the Principal and Dean or by the Divisional Chair, with a view to ensuring the Grading Practices Policy is followed in future.
- g) Appeals of the decision of the Office of the Principal and Dean are made to the Academic Committee.

From this it becomes clear that to comply with this policy, professors need to play the marking game. It is a balancing act where they are expected to juggle the grades until they land just right. As we will see throughout this chapter, professors can play the marking game in several ways: bonus assignments, bonus marks, adjusting level of difficulty when making up tests or assignments, adjusting level of difficulty when marking tests or assignments, adding or subtracting marks to grades and so on. For the creative professor the possibilities are endless.

A professor that is skilled at the marking game might find that it is best to give students low grades by marking hard and creating hard assignments at first, since it is more acceptable to the students if their marks are raised rather than lowered. After all, no one will complain publicly about having her or his mark raised, but if it is lowered some people will inevitably make it public by challenging the lowered grade, resulting in the professor likely being reprimanded. As well, this strategy is also one that can be used to lower class sizes by scaring students away. Others take the opposite tactic: They offer students higher grades, in part, in the hopes that their course evaluations will be favourable. Once the course evaluations are in, they ensure that the final exam is so tough that the students' grades will inevitably come into line. Course evaluations are such an important part of a professor's (especially a new professor's) career: having your contract renewed, promotions and tenure are often, in large part, influenced by it. Many professors I speak to are clearly worried about getting negative course evaluations.

What upsets me most about the marking game is the impact it has on people's everyday lived experiences. For example, one young woman I talked to graduated from high school with a very high and respectable average. As a result, she was accepted into a

prestigious program and given a generous scholarship. Her parents do not have the means to send her to school and so she relies heavily on her scholarship. She was confident that, given her past experience with schooling, that she would continue to qualify for a scholarship in the years to come. Unfortunately, she was unaware of the marking game. She did not know that universities had marking policies and that, in reality, no matter how hard she worked and how well she knew the material she would be forced into a grading pyramid. Despite how hard she worked, she could not achieve the grades that she thought she deserved. Soon, not surprisingly, she began to question her abilities. She spent endless days and nights anxious and in tears because of her frustrations. The impact that these policies have on individuals' lives and sense of self should be enough to abolish this unethical practice.

Why, it would be wise to ask, do universities play this marking game? One response is that universities are huge complex businesses. If they allow students to get the grades that they deserve, they will have to continue to offer scholarships to students year after year. Clearly, this is not sustainable. The decision is largely an economic one, not a pedagogical one. Furthermore, relatively low grades, for some strange reason, signify that the university is a respectable one. If students get grades that are too high the university loses credibility. Therefore, grades are artificially deflated.

A parent that I spoke to shared with me how if his daughter did not get at least a B+ average in her first year of university he would discontinue paying her tuition. Based on her high school grades, he assumed that if she received lower grades in university it would be an indication of her lack of effort. When I shared with him the marking game he was shocked and rattled by it.

In some cases, professors knowingly play the game and secretly and sometimes publicly wish that they did not have to play it. In other cases, professors themselves have internalized this to the extent that they self police the policy by willingly complying and endorsing it. One professor I interviewed lamented that since students are increasingly being assessed using multiple choice tests, it is harder to go back and remark the tests “more gently” since these forms of assessment are more black and white. Another professor shared how she purposefully adjusts how difficult her tests are until the marks fit the university grading expectations. She also offers students’ bonus marks to help ensure that the grades fall where they are supposed to. She readily admits that as a new professor she is concerned and focused on the policies for fear of getting into trouble if her marks do not comply. Another, professor recounted to me the frightful experience of one of her colleagues experienced when she was called in front of a committee and forced to explain and clarify her grades. Yet another professor shared with me how she offered students a bonus multiple choice test. The questions for the test were taken from past multiple choice tests that students wrote. So all the students needed to do was memorize the correct answers (that they were supplied with) to past test. The reason for doing this is not pedagogical, but so that students can gain higher scores.

While doing research for another study, I came across another interesting manifestation of the marking game and how it plays out. Peter Joong and I were looking at whether there would be a significant difference in student first year university grades between the students that had completed four years of high school and those that had completed five years of high school before entering first year university. Ontario has eliminated one year of high school and so some students are entering university after

completing four years and others five. This has become known as the double cohort (Joong and Ricci). After getting the grades from the registrar's office and comparing them to previous years, it seemed that there was no difference in grades; however, after talking to the individual professors, some shared with us how they were forced to play the marking game to get the scores to where they should be. So the grades were where they were expected to be, in part, because professors adjusted them by playing the marking game to ensure the grades would fit the pyramid.

One student I spoke to recounted how his professor raised the class's overall grades by 30% because the class average was 47%. This was clearly unacceptable. Perhaps, what surprises me most is the students' acceptance that the game exists. One student shared with me how a professor had to come back to the class, inform them that the marks were high and that he therefore was ordered to lower them. The professor then lowered the marks. The student conveyed to me that he and his fellow classmates, rather than be upset and protest the lowering of their grades, accepted it is part of the marking game. In fact, they even felt sorry for the professor because he got in trouble for his high grades.

Currently, I am fortunate in that I work at a faculty of education. In the program that I work the students all have a degree. Whether I am teaching a graduate course or a pre-service course I am exempt from the University marking policy. In part, the pre-service program is one year, and so there is no concern about the University losing money by having to pay out scholarship money to students; however, I have been nudged lightly on several occasions in a playful way about my grades.

As an undergraduate student I remember an incident that I was puzzled by. It did not make sense to me until I really began to understand the marking game. At this point in my schooling, my grades were all A's. I was a senior student and the marking game seems to ease in later years. As I mentioned earlier in the book, I had a Specialized Honors in Philosophy and decided that I wanted to become a high school teacher. To do this, I had to go back and do a second degree focusing on subjects that were recognized as eligible teachables. So, although I was a senior student, I took a second year course in English. The teaching assistant was in his first year in this position. He was a PhD candidate. I wrote a paper and received a C+ on it. This was by far the lowest mark I had received in several years. I had never approached a teacher, professor, or marker about my grades, but I felt that the others were giving me marks that I did not deserve and this teaching assistant's assessment was more "accurate." I genuinely wanted to learn from his suggestions. It is sad how so many of us ignore all of the positive feedback and obsess over the negative. It is also sad how we assume that the person making the negative comments is more authentic than those making the positive comments. In short, when I approached this person about my grade the only thing he kept repeating was that I received a C+ because I did a good job on my paper. What I have now come to understand is that the reason I received a C+ on that paper was not because there was something deficient in my work, but because the marking game dictated that I get a C+. In this person's mind a C+ was a good grade. This was our first assignment in the course and his first attempt at playing the marking game. He, I am sure, was playing it the way he was coached to play it.

A teaching assistant shared with me how her professor asked her to increase the student's grades. The professor did not see the papers, but just the marks. Based on the marks alone, he made this request. The point is not that the professor disagreed with the teaching assistants grading, but that he disagreed with the grades. What I mean by this is that he did not take the time to review the papers for himself in order to make an informed request, but he simply based his request on the marking game.

We need to understand that the marking game is not a neutral game, but that it has serious implications in individual's lived experiences. This unethical practice needs to stop. We need to stop fooling ourselves and cheating our students. We should not be artificially deflating grades, nor should we be artificially creating assignments of the kind that can artificially "differentiate" between students. Our job is education not ranking. I want to end by repeating the quote already mentioned above in the hope that these words will anger you into action as much as they did me:

I am asking you this year to be prepared to make wider distinctions among the students. Be sure that your assignments are of the kind that can differentiate among excellent, good and average students. In a class of that size we would normally expect an average of C+ or B-. I will not be prepared to submit grades that are wildly out of line with those expectations.

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Chapter 10—Conclusion and Freeing the Victims

In this chapter I would like to end with hope by offering some alternative models to our current system of schooling that I believe if adopted would create more democratic people centered spaces. My preference is to create truly learner centered, democratic spaces where people's minds, bodies and spirits are nurtured and respected; as opposed to spaces of control, oppression and abuse. The closer we can reach this hope the more supportive I am of it. Below, I will offer some alternatives to our educational spaces. For me, unschoolers offer the best vision and so the closer our spaces are to this learner centered, democratic alternative the better. Given this criteria, the alternatives I support are unschooling, Sudbury Valley models, schools that deemphasize judging, grading, and ranking students, schools that allow students to decide what they want to learn, when and how; rather than, schools that impose an external standardized curriculum that does not resonate with the stakeholder within that community.

Whether students are successful in school depends on whose fantasy of education they are made to play within. After receiving a number of letters, John Taylor Gatto (2003) describes them, "as a spontaneous outcry against the violation that so many feel in being compelled to be a character in someone else's fantasy of how to grow up" (p. 312). For example, in too many cases schooling negatively affects peoples lived experiences and changes the course of their lives. A recent report on the state of Ontario's schooling system was released by the Ontario Ministry of Education. The report was written by a Queen's University researcher: Alan King. *The Double Cohort Study, Phase Four Report*

(2005) outlines how our current fantasy of how children should be schooled is failing our children miserable. Heather Sokoloff (October 15, 2005) quotes the Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy, as saying, "It's going to unfortunately be an unvarnished fact that their futures were changed" (Study Flunks Ontario High School Curriculum p. A10). Sokoloff goes on to describe how only 60% of Ontario students graduated after four years last year compared with 72% in British Columbia and 82% in Nova Scotia. Since the new curriculum was introduced in Ontario high schools in 1999 the student drop out rate has increased from 22% to 30% (Canadian Press cited in the Toronto Star New Programs Will Cut Dropout Rate, Says Premier September 2, 2005). This means that as many as 48,000 students could not earn enough credits to graduate (Graduation Rates Unacceptable, McGuinty Says October 14, 2005 Tess Kalinowski). Many of the students who are dropping out under the current curricular fantasy in Ontario would have graduated under the previous curricular fantasy. And many of the students who are dropping out under the current curricular fantasy in Ontario would have graduated had they lived in British Columbia and many more would have graduated had they lived in Nova Scotia. The fact that these curricular fantasies are unfortunately changing people's futures is a shameful, embarrassing, reprehensible disgrace.

I am saddened by how few people I speak to in the university who are not familiar with alternative schools (for example, Sudbury Valley, Fairhaven, The Albany Free School, The Beach School) that truly offer a learner centered democratic alternative schooling. Being exposed to these alternative theories and practices continues to strengthen my resolve that we must do better than what we are doing in our current standardized, one size fits all, externally mandated system.

Unschooling

Not everyone wants to send their children to school. At the 2005 AERO conference Matt Hearn recounted how his daughter wants to attend grade nine and he is against her wanting to do so. Typically, you would expect that the child would want to stay home and the parent insist that they go to school. Some parents insist that even a child who is sick go to school. “I do not care if you have a fever of 57 degrees, get out of bed and go to school,” but fortunately there are people who think in other ways. There are parents who insist that they will not send their children to school. For example, John Holt a very influential proponent of unschooling titled one of his books *Instead of Schooling*(2004) and another co-authored with Pat Farenga *Teach Your Own* (2003) and he started a magazine titled *Growing Without School* (GWS). In *Instead of Education* John Holt describes the Beacon Hill Free School and The Learning Exchange as alternative democratic models for educating. These organizations successfully connected people who wanted to learn with people who wanted to teach. Holt (2004) quotes from the Beacon Hill Free School catalogue that reads, “There are no requirements, tests, grades, credits, or degrees” (p. 27). At the Learning Exchange people would simply call in and identify the area they live and their interest to either teach a topic or attend educational sessions in a topic. For example, someone who wants to learn to fix bikes with someone who wants to teach the fixing of bikes would be connected. You can see how much simpler this would be to facilitate with computers and the Internet now, than without these technologies then. This was done before we had our contemporary computer innovations to facilitate this. This is what education should be all about –

people who want to learn something and people who want to teach something genuinely getting together and engaging in this way.

John Holt talks a lot about schools and unschooling and one of his quotes that sticks out in my mind is, “It is above all, that *the S-schools are not failing*. They are doing what most people want them to do, and doing it very well. They know their true social tasks, functions, purposes, and they are carrying them out” (Holt, 2004, p. 157). That is a powerful statement, which leads to a powerful question, What if schools are doing exactly what they are meant to be doing? Schools are ranking and victimizing children. We know if we look at EQAO standardized test scores that this is the case. As we saw earlier, we know as well that teachers in Ontario are against standardized testing.

I recently read in a book (and I cannot locate the source) that children working in deplorable conditions, when asked if they would rather remain in these conditions or go to school, they overwhelmingly responded that they would rather work even if they were paid the same amount they are making working if they went to school. After reading this, I turned to my wife who loves to learn, is a voracious reader and holds a Master’s degree in education, and asked her if she would rather work or complete her doctorate if she were paid the same salary. She responded that she would rather work. When I asked her why, she said that if she went back to school she would lose too much freedom. If someone who loves learning as much as my wife does, would rather work than go to school—a supposed place for learning – it is clear that we are doing something wrong. This fact becomes even more troubling when we consider that out of all institutional schooling graduate schooling allows the most freedom.

It is not right that economically driven policies victimize people in this way. This immoral aspect of institutionalized schooling that needs to be exposed. But as an untenured assistant professor I have to be careful because I risk being marginalized and punished for advocating against the system. After all, those who make decisions about my tenure and promotions are my colleagues (see chapter 8).

These are among the types of things we have to question. These are among the types of things we have to challenge. I have two daughters, one is just over 2 and the other is 5 months old. My older daughter started speaking when she was 9 months old and she speaks in complete sentences with impressive pronoun use. It is pretty shocking how articulate she is especially when compared to her age peers. I did not read to her until she was one because she was not interested. So, why would I force it? Here is another myth, so called experts tell you that we know how to teach people how to read. The truth is that nobody can teach anybody how to read. Holt (2005, Autumn) writes,

At the Ny Lille Skole (New Little School) in Bagsvaerd, near Copenhagen, which I describe in *INSTEAD OF EDUCATION*, there is no formal reading program at all—no classes, no reading groups, no instruction, no testing, nothing. Children (like adults) read if, and when, and what, and with whom, and as much as they want to. (p. 17)

We can't teach people how to read, and nobody knows how to teach people how to read, but you have to pretend you do because if you don't how are you going to sell your product? If you do not say that you can teach people how to read, then you have nothing to sell. Anybody who has seen somebody go from non-reading to reading, I challenge to try to put what they did into words and to replicate their method over and over in a

variety of contexts with different students. I am convinced that if I send my daughter to school, which I am hoping not to (she wants to go to school and every time she says it my heart skips). I read a study that said that all four year olds want to go to school. This is not surprising given the number of exposures my daughter faces on any given day about how this is her fate. Relatives try to get her excited about school, she sees her neighbourhood friends go to school, her television friends go to school and so her excitement is not surprising given that she has never been to school but has heard so much about it. If she chooses to go to school, I will ask the school to put her in with the meanest teacher's class they have and if they do not have a mean enough teacher I will ask that they hire one for a few days to help me knock the idea of school out of my daughter's head.

In the previous paragraph I was being flippant, but this I am serious about: If I send her to school her reading will be retarded. No doubt about it. I do not know what she is doing, I have no idea, but when we read to her she is doing something. She is picking up words here and there, I am not forcing her to but she just is, and if you ask me what am I doing? I have no idea. She is doing it. What is she doing? I do not know. I cannot ask her because she will not be able to tell me, yet if she goes to school I am convinced that her reading will be retarded because they are going to put her in a program. And whatever program is currently in vogue is what they are going to try and use to teach her to read. She is going to get confused because they are going to tell her to do whatever the program dictates rather than let her do whatever it is she is doing. This is one of my favourite studies, (unfortunately, I cannot locate the reference and so the ages may be off but the conclusion remains the same) if you take two children one that starts to read at 3

and one that starts to read at 10 and you look at them at age 13, you will not be able to tell who started to read at 3 and who started to read at 10; unless, people hurry the person who started to read at 10 to read earlier. Then you could tell the difference. So, if you leave them alone you cannot tell the difference. As soon as you start interfering and you pressure the child who did not start reading until he was 10 to start reading earlier then at age 13 you can tell the difference. And if you read Gatto's (2003) *The Underground History of American Education* you will read that as soon as the number of children who went to school increased so did illiteracy (pp. 53-4).

My two and a half year daughter was signed up for a somewhat structured gymnastics class. My daughter is very flexible. I take her to the gymnastics class and it is overly structured. There are one, two and three year olds in the class. The class begins with stretches and a formal warm-up that the students are clearly not interested in. Yet, it seems that it is not about the students, it's about the structure. The students want to and would benefit from being allowed to choose the equipment that they want to explore and to be given the time to explore it on their own. I suspect that part of the problem with this is that some may question the \$100 fee if there is no direct instruction. Children clearly did not need or want the warm-ups. The parents were doing the warm-ups and the children were watching the parents, looking around and longing to attack the equipment. As soon as I realized that is what was happening, I politely removed myself from the group and followed my daughter to where she wanted to go. She wanted to swing on the bars and so I was not going to force her to stay and do all of the warm-up exercises that she was clearly not interested in doing. I trusted my daughter to know where and how she wanted to explore and challenge herself with the equipment. What those children need is

to be left alone so that they could explore the wonderful equipment as they are inclined to do. Instead the children were directed, placed into long lines and forced to wait their turn to use one piece of equipment while the other equipment remained unused. The end result was that they had so little time actually interacting with the equipment and spend too much time waiting patiently in lines.

When some children momentarily escaped from the parent/guardians they creatively played with the equipment in the way that they were dying to do so. When the children were expected to do trampoline work we were made to follow because it was clear that this was a piece of equipment that I was not to experiment with without the instructor present. My daughter was bursting until it was her turn. The children were asked to practice an activity that I knew she was capable of performing because I had seen her do it on our bed: her makeshift trampoline. But the instructor thought, perhaps because of my daughter's petite stature that she could not do it and so she helped her out. My daughter quickly played the dependent role and acted in a timid, careful way. This is the way I believe she thought she was expected to perform. The instructor had to hold her hands, she had her jump then fall on her bum and bounce back onto her feet. She was able to practice this twice and then had to sit down again and wait five more minutes until it was again her turn again. This is so structured that it is retarding her progress. She would be better off just left alone and given time to experiment on her own just like reading. Despite the formal classes consequence of retarding my daughter's progress by limiting what she can do and not allowing her to follow what she knows she needs to be doing my daughter is flourishing. I am amazed by how creative she is in creating moments and spaces for her to practice on her own. For example, she was an

accomplished somersault before she attended the class and as mentioned she uses our bed as a trampoline. I do not think the instructor is aware of how my daughter's progress is largely due to my daughter's learning on her own. The instructor believes that she taught her how to somersault and to work the trampoline, when in fact my daughter is doing it on her own outside of class time. I can already see how she becomes frustrated in the class because she wants to do things on her own, yet she is expected to follow.

There are also the Ontario Early Years Centers (2005). According to their website these centers "are places where parents and caregivers can take part with their children in a range of programs and activities, get answers to questions, get information about programs and services that are available for young children, talk to early years professionals, as well as other parents and caregivers in the community." When we go, children, parents or caregivers spend time playing or engaging together with various activities. The activities are laid out and children can play with what they want when they want. The younger the children the less forced participation there is. As the children get closer to school age, then they are forced to partake in school preparation programs. Anyone can sign their child up at the center and it is free. They are located in various areas throughout Ontario. The program for younger children is a great model for what education could be like. Unfortunately, the closer to school year they get the less control the children have over their own learning and over their bodies and spirits. What should happen is that the older they get the more control they should get over their learning and over their bodies and spirits. I notice that when students are allowed to roam freely there is a chaotic organization happening, but when they are corralled for snack time and large group activity the children try and escape, while the guardians play sheep dog trying to

round them all up at the main instructor's command. Watching the children try and exercise their autonomy is quite sad and comical at the same time. I always cheer for the underdog that gets away to the guardians embarrassment at having such a free spirited child.

My daughter also went to swimming classes and they gave her a report for her swimming performance when she was not even one year old yet! My neighbor, a little girl who was four at the time, went to swimming and did not do well on her report. Another child who also lives in our community attended the same class. He moved on to the next level and she did not. Before receiving her report, the child that was held back you could not get out of the pool; after her report, you could not get her into the pool because she was told that she was a failure at it. She was held back simply because she did not place her head under water or something ridiculous like that.

Alternative Schools

Does schooling have to be this way? I know of one publicly funded school in all of Ontario that does not grade. It's the ALPHA school in the Toronto District School Board. It's an alternative school on Spadina and King in Toronto. Some of the school community are protective of this advantage because they are afraid that if word got out they would make them grade. Their philosophy, shared with me by one of the teachers, is that we do not stand in judgment of others. The school started in the 1972 when a group of parents started holding weekly meetings at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto to discuss alternative schools (ALPHA, 2005). They just rebelled against the system and wanted to start an alternative.

There is another school; it is a private school, called The Beach School. This school is modeled on the Sudbury Valley Schools. I talk about this to educators at the elementary, secondary and university level and they have not heard of these alternative ways that schooling has been done. The critical question is why are these marginalized schools not being discussed in a more active way? The Sudbury Valley Schools are based in Massachusetts and they have a very different philosophy. To share with you one example of how radically different they are, the children have a part in hiring the staff and if they do not like you they have a part in rehiring or not rehiring the staff the next year. They have an excellent website that I encourage you to visit. It's a democratic learner centered school. It's democratic education. There is no externally imposed curriculum. The students learn whatever they want, whenever they want, however they want. There are other schools as well: The Fairhaven School, The Albany Free School in Albany New York and more listed on the Sudbury Valley's website.

The Beach School in Toronto also has no externally imposed curriculum, no grades, and no tests. So here is another myth: that you have to test and grade in order to learn. Many of us would argue that as soon as you start testing and grading then people do not learn. So, there are alternatives even within schooling that I believe are more attractive.

The Institute for Child Study on Walmer Rd. in Toronto, which is a laboratory school connected to OISE/UT is another example of an alternative school that deemphasizes grading, at the early grades at least. I remember being there one day and the students were learning about flight. They were asked to fold their own planes using whichever model they wanted to follow and then rank the performance of their planes

from A to D depending on how they liked the way their plane performed. This was a grade four class, and one student put up her hand and asked essentially, if I like the plane and I want to recommend it to others, is that an A or a D. These very bright children had been successfully schooling without being graded. In fact, this student did not realize that A is good and D is bad. I like this example because it is a clear example of how students can learn without grading. This school has a waiting list of over 1,000 students and tuition to be paid. Another thing that struck me while spending time at the ICS was how one teacher, and not superficially but genuinely, hugged her students lovingly throughout the class. She was just so open to these students. We know that in our faculties of education among the first lesson teacher candidates get is hands off the students and make sure you are never alone. Learning is not only cognitive but emotional. The importance of touch in education is so important. John Holt (2005), for example, writes, “The point I make here is that the first thing she had to do, before the work could begin, was to get in cozy physical contact with me” (p. 16).

In *Designing a Home Education Curriculum* Priesnitz (1995b) writes the following:

As John Taylor Gatto (educational reformer, independent education proponent and New York City’s 1990 and 1991 Teacher of the year) said in a recent speech, “The successes I’ve achieved in my own teaching practice involve a large component of trust, not the kind of trust conditional on performance (if you do this, then you can have that), but a kind of categorical trust—a faith in people that believes unless people are allowed to make their own mistakes, early and often, and then are helped to get upon their feet and try again, they will never master

themselves. What I do right is simple: I get out of kids' way. I give them space and time and respect and a helping hand if I am asked for it." (pp. 10-11)

What we need to learn more is to do less. Allow people the dignity and the freedom to explore what they are interested in exploring. In *Pedagogy of Freedom* Paulo Freire (1998) talks about curiosity and how it is "what makes me question, know, act, ask again, recognize" (p. 81). We all have this type of curiosity. I have yet to meet somebody that does not want to learn something. When students go from regular schooling to the alternatives free/democratic schools the alternative schools have a term that they have coined called detoxification. It refers to how when students go from a regular school to a democratic free school it could take them four months, a year where the students have to detoxify. They have to be reminded that they can learn and explore things on their own because a large part of their schooling has been students being told what they need to learn. And so they go through this detoxification period where their bodies are in shock, and their minds are in shock and their spirits are in shock and they have to feel that they have the power to learn. And so sometimes they do nothing for months or even years because they do not know what to do. They have never had an opportunity to take charge of their own learning, they have always been told what to do, when to do it, how to do it. Consider a typical school day: bells are ringing in students' ears, their teachers' ears, everybody is expected to move when they are told to move. It is a chaotic place to be.

Lies My Teacher Told me: Everything Your History Textbook Got Wrong (2005) helps expose the politics of education by exposing the biased information that students receive. For example, in Japan, textbooks gloss over war time atrocities. An article in the *Star-Phoenix* (2005, August, 13) titled *Japan Refutes Disputed Textbooks* reports that,

A history textbook that critics say glorifies Japan's militaristic past was approved Friday for use in 23 Tokyo junior high schools beginning next year, officials said... Many say the textbooks gloss over Japan's wartime atrocities such as the massacre of civilians in Nanking, China, and the use of Asian women as sex slaves by Japanese soldiers. (p. B8)

We do the same things here. For example, one of my students who is an elementary school teacher shared with me how in the new social studies curriculum the war of 1812 is a draw. When I was in Africa I would hear the lies that teachers would tell their students and be shocked, until reason set in and I realized we do the same thing in Ontario: We tell our students lies all of the time (See chapter 6).

In sum, the hopeful purpose of this book is to address oppression and alleviate human suffering (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 156). Roth (2005d) argues that to bring about institutional change requires that we begin doing and writing institutional critiques (p. 279) and by voicing the concerns of schoolings' victims my hope is to inspire a transformative movement.

Last night I went out to meet the person who picks up my garbage. In the minute that we spoke he shared with me how he is up by 5am at work by 6am and does not get home until 9pm. Part of the reason for this heavy, unrealistic, and exploitative workload is that my city has decided to save money by privatizing our garbage collection. The result is that this overworked gentleman is made to work long hours for less pay than those who worked before the system was made more efficient. If efficiency means that we are creating slaves, do we want efficiency? If efficiency means that when I speak to my respected garbage collector and the first words he utters to me the first time I meet

him is that he is too tired, do we want efficiency? If efficiency means that bodies, minds, and spirits are broken, do we want efficiency? In the same way, if this is how we define success, do we want success?

A similar argument can be made for those who overwork and are exploited in our institutional schooling systems. In the name of efficiency, cutbacks are made and people suffer. This is why I believe it is so important for us to share our stories. Our stories should serve as the inspiration for betterment. Victimizing people is not good enough, it is not acceptable; actually, it is reprehensible. In a holistic sense, we are all responsible for the condition we are in. The gap between rich and poor is increasing at an increasingly, unacceptably, shameful rate. To save money in the name of efficiency by exploiting people is indicative of a sick society. We need to be respectful of a person's body, mind, and spirit; not crush them. We cannot see them as a means and abuse them.

Institutional schooling ought not to consider an environment where people are oppressed, controlled, and abused as successful because an arbitrary numerical measure is met. Schooling needs to respect people's agency, inner voices, and will. If it does not the implicit lesson that is learned is miseducation.

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