

SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVIST TEACHERS THEORIZE THEIR WORK
IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Curriculum Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

July 2008

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand how four social justice activist teachers theorized their work within the public school system of British Columbia, Canada. The focus was on their understanding of the meanings, motivations, constraining and facilitating factors, and the impacts of their work. Through case studies, this study explored the lived experiences and reflections of prominent activist teachers who are a small minority in the teaching population. The term “social justice activist teacher” referred to one who advocates for the rights of minority groups, challenges widely held attitudes and assumptions about curriculum and teachers’ roles, and works for change beyond the confines of one’s own classroom.

Four prominent teacher activists were interviewed two or three times across the 2004-2006 school years. Their reflections were first analysed individually, then for similarities and differences. It was found that they understand activism to be central to their roles as teachers and a key feature of their own identities. Their activism had its roots in childhood experiences and upbringings. They defined their activist work as focussed primarily within one or two theme areas (i.e., environmentalism, feminism, anti-racism, anti-homophobia), and they worked in networks and coalitions to accomplish their goals. They found the education system to be a place where effective activism could take place. They all felt they were successful, although they sometimes felt thwarted or unsupported. A defining feature was their persistence.

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Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for helping me get through this project. My advisor Walt Werner helped me through every step of the research and writing process in a way that taught me about graduate work and ultimately about teaching. My subjects were excellent and patient members of my study, and very supportive of me. My colleagues and teachers in Curriculum Studies and Educational Studies have been helpful and supportive, thanks go to all of you. My students and colleagues, both in my school(s) and in my union and committee involvements were supportive and interested in my work, especially my carpool partners, who heard about my ideas over the years. My sisters, parents, and extended family have been patient supporters as well, and my partner Travis has been especially supportive with late night pep talks when I needed them. Sincere thanks go to all of you for being with me every step of the way.

Chapter One

Purpose and Method

Some teachers see themselves as agents of progressive change in their schools, districts and teacher unions. They challenge the status quo, work hard to accomplish their goals and provide persistent leadership and motivation for implementing change. Not surprisingly, their advocacy and work may attract both positive and negative feedback from colleagues and supervisors. Yet the work and experiences of activist teachers are rarely examined in the literature. This study begins to address this lack.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand how four social justice activist teachers theorized their work within the public school system. The focus was on their understanding of the meanings, motivations, constraining and facilitating factors, and the impacts of their work. Through four case studies, this study explored the lived experiences and reflections of prominent activist teachers who are a small minority in the teaching population. The term “social justice activist teacher” referred to one who advocates for the rights of minority groups, challenges widely held attitudes and assumptions about curriculum and teachers’ roles, and works for change beyond the confines of their own classroom. Understanding these teachers may be helpful, not only to researchers interested in school culture and change, but also to policy makers in unions and schools in terms of valuing and facilitating these peoples’ work.

The central question was: How do social justice activist teachers theorize their work within the school system? More specifically, this question included the following sub questions:

1. What do these activist teachers define as their activist work?

- What do these activist teachers understand as their role in the school system?
 - Is this work individualistic or part of a larger project / movement or collaboration?
2. What are activist teachers' past and ongoing motivations to do this work?
 - What is their rationale for activist work?
 - What key life experiences led to this work and worldview?
 - Do they see themselves as “agents of change?” How?
 - What rewards do they seek and receive from their activist work?
 3. What are the facilitating and constraining features of both their workplace and profession?
 - How do they negotiate the time, space, support, and legitimacy to do their activist work?
 - What frustrations have they experienced and overcome in their activist work?
 - What strategies do they employ to be effective as a teacher activist?
 4. What positive and negative impacts result from their activist work?
 - for themselves, both personally and professionally
 - for the school / school system
 - for the students

Method

This study was interpretive in its design, trying to neither predict nor control the outcome, but “rather to reconstruct the world at the point at which it exists in the minds of the constructors” (Andres, L., personal communication, September 22, 2003). By

interviewing teachers and representing their thoughts, I sought to identify their constructions of their worlds and represent these faithfully. This study took into account aspects of a feminist research agenda by valuing activist work as significant, not as an extra-curricular interest (Palys, 1997, pp. 83-84). I was accountable to the individuals I interviewed, and accountable to the project of feminism in asking about the various linkages that their activist work had to other areas of their lives. Stories and personal accounts of individual experiences were valued through in-depth interviews, and my analysis did not seek generalisations about all activist teachers.

Participant selection

I interviewed four prominent teacher activists who were involved in union, community, district, and school based social justice initiatives. Each had been teaching in a school in some capacity within the previous three years, which differentiated them from activists who have moved away from classroom teaching into full time union work, for example. I wanted this because I thought that it could be easy to forget the challenging nature of being a social justice activist in schools when one is away from the context for very long. All four of these teachers were known by reputation as prominent activists in my teacher networks, which included colleagues known to me in my school district and in the provincial teacher union. In my sample I achieved some variety of age (35-55), ethnicity (three white, one First Nations), years of teaching (6-30), foci of activist work (i.e., environmental, feminist, anti-racist, anti-homophobia), age range taught (Kindergarten-12), and gender (two males, two females). I found this variety by inviting specific people to participate; they were first contacted with a letter of request for their participation (Appendix A).

Each participant was given a pseudonym. They had the option of withdrawing comments or statements through my member-checking during the interview and transcription stages, and after reading my analyses of their interview data. They also had the option of withdrawing from the study altogether at any time.

Data collection

There were two hour-long interviews with each participant, with two members having a third interview for clarification and extension of some points. The interviews were tape recorded, and took place in the Vancouver area of British Columbia during the school years 2004-2006, at places and times convenient to the interviewees. They had the chance to read general interview questions before the first interview and think about how they would respond (Appendix B). Although I had pre-prepared questions, I encouraged participants to comment on any aspect of their work. In this way I did not totally control the discussion. My questions, combined with participant freedom, allowed for effective, yet loosely-structured interviews, whilst avoiding derailment. Before the second interview, each participant received a printed transcription of the first interview, thereby providing them an opportunity to reconsider what they had said and to expand upon some ideas. In the second interview, and in two cases the third, the participants followed up on some of their earlier points, expanded into new areas of thought, and filled in some blanks in my understanding of comments they had made in earlier interviews.

In my process of interviewing, I considered various criteria of trustworthiness, among them: time effect, response effect, deference effect, and expectancy effect. Time effect was actually a benefit to me in my study; as participants spent time thinking and theorising between their interviews, their deepening analysis added thickness to my data.

To guard against response effect I sought not to project my views too much; I framed my questions and the conversation in such a way so as to have any answer be acceptable to me. I constantly invigilated my reactions both during the interviews and at the analysis stage. Deference effect is when subjects “tell you what they think you want to know in order to not offend you,” and although I doubted that the strong-minded individuals I interviewed would be deferential to me I kept this phenomenon in mind (Russell, 1994, p. 231). In order to avoid an expectancy effect, where subjects are led towards certain responses by the way the questions are asked, I used questions and an interview style that did not suggest certain answers. Also, during the interviews I endeavoured to question my assumptions about the answers they gave, and took time to clarify what they had said. It was especially important to remember to do this when they included “meta statements” of their beliefs or positions (Anderson and Jack, 1991, p. 21).

Analysis

I considered the cases individually in my first level of analysis. I analysed the transcriptions through a process of coding, where I sought to identify and categorise the ways in which each participant conceptualised their activist work. Most of the codes I created were common to all of the participants; others were individual. I used atlas.ti software to sort the codes and to group codes into themes. I worked iteratively, returning to the raw data, revising my code categories and considering how those categories informed each other and my research question. In my second level of analysis, I moved to a process of comparing and contrasting the individual cases (Chapter Four). In my analyses I have tried to present the authentic voices of the subjects within my own text, through inclusion of fairly long quotes.

Ethical considerations

The participants were veterans of various projects, and found my interest in their work validating. They self-identified as falling within my sample criteria, and provided “informed consent” by being voluntary participants with control over how their comments were portrayed (Flinders, 1992, p. 102). My interviews and analysis were respectful of boundaries as controlled by the participants, and I offered the use of pseudonyms and masking of identifying information. I also discussed the issues surrounding analysis and publication of the data.

Flinders’ concern that “participants may be upset at how they are portrayed” was mitigated through my process of member checking, where I submitted my analysis to each participant for their input (1992, p. 105). His caution about “individuals being subjected to unwanted publicity” was addressed through my discussion with each of them, having them decide with me what would go forward in final written form (1992, p. 105).

Cotterill (1992) points out issues about women’s friendships intersecting with the interviewing process, where “obligations to friendships may limit the researcher’s ability to use information generated via the interview” (p. 597). In the case of my research, particularly with the interviews with the two women subjects, whom I count as friends, it was therefore important for me to explain how the interview was different from other conversations we might have.

I also took into account aboriginal research methodology principles, not only because I interviewed a First Nations teacher activist, but because these principles were excellent ethical guides. These were the 4 Rs of respect, responsibility, relevance, and

reciprocity, which speak to the importance of paying attention to local culture and context, valuing the voices of those commonly excluded, and involving the researched in every step of the research process. In particular, the guiding principles of relevance and reciprocity informed the study, so that its process and outcome could become more engaging to both the researcher and subjects (Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002, p. 102). The study contributed to the activist work of the participants, either as a process that facilitated their own reflection, or as a part of their community of support. “Reciprocity honours everyone’s roles. Clearly defining each group’s role and expectations will ensure that all involved respect each other. There must be a balance of sharing and gathering” (Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002, p. 102). I collaborated with my participants, inviting them to help frame the emphases in my data gathering and analysis. Although I interviewed my peers, I was aware that I was an outsider because as a researcher, I came from the university environment. I acknowledged that they may not have always perceived me as an insider to their experiences because of the privileges I take for granted in this society and within the teaching profession, as a straight white woman. I enjoy privileges of time and money (no dependants, no debts), for example, which allowed me to take a year off teaching to study.

Motivations for this research

My formation as an activist started well before I became a teacher. I was influenced as a child to see the world in a critical way by my parents, who were both in helping professions and worked to promote social justice in our society. Formative experiences in high school in the anti-nuclear movement, and afterwards in Mexico working with the very poor and studying liberation theology, made me ill at ease with

status quo North American values. I have always been involved in various activist groups. Becoming a teacher was compatible with my activist interests, because I realised that I could expose students to social justice issues within the curriculum, and that the role of teachers as cultural workers can be influential. I was nurtured by older activists within the profession to be able to effectively make my idealism a practical feature of my teaching.

I define myself as an activist teacher. The longer I am in the school system, the more interrelated every aspect of my work becomes. When I first became a teacher, the tasks of day-to-day teaching dominated my life. I found it quite demanding to work with hundreds of different students, plan lessons for five hours every day, and interact with the other teachers, the support staff, and the administration in a school. Relationships with students and other staff were the dominant features of my workday, and these interactions were both stimulating and draining. After a while, though, the planning and administrative tasks became routine and reflection on the system was possible. I became more influential in the life of my school as I took the time to nurture relationships with other staff, involve myself in committee work, and become vocal at staff meetings. I approach these activities cognizant of my underlying values and ideological goals. I know that my work in classrooms, my interaction with staff, my position as a union shop steward, and my energy deployment in the school make me a valuable member of the staff. But I haven't always felt appreciated when questioning the status quo or inserting my opinion at meetings. I have struggled to understand why my own activist work has at times been devalued, and have found that through the process of interviewing and

giving value to the activist work of teachers as actual work, I have found myself to be more valued as well.

For me it is important that activist work and an emphasis on social justice be a central piece of what I do in the school system. I believe that the development in students of both empathy and critical thinking are necessary for building communities of tolerance and progress. Activist work in schools is vital, because school is one of the only non-commercialised spaces where almost every citizen participates. Further, we teachers need to see ourselves as members of a community of lifelong learners who constantly develop our own critical thinking and currency. While sometimes uncomfortable, this doesn't happen without change.

I came to this topic needing to see my experience theorized instead of sidelined. After having read the work of Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, bell hooks, Henry Giroux and others, I realised that the long history of activist teachers is an inheritance to be claimed. Perhaps my study could offer support to others like me, or to the many who drop out of the school system disillusioned with having tried to make a difference but who felt frustrated, shut down, isolated or even attacked for having tried to change things. In terms of retaining the services of idealistic young teachers, I hypothesise that the existence of meaningful support for activist work is crucial.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to locate my research within a broader context of literature on teacher activism. There are three relevant literatures: (1) empirical studies on the perceptions that teacher activists have of themselves, their work and their context, (2) conceptual studies on the meaning of teacher activism, and (3) advocacy studies that provide examples of and advice for successful teacher activism.

Empirical Research

Three studies have focused on teacher activists: Lindsay Paterson's 1998 survey of Scottish teachers' involvement in civic organisations, Seth Kreisberg's 1986 study of six teacher activists in the Boston Area Educators for Social Responsibility Committee, and Darren Lund's 2001 dissertation on teacher activism in Alberta. The following discussion summarizes some selected insights from these studies that are relevant to my project.

Paterson's (1998) large scale survey (N=801) was designed to discover the extent to which teachers participated in their community civic life. He investigated why teachers engaged in voluntary activities outside their professional work and the consequences of that activism for their professionalism. Questions were asked in two directions: "whether teachers bring to their civic activities any special qualities as teachers" and whether "teachers might be expected to be influenced in their professional work by any experience they gain in civic activism" (p. 4). It is not so much his questions but some of his findings that are relevant to my study. He found that "levels of activism were high (88% of respondents were members of at least one community organisation) in comparison with Britain (73%). A significant group of teachers (24%)

were very active as “members of five or more organisations, whereas the analogous proportion in the general population was 9%” (p. 7). Those who were “active in several organisations tend also to be the people who get the most out of any particular organisation” (p. 10). Perhaps these high levels are not at all surprising, because as Paterson points out, “teachers are a key professional group in social reproduction. They are well educated, they are dispersed geographically throughout society – probably being the largest group of graduates working in smaller or socially deprived communities – and their professional practice encourages them to be reflective about social change” (p. 3). Also, teachers often have the types of skills that civic organisations need, such as confidence in public speaking, experience dealing with all segments of society, and high levels of education.

Most relevant was his finding that being an activist had a positive effect on one’s teaching. According to the survey respondents, their activism “contributed to their being better teachers” (Paterson, 1998, p. 12). They reported “beneficial effects of activism on their professional competence, both in the sense of their access to curricular materials and their general effectiveness as a teacher; [they also got] a better understanding of the community which their educational institution served and a better knowledge of the (Scottish) political system” (p. 11). Not only did activism contribute in various ways to improving their professionalism as teachers, but these effects were strongly linked with “political types of activism” (p. 1). He concluded that:

For all teachers the types of activism which were most consistently associated with the benefits of activism were the political ones, ranging from the low key (discussion of politics) to the strongly active (attempting to influence political decisions of central or local government). Far from political interests being inimical to effective professionalism, they are in fact associated with its fullest development. (p. 11)

When the organizations were political in nature, the participants had an enhanced “sense of political influence.” For example, a stronger belief in political efficacy was associated with holding more memberships, with holding more memberships in “politicized organizations, helping at social functions, holding office, raising political issues, discussing politics in the organization, and being in an organization that itself influenced political decisions” (p. 9). He cautioned, however, that “most of the statistical associations probably represent two-way influences.... For example, a sense of personal political efficacy may lead to people being active, and successful activism may then enhance the sense of political efficacy” (p.11). Involved people also had a sense of purpose and reward from that involvement (p. 9).

Seth Kreisberg’s (1992) series of interviews with six activist educators in 1985-1986 explored “the experience of empowerment and empowering, and the nature and dynamics of power in these experiences.” These six educators “were active members of the Boston Area Educators for Social Responsibility, (ESR) which was founded by educators seeking ways to address their own and their students’ concerns about the possibility of nuclear war” (p. 91). They were career “educational activists who had been involved in innovative educational experiments that challenged the status quo,” but before joining and becoming leaders in ESR their activism was essentially “individualistic – centered on their work in their classrooms with their students” (p. 101). Because of their feelings of urgency and despair about nuclear brinkmanship, these teachers wanted to reach out beyond their professional and personal isolation to connect with “colleagues with similar commitments and work on the political and educational issues they felt were important” (p. 103). What they found was “a unique opportunity to

learn, grow, organize and collaborate with other teachers on issues that were central to their commitment to teaching” (p. 103). Through their involvement in ESR, these teachers became empowered to do such things as “lead teacher education workshops, make speeches, write curricula, ... in the context of goals [they] cared about and with people who encouraged [them]” (p. 110). They were involved in an ongoing dynamic praxis about education and the experience of trying to influence social change through an organized group. “Within a community of shared purpose these six educators felt their own sense of competence enhanced as the barriers of isolation were broken. They felt they were making a difference in changing the direction of important educational and social issues” (p. 118).

Darren Lund’s (2001) study focused on the social justice activism of eleven Alberta high school teachers. Informed by multicultural and antiracist pedagogy, he explored the theoretical underpinnings and practical realities of their work. He says that they “represent the resilient and persistent activists who struggle on their uphill climb. They recognize the limitations and barriers imposed by the current political context, with diminishing resources, ... negative portrayals of marginalized groups including young people, and an individualistic ethos that permeates contemporary society. However, all of them remain hopeful that their own ongoing activism is meeting a crucial need to keep addressing social justice issues through their school based coalitions” (p. 113).

All of the teachers believed that a supportive environment and principal were important for the success of their work; however, not all of the teachers enjoyed “positive support from their principals” and so had to “win over reluctant administration through strategic framing of initiatives” (pp. 160, 204). This involved a careful integration of their more

controversial work (e.g., related to antiracist education) into “safer sounding programs and initiatives. Not wishing to deceive their superiors, they were simply doing the work of social justice activists within the constraints posed by their specific school and community environments” (p. 160). Lund points out that there also needed to be a change of attitude not only from the administration, but also among the activists. In this way “rather than being viewed as potential barriers to building inclusive school communities, administrators at the school, district, and provincial levels need to be included as contributors to the discourse among committed activists” (p. 181).

Despite their frustrations, these activists were not deterred by resistance. “Far from causing such activists to cease their efforts, their constant ‘going against the grain’ of the more conservative mainstream seemed to reinforce further the imperative nature of their continued activism” (p. 110). Their resolve was reinforced by the very work itself:

Each teacher in the study found sources of strength and determination amidst a community mentality that often denigrates the discussion of social justice issues. [One] teacher especially valued the personal growth she witnessed with students who may have been stereotyped as outcasts or misfits, now finding a new esteem as activists working towards equity and fairness. (p. 165)

For activists to be able to move forward in their important work within the school system, a challenge they must learn to deal with is how to work effectively and openly, so that “progressive social justice activism [comes to be seen] as a value and strength for the school or district” (p. 204). Lund suggests that “further research is needed that documents and analyses existing successful activist programs in schools. Their lived understandings of the intersections of social justice pedagogy and activism will be invaluable for researchers attending to curricular or pedagogical aspects of this work as it is brought to life in actual school settings” (p. 178). My study starts to address this challenge.

These three studies make some shared observations about teacher activism. Activism usually happens in a coalition or group, and is characterized by being supportive and nurturing, differentiating it from the activity of regular classroom teaching, which is often solitary. In all three studies the activism is linked to their professionalism as teachers, and enhances that professionalism through the activists' engagement in the community and through their continued learning. In each case the teachers have a strong rationale and clear focus on a particular concern in their activism, especially in the studies by Kreisberg and Lund, where the teachers focussed on anti racism or the nuclear arms race.

Conceptual Studies

A number of writers provide theoretical work about social justice activism in education. They breathe conceptual life into the great project of education, which is to enable the oppressed and disadvantaged to lift themselves up through education. They also nuance the importance of the teacher's self-awareness and critical stance. Of the many, three stand out as clearly informing my study. Judyth Sachs, an Australian, is particularly relevant with her conception of an "activist professional", Henry Giroux's conception of the teacher as a "transformative intellectual," and Michael Fullan's conception of "change agency" (Sachs, 2003, p. 137; Giroux, 1991, p. 53; Fullan, 1993, p. 12).

Sachs (2003) describes teacher activism as characterized by a professionalism that has "strong roots in more orthodox definitions of professionalism, in terms of expertise, altruism, and autonomy. At the same time it differs from orthodox or classical views in that its fundamental purpose is political. It brings together alliances and networks of

various educational interest groups for collective action to improve all aspects of the education enterprise” (p. 138). She says that this activist professionalism is premised on three concepts – public trust, active trust and generative politics - and on their interplay (p. 138).

Sachs explores the notion of the public trust that society has in the institution of education and in the profession of teaching. This notion of trust held by society functions as a “social shorthand,” reducing complexity, as each individual understands at some level what goes on in schools or in any other institution, such as the police, without having to investigate it firsthand (p. 138). Public trust in institutions, especially in those such as the military or the church, has declined in recent years but in fact remains fairly strong in schools and teachers; people assume that there are caring professionals in their neighbourhood school. Trust in teachers sometimes comes with mistaken or historical expectations, which can be a burden to teachers in terms of workload, or may hamper progressive change. However, the trust given to teachers also allows them to walk with authority in the classroom and as spokespersons in the community on many issues. Along with a reduction in complexity, trust “contributes to cohesion... and mutual respect and solidarity among people with differing perspectives” (p. 139). This trust is given freely to teachers, and should not be squandered.

After consideration of traditional public trust, Sachs then discusses the notion of “active trust,” which is generated through the interaction of individuals. Teachers who receive society’s trust also may generate active trust, which is earned as a group, not simply given. Active trust is generated for particular purposes, such as happens sometimes among the staff in a school, where by working together through various

issues, they negotiate a way to be effective in their work, and to know in what ways they can count on each other. This active trust is then available to be used to resolve further conflicts or tackle areas that need change. Active trust may also be negotiated between a teacher and parents, where, for example, disillusioned or mistrustful parents may come to see that the dedication of a particular teacher is meaningful, particular to their child, and effective. It requires effort and a commitment to listening and flexibility. In short, “collaboration is central to active trust” not as blind faith in other people, but as a “contingent and negotiated feature of professional or social engagement, so that different parts of the educational enterprise may work together in strategic ways” (pp.140, 141).

Active trust is a core concept within Sachs’ discussion of activist teacher professionalism, because it implies an engagement with issues that is particular, yet it also demands that teachers analyse an issue with a larger perspective, and choose a course of action, such as, for example, performing an advocating role or engaging in a political response. Active trust “requires that a shared set of values, principles and strategies is debated and negotiated” (p. 140). Active trust also involves risk and uncertainty because it is based on an assumption that “someone’s intended action will be appropriate from a variety of viewpoints” (p. 139). Teachers are a part of a changing institution, and are often innovators who move the system forward. At the same time they are the face of the institution to the parents and students, and are the facilitators of the constantly negotiated changes. The “development of trust is coextensive with the development of social capital.... Social capital comprises stocks of trust, norms of reciprocity, and networks of civic engagement that make voluntary cooperation easier to attain” (p. 139). Active trust is built slowly and incrementally, is never fully realized,

and needs to be continually “maintained and reinforced through networks of civic engagement and norms of reciprocity” (p. 140).

A third aspect of the activist professional is Sachs’ notion of generative politics. When a teacher has the trust of the community because of traditional trust, and is a participant in circles of active trust, there is a possibility for change. Generative politics entails purposeful planning that arises out of a group’s concern about “local and global issues and the needs of those most directly involved and implicated” (p. 145). This planning is productive, if it “allows and encourages individuals and groups to make things happen rather than let things happen to them in the context of overall social concerns and goals” (p. 144). For example, a group of teachers in a school who has fostered active trust can collaboratively develop a response to an issue and is more likely to see results from its efforts than a person acting alone. It matters what type of concern is addressed by the group. “Social justice concerns are crucial for successful generative politics, as they lead to widened scope and increased levels of dialogue among various parties” (p. 145). As activists begin to plan and act on such concerns, their work “stimulates the production and dissemination of new knowledge and creates opportunities for productive debate and engagement” (p. 145). This can lead more broadly to a process of changing people’s beliefs around “issues of equity and social justice. Its focus is on the long rather than the short term, and is rooted in everyday life, which is its strength” (p. 146). This “challenges not only dominant interests, but also the beliefs and practices that sustain power in everyday life” (p. 146).

Sachs proposes a protocol for activist teacher professionalism. She suggests the need for inclusiveness, collective and collaborative action, effective communication of

aims and expectations, recognition of expertise of all parties involved, creation of a community of trust and mutual respect, ethical practice, responsiveness and responsibility, acting with passion, experiencing pleasure and having fun.

She sums up:

Activist teacher professionalism is not for the faint-hearted. It requires risk taking, and working collectively and tactically with others. Like any form of action it demands conviction and strategy. However, the benefits outweigh the demands. The activist teacher professional creates new spaces for action and in so doing improves the learning opportunities for all of those who are recipients and providers of education. (p.153)

Henry Giroux's transformative intellectual is one who understands and acts upon social justice issues. Thoughtful analysis leads to action, and action in turn clarifies analysis further; analysis and action are intertwined. He locates his understanding of teachers as transformative intellectuals within a concept of emancipatory authority. Traditional notions of authority feature domination, coercion, management, or tradition, which are given to teachers through training or expectation. These notions must be troubled so as to enable transformation. Emancipatory authority frames schools as "places where teachers and students learn and collectively struggle for the economic, political and social preconditions that make individual freedom and social empowerment possible. ...[Here] authority exists as a terrain of struggle and ... provides the basis for viewing schools as democratic public spheres within an ongoing wider movement and struggle for democracy" (2005, p. 89). To make this emancipatory authority a reality, teachers need "to critically engage the ideological and practical conditions which allow them to mediate, legitimate, and function in their capacity as authority-minded intellectuals" (2005, p. 90). This critical engagement process is key. Once teachers reflect on the purposes of schooling, and their role in it, most will want to assist the children in their care by also analyzing the unequal society children will enter and then

preparing them with skills they will need to thrive. To do this effectively, the teachers need to be “transformative intellectuals who will undertake social criticism not as outsiders, but as public intellectuals who address the social and political issues of their neighbourhood, nation, and the wider global world” (1991, p. 53).

Giroux’s transformative intellectual teacher is characterized by being fully engaged professionally and politically, and seeking to promote this full engagement in the people around them. Their work has a number of features. First, it is “morally courageous, as it does not require educators to step back from society in the manner of the ‘objective’ teacher, but to distance themselves instead from those power relations that subjugate, oppress, and diminish other human beings” (Giroux, 1991, p. 53). Second, they are also “concerned in their teaching with linking empowerment – the ability to think and act critically – to the concept of social transformation. That is, teaching for social transformation means educating students and other teachers to take risks and to struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived” (2005, p. 90). Third, these teachers are “bearers of critical knowledge, rules and values through which they consciously articulate and problematize their relationship to each other, to students, to subject matter, and to the wider community. Such a view of [teaching practice] challenges the dominant view of teachers as primarily technicians or public servants, whose role is primarily to implement rather than to conceptualize pedagogical practice” (2005, p. 90). These conscious, public and transformative intellectual teachers “have an opportunity to make organic connections with the historical traditions that provide them and their students with a voice, history and

sense of belonging” (1991, p. 53). In Giroux’s conception, these transformative intellectuals theorize their work, and then they act on that theory.

Michael Fullan’s (1993) conception of teachers’ change agency is also relevant to my study of teacher activists. He defines change agency as “being self conscious about the nature of change and the change process,” and describes four core capacities an effective change agent should have: “personal vision building, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration” (p. 12). First, there is no change without vision. He exhorts teachers to recall their moral motivations for becoming teachers who make a difference in the lives of children. He says “teachers should be pursuing moral purpose with greater and greater skill, conceptualizing their roles on a higher plane than they currently do” (p. 13). Second, this process is both initiated and kept current through persistent questioning, because, he argues, inquiry “is the engine of vitality and self-renewal” (p. 15). An effective change agent is one who has “internalized norms, habits and techniques for continuous learning” (p. 15). Third, the capacity of mastery is important, as “people must behave their way into new ideas and skills, not just think their way into them” (p. 15). In the context of change agency, “mastery is a learning habit that permeates everything we do” (p. 16). It is not enough to be exposed to new ideas; we have to “know where the new ideas fit, and we have to become skilled in them” (p. 16). The fourth capacity is collaboration, which “is essential for personal learning, because there is a ceiling to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves” (p. 17). “Without collaborative skills and relationships it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as you need in order to be an agent for societal improvement” (p. 18).

These capacities alone do not make it easy for change agents to effect change in schools, because school systems can be very intransigent to change, as Fullan describes:

We have an educational system which is fundamentally conservative. The way that teachers are trained, the way that schools are organized, the way that the educational hierarchy operates, and the way that education is treated by political decision makers result in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo than to change. When change is attempted under such circumstances it results in defensiveness, superficiality, or at best short-lived pockets of success. (p. 3)

However, he offers hope in the potential for both individuals and groups of activists to have effect. He suggests that “systems change when enough kindred spirits coalesce in the same change direction. This is why top-down structural change does not work. You can’t mandate what matters because there are no shortcuts to changes in systems’ cultures. But like-minded people pushing for change do add up” (p. 143).

It is clear that change happens, but “systems do not change themselves, people change them” (p. 70). An individual teacher can be a successful agent of change. He contends that “the individual educator is a critical starting point because the leverage for change can be greater through the efforts of individuals. Each educator has some control (more than is exercised) over what he or she does because it is one’s own motives and skills that are at question. Each and every educator must be an effective change agent” (p. 12). Each teacher with an orientation toward social justice needs to start with themselves, develop habits of mind and capacity, and seek allies to help them make the change they wish to see happen. They can build the support they need, first by expressing their own vision, because

especially in moral occupations, like teaching, the more one takes the risk to express personal purpose, the more kindred spirits one will find. A great deal of overlap will be experienced. Good ideas converge under conditions of communication and collaboration. Individuals will find that they can convert their own desires into social agendas with others. Remember personal purpose is not just self-centered; it has social dimensions as well such as working effectively with others, developing better citizens, and the like. (p. 14)

Fullan relies on individuals taking the initiative and working in groups, if there is going to be effective change in schools.

It is only by individuals taking action to alter their own environments that there is any chance for deep change. ... Moral purpose needs an engine, and that engine is individual, skilled change agents pushing for changes around them, intersecting with other like-minded individuals and groups to form the critical mass necessary to bring about continuous improvements. (p. 40)

All three theorists agree that the individual activist teacher is a vital starting point for effective change. These activists have strong moral purpose and should be encouraged. Teachers can and should theorize what they are doing in schools, and should work with others and build networks of support to accomplish their goals.

Advocacy Studies

There is an advocacy literature that, although not necessarily research based, gives helpful rationales and examples for doing social justice activities with students and teachers. These pieces document key processes and features of activism. Let me provide two examples.

Becoming a teacher and becoming an activist were inseparable in the experience of Herbert Kohl (1998). As a young teacher, he brought to his work a strong passion for social justice, and soon realized that he needed to improve his teaching practice to be a more effective activist. Based on this experience, he offers the following advice to new teachers who are driven with moral purpose:

Hone your craft as a teacher. When I first began teaching, I jumped into struggles for social justice. During one of my efforts a community person asked 'so, what's going on in your classroom that's different than what you're fighting against? Can your students read and do math?' I had to examine my work, which was full of passion and effort but deficient in craft. I realized that I needed to take the time to learn how to teach well, or I couldn't extend myself with authority and confidence in organizing efforts. This is essential for caring teachers. We have to get it right for our students or we can't presume to take on larger systems, no matter how terrible those larger systems are. As educators,

we need to root our struggles for social justice in the work we do every day, in a particular community, with a particular group of students. (p. 286)

He speaks of the importance of staying true to one's moral purpose, advising social justice teachers not to "teach against your conscience or align yourself with texts, people and rules that hurt children" (p. 285). He also asks these teachers to continuously evaluate what it is they are doing as teachers, because "in a society where there is too much institutionalized inequity and daily suffering, you have to understand the importance of being part of larger struggles" (p. 286). Along with self evaluation is the need for thoughtful action to "resist in as creative a way as you can, through humor, developing and using alternatives, and organizing for social and educational change with others who feel as you do" (p. 285). And most important, actions and reflections are enhanced through collaboration and networking: "Don't become isolated or alone in your efforts. Reach out to other teachers, to community leaders, church people, parents" (p. 286). He learned that tenacity was a necessary characteristic of social justice teachers, and urges them to be persistent: "Don't quit in the face of opposition: make people work hard if they intend to fire you for teaching equity and justice" (p. 286). These are examples of the kinds of encouraging pieces of advice that infuse all of Kohl's writings.

In a similar vein, Donna Clark (2005) interviewed seven retiring teacher activists in British Columbia, asking them to reflect on their experiences of trying to bring change within the schools and the teachers' union. Although the transcripts were published without analysis, they highlighted the importance of motivation, personal growth through involvement, and networks of support. As to motivation, for example, an activist commented that "most people get involved through their passion; their burning issue. Mine, of course, was feminism and the promotion of women within teaching, the union

and the world, so I got involved in the status of women program” (p. 73). Focus and persistence characterized the motivations of this and other activists. A strong and consistent sense of long-term purpose kept them involved over time:

Actually the hardest job I ever had was as the Status of Women chairperson and contact to the Provincial Teachers’ Union. The task was so monumental. How do you fight for women’s rights in the local, and the whole of society, classrooms being the microcosm of that? Of course it happens over long periods of time. When you are chairperson for one year you want to see substantial changes. I wanted the women’s revolution to occur, and it didn’t. I was shocked! There were so many fronts to work on, so many things to do. There is so much to do that it becomes overwhelming. At a certain point, you think “I didn’t do anything,” but I did, I just didn’t do it all. (p. 73)

All seven activists were involved in networks of support centered around shared aims or issues. Networking was the key strategy for promoting change: “One of the main things I have learned is that no one person can do it. You’ve got to organize networks and that is about process” (p. 81). Through intentional network-building, they recruited other teachers to a common cause that allowed them to feel part of a much larger movement:

We were most proud that we established a network. The common phrase of the day was “the personal is political.” We made it very, very personal. We had conferences featuring topics such as why we are nurturers as opposed to leaders etc. Light bulbs went off for women all over the province. Even today I meet women, teachers from around the province who say, “you came to Port Hardy in 1974 and the Status of Women program changed my life.” For women who were single parents trying to forge their way in the world despite all this sexism and oppression, it really did make a difference in their lives. They could see it happening to the girls in the classroom. I think the network was the most important thing because it made feminism live and breathe in so many places in the province. That was big. (p. 59)

The results from being involved as activists were positive for all seven of these teachers. They achieved larger goals, learned political strategies, and improved themselves as teachers. As one of them commented: “on every front it has been a huge boon, not the least of which has been personal. I have met people who share strong political values, but who also share interests outside politics, and are lifelong friends of mine now” (p. 74). As she got more involved, she also found that her activism made her

a better teacher, because “as I talked to other teachers, I learned about teaching. As my union activity increased, my teaching also improved. As a secondary teacher I have learned a lot about teaching from my elementary colleagues. I got into their classrooms when I visited them about union issues and picked up pointers for my own teaching” (p. 74).

Their confidence and skills in working with groups of colleagues and various publics developed through learning-by-doing. As two of the activists commented:

I was not comfortable standing in front of a group of adults making a speech. Being in front of a classroom is different and I think a lot of teachers are the same. I realized through this activist work that people would listen to me and know what I am talking about. (p. 6)

I’m a better writer, thinker, speaker, and person for having been involved. I have gotten so much more than I have ever given back. People say “thank you for all the work you do for us.” Well, you are welcome, but I have gotten so much more. And it is just there for the taking. (p. 83)

These teachers found profound personal satisfaction in their activist work. However, in reflecting back on their careers, they expressed a sense of urgency about the need for new teachers to get involved. They were concerned both that there be people to carry on the work, because social justice goals are too large to be accomplished by a few individuals over the course of a few years, and because engagement enhances the effectiveness of one’s own career. One activist summed up the rewarding nature of her involvement with the following metaphor:

I wish everybody could have the opportunities I’ve had because of my political involvement ... It’s like the height of summer and you go by the blackberry bush; berries are just hanging off the bush, there for the taking. Your hands get a little roughed up in the process, but it’s really worth it if you do something with them because you can have blackberry jam in January. That’s what being involved in the union is like. (p. 83)

Common themes run through the advocacy literature that I have read. Social justice goals permeate all the work of these teachers within their classrooms, schools,

school districts, unions, and communities. They don't just work alone, but actively build and participate in networks to achieve their goals. These teachers analyze their role in society and deploy their talents and privileged position as teachers to push for progressive change. They get a profound sense of purpose and satisfaction from their activist work over time.

Chapter Three

Four Teacher Activists

This long and detailed chapter gives separate accounts of how four teacher activists interpreted their work, including their rationales, areas of activism, and factors that constrained and facilitated. Extensive interview quotes are used to provide each teacher's own words as much as possible. This choice to extensively detail the ideas of each activist has a benefit and a cost. The benefit is that the reader is given a sense of how each teacher expressed his or her voice about what was important, and the details allow for greater nuance. On the other hand, the use of many and long quotations make this chapter more difficult to read; the section on each activist concludes with a brief summary of his or her work. By contrast, the next chapter (Chapter Four) is easier to read because it provides a much shorter comparison of the views held by the four activists, a composite set of general themes, and explanations for the similarities and differences.

Quotes are referenced to indicate from which interview transcript they were taken. For example, (I: 22-25) refers to lines twenty-two through twenty-five of the first interview with that subject, and (II: 10-12) refers to lines ten through twelve of the second interview. Pseudonyms were used.

Dave Keller (DK)

Activism for me is any actions that are intended to create positive change, change the status quo, the power structures, policies, or peoples' behaviours in order to make the world a better place. (I: 46-48)

Dave is a secondary (8-12) math teacher in a large suburban school district, where he has been teaching for 12 years. He has a global issues club at his school and is involved as an activist in the community with environmental, vegetarian and food activist groups. He is the president of Earth Save, a food choices environmental organization, and

is a liaison to his school board for the “healthy schools lunch policy” which is trying to change food policies in the schools.

At his job, he is a dynamic senior math teacher, describing his teaching work as energizing:

I think it keeps my positive energy up. Dealing with kids in terms of a math classroom is fine, and to some extent that energy energizes me. I know when I am really sleepy and sleep-deprived, I can go to school, feeling like crap, but ten minutes into instructing in the classroom, I feel energized and lively. (II: 166-169)

Students come to Mr. K’s class with the usual reluctance to do math. He reports that they come with their preconceived notions of “Math’s gonna suck” so you “have to fight like heck to get them to lose the attitude at the door and not expect that it’s [going to be] a miserable class and [wonder] what’s the point of all this” (I: 85-87). He creates a lively learning environment that reflects his interests, describing his classroom as a place where “kids can go to hear non-standard messages” (I: 494-495). His classroom is “decorated pretty uniquely; the whole back wall is alternative music promotional posters, and the other wall is posters [he] got from Nepal, and climbing, or environmental stuff, and they get to see all sorts of items, such as big plants [in the classroom]” (I: 491-94). Dave believes that his persona and values have an effect on students:

I feel positive that because of my actions, the world is better, and these people have learned stuff, and that it mattered. It was better than just having a math teacher that plugged away and showed the Pythagorean theorem, and then said “here’s your homework” and sat at the desk and marked. (I: 481-484)

Rationale for activist work

As a teacher, I have a responsibility to expose the students to other realities beyond the corporate consumer celebrity world that we live in; where people know the details of Britney [Spears’] life, or Michael Jackson’s trial, but can’t identify any species of trees or plants around them; they don’t know about struggles around the world or the effects of their own behaviors on the ecosystem. That’s wrong! (I: 219-223)

DK sees his job as both an opportunity and a responsibility. He likes the fact that he “gets to see students and young people changing not only their behaviors but their perceptions, so there’s a much greater likelihood that they will not be typical consumers the rest of their lives. [This gives him] hope that change is possible” (I: 476-479). Along with this privilege, he sees a teacher’s responsibility as more than just delivering the curriculum:

Our position as teachers includes exposing the kids to a variety of ideas, a variety of realities and ways of seeing the world, and some of them desperately need it. Many of our students have no concept of a life beyond just being a wage slave, and trying to buy more stuff, have a flashy ride, etc. (I: 390-394)

He has a deep sense that he needs to make a difference in the world, and that an individual can be effective.

Why do I do it? Well I guess partly out of a sense that it is a responsibility, I am one of the people in the world that has the money and the free time that gives me the luxury to be able to focus on things other than just the bare necessities in life, and it makes me feel good that I am leaving the world a slightly better place than if I weren’t here. I guess for me, I don’t have any real spiritual sense of there being a heaven, or another life or anything like that, so for me it’s “what do you do with your time on the planet now?” Will it matter that you were here, will anyone outside your immediate family regret that you’re not there, so just mattering in the world is part of it. The pay off is being able to see changes. You write a letter, and that wild place is a park three years later. For the rest of my life I can say I was a little tiny piece of making that happen. (I: 205-217)

Activism was a part of his family background:

My parents were both immigrants to Canada, from South Africa and Northern Ireland, so they both came from places where social justice was a big part of the scene. I grew up being aware that in other places there were great injustices that my distant family was in the middle of. My parents joined the Unitarian Church, which is pretty activist. In fact, I grew up being surrounded by a circle of adults who were involved in the civil rights marches in the States during the 60’s, and the anti-war movement, and the anti-nuclear movement in the 80’s. One of our babysitters used to take us downtown to hand out leaflets. (I: 189-196)

He grew up believing that progressive political action was a normal part of one’s life:

That was considered a natural thing, for you to do stuff in life. I guess I just had a sense that there are all sorts of problems in the world, and it’s better to get involved and try to help solve them, rather than whine on your own about how the world is a terrible place while you busily collect more money and buy more stuff. (I: 200-203)

DK became a teacher after having worked as a medical researcher. He says he changed careers because of his “sense of service and [his] own curiosity, enthusiasm for learning and for nature” (I: 268-269). Being a teacher gives him “a really good opportunity to connect with youth; they’re the ones who are more open to finding a path in life, they’re not set in their ways; it’s a great opportunity” (I: 265-267).

Areas of activist work

He is an activist at school with his global issues club, as a union involved teacher, and in the community as a leader in a group promoting vegetarianism. For the purposes of this study, he reported primarily on his school-based activist work.

Activist work in the school

DK has a global issues club that does a range of activities and accomplishes an astonishing amount of work. Over the last few years, the club has “slowly been growing; it took several years to really get it going” (I: 138-139). He explains that:

[The membership] rotates. Let’s say at the high point there are probably thirty kids, and there’s probably about ten to fifteen real core members, and occasionally we get new kids dropping in or coming to one activity or something like that. (I: 171-173)

Central to the club are the leadership and creativity of a few key students:

There are four or five key girls who organized many of the events in this year, across many different subject areas. Human rights, environmental issues, local compassion initiatives, like making Christmas hampers, etc. They seem to have pretty diverse interests, and are sucking up like little sponges my idea that having a variety of concerns is better than being obsessed with one. (II: 200-204)

He describes a typical school year’s club activities as follows:

The first thing that we do that has remained constant is the international coastal cleanup, which we do about the third weekend in **September**, and then this year we also went and volunteered at the “jog for the bog,” [to help preserve the local bog] in North Delta. About eighteen students came out for that one. (I: 139-142)

Then in **October** the kids prepared speeches and posters etc, for the UNICEF coin box program, and formed four teams which went down to one of the elementary schools near

us, and did presentations to classes on the benefits of that, and that's the third year that they've done that.

November might have been when we did some Amnesty International letters.

Going into [**December**] they did Christmas hampers locally, and something called "The Christmas Child" campaign, which is through a local Christian church. (I: 144-150)

Right after the holidays there had been the tsunami in Asia so we spearheaded a campaign to collect funds, and collected about 1700 dollars in our school. (I: 152-156)

Then in the **spring** we developed a naturalization program, and put together a proposal with some help from outside people, and submitted it to Surrey parks and our principal. We got the OK to naturalize a little piece of the park that borders on our [school] garden, and so we are just finishing up the controlling of the black berries. We've put in native species and put in mulch that they've brought in to put around them, etc. (I: 158-162)

We did a spring clean up, in **May** as well, and another coastal cleanup. (I: 169)

[In **June**] was "clean air week," so about 15 students got together, formed a committee, and organized a whole series of events for that week. They had me signing letters or making an occasional phone call, or making announcements over the P.A., but pretty well they created this thing and wrote a proposal to our principal with a timeline of when the set up and the take down was every day. (I: 164-168)

Although the club has many on-going projects, chief among them is recycling:

We also set up a recycling program for the school with yellow painted boxes for mixed paper, blue boxes for white and colored paper that can be sold, and a bucket for pop cans and drink boxes in all the classrooms and in the hallways. (I: 175-177)

To make this happen, they "went to the liquor store many many times [to collect enough boxes] and then got paint and painted three layers to make them actually look yellow" (I: 181-182).

Kids like to do active hands-on activities, where they can "get out there and see the results of their actions" (II: 277-278). They have done letter writing on issues, but there are limitations to that type of activist work with kids. They need to see concrete results from their activism:

I don't think you want to go top-heavy with writing letters about the rainforest, because it's so abstract and disconnected. Our kids just got letters back from [provincial premier] Gordon Campbell's office about this gateway transportation plan, but I don't think that

that can sustain them. They particularly said to me this week, “we want to go out and do more of the Scotch Broom [an invasive plant] removal.” (II: 270-275)

He does see the value of having the club do activities that are on a global scale, however, as long as they are strategically thought out in terms of maximal impact:

[As far as] Amnesty International, we haven’t done much, but a couple of times the kids have researched some cases and have written letters. I would like to see them doing more educational campaigns within the school, to get other kids aware of it, because if only twenty kids a year are conscious of this stuff, then it is a very limited effect. If those twenty kids could make a thousand kids aware of Amnesty or sustainability, then that could feed out; some of those thousand might change the ways they end up living their lives and raising their families. (II: 180-186)

Within the club, some tensions do arise between what he would like the students to do and what they themselves want to do. They try to work out a balanced compromise:

The specific combination of topics I choose to expose to the students in my club are based on my particular interests and background. The kids don’t always bite at what I’m interested in, and they tend to want to do more social justice stuff, like Amnesty International and Christmas hampers, and I want them to do a little but more environmental and animal related stuff, but we get a good mix. (I: 99-104)

He muses that their choices are based on “the interests of the kids that are there and what they feel comfortable taking on. Sometimes I think maybe because of my known interests, the kids don’t want to take that path” (I: 110-112). He also sees his time and energy limitations as a factor in what the club does. “I would like to do more outdoors, kind of on-the-ground stuff, but that’s the stuff that takes a lot of time and energy to organize” (II: 153-155).

He sees the opportunity to have this club and the existence of it as an important and dynamic part of the school:

I guess the way I see it, the school is a community, rather than a factory model where we are just doing stuff to the students. I see it as a community that develops its own present and future, and I have the freedom to have this club, and I can’t think of any [instances] when I’ve been told not to do it. (I: 421-424)

Facilitating and constraining factors

Despite the success of the club, there are some areas of difficulty. DK's main frustration is with low numbers of student participants in the club:

There is a huge number of kids that just sit and talk and complain. They sit in the hallways, [saying things like] "oh, this school sucks, ...oh, so and so [did such and such]," and just gossip and talk about crap. And I try and say "hey, just one lunch hour, just one this year, come and try and help us with this thing," whatever it is. And we'll get maybe three new kids out of 1100-plus students. So most kids, like most adults, are satisfied to be passive whiners about how things are bad and why doesn't somebody fix it. Somebody else. (II: 306-312)

He blames the pervasiveness of consumer culture for this lack of involvement:

In the consumer media culture these young people are raised in now, they don't really have any sense of themselves being involved in activism, they think their role is to look good, and have the right stuff, and be considered popular. These are all concerns [that have existed] probably forever, but now it is being even more commodified and structured. [Popularity] is based a lot more on products, and less on personal qualities or style than it was before, so I think the kids are basically co-opted into not rocking the boat, not doing something different from other people. It's even more important now to conform with Michael Jackson / Coca Cola / Tiger Woods, etc. (I: 436-442)

To combat this strong draw, DK has found that the answer lies in personal invitation. He cites a recent example of this:

Today I had yellow recycling boxes to take out to the dumpster to empty, and I saw two kids, one guy I know who didn't really like me and his girlfriend, and I said, "hey, can you folks help" and she said "yeah, absolutely!" He was stuck having to tag along...and he helped me get stuff out. They've never come to anything before and I know if I called a meeting they wouldn't be there; but if they are asked in the moment, they don't mind [pitching in]. (II: 317-324)

He learned the importance of personal invitation as a recruitment strategy from his involvement outside of school as president of Earth Save:

That is a key thing in our organization. We've identified that almost all the key people who have joined the board or the organization in the last few years, did so through personal invitation by the board members. You need to say: "I believe you have skills that we could use, you are valuable, we recognize you as an individual, and want you here." And when you do that, people go "well!" (II: 324-328)

Another frustration is the lack of involvement by other teachers in the activist activities in the school. He "wishes more staff were interested in this kind of [work]" (I:

296-297). One of the “barriers [to the success of the projects] other than the apathy of the students is the lack of buy-in from the other teachers” (II: 12-13). Teachers in general seem to be uninvolved with extra-curricular pursuits. He thinks that:

it’s a real shame. I’ve seen it at lots of schools, particularly the school I am at now, this tendency where about one third or less of the teachers do virtually all of the extra curricular work. There’s a smaller and smaller group that do a larger and larger proportion. Out of sixty teachers, there are probably ten of us that do three or four things each, and there’s a few more that do two things and a bunch that do one, and a whole bunch that do nothing. They won’t even chaperone the dance. They want to be in their garden by four. And you can’t force it. (II: 221-227)

Involvement is requisite to the success of a school community, therefore, lack of engagement is inexcusable:

Unless there is some over-riding concern about their health, I don’t think there is a good excuse to do nothing. As a teacher, I think it is pretty standard that being involved in your school community is ... an extremely common part of being a teacher. So to exclude all that and say “I’m just going to instruct, and evaluate, and not connect with students in any other way,” I think that impacts the community. (II: 231-237)

Some teachers only demonstrate their support of his work by saying they are glad that school-wide recycling is being done. “I’ve had people acknowledge it and say, ‘good job,’ and so on, but they don’t tend to get involved in the buy-in for keeping the paper out of the waste stream. [Their commitment] just isn’t as good as it should be” (I: 297-299). Some other teachers think of it as his pet project, and if they do communicate with him, it is to complain through e-mail that “their [recycle] box is overflowing” (II: 87). Although he thinks that the work is worthwhile, he feels isolated in his efforts. “I’m aware that other people are doing it, and every bit that I do contributes to a larger change in society, but it’s pretty isolated” (I: 98-99). His experience of doing this work alone makes him feel bitter to some degree.

And my attitude now is “Fuck ‘em.” You guys don’t want to help me with it even though you know I’m doing way more in this school than any of you, I tutor after class virtually every day, I am running tutorials for any grade 11’s, and do all these clubs and climbing

wall and all that, and then nobody will assist with anything, not even one little thing. (I: 539-542)

He also acted as a union representative for the teachers in his school, but has now refused to take it on by himself.

I have done my share, I've got too much on my plate, I have commitments within the school, I have other commitments as president of Earth Save. Somebody else in the staff of 65 is going to have to take this on. It would be better if it was two or three people, but it's not going to be me. I will not be guilted into taking it because no one else is stepping up to the plate. (I: 527-530)

Recently he has received excellent support from one teacher who "expressed an interest and has really collaborated well" (I: 174-175). This is new for him, and he reports that she "does as much as I do, if not more, and she's constantly telling me to delegate stuff or give her a task, rather than me do everything. It's nice, and we carpool together...and it's working out really well" (I: 289-296).

The administration of the school is supportive at times, and at other times is not. He understands that "they have to try to avoid problems so things don't come back and bite them in the ass later" (II: 414). As well, some have "concerns about taking classes outside, not necessarily for safety, but for setting an expectation that the kids can get other teachers to let them out whenever it is sunny" (I: 260-262). Generally, though, he feels they don't recognize the value of his activist work, and they see his activities as adding to their workload by making it more complicated. He even perceives a certain amount of harassment that is unwarranted. For instance,

I was advertising for an event about a month and a half ago at the school, and the principal came in at lunch, and in front of my other colleagues, said, "so Dave, the event is over, right? The posters are going to come down?" and I said, "no it's not 'till next Saturday." He says, "Oh, OK, so you'll take care of that." So here he is harassing me for posters in the hallway that would have only been four days [out of date] and we have tons of other stuff in the hallways that's way out of date, and I'm getting grief for it. I just saw a poster in our school, a big fluorescent pink poster for a grad event that got cancelled three months ago, and it's still stuck on one of the windows in a corridor in our school.

High visibility and it hasn't been dealt with. He hasn't got on anyone's case for that one. (II: 128-140)

There are problems stemming from ideological differences. DK had an administrator tell him that "he didn't want it to be known as an activism club because [the word] activism sort of smacks of terrorism" (I: 406-407). However, he points out that "this was not long after September 11th, 2001, so people were highly sensitive about anyone who questions or challenges or is not polite or something" (I: 409-410). No matter how disappointing it is to feel unsupported, though, he asserts that "you can't search out the kudos, it has to be a gift that they offer genuinely" (II: 105-106).

The fact that activist activity is undervalued or under-appreciated does rankle. His anger arises because, he points out, although the recent curriculum change purports that "we're in an era when values education and moral intelligence are being touted as significant, here's my club. It is the only thing in our school that is specifically aimed at having kids take social responsibility to make positive change, particularly for other people" (II: 114-117). "Yet it isn't something that we really value enough to make essential to the school" (II: 113).

Working as an activist with students is a privileged position because the kids are so impressionable:

We are in a position of not only authority, but role models and the people to which they look for direction and inspiration, so ideally it puts us in a place to do these kind of things. I've had kids say that having listened to me has really changed the way they see things. So I know that we do have that kind of impact, so there is real opportunity there to be there, and one has to be careful that one doesn't exploit it improperly. (I: 373-377)

As a consequence, he expresses some discomfort about the things he says to his students sometimes, commenting that "they could call me on it, [but] so far they haven't" (I: 72).

He recently had his awareness of this issue raised by attending a

BCTF (British Columbia Teacher's Federation) workshop about teaching controversial issues, where they said you do have to be conscious of not using your classroom as a soap box; that we are paid to teach the content of the courses that we teach, and skills that would be related to learning that topic. I think talking about work habits and getting decent sleep is probably [not risky], but if I say: "hey, are any of you registered to vote in the next provincial election?" may be more so. I'm always careful not to endorse any particular position, but I'm certainly trying to get them to be active in democracy, which doesn't really fit in with my senior math curriculum! (I: 64-70)

DK points out that "most people know better than building up one political party over another, or putting out their religious beliefs, or something like that, but I'm probably not wary enough" (I: 385-387). He also understands that his students' activities do need to be thoughtfully considered for their potential effects. For example, "some students wanted to do something to do with animal cruelty, and I specifically told them not to organize any protests at KFC in the name of the school or me or anything like that. They actually joked about putting my name on [one of their signs]" (I: 401-404).

Impacts of activism

DK gives a contradictory analysis of the toll that activist work takes on him. On one hand he says he "doesn't find the system limiting [his] capacity to do activism with youth very much; the main limiting factor is how much time and energy [he] has to put into it" (I: 277-278). He says the major limitations are his "own time and energy because [he] is exhausted most of the time" (I: 425-426), and reports that "the cost to me is that it takes a lot out of me, like quite often I am so tired... just painfully sleep deprived. People say, 'oh you look like hell'" (I: 497-498). However, in the second interview he said that "he could see himself continuing to do this... I don't think it's killing my energy, in fact it gives me energy" (II: 157-158). He also knows that his current situation in life isn't necessarily permanent. "I have to be mindful that things could change for me, other stuff could interfere. I might end up being a parent, you know, I might have to struggle with

something else...so if something else came up, sure I'm willing to put this activism aside rather than burn myself out; but right now I think I get a lot out of it" (II: 160-163).

DK sees himself as an agent of change in society, and in the lives of individual students. A club-involved student commented publicly at her graduation that "I have realized that being unique is a gift and not a curse" (I: 459). Other students recently came, "waving a letter, saying 'look Mr. K, I got a letter from the Premier'" (I: 120-121).

Through the club activities, he and the students feel both a sense of purpose and accomplishment:

I don't think I will see the final solution to problems, but I'll see positive effects. For example, just with the recycling in the last year we've definitely seen a huge amount of paper that has been kept out of the waste stream, so I feel that, yeah, I'm an agent for stimulating that to happen. (I: 354-357)

His activist work benefits both the school and the school system in terms of their image as well:

People's perception of what's going on in schools improves, when they hear that their kids or some kids are having opportunities to do these kinds of things. Especially with the tsunami relief, everybody became suddenly empathetic. I think if they look and see that kids are organizing stuff, raising money for others, then they think "yeah, the school community these days is a good thing." Either they think we are doing stuff that wasn't done before, or it reminds them "gosh I remember way back when we did fundraising," and it restores their faith in schools, they're not just factories turning out university prospective candidates, full of standardized tests and stuff like that. (I: 512-519)

So even though the activist teachers are sometimes viewed as a "pain in the ass, or a ...danger sometimes, they make schools keep up with the times" (I: 12-15). And for himself personally, doing the activist work keeps him going.

When the kids are really tired, and the kids are not responding, occasionally I feel down. When I'm not getting the positive energy back from them, it's good to know that even if I don't have a global issues meeting today, those kids are there and working on something, and we're going to be doing another event soon enough, so it gives me a feeling that there is another purpose to my presence in the school. (II: 172-177)

If I wasn't being successful with the club, then I might think of changing student populations to see if there was interest elsewhere, but I think these are kids who really

need this example. More than at some [other] schools they need exposure to this stuff, so I'm happy to continue doing it. (II: 149-152)

DK often posts information on the "Green Teacher" electronic bulletin board that is available to all teachers in the school district. He encourages other teachers to involve themselves and their students in green initiatives such as beach clean-ups and other community events. His group hosts other teachers, schools and clubs sometimes, showing the work they have done to green their school grounds. In this way DK is having an influence beyond his own students.

Summary

DK is a highly self-motivated activist. His primary activist work in his school is with a group of students who do a great number of activities that enhance those students' educational experiences and change the culture of the school. The activities of the club are mainly environmental and social justice oriented. He sees himself as an individual crusader, calling the group "my club," and taking responsibility personally for all aspects of the club's needs. He has a high moral purpose in this work, seeing these students as "kids who really need this example," because they are in a large working class suburban school, where, he believes, the consumerist status quo is rarely challenged (II: 151). He feels that he is giving much of himself in this work, and as a result experiences burnout from exhaustion, as his club involvement is in addition to his full teaching and other extra-curricular duties. However, he also reports that the work with the club helps him maintain enthusiasm for teaching. He receives support from a colleague who now acts as co-leader of the club, and is appreciative of her work, but he sees himself in the primary leadership role. He views himself as different from most of his colleagues in terms of lifestyle and worldview, especially because of his vegan lifestyle and adventurous

wilderness activities during vacations. He is critical of colleagues who don't contribute to the culture of the school by giving more of their free time, yet he understands that their life circumstances may not permit greater involvement. He gets minimal support for his club endeavours from the school administration, and also does not strategize to get more support. In the past he has been involved as a school representative to the union, but has resigned from these duties due to over work. However, he offers his experience and expertise to other teachers who may be working with other clubs.

Outside school his activist work as president of Earth Save fits his beliefs and lifestyle as a vegan, and gives him personal support. His social life includes many people with similar hobbies such as travel and rock climbing. From these outside involvements he sustains energy for his school activist work.

DK's activist work illustrates one of the characteristics of Giroux's transformative intellectual. He thoughtfully analyses his ideals and actions because he sees himself as a model from whom students can learn. The activist club is a place where students can come to recognize and distance themselves from consumerist status quo thinking. In short, DK sees the school as a place where ideas about change can be debated and relevant actions fostered. Fullan's conception of change agency is even more evident in DK's strong sense of the moral purpose for teaching; he not only wants "to expose the kids to a variety of ideas and ways of seeing the world" (I: 392), but also "to leave the world a slightly better place" (I: 210). He is self conscious of the need for change and his role in the change process, and constantly theorizes through action.

Anna Lamb (AL)

When we get really complacent or complicit, and too comfortable with the status quo, I think it is our job, as activists and teachers and people in the world ...to

question that, to say “OK, there’s something not OK here, this is too comfy...I know somebody’s voice isn’t being heard.” That has always been my experience as an aboriginal woman. That awareness acts as my compass and helps me move through. (II: 514-519)

AL is an aboriginal woman of Nisga’a ancestry who is currently working as the assistant director for aboriginal education for the provincial teachers’ union, where she has been for the past three years. Before that, she worked as a secondary and elementary teacher for five years in a large urban school district, and as a faculty advisor training pre-service teachers for one year at an urban university. She is known throughout provincial teacher union circles as an advocate for First Nations’ issues, and as an effective cross-cultural activist.

Rationale for activist work

Anna perceives herself as an activist who takes on the task of “disrupting or challenging the status quo” (II: 167). She believes “her particular way of seeing the world [requires that she try] not to indoctrinate, but to help facilitate a constant questioning of the world that we live in [among students, parents and colleagues]” (II: 28-29). Her activism is central to her role as an educator:

I think it’s really important for me as an educator to practice [my activism], not just in my teaching practice, but also in how I relate to my colleagues and how I relate to parents. I think it really has to be part of my DNA as a professional.... I think I have to live this, as well as what I practice in the classroom. (I: 12-17)

She describes her role as working between cultures with a transformative purpose:

I really see myself as a cultural broker, a change agent. I see myself as a pivot, and yet a place to move where I can move comfortably back and forth in between communities, in between spaces. Sometimes I’m often in the middle of the space in a kind of Venn thing ... it’s like a chameleon, you have to be willing to move in and out. (I: 376-386)

Despite this fluidity, her identity as an activist is firmly grounded in her aboriginal background. In the past she tried to fit herself into established categories of progressive

thinking, such as feminism or social justice, but found the best fit with “something like anti-oppression. It fits better for me, or it could be even more like anti-colonial practice, an anti-colonialist. I don’t know if there is such a thing. For me it is about critiquing when I become complicit or complacent in my stance so I want to challenge that for myself” (II: 205-208).

I’ve tried to fit into different critiques of the world, right? So, feminist perspective, social justice, anti racism, I think there are places there to have coalition work but I don’t think I can only be one [of these], and if there was one that fits me the best, it would be an anti-colonialist type of thinking. [And I don’t mean] post-colonial, I always think this when people say ‘post-colonial’: “we’re still living it honey! What are you talking about?” (II: 213-220)

She displays a high degree of self reflexivity about her personal agency and identity, and seems able to move among communities without rigidity.

AL has been a questioning person since childhood. Her activism has a history as her “way of being, it’s who I am in the world; even with my own people it is who I am. I think some of my own aunts or grannies in my tribe see it as who I am” (II: 72-73). She was seen by them to be a curious and gregarious child, and so they helped her develop these skills. She mused that perhaps they thought: “she likes to talk, she asks questions, she’s going to put it out there, whether we like that or not, [so let’s encourage her,]” or perhaps “they thought, she’s so inquisitive, let’s keep her busy” (II: 77-80)!

A critical incident occurred when she wrote a school essay on a family experience:

I talked to my mother about what happened to her, and she helped me write this little paper, only two or three pages, about...what the Nisga’a were going through....It was during the period when people were slowly starting to talk, without feeling they had to go underground to talk about land claims, because it [had been] illegal to do so. People were just starting to talk about their language and the need for language to be spoken, how it was taken away in residential school. So I talked to my mom about this, then we wrote this little thing together, and then I read it in class....I remember there was dead silence and nobody said anything. The teacher didn’t even say anything, and how I interpreted

that was “oh, man, I’m fucked! This is really bad, this is not good.” Because indifference is worse than saying “you’re full of shit,” right? ...it was like “now what?” (I: 477-496)

In high school she saw herself as an activist, and was a leader in organizing the other students around their language rights:

I dropped out of school. I was kicked out, actually, because in the French program I tried to organize the aboriginal kids to walk out. I was really big on, “hey, we need to be speaking our language, not your language; why are you making us do French? We speak this language, this is our territory!” (I: 497-500)

After this incident her mother was called into the school:

The counselor called my mother, who worked for public health, so she understood what was going down, and she came in and there I was. This counselor asked us things like “do I sleep in the same room with my parents, do I have my own bed?” I just thought “what the hell is going on here?” It was the weirdest thing. And my mom... was really pissed at the counselor...and said... “what are you getting at, do you think there is neglect?” Even then my mother was very concerned to be so... challenging towards the system. [Of course she was] very diplomatic about it, but they called a social worker from the ministry to investigate because of the defiance I had when I tried to get these kids to leave class in protest. My mom was pretty disappointed [with me,] but when we came out she said “you should be learning our language. I don’t know what the hell she’s getting at, and why she should care about what room you sleep in, and whether you have your own bedroom.” They... [believed that] to be so defiant, and to be so resistant, must have meant that there was something wrong at home. (I: 505-530)

Her mom was fundamentally supportive of the point she was making; however, this incident was much more than a parent conference. Because her mother was raised in a residential school, she had a real fear that “at any moment her kids could be apprehended and she could be deemed unfit” (I: 551-552). AL explains:

For her, to have all seven of us home, to not lose any of her children to the ministry or to children’s aid or whatever it was called back then, was so important to her, that I think she kept us really tight; we were each others’ playmates, we didn’t go out and hang out; we always lived with the fear of being taken away. (I: 464-468)

This legacy of fear extended to AL’s own adult life:

There was damage, intergenerational damage. I had fear; for example, I didn’t want public health nurses coming to my house after my son was born. I didn’t want anybody interfering. I wondered, “why are they here? Is it because I’m aboriginal? Who told them?” [I felt] nobody should know that. They said “no no, we do this all the time, all the new moms get this.”...I was very suspicious, because of what I grew up with, and to live in that fear is real. (I: 560-568)

It was challenging for AL's mother to model forthright behaviour and to articulate courage, because she also endured violence in the home:

At night my father was incredibly violent, not with us, but with my mother. I'd have to go to school all day after experiencing this if he was drinking or something was happening there, and then go to school and hide this other part of me or what I'd witnessed. (I: 541-545)

All of her siblings are activist-minded, stemming from childhood experiences: "We all do this type of work to some degree. We all do it differently, and have different ways we intersect in our worlds and with our families, but you know that when the chips are down and everyone is showing their cards, we all have [that same spirit]" (I: 469-473). Strong examples of the mother's forthrightness and support of her children's right to think and speak bore fruit in the next generation.

Despite dropping out of high school three times, AL returned and eventually finished.

I think what helped, was when my grandmother was dying of cancer, I lived in a nearby place and went back to school. I would go to see her every day, and helped take care of her. Eventually she went home and died, and we went home for the funeral. I think that experience was important and really grounding for me, because I could have ended up on the street, I mean literally...I was a pretty wild and crazy kid. (I: 581-586)

Various other experiences also formed her way of being. For example, getting "involved young in the native sisterhood, and in different aboriginal rituals that may not be from my nation; but being involved in sweats, working with women, these things helped me, made me feel good about what I am doing" (II: 86-89). A specific example she highlighted was when she was delivering newspapers for Kinesis (a feminist magazine) during the union solidarity movement in British Columbia. "I remember the big solidarity day march, and I was such a little kid; I had no idea of the magnitude, but it was such a big deal. I remember the paper and trying to tell my friend, 'come on, let's get going; oh my god

we've got to get down there, let's get this stuff delivered! And we'll head down to the march'" (I: 640-644). "All these things influence who you are" (I: 639). Later on she was "involved with some really ardent feminists, separatist lesbian women, at a really young age; I was probably about 16 or 17 when ...I got involved in feminist work.... I was just a kid" (I: 572-575).

It was like a therapy group, but it wasn't a therapy group. I was the kid amongst all these grown women. They were more experienced, they had come from all this class and privilege, but I was very much on the edge, just in your face, you know, asking questions, trying to understand, asking "what are you guys bitching about?" (I: 592-603)

Later, she worked as a child care worker which put issues about racism into sharp focus for her.

I worked as a child care worker at a West Vancouver house, and we had kids running away; they were aboriginal girls. I remember calling the police, when I first became house head manager....I must have been in my early 20s ... and it was during the punk time, right, so I must have looked like a punk! And the police asked me if they were aboriginal, and I said, "yeah, they are aboriginal," and he said "oh, they are probably out tipi hopping," and I remember I just said "what? You know...are you going to be able to do your job? You know, go and find them?" And he stopped, and then I called my director, the CEO of all the programs, and said, "you better talk to him, you're not going to believe what he said...and this is who we are sending out to go and look after our kids? They are supposed to go out there and look for them? They don't care if these kids are out there, and all it takes is one night out on that street and they can end up in all kinds of horrible situations, and it only takes one night! Come on, we are intervening right now!" Anyway he phoned; the cop was supposed to apologize to me but he never did. I went in with my director to complain, and of course it didn't help how I looked, right, it probably made things even worse! (I: 606-628)

She worked for four years in the school system as a First Nations support staff worker, during which time many people encouraged her to become a teacher (I: 245).

Initially she resisted because her own school experience had not been positive.

When I was a support worker, or even when I was in teacher education, you know if someone had said to me five years prior to that, "would you want to become a teacher?" I would have said, "hell would freeze over, choose that? That's a horrible place! Are you kidding, you want me to be a part of something that hurts our people?" (II: 397-400)

Although AL "wasn't really sold on whether or not to become a teacher, I realized this is where the power is, and how you could make changes, and influence stuff in a different

way” (I: 248-249). “I really did feel that there was a lot of possibility to work with students” (II: 35-36).

There was a point at which I felt that [by becoming a teacher] I could ... help facilitate that constant questioning of the world that we live in. And don't take everything for granted, and don't think you're comfortable, because there is always something unsettling that can happen. (II: 26-31)

She worked for six months as a teacher-on-call in Vancouver, including a long term teacher on call contract as an area counselor, then as a teacher for an alternate program for aboriginal children (I: 232). The latter was frustrating because she felt she was being marginalized, rather than being given the chance to teach mainstream classes.

Administration for some reason was unwilling to let her make that move. The experience of substitute teaching, however, was formative in that it helped her learn with what kind of kids she wanted to work.

I would get pulled out of really nice swanky classes where the kids thank you for teaching them... and get sent to classes where subs would have left crying, mainly because I never said no. But it definitely helped me understand more. That experience helped me decide where I wasn't going to teach, and where I was not going to go. The places I really liked were inner city schools, where there was hardly anything there, but the kids really appreciate what you do for them. (I: 195-201)

She taught secondary school, social studies and English, and elementary, grade six/seven. She taught for only five years in total, before “becoming a faculty associate, coordinating the indigenous people's teacher education module at Simon Fraser University for eight months” (II: 58-60). For the past three years she has been the assistant director for aboriginal education at the teachers' union.

Areas of activist work

AL works with students to carefully create anti-oppressive classrooms safe for all learners. With colleagues she helps many teachers to develop their understanding of

aboriginal issues. As a union activist and director, she helps develop and implement policies that acknowledge aboriginal issues, and address inequities.

Activist work with students

AL describes her goal of teaching with an activist mentality:

High school especially is a site, where, when kids trust that you really are genuine, that you really genuinely care about them, and you are really there, and you create space for them to engage in either some sort of critique of the system, or of themselves, or of what you teach, or of the curriculum that is being taught, they really can flourish and learn. (II: 408-412)

She thinks that “children should love coming to school, love learning,” because, like all people, they love “accomplishing things and having fun” (I: 110,112). She enjoys working with kids in less advantaged neighbourhoods because they really appreciate the teachers. Teaching these kids is great, not because “people have low expectations of you, rather, people have very high expectations of you and the children have high expectations of you because they know the rhetoric that is passed on out there about their schools and who they are in the world” (I: 211-214). The needs that these students have require the adults to advocate on their behalf. They know “how people perceive them, and say things such as ‘we’re receiving second-hand [books] from [another school]’... and so adults need to lobby. I think it is so important for us to make sure, for example, that these kids have new books that belong to them. Not somebody else’s second-hands, and I think that more than ever, these kids in this inner city world should have that” (I: 214-220).

In her own classroom, AL tried to create an anti oppressive space that was safe for all learners:

An analogy or metaphor I use is: this is my home. When you are being rude you are a guest in my house, you have to behave in a certain way.... As an educator, the things that cause me to get really upset are lying to me, or taking things from me, because I don’t go through your stuff and I won’t lie to you about anything. The other thing is bullying, or making negative or derogatory comments to your partners in the class. Those are really

the two things, right, because we have to create a safe place to learn, especially around the lying, or the stealing from each other; and the lying to each other and me; it causes harm, it causes mistrust, and it doesn't help our relationship. (I: 42-51)

I am really big on anti-oppression. I always say "you know, no-one is getting oppressed here, we already live in a world that we can't control, so let's create an environment that isn't going to do that, a place that really prides itself as an anti-oppression place to be." (I: 89-92)

To do that, she pays close attention to relationships among the students. As an example, one year there was a student with Asperger's syndrome (a form of autism) who was picked on by the other students:

What I noticed was a handful of the students picked on him right from the get-go, and so every time this happened I would stop the class, and we would re-focus the gaze onto what was going on, reflect it back on them, saying "OK, What is lacking in your life that you feel you can do this to another person?" It got to the point that they just stopped. (I: 56-61)

The mother of the child with Asperger's came to parent night:

His mother was crying... at first she was saying "I am really happy my son is with you" and then she just burst into tears. I said "oh my god, what is going on?" She said "this is the first time my son has come to school and has felt cared for, and felt safe. That he felt that he was in a classroom where the teacher has a sense of the inter-personal dynamics that are going on, and is paying attention, and is stopping things!" (I: 70-77)

AL believes this direct approach is effective. She concentrates on enhancing the quality of relationships amongst everyone in the room.

An example of a creative teaching and learning experience she facilitated was an all-candidates debate created and hosted by her grade seven class prior to a municipal election:

I got challenged by [Member of Parliament] Libby Davies who said, "you know Anna, I know what you can do, have an all candidates meeting! What better way to get parents in there, and have the kids do this, they will learn so much!" We had only two weeks, I said, "are you nuts?" And she said "nah, you can do it." Of course once the seed was planted, I couldn't put it away. So I worked with the grade sevens to actually plan this with them. The kids divided themselves into parties and learned what the political party platforms were, and the kids dug up information from previous municipal elections, and they came back and shared it with the class. Each party shared their information, which was so empowering because kids came and shared; they were horrified by the slashing and burning of program cuts to their inner city programs; they were horrified by the hot lunch

program being seen as a handout, that somehow they have this status that they are somehow not entitled to this very basic need. They became indignant that the adults who were in these elections in the past would be so cold as to get rid of multicultural workers; that they would want to get rid of youth and family workers; that they wanted to economize by not meeting the needs of special needs students. It was a good experience because the kids really did it themselves. One of the things that happened was the children translated the eight questions they had decided upon into Mandarin, Vietnamese, Spanish, Tagalog, and English...and then the kids asked the questions and translated the responses. Most of the parents there weren't illiterate, they could read, and if they couldn't the kids read the questions anyway in their language, and then the parents and each candidate could respond. The kids did it man, they organized it, it was very exciting. (I: 144-184)

When they debriefed the experience together, the kids said "what's next?!" and I said "that's [up to] you, man! What do you think" (I: 186)?

After some of the students enrolled in the local high school, they became "involved in some politics there," especially in a campaign to earthquake-proof the school. They still come back and visit, too, and other teachers who are still there tell me 'oh, so and so came back, wondered how you were doing'" (I: 188-191).

AL believes that introducing students to some activist experiences "is what teaching is all about, this is what it is supposed to be about. To me this is it" (I: 416). Such teaching challenges students to do critical thinking, emphasizes active learning, does not attempt to control the outcome, provides the group with greater autonomy in decision making, and enhances the relevance of the subject matter.

As an activist she is careful in the classroom "to be always vigilant and conscious, thinking, 'how am I steering them?' in an activity or discussion" (II: 419-421). She points out that "not all teachers ask themselves those questions. 'What are the implications of questions that I ask or don't ask? When we are studying Anne Frank, what do I ask? What's implicit in what I don't ask?' And we [teachers] are not taught that" (II: 422-424)! Over time this interrogative tendency became more complex, and "got stronger, as I

could see or experience a marginalization of myself both in teacher education, in graduate work, what community organization I work in, in my own family dynamic. [I think a lot about] why I pick certain things, why do I do this and what is the impact I have on these kids” (II: 425-432).

Activist work with colleagues

AL wants to share her expertise and experience with colleagues; for example, she took the idea of creating anti-oppression classrooms to her colleagues in the high school, seeking to implement these ideas more widely.

My colleagues said to me, “you know, Anna, you can’t control what happens to students; as soon as they leave your classroom, they are going to be back to their old behaviours.” And I listened to them and I said “you know they will be because you believe that about them.” And I said “why am I the only one who does this, why can’t we all do this? Why can’t we? What is it that stops us...from creating this safe place in high school?” (I: 93-99)

Underlying this advocacy was the belief that children’s feeling of safety should be paramount.

I came from a place that said kids aren’t going to learn if they’re not safe. And I really took it to heart when we did that school accountability accreditation survey where students filled out their needs. It was found that the primary need was safety; that over sixty percent of the student body felt unsafe in the school. For some reason that was not a number one priority for the admin staff, and I just said “why? Why isn’t this a priority?” (I: 102-107)

Although she experienced frustration with this particular staff group, she continues to believe that it is important to work with all colleagues, to get them to consider the importance of their actions, or lack of action, as the case may be:

I think it is important to model and encourage my colleagues to think about how, when they make decisions, they affect the children in the community, and their parents. (I: 28-30)

AL spends quite a bit of time reflecting on her interaction with others, including colleagues.

I think one of the really critical things for me in the classroom is to really engage students in their environments, to engage them in their communities, and with parents, and with my colleagues, who may or may not come from similar backgrounds. I'm constantly teasing out or trying to sift through what's mine and what's not around working with colleagues who may...have beliefs or biases or values from when they were growing up as children, or when they were going through the public system. Their experience is going to be different...and they don't necessarily live in the communities they teach in. (I: 19-26)

She spends time trying to find common ground with them and to move them to see the world of the children they teach more clearly.

Activist work with the union

Her current position as a program director with the provincial teachers' union provides opportunities to work with colleagues, pursue policy development and implementation, and bring aboriginal issues to the fore. Her instinct to interrupt status quo modes is apt for the position.

She has the idea of incorporating as many aboriginal colleagues into the policy creation process as possible. To do so she actively enables the Aboriginal Education Committee to work effectively in the union. She describes her colleagues on the committee as "really strong" (II: 450). "If I got sick, or if I had to leave early for whatever reason... any one of them could come in. I'm really confident in those people; they could pick it up, because they know what the pressing issues are. Even though amongst them there is a lot of diversity, there's some common ground that we've been able to have" (II: 483-487). If I'm "getting out of line, they can certainly remind me, [it is a great working relationship,]...we have our own way of conducting and being" (II: 451-452). The committee operates on the premise that there are "great allies and supports out there; ... there's some really active coalition work that takes place, there's some common ground, and so it's been really exciting" (II: 184-187).

The process of transferring from a classroom to the union head office was quite challenging as she re-framed her activism to this new context. Initially AL didn't find a natural fit for her way of working:

At first I felt a little bit like a fraud, somehow. I was asking myself: "what am I doing here? This isn't where transformation takes place! This isn't where we can move, and to make space here." There were some tensions there for me. I was coming here with experience, and I can speak from experience and with authority, and I felt I still had that for about six months, and then after that it was: "forget it, you're like the rest of us!" (II: 133-139)

"I went through a period where I said to myself, 'OK, I'm here. I need to figure out how to negotiate space and move agendas, and get the word out, and try to talk to people,' and things like this, it was really challenging" (II: 144-148). But she spent time learning how to work in the new environment, and found ways to make her way of thinking and acting work there as well. "I had to keep flipping and turning my understandings of what I was to do in this job...I realized I couldn't change their perceptions and needed to find a way to make common space.... I had to shake it up a bit, not to hurt people but to find places to say, 'Look! This is from experience, this is what is happening out there and we need to respond in a different way, we can't use the same old methods, they just aren't working'" (II: 139-143). She understands now that it is her job to be the disruptor, but that doesn't always move smoothly because it means change throughout the organization if historical injustices towards aboriginal people are to be sincerely addressed.

Facilitating and constraining factors

AL reports that her skills of working with people, public speaking, and of negotiating consensus were improved through practice. "There are certainly skills that I acquired from working with other teacher activists, or other activists outside of teaching, but certainly there was some honing of skills that I may have had, but didn't use. ... For

example, as I engaged in public speaking all the time that got better” (II: 41-45). She also quickly learned the importance of negotiating for initiatives in aboriginal education. She recalled her first attempt at a bargaining conference:

Someone came in and said, “Oh, Anna, you’ve got to talk to so and so [because] they’re going to try to block this,” and I said, “well, why don’t you?” And he said, “no you’ve got to do it ... because I’m scared too!” Well, I hadn’t done it before either, but I said, “OK, I get it.” Then I went up to the person and just said “how are you doing, can I have a minute of your time, would you mind, can we go outside, can I talk to you outside?” And then I just opened with the concern, saying “I heard this, I want to ... find out if it is valid, and I am here to seek clarification from you as to what you need to be able to support this. What are your concerns? What are your feelings? Maybe we can ameliorate that together.” The person would say “Oh, OK!” and they didn’t block it. (I: 410-417)

These early experiences gradually led to an effective way of working. For example:

Over the years, people expected me to lobby table to table at the AGM, saying, “you know this is what we’re doing, can we count on you for support?” or “this is what we are doing, this is who I am, we have a little committee, you know there’s only 300 aboriginal teachers, we need allies, can we count on you?” ... And people say “Oh, yeah,” or, “well, I don’t think so, because we are unclear on this still,” or “Ok, thanks for letting us know.” (I: 427-433)

Her primary strategy for challenging status quo thinking is through questioning or clarifying. “I take every opportunity to ask questions, and seek clarification and put my concerns out. If I don’t do that they may get sidelined, or become a fringe sort of thing” (II: 495-497). Her questions are designed to help people realize who or what is being ignored in a debate. If she hears something objectionable, she says: “I need clarification; this is how I’ve interpreted what you are saying; is that your message” (II: 534-535)? The clarification she is seeking is sometimes uncomfortable for those who are in denial about racism and the legacy of colonialism, and who skirt these issues out of discomfort, or ignore them because of unfamiliarity. “People are afraid to talk about racism or the legacy of colonialism, but I think it is important to bring it out. It is easy to deny it and pretend it’s not happening, but I think there are ways to do it. I know many people who just go in there, and stir things up, and say ‘well you are all a bunch of...,’ but that is not

a way to effectively transform people's thinking" (II: 529-531). She finds that adding subtlety or complexity to the discussion by seeking clarification early on is an effective way to move the discussion. She uses an inquiring mindset to guide her action: "It doesn't mean I have to stir it up all the time, but it means I have to be thinking, [for example,] 'who's not here? You set the table, and who isn't here'" (II: 520-522)? Her questioning method differs in its style depending on the audience. Within classrooms, union meetings, and committees, she is often direct, and will confront ideas publicly. With individuals, she tailors her questioning of behaviour or assumptions to preserve their comfort, by means of a private chat. If it is too uncomfortable to confront in a meeting, sometimes she will speak to individuals before a meeting or during a coffee break.

As an activist who speaks publicly and intervenes, she is sometimes very bold. We attended the anti-free trade area of the Americas protests in Quebec City in 2001 with a delegation of provincial teacher unionists, and she was the one among us who marched to the microphone and raised concerns with some of the organizers over what she perceived to be a lack of aboriginal content in the alternate summit. It was obvious that she walked with purpose and power and articulated an issue that many were ignoring. When the rest of the delegation was feeling out of their element and wondering how to participate, she knew what to do. She reports that it was a moment when her purpose was very clear to her. "I'm always exposed in a way; I think there is a point at which you just have to state [your objection to the organized structure that is excluding you,] even if it sounds ridiculous, even if it sounds obvious" (I: 119-121).

One thing that annoys AL is how aboriginal issues need to be constantly brought to the forefront. She was hired by the union to do this, but nonetheless, is astonished by the uphill nature of the work. At times there is lip service and no action, or inconsistently evolving or fluid intentions. “It is as if it is the flavour of the year [instead of structural self examination,] so I find it at times frustrating and annoying” (II: 232-233). She finds half-hearted implementation of positive change “when policy is set in place, not just in our organization, but also [in government ministries,] in band politics, in teacher education, it is everywhere; there are traditions that are held on to deeply, and when we try to challenge or question them, we’re squashed” (II: 234-237).

Oftentimes AL feels she has to be physically present at a meeting to make sure the aboriginal agenda moves forward, because little ownership is taken by other people for aboriginal issues.

If I’m not there at a meeting, aboriginal issues would not be on the table. I think that is something that’s a tension within the union and social justice work; we are all complicit in it, we all play into this. (II: 148-153)

She and the aboriginal education committee recommended, for example, that the union adopt a policy that at the start of its annual union meetings there be public acknowledgement of the land that the meeting is taking place on, which in British Columbia is often un-ceded traditional territory. Despite this policy she continues to feel that:

there is no ownership taken. I think: “look, we inherited a collective shared history here; it’s not just mine, it is yours too; and how we participate in this together has impact; we can transcend [the problems], but we’ve got to do it together, we [aboriginal people] can’t do it alone.” It seems like if I’m not in the room, or if I’m not here, no one will do the acknowledgement [of un-ceded traditional territory]! (II: 307-313)

Although this may be viewed as a token gesture, AL thinks it is a valuable first step. To get policy compliance, she does not criticize “in public, but goes to the side and says to

the person, 'oh, I wonder if you might want to consider adding'... or 'I think there was something left off; I didn't want to bring it up because this [agenda] may be a draft, but perhaps we could remember it is policy to acknowledge traditional territory'" (II: 317-321). Evidence of change is that "this year, I've had many people coming to me and saying 'Anna, can you find out who is in this or that particular territory?' I mean, it is really on some level tokenistic, but I'm happy that there are these questions, because prior to that it was exhausting" (II: 314-317).

Another example of AL's work is in planning how to "to infuse and embed aboriginal equity in all of our work, in collective bargaining, in grievances, and in legal aspects of our union" (II: 270-272). She attempts to help the union recognize that just creating a program or hiring a staff person is not adequate. For example, many aboriginal women teachers are also mothers and community leaders, and when someone dies, for example, they have traditional responsibilities for food preparation and other ceremonial functions. AL believes that leave provisions for kinship duties should be negotiated into the collective agreements.

I think that we in our western eurocentric ways also need to make some space for that. And I think that to find places to make that more palatable, would reduce stress on these women, who are primary breadwinners, who have children that they have to watch, plus teach, plus do their tribal duties. (II: 356-359)

The union needs to accommodate particularities like this within contract negotiations, thereby rejecting an implicit attitude that says to aboriginals "you fit into our system by trying to find some happy space in the middle" (II: 377-378). Various forms of support have to be addressed in order to respect aboriginal teachers and their communities. A challenging aspect is the extent to which she has to play into the union's politics for moving decisions forward. "It annoys me how there are conditions upon which

participation or support is put forward, or the support is not sustained” (II: 261-262).

Such politics are based on the attitude that “‘you are either with us or against us,’ which is something I find offensive in our organization. I think you can’t even have public debate on some things without being fearful that you are going to be put in a box” (II: 247-249). She dislikes the practice where an advocate for an issue arranges for his or her allies within the organization to vote in a particular way, thereby showing disrespect for debate; “in that process people feel betrayed, compromised, hurt, and that they haven’t been heard. There also hasn’t been a real hashing [out of the issue] because people are afraid to talk about it” (II: 525-529).

A main barrier to advancing aboriginal issues within the union is people’s unexamined and unearned privilege. By this she means that many people unwittingly speak or act in an exclusionary way towards aboriginals, or subtly assume superiority. “The non-questioning of unearned privilege is so common. I have to be doubly aware of it in coalition work; I have to really be thinking five to ten steps ahead to understand where this is going, and ask questions that open it up more deeply, so that it isn’t just one way” (II: 263-265). Although it is challenging to broach this subject of assumed privilege, people need to realize that if “you are somebody who represents the mainstream, and you understand the inner workings of collective bargaining and grievance work, you [also] need to fully understand white privilege, and to understand who you are in the world.... If you are white you automatically have unearned privilege, just by your very presence” (II: 387-392).

Another frustration is when aboriginal teachers want to maintain the status quo:

They do not want to be seen, they want to stay invisible and say “I’m a teacher, I’m not an activist, I’m not a rabble rouser, I like to be only concerned about this,” in a one dimensional way. There are not that many, but certainly I know they’re out there, who

would like to keep teaching as if it is non-political. Those teachers, both aboriginal or non aboriginal, can be cause for some tensions for me, especially if they are in positions to really create and facilitate some change. And they just squander it. They just want to maintain the status quo; it drives me nuts. (II: 334-342)

Despite various frustrations, work with the union has been positive: “I feel really privileged, and have just been so advantaged by doing this work. “As annoying as it gets,” AL sees the value of answering all “the questions, all of these things that people need to have [explained to them.]” She thinks it is important for the union to be on this reconciliatory path with aboriginal people, and tries to “remain optimistic, hopeful,” and confident that her impact is being felt in the organization (II: 171).

AL has several friends who are teacher activists, as well as family members and non-teachers who are her active support system. “There are three or four people that I regularly talk to ...especially if it is in different areas. There’s my own family group as well, and then there are a few white teachers, who, instead of trying to make sense of the organization myself, [I can ask about] some corporate history. I may ask ‘how did we get here? Because I wasn’t here for this, when did it change?’” (II: 537-544)?

Summary

AL brings an anti-colonial mindset to current issues, and is not afraid to interrupt and interrogate status quo thinking. Her primary strategy is to insert her concerns and questions early in whatever debate is going on, and thereby opening up the discussion. Her inquisitiveness extends to herself, which gives her a high degree of self-awareness in her work. She is aware of her between-cultures identity, finding it gives her nimbleness to help others also understand how to move forward together.

Effectiveness comes from a style which is to be firm and clear but not confrontational. She listens to what people are saying, acknowledges their thoughts, and

if she differs, challenges them in a clear, example-laden, and gentle way, often with humour. This is an effective method to get people on side, although some are uneasy with its directness. Its efficacy lies in its emphasis on the exchange of ideas and on interrupting status quo thinking while inviting people to think differently.

All three theorists' conceptions of activism in teaching are evident in AL's work and thinking, particularly Giroux's transformative intellectual. Her thoughtful analysis of her own identity and the changes she believes need to happen in schools require her to engage politically and professionally. She questions authority and status quo thinking as she problematizes the need for more awareness of colonialism's lingering effects. She is in a constant process of analysis that leads to action that in turn helps to clarify her ideas. She also relies on and reinforces the authority of networks to facilitate her activist work (Sachs, 1993), and has a very strong sense of moral purpose and inquiry (Fullan, 1993).

James Freeman (JF)

There's one quote in my head that has always guided me in my social justice work and I say it a lot to other people when they say: "oh, I can't do anything, I'm just one person." I say the Margaret Mead quote, "never doubt that a small group of individuals can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has." I totally live by that, and [yes]...it empowers the little group, but it [also] empowers the individual to see themselves as being able to make change, they are not frozen in apathy or fear or whatever it is that immobilizes them. (II: 767-774)

This grade three teacher and prominent gay activist has taught kindergarten and the early primary grades for 15 years in Surrey, Richmond and Vancouver, large urban school districts. He has been active in GALE, the provincial gay and lesbian educators' association, helping to build its efficacy to support gay and lesbian teachers and students. He has also been involved in various task forces and initiatives to publish resources supporting gay and lesbian, bi-sexual and trans-gendered educators and students, and has

been instrumental in developing queer-friendly anti-harassment policies that are being implemented in some school districts. He fought the Surrey School Board up to the Supreme Court of Canada in his bid to have three age-appropriate books that depict a positive view of same-sex parent families approved for use in kindergarten classrooms. He is keenly aware of the need to constantly seek out allies and plan political moves astutely in his work as an activist.

Rationale for activist work

To do effective work, JF says “you have to work from your place of passion, and that’s where you put most of your time and energy” (I: 137-138). Motivation for his activist work is rooted in his formative experiences as a student: “One of the reasons I am so passionate about the activist work that I do is because school was utter hell for me” (I: 351-352). This was because “I was really bullied a lot as a kid for being gay, or for being perceived to be gay” (I: 342-343). Even as an adult, he “still experiences discomfort, walking into a secondary school, or if he sees a group of teenagers coming down the street, he crosses to the other side. Rationally it doesn’t make sense,” but fear persists (I: 343-347).

He also recognizes that “if you’re too emotionally entangled into a social justice issue, then you can’t be an effective advocate” (I: 361-363). Through self -reflection, he has gone through a maturing process towards becoming an effective advocate and an effective teacher.

In the first couple of years of teaching, [I couldn’t, but] now I can [respond effectively] if [a] kid says ‘fag’ or whatever in the hallway, I can deal with that and talk with the student either in a group situation or one on one, and I’m not personally offended, it has nothing to do with me, and I can separate myself from the situation, to debrief what the actual situation is there, but in my early years of teaching I couldn’t make that separation. (I: 357-361)

JF points out that “what you’re exposed to, through oppression, or family modeling, or friends or community organizations, or whatever, it all shapes who you are and what you become as a social activist” (II: 77-79). Whereas some activists come from family histories of activism and “progressive” thinking, he came from a very conservative family. He contends that

If you’re raised around people who model being committed to social justice issues, then it becomes ingrained as part of your personality. My family wasn’t, there’s nobody in my family that’s a social justice activist, really, and so that was never modeled for me.... My family has always voted for the conservative party, as they are socially and fiscally conservative. (II: 38-46)

As he says, “[they] don’t talk politics in [his] family” (II: 65).

He was studying agriculture in university, with no intention of becoming a teacher, when an experience there changed his career path:

I initially went to university to be a veterinarian. I wanted to get into pre-vet, but my marks weren’t high enough, so I did my degree in agriculture, and ended up working at the research farm at UBC. One of the things I pushed for was having practica for the second year university students in the barns, because there were so many kids coming through the program that didn’t know the front end of an animal from the back end of an animal. Oh yeah, it was appalling! These kids were smart, they were from the city, and they wanted to be a dog and cat vet ...yet from my own course experience with them, when they were talking in the classes and giving their ideas, they were from mars! [I would think] “have you ever been on a farm?” I didn’t say it to them, but I thought that often, so I pushed for them to have mandatory practica. I worked with a couple of professors in one specific course, which was required for all agriculture students in their second year, and so I started teaching practicum students in the barns.... And that was how I started getting interested in being a teacher, ...I left there and worked for the aquarium for two years with school programs, working with school aged kids elementary aged kids; and that’s how I ended up going into teaching. (I: 388-412)

Although he was inspired by his rapport with young children when instructing them, the decision to work in the institution where he had faced abuse as a child was difficult.

I just happened into teaching 10 years after working in another profession. It wouldn’t have been my first choice of a profession when I graduated from university, and so to go into it, was like going back to [my] childhood, to the abusive situation. (I: 352-357)

Like many new teachers, at that time, JF's career got off to a rocky start, as it was difficult to get a continuing contract in the field.

1992 was my first year of teaching, and I subbed for three years in Richmond.... [I had] short term contracts here and there, but I couldn't get anything to sink my teeth into, so friends kept saying to me, "go to Surrey, go to Surrey, there are jobs there." I got bumped out of a classroom in Richmond that I [had] started up and it was October, and [so] I thought [forget it,] I'm going to Surrey, and I got a job in a week. I fluked into primary, because I was an intermediate-trained teacher, and I was terrified of the little ones, [but] somebody persuaded me to do a three week stint in their grade one class, and I did it, and I loved it. Then I went back to school and got kindergarten curriculum and instruction courses, and that's how I got my foot in the door for kindergarten. [Now] I've been doing kindergarten or grade one for the last 10 years. (I: 426-436)

After moving to Surrey, he has been at nine different schools, although his first three years there account for six of the schools, which was a difficult period. He taught Kindergarten for ten years, a mixed ESL and regular class in the morning; and ESL Kindergarten in the afternoon. He now teaches grade three at a school attended by the children of South and East Asian immigrants in a working class neighbourhood.

He became an activist after becoming a teacher, and because of being a teacher.

Before I was a teacher, I wasn't an activist at all, not one iota. I never went on a march, I never handed out a pamphlet, I never did a thing, never, not even in my university days. So I think it was, going into teaching ... the idealism of changing the world and helping kids, and [so on,] that was the initial motivator. But I think what motivated me to do the anti-homophobia work and other work in teaching, was seeing how kids treat one another on the playground, in the hallways, and in places where they're not normally watched a lot by teachers. (II: 214-222)

After witnessing abusive behaviour in the school halls, JF saw an opportunity and a new path for his life:

I felt like a child when I was a teacher 'cause I still had to deal with childhood issues that had nothing to do with teaching per se, but the teaching environment triggered these childhood issues from bad school experiences. That forced me to look at social justice issues in a slightly different way, not as a victim, but as the person who could effect change. [I thought,] how could I effect change in a way where I wasn't reacting based on my own personal shock at the kids' behaviour, like flying off the handle and yelling and screaming saying "you will not talk to an other person that way, that's so

disrespectful!”... [I found myself] moving over a number of years, to a point where I now say “well, why are you talking that way to another person?” getting them to unpack their thinking. I’m getting better at it. (II: 280-291)

The process of becoming a teacher and an activist was also conflated with his own struggle to be an out gay teacher. His experiences while “coming out were a partial motivator” (II: 224-5).

I came out a few years before that, but I sort of came out in a bigger way about a year before I became a teacher, and I went into the closet to do my teacher training.... I [mean I] struggled, I tried to go into the closet during my teacher training, but I wasn’t successful at it. But then I had to go into the closet during my first year of teaching in Surrey, because when I was in Richmond for the first three years I was out, as a [teacher-on-call], and that created very interesting dynamics in different schools with different colleagues. ... I think it contributed to why I never got a job in Richmond, ‘cause this was in the early 90’s, you know, more than 10 years ago. [As a result,] I forced myself to go into the closet for one year in Surrey, until I got my [successful] evaluation, and then I came out to my principal the next day. (II: 229-238)

A key feature of growing into activism was a deepening awareness of the possibilities for engaging with issues in the classroom:

I grew into [activism] by embarrassment, of not having done anything beforehand. And there’s one, actually a couple, of role models who kind of indirectly spurred my guilt into making me do something. (II: 323-326)

One of the role models was a teacher in the teacher-training program he completed at the local university.

We were talking about sexism in the class, and she was talking about how you need to challenge kids whenever you see that opportunity in the classroom. And I said, “Whenever you see it?” But, you know, she was encouraging us to effect change. I put up my hand and said “you know what? As a first year teacher, I’m going to be so busy teaching math and language arts and all this stuff, I’m not going to have time for this!” WOW, what a reaction! Holy cow did we hear about it! The whole class heard about a half an hour [lecture] about why it was important to deal with sexism and how, and examples. I was so utterly embarrassed because it wasn’t that I was “the patriarchal, I’m-not-dealing-with-this-shit” thing as a male; it was that I truly didn’t think I could actually effect change in my first year of teaching; I didn’t think I could actually do it. She gave an example for primary teachers, of when you are teaching about [prehistory], you can deconstruct the cave man, cave woman roles, (dragging her along by the hair,) and the cartoons, and I was [thinking], “oh my god, I’d never seen the cartoons as being a moment for teaching.” Or when you’re a kid watching cartoons, you never deconstruct them saying “that’s really sexist,” you just see it and think that’s what cave men and women did, right? I was really embarrassed by that but it also made me really feel guilty

that I hadn't done anything, having grown up in a very constraining social fabric. (II: 326-348)

So that was how, as a gay man, a new teacher, shocked by what he has seen, newly aware of his power as a teacher to influence children's attitudes, and goaded by role models to action, JF launched himself into the activist world.

His first area of activist work was within the GALE organization (Gay and Lesbian Educators).

My social justice work started within GALE, before it started in the classroom. Because [there] I worked with [some] men and women to try to open up GALE and make it more democratic and make it run in a way that was not hierarchical; where things were based on consensus, and so there was a lot of work internally, changing the organization. (II: 251-254)

Working within GALE...was one of the primary motivators for making change. Initially, when I joined GALE, it was like this closeted gay men's tea party. People would do social things, they would get together...but they actually never did anything to effect change. (II: 240-246)

He now sees that as a formative experience, and reports that "[GALE] started to have a name and an image, and we started to bring motions forward to the [teacher union provincial] annual general meeting, so my social justice work actually started within that community organization, I'd say in tandem with working in the classroom. Now I would say it's primarily in the classroom, and in building coalitions with other organizations to make change" (II: 258-262).

Areas of activist work

JF has been able to extend his activism into a range of arenas, working with students, colleagues, administrators, curriculum, activists, the teachers' union and other organizations.

Working with students

The teaching profession fits well with the role of the activist. As a teacher in public school, one is afforded access to a large segment of society because “there’s a broad cross-section of people in public schools that you’re going to encounter through parents or students or colleagues; you’re going to encounter pretty much any kind of personality” (II: 141-143). This activist teacher makes his sphere of influence very large.

As a teacher, I think I have a lot of opportunities for influence that I wouldn’t have as an individual, ‘cause [I] come into contact with so many people in the system, parents and community members, building bridges with allies, and like-minded community groups. So I think being a teacher helps to facilitate social justice work a lot more than if you were just an individual working within a smaller organization out in the sea of the world, trying to make change. Sometimes it’s more frustrating because the school system is so conservative and you feel like you have to spend a lot of time nurturing people to make incremental change, but I think it’s a profession that lends itself well to social justice work. (II: 130-138)

Activism is an integral part of good teaching. He explains that “teaching ‘activist topics’ is part of just teaching kids to become responsible citizens...[who will be] part of the planet, and [able to make] positive contributions” (I: 30-34). His role as a “primary teacher is to plant the [social justice] ideas, which will hopefully take root with certain kids later in life” (I: 176-177). He defines “activism in teaching as anything that challenges the status quo” (I: 13-14).

In his early years of teaching, he separated activism and teaching more than now because he “didn’t really give kids credit for being able to get it: that is, to be critical thinkers. Now, as a more experienced teacher, [he is] always looking at ways to hook social justice issues into what [he] teaches” (I: 143-147). His goal is to teach kids to be critical thinkers, or to teach them to question authority; to teach them to be curious about the world, ask lots of questions, make informed decisions for themselves and their families, and not to just “swallow things hook line and sinker” because the teacher said it

(I: 70-73). He embeds social justice issues into the curriculum, and into assessment of the students' learning.

A simple example of activism would be to teach about sexism in Kindergarten: it's something kids need to know in an age appropriate way, but it makes people go a bit crazy. And it's something everyone should be just teaching as a part of their commitment to social justice issues...and embedding it into whatever they do already. (I: 17-22)

He tells a story that illustrates how he has taught about sexism in an age-appropriate way, and the results seen in the kids:

This year I was [teaching a lesson] on gender roles, and we looked at what the jobs were of men and boys at home and women and girls at home. We were doing a Venn diagram, and it started to become very sexist in its layout. Then I started to pick pieces from either side and say: "well what about this one, can only girls or women do it?" Or, "can only boys or men do it?" [This] got them debating and arguing. Initially they were all just buying it hook line and sinker, and then I talked about my own experience in the 70's as a child and what the roles and responsibilities of myself and my sister were. They came to see that most things were actually in the middle and not on either side of the Venn diagram. Then I told them what sexism was, and that in the 70's and 80's sexism was predominant, and now it's mostly equality that is predominant, even though it really isn't in the real world, but [in] kindergarten, we're trying to show them "this is the nirvana boys and girls, this is where we're heading." And I didn't think a number of them got it, but then a couple of weeks later, we were talking about something else, and one kid said "that's like when you were born in 1981 and there was sexism!" [This was when we were discussing] a completely different topic but it was related to sexism...and he made a connection. (I: 152-167)

However, in doing this work, teachers need to be conscious about their power to influence student thinking.

If I phrase things in a certain way, they will agree with me. Primary kids will agree with you; all you have to do is change the tone of your voice, and ask a question in a slightly different way, and the majority of them will agree with you. So we have a lot of power as teachers, we have a lot of ability to make them think and we have a lot of power to make them not think and just follow. I think there are far too many sheep in the world, in schools and in society. (I: 87-92)

When deciding on unit plans that may include controversial content, he also goes through a process of analysis. For example, the question he asks himself is "how much heat will I take for teaching them this? Sometimes I say to myself: 'I am really passionate about this and this is really important to me, [and so I'll do it]'; and sometimes I decide, 'OK, well,

not with this group, or not this year, or not this climate.’ I don’t do everything I would like to do every year” (I: 203-208).

Another example of activist teaching in the context of a conservative school is as follows:

Something as simple as... having kids self-evaluate in [the] personal planning [course], for instance, is activist in that setting. The kids are going to question things ...like defining their rights and responsibilities. I’m going to get the kids to do that. I’m going to get the kids to establish the class rules, but in my current school culture, those are activist kind of [moves.]... I think my colleagues won’t like it because when those kids go to the next grade they may question something. (I: 48-57)

JF summarizes these thoughts with this comment: “I think whenever you challenge [the] status quo you get action and reaction. I want kids to become actors instead of reactors in their own lives” (I: 27-28).

Working with colleagues

JF thinks “the [teaching] profession is pretty conservative and conformist” (I: 16-17). There “are not too many teachers out there that have a true social justice approach to their teaching... [they] are few and far between” (I: 500-502). For example, he points out that “you can put up a bulletin board display... or read a few books that have positive representations of people of colour, but if that’s all you are ever doing, you’re just doing tokenism, you’re not actually effecting change at the root issues” (II: 26-29). Colleagues are generally supportive of “fostering a child in another country, or supporting a literacy initiative in a developing country, or the milquetoast sort of stuff; generally teachers jump on board and as long as you arrange it.... We’ll have our classes donate or raise money or whatever. If it’s simple and doesn’t involve much of their time, they are generally on board; if it asks them to question their own practice, or examine their own practice, generally I get heat for it, or they just ignore it” (I: 224-231).

So, working as an activist is not always easy. “I see it as part of a larger movement, but often it feels isolated. I’ve been in about 10 schools, and in the majority of those schools, I’ve been seen as Mr. Racism, Mr. Sexism, Mr. Homophobia, and colleagues kind of roll their eyes sometimes” (I: 222-224). There are various reasons that colleagues decline involvement. “I’ve found the resistance comes from people thinking more work is going to be loaded on them; it’s a workload issue for some people, and for others it’s the content” (I: 498-500). Homophobia is a difficult content area for some teachers:

There’s still a level of discomfort around discussing the topic and examining what it really means in their classroom practice or in their school...or in their life. A lot of people have internalized homophobia. And they won’t say to you that they don’t think gay people should get married, and they’ll be nice to you at school; but in reality they prefer that we don’t get married....There’s a lot of underlying covert homophobia that still exists. Homophobia is not as easy as dealing with the issue of sexism. I think racism is the easiest of the oppressions, because everyone agrees you shouldn’t call another kid a name because of their skin colour. Even the racist teachers know it’s not politically correct, so they won’t allow it, because then they’d be seen for who they really are, but the issues of sexism and homophobia are difficult in schools. (I: 589-604)

Another reason for lack of involvement is teachers’ dislike of conflict. “They want everybody to be harmonious and get along, especially elementary teachers” (I: 574). But the problem with this is that “we don’t live in a world like that, it’s an unrealistic social construct. So let’s teach kids how to deal with one another in a variety of ways, because we are not all going to get along” (I: 575-580). His strategy is to nudge reluctant colleagues to confront homophobia by engaging in small concrete actions. For example:

There are new posters from the BCTF saying “that’s so gay” with a red circle through it; [They] say “homophobia free zone” on the top. And they’ve just been produced. So I’m going to go around to all the intermediate teachers and ask them to put one up in their classrooms, and have a discussion about it. For my school that will be a really big activist thing, to go around and ask them to do that in September or October, setting the tone in their classroom. I figure I’ve been there long enough now, that I can ask people, but it will create a bit of a stink with certain people. (I: 232-239) It’s almost like holding a kindergarten child’s hand through a process, and then saying to them afterwards, “look, I

knew you could do it, you said you couldn't do it! But you could do it, look at you!" It's almost like that with adults. (I: 662-668)

Teachers' acceptance, endorsement or even active support depends upon how they perceive the activist as a colleague:

They buy in while you are on staff, and if you keep beating your drum for whatever the issue is, if you are seen as someone who gets along with them. If you are seen as a political upstart, or a person who is trying to push an agenda, or you're in their face, then they won't help you no matter what. But if they like you...and you're fun, and you can joke with them, then you can get them to put up a poster in [their] room, you can get them to do this or that little token thing, but generally they are not out there as social justice activists for the good of the world. (I: 643-650)

However, most of his activist work is not enacted within his own work place. He looks beyond that arena to effect change.

I would say that I spend a lot of time on advocacy work, educating colleagues about the political process of getting things done. I spend more time on that than I spend teaching in my classroom. The hours that I spend in evenings and weekends, with all the organizations and meetings; it's all largely politics. It's all facilitating ways to get the work done through whatever channel, within whatever organization, so you can effect change. A lot of it is politics, a lot of it is semantics, and a lot of it is repeated, repeated, repeated discussion, until the people you're working with get it, or have a certain degree of comfort with it so they will actually go "OK, we can do that now, oh my god we made a difference!" (I: 657-662)

Working with curriculum

Descriptors of learning outcomes required by the curriculum lend themselves to social justice teaching. For example, "the good thing about social responsibility performance standards is that because everybody is so buzzed up about them right now in education, they're an excellent tool for doing social justice work. And that's a good motivator for me; it's a good way of doing social justice work and legitimizing it" (I: 314-317). He always "justifies activist work through its connections to the curriculum," and to the program he is teaching (I: 488-490). This coming year he plans to use the new social responsibility performance standards with students. "I'm going to have them self-evaluate using the standards. In our school the standards are not used in many

classrooms, and most teachers don't even want to consider kids doing self-assessment" (I: 39-44).

Working with administrators

Administrators like stuff that looks good for the school. They love multicultural week, Diwali [Indian festival of light] celebrations in your classroom, where you invite the parents; they like the tokenism stuff, but they don't like the stuff that digs deeper to the core issues. And I think a lot of teachers are like that too. (I: 490-495)

Generally, activist work in the school is not facilitated by management; they shy away from dealing with controversial issues. JF is "disappointed in the lack of leadership on social justice issues on the part of people in power, ie: principals, vice principals, superintendents, ministers of education. On all social justice issues, there's a real appalling lack of leadership and wisdom" (I: 305-308). This doesn't mean there aren't some people with power who aren't grateful for some of his activist work, as in the instance of the principal who was appreciative about how he had dealt with the kids using the word 'fag' in his classroom.

He now has a strategy for work with administrators. When moving to a new school, for example, "[he] sees [his] role as interviewing the administrator just as much as they are interviewing [him]:"

Some of them don't like it. I always save my questions to the end, and my questions are hard questions. And you can tell by how red in the face they are or by how uncomfortable they are whether they're being honest or not, whether they're a straight-shooter kind of person. And if I get a sense they aren't, I think, "no way, I'm not working there"...I think because of my social justice work in the district some administrators and colleagues would see me more as a hindrance than a help. (I: 463-473)

It is necessary to work with administrators, colleagues, union, government, and boards to implement real changes. So, no matter how frustrating or maddening it may be, JF points out that this difficult work is important:

If you work within the system, and you have supportive people at the highest levels of the system, then you can make amazing change, because it gives people permission to

legitimize the social justice issue, whatever it is. So if they know, [for example,] that the district has a multiculturalism and anti-racism policy, and that the district supports anti-racism...then teachers will do it, they won't be scared. (I: 566-572)

Working outside of school

Because of the frustrations of trying to do work in the school with colleagues and management, JF spends a great deal of time working with outside organizations to achieve his activist goals. He first started getting involved at the school district level through:

the political action public relations committee, that was my first, and then the 'resolutions committee' for the BCTF AGM. A number of the actions that we took in the early days were as a result of motions we took forward to the BCTF AGM for them to recognize homophobia and heterosexism as problems in the schools; that was in 1997, and that was kind of ground-breaking for Canada (I: 122-127)

After that, JF's activist work ballooned. He recites a litany of involvements:

I've done a lot of work in anti-homophobia education. I've been involved in challenging my school board about resources for use in schools and I sued my school board through a court case to the Supreme Court of Canada, which was successful. I've done a lot of work through the BCTF, and through my local, where I've been a social justice representative for five years or so, and working with gay and lesbian educators for 15 years on resource development and workshops for teachers. At the BCTF, I am one of the professional development facilitators for anti-homophobia workshops and I've done that for the BCTF for about five years. I've done workshops in GALE (Gay and Lesbian Educators) for about 12 years. I'm currently on the Vancouver school board's "pride advisory committee," which I've done for the last two years. There we've developed a lesbian gay bisexual, trans-gendered policy that's been passed by the board, and a comprehensive action plan; and [since then] we've been working on the action plan components for all schools in Vancouver. I also co-chair a national committee on homophobia and schools through EGALÉ, a national group in Ottawa. (I: 104-121)

He also works to educate parents, and to do so in ways that will be politically effective.

I'm working with a parent right now on facts and myths to do with anti-homophobia education for parents. The Safe Schools Centre is going to produce it, but we are going to write it, and then they are going to put their stamp on it. It is going to go out from that organization because I said it can't go from GALE, it will look like we are trying to influence the parents! Yeah, it's really important to have allies, and it's important to listen to other people's perspectives, too, because I've learned a lot. (II: 574-579)

Working with activists

Particularly important are his attempts to help other activists accomplish their work, coaching them through the various tasks required to get things done, and building coalitions with organizations to make change.

For example, I'm working with a guy in a rural school district and we're bringing forward a sexual minority policy to their board, and that's a huge thing for them to do that. And I'm working with people in Prince George and Victoria and people from the Vancouver school board. After these many years of social justice work, I'm seeing my role as helping others to facilitate change in their regions. (II: 261-267)

He has also depended upon the larger community of activists for support. For example:

I would have quit teaching if I hadn't been a part of GALE. GALE provided me with the friendship and emotional support to keep teaching, but I almost quit teaching in my first year, because of the homophobic climate of schools. (I: 337-340)

But who makes up this community, and what are the people like? "Most of the people who've been involved in social justice issues in a real way have been involved for quite a long time. Those are most of the people that I come into contact with, [although] within GALE we have the occasional firecracker person that comes on board for a year and then they kind of fizzle out and then they don't come back again, but the same core group are the core group of activists doing the majority of the work, from year to year to year" (II: 10-15). This has positive and negative aspects to it: "I find it is the same people doing the work forever and ever, so you know who you're dealing with, and you know people's strengths, weaknesses and passions, and that's good in a way, but it gets tiring sometimes, too" (I: 630-633).

Working with the union

Involvement in the teachers' union locally and provincially has been a key component of his teaching career and activism. He received strong support from the local union for his activist work as a gay teacher.

One thing I think is critically important is having the support of your union. I know the STA [local union] is very supportive of social justice work. Just being able to have a discrete committee, being able to set your own goals, being able to have a budget, figure out what you're going to do with that budget, that is huge. I say this because from what I hear from social justice activists in other locals, is they get some idea into their head about something they would like to do, and they have to approach their executive about it, and get a budget; if they can't get a budget, their idea is dead in the water. Then they get really frustrated, and they say, "well, we have a social justice umbrella committee, but we only get things approved if they don't cost money, or we only get things approved if our president likes the idea, sees the benefit in it"; they are not given the autonomy to make decisions as a committee, and move forward as a committee. Yes, you still have to go through the bureaucratic...organizational checks and balances, you can't just go out and do a project without the executive knowing, but...they do trust us to be the leaders on the issues. (II: 145-164)

If I had not been in Surrey, in the union I am in, I would not have been as successful or supported or felt validated as a gay man. And if I'd been in Richmond, for example, which is where I started out teaching I think I would have been very demoralized around social justice issues, and I probably would have burnt out. I probably would have just said 'screw it,' but then I would have felt really bad that I wasn't effecting change. (II: 712-717)

This involvement in the union introduced him to many supportive teachers.

Knowing a lot of people through the union, that helps. That's how I know hundreds of people in the district; largely through my union work. (I: 455-457)

Involvement also taught him how to do political work that is effective. The following incident is illustrative:

When we were starting with our GALE [motions for the BCTF] AGM, three prominent feminist teacher activists... invited us to one of the activist's house, and they gave us a history lesson... [or] more like a herstory lesson of the BCTF. They explained how microphone strategies work, and how they were going to help us at the AGM, and how we shouldn't let our cat out of the bag. [This was] because at that time, [a few executive members had] invited themselves to a GALE meeting. We [had been excited, like] "Oh my god, the BCTF president is coming to our meeting!" but little did we know that they were trying to find out what we were going to do at the AGM with our motion. Luckily we had met with the feminists in advance and they had tipped us off, and so when the three of them came to meet with us, we [acted] like we didn't know what we were going

to do, we [said we would] “figure it out when we got there, we were just new at this, we’d never been to an AGM,” and we totally played dumb. And they bought it. So we had a strategy, but we didn’t let one breath out about what it was. (II: 366-381)

JF affirms that it was a strategic meeting, specifically designed to assist them in this critical rights issue. He learned the importance of particular strategies. He describes how the feminists’ advice helped when strategizing to get support for union assistance in funding the Supreme Court case.

One of the things I learned from them is flit around the room a lot, talk to a lot of people, smile, chit chat with people in [teachers’ union] locals. Even if you don’t really like that local, there might be someone there that you connect with, and you can make allies in the most unlikely of places. [You can get people to support you if you say things like] “I need you to go to the microphone and speak in favour of this, because....” I went to the president [of a different local], and she was beet red in the face, ‘cause her whole delegation was listening, and I said “I know you wrote up an affidavit in support of the court case, and so now I need you to do this for me.” That was very embarrassing for her, because she wasn’t the president of the local five years earlier, when she wrote the affidavit, but she got up. And I went to [another] president who’s pretty right-wing and I said, “I need you to go and speak in favour of this,” and everyone I went to actually got up and spoke; there were people on the left and right speaking in favour of it, and there was no-one speaking in opposition, and they said “is there anyone in opposition?” And not one hand went up so they voted. I was shocked. (I: 396-411)

Effective activism

Effective activists do require particular personal characteristics. First, “the only people who do [social justice work, do] it because of some personal passion. They’ve either been victims of discrimination, or they’ve witnessed it, or had a family member affected, or they have some personal strong motivation. It’s not just their idealism to make the world a better place” (I: 505-507). Second, the activist has to be seen as a competent and credible teacher. He or she has to be a good teacher, because s/he needs the respect of colleagues to get things done. “You need people to trust that you’re doing a professional job. You know you are, but you need people to see your professional job of teaching before you can get anyone to buy into your projects” (II: 826-828). “I think if you are seen as a well-rounded person, whether it is in the classroom, or in the school or

in the union, then you are more palatable to people” (II: 521-522). Third, the activist has to be perceived as focused and determined, while also supportive of colleagues. S/he needs to be seen as friendly and approachable.

[It’s necessary to have a] quiet, calm determination, to stick to your principles, never waver from your principles, and [that’s] what brings people on side to social justice issues. I think [this way] they see you as a person, and then accept change over time. Change takes a long time for lots of people, and so you have to acknowledge everything people do, like baby-steps; if they put a poster up in their classroom, you need to say, “wow...great job, I really appreciate you putting up that poster... that means a lot to me.” Or talk to them about the effect of putting up that poster; “what effect did you see in your classroom, what discussions did you have around that or how are you feeling about that?” You have to be a facilitator and a guide for allies, to give them a comfort level that they can actually make change in safe ways, and sometimes that is really tiring. Sometimes you just feel like [saying,] “put up the poster, goddammit!” But you always have to [temper that, because] there’s as much nurturing and supporting of adults to do social justice work, as there is for kids, to [encourage them to] effect change in their lives and in their communities. (II: 86-101)

Of all the social justice activists I know, they are generally tough cookies, they are generally positive, they are friendly, but they’re kind of the ‘don’t mess with me’ kind of people, so they are pretty thick-skinned. And I think we need to be. (I: 510-513)

Fourth, the activist needs to be able to devise strategies appropriate to various contexts.

At school his strategy is to be proactive. JF goes ahead with ideas he comes up with, creating interesting learning opportunities for his classes. He is always ready to discuss his work with an administrator. “If they come with a concern, then I tell them what I did and why and how I did it, etc. I always justify it through the connections to the curriculum” (I: 486-489). However, despite his multiple involvements and support of and by other people, JF is still cautious at the school level, primarily “because of the climate of [his] district” (I: 151-152).

JF reports various strategies he uses in committees and forums to help move his social justice activist agenda forward. For example, he describes a strategy to have a committee decide in favor of his idea, by “showing people what the options are and then explaining what the benefits of each option are, and the pitfalls [getting them to engage

with the issue]. I say what we really need here is [such and such, and so they agree]” (II: 552-554). Another idea is taking the time to establish the agenda of the next meeting whilst at the present one, so as to highlight a particular issue effectively. “Always at the meeting I say: ‘at the next meeting could this be first on the agenda?’ and so then [whatever it is] isn’t at the end of the agenda when we are tired, and so on” (II: 584-587). Another strategy that is effective in different organizations is this: “if there is someone who needs to be the leader, the figurehead, then let them be [to stop power struggles,] but make sure there is a way that the democratic process is being followed” (II: 544-546).

Sometimes setting people at ease through self-effacement is effective. “When you are in a workshop or whatever, just admitting to the people that you aren’t the expert on the topic, even if you have done the work for 10 years; you can say : ‘I’m still learning on this, I’m not an expert on this’ And that really sets people at ease ...you can see them go ‘Ahhhhh,’ and they are thinking ‘Oh my god I can actually have an idea here, I don’t have to rely on so and so’” (II: 590-596). The key thing is, “you give one person or one group of people permission to do the work in whatever way, shape or form [and so they are enabled and find themselves effective,] and then they go ‘Oh, it’s not that scary!’ and then another group of people hopefully takes on the work” (II: 764-767).

Another aspect of strategy within an organization is the activist’s attitude:

Tempering your enthusiasm is really important because otherwise you look (a) crazy, or (b), you just have narrow tunnel vision, narrow focus, only on a social justice thing, and that’s the only thing you are going to get excited about. It is important to learn what other people are passionate about, and support their work too, so that when you need them they will be there to support you too. (II: 602-610)

When you are facing concerted opposition, calm behaviour and attitude also serves the activist. For example, JF reports that “when the motions supporting gay teachers and students came up at the BCTF AGM, a group of conservative teachers asked for a

meeting with me to try to dissuade me from pursuing the resolution. I listened to their concerns, and they wanted to deep-six it in a big way, they just couldn't support it, and [so on,] and I [stayed calm and collected.] I stuck to my guns, no matter what they did or said or tried, and was like "no, sorry..." (II: 730-732). In the face of people like that, "they have to see that you're cool and calm and collected whatever happens" (I: 365). The key thing is to pre-plan your strategy for meetings to make sure your agenda goes forward.

I usually talk to my allies in advance of an important meeting, and I say "what is the one thing we are going to push them for in this meeting?" There is another guy in the [committee], and he and I are on the same brainwave.... Between the two of us, you know, pretty much we set the agenda for that committee, generally. Like if there's something we really want done, it is usually achieved within a meeting or two, and the associate superintendent who sits on the committee, says to the committee: "Wow, you guys are amazing, you're so action-oriented, you don't just sit around and talk. Out of every meeting comes a concrete action!" (II: 554-566)

When we were crafting the VSB [Vancouver School Board] policy, we knew that if we were able to get a comprehensive policy in place, with the right components to it, we would need to have a concrete action plan, with...doable pieces; wide goals but doable things as the components of each goal. (II: 554-562)

Whatever the forum, an effective strategy for convincing others of the need for the work, is the power of the personal story.

You know, we told our personal stories as gay and lesbian teachers at the microphone that year, and people were [thinking]..." [what I am hearing is] not acceptable; we've got to change this." And we had kids fill out postcards about their personal experiences in school, and we handed them out at the tables. So if a kid from Kamloops filled out a card, we handed it to the Kamloops delegation, all over the room, we had photocopied cards with kids' experiences, so delegates were reading those at their tables. We had a pretty good strategy happening and then we coordinated about 300 youth to do a pro-BCTF rally outside the AGM. Teacher activists helped youth to do that. So there were a number of components that we sort of played on, but the power of the personal story, I've used it many, many times. Not [so much] my own personal story, but encouraging other people to come forward with their personal stories. Like when we did the VSB recommendations to the previous board, which was very conservative, we had three youth present the recommendations.... We helped them, but we made sure that the youth were presenting them, and that one of them was in high school currently. And when we did the press conference for the queer friendly schools conference last year, we had youth tell their personal stories to the media, and the media gobbled that up. Everybody wants the personal side to it. (II: 447-458)

Tensions

JF experienced a number of tensions in his activist work. There was the constant reality of a teacher's expected behaviour. Teachers hold themselves to a high standard of personal conduct as professionals.

One of the things I find as a social justice activist really constraining is that as a teacher we always have to behave in a certain way. Society expects us to be a certain way. And there are times when somebody does something abusive or rude, and I would love to just swear at them, you know, something like that, but you always have to be the professional. And sometimes that irritates me, I would like to lash out with my sarcastic tongue, but I can never do that. I find that very constraining sometimes. (I: 371-377)

Another tension he finds is that he now needs to be more selective in terms of where he will work. When he was considering where to apply last time, he says: "I had to be careful, pick and choose where I was going. Because of the court case and the media profile attached to that there were times when I had to phone up the local union office and say, "OK, now where should I avoid? Where should I go that would be a good fit for me" (I: 457-460)? This way he could avoid administrators who are known to be homophobic, for example.

Beneath the polished professional exterior, JF has some regrets. As he points out, "there are times when we are reactive and there are times when you kind of feel a little bit ashamed because you didn't do enough" (I: 368-369). Also, at these times, there are people who are very combative or negative. It is hard to not have a reaction, even if you keep the reaction under wraps. JF struggled with this tension:

There's nothing wrong with [feeling hate towards some people.] There are people who are colleagues, who I hate because of things they have done to me personally, because of their internalized homophobia, because of what they've got other people to do to me indirectly, parents or whatever. I honestly can tell you I do not like them. And I don't think we have to apologize for that. You can only be so forgiving in this work. Their nastiness is what will get them in the end. I am a strong believer in karma, and the way you go about the world will sooner or later come back to you. (II: 648-658)

Another aspect of activist work that JF finds stressful is the sheer amount of nurturing it takes for only small increments of change. “There’s as much nurturing and supporting of adults, to do social justice work, as there is for kids, to effect change in their lives and in their community” (I: 99-101). He contrasts how much more difficult it is to work with adults compared to kids.

Children, young children, they are eager to try and do things; adults are resistant, they are worried about what their peers will think, or how their administrator will perceive them or what impact it will have on them in their community, if they live in the same community they teach in; yeah they have a number of things that influence them that don’t influence kids as much, ‘cause kids get excited about making the world a better place. If you frame it in a certain way, kids can get quite excited about it. [It can be] something as simple as going around picking up garbage at lunch. They might see the results and say things like “It’s better now! Our school is better now!” (II: 106-113)

However, generally, JF does take a positive attitude towards the tensions in his work.

If I look at [the difficulty] over the last number of years it pales in comparison with the number of good things in my life as a result of my social justice work. And you know even when I was suspended [from my job], they thought they had deep-sixed me and demoralized me, etc, but I was sad for [only] about two weeks. It was unusual for me, and my partner was like “Oh, my god, he is not smiling, he is not happy, he is not jovial, he’s been glum for two weeks, he is probably going to commit suicide!” He was totally worried about me... and I said “that’s it, we’re having a party”...it was so cathartic! And it was like therapy, it was like five years of the best therapy in one party! (I: 661-673)

Although being a teacher activist “is challenging work, it is work that has kept me in teaching. Without social justice work, if it had just been ‘OK, we are learning math or the alphabet’ or whatever, I wouldn’t have stayed in teaching, because a lot of the stuff we do is required but mundane. A lot of it I see as just clap trap. When they grow up and remember their favorite teachers, they won’t remember a stitch of what they taught; they’ll remember the kind of person they were, and how they made them feel and whether they connected with them” (I: 378-384).

JF concluded with a comment on the power that teachers do have, and may squander. He suggested that there is a need to channel this power more effectively as activists and to nurture the younger teachers:

We do walk with a lot of power, in elementary and secondary schools, and let's channel that power, like we are already trying to channel it in a tiny way, in our classrooms. But we should [try to think of ways to help] give social justice newbies a lot of excitement, but also the political know-how to get things done. You need to temper them a bit so they can actually have success, but not freak people out along the way [so they] have no success and then give up. (II: 817-821)

Recommendations to facilitate the work of social justice activist teachers in our province included the following:

I'd like to see some sort of social justice cohort officially set up with the universities, or with the BCTF, or with mentoring. I've mentored many first year kindergarten teachers through the STA [local union] mentorship program, but I'd like to see a social justice mentorship program either within our local, or at the federation or at the university level. (II: 807-811)

It would be fabulous at the universities to have a social justice mentor program with young teachers [placed with] experienced teachers in the field; placing these kids ('cause they pretty much are kids compared to me!) in experienced social justice activists' classrooms, that would be phenomenal. (II: 791-795)

Summary

JF is a fully involved activist teacher who works within and outside his school to bring about real change. His motivation to be an activist teacher grew out of his experiences in the homophobic school system and society. Although his primary area of activist work is anti-homophobia education, he is also involved in larger social justice issues such as anti-racism, anti-sexism and others. He thinks strategically and carefully balances his own time and energy. He directs his effort to areas where real change can be expected, for example in the area of policy that is implementable. He values his activist colleagues and recognizes them as a crucial source of support, and in turn he nurtures idealistic teachers to become effective activists. He advocates a thoughtful approach to

activism, with training that enables people to do effective work, based on real lived experience.

An idea common to all three theorists is exhibited in JF's work: the role of networks in affecting change. This teacher activist works thorough networks and builds alliances to achieve his clear political goals. He purposefully plans and strategizes his activism, working with other people to make things happen, as he did with GALE, transforming it into an effective advocacy group. He is also an example of a transformative intellectual, who constantly questions authority, sees schools and curricula as spaces for change to occur, and cajoles colleagues to take risks to make schools safer for GLBTQ people.

Gail Jones (GJ)

There are still things to work on, there always are, because not everyone is on-board. I am always bringing people on board, making things palatable for them, so they can be a part of it. (I: 154-157)

Gail is in the last five years of her career, after 30 previous years of teaching in a large suburban district (65,000+ students, 4,000+ teachers). She works as a learning support teacher in a small elementary school (K-7) in a relatively affluent area of the suburb. In this job she assists teachers to meet the needs of learning-disabled, disruptive, gifted, and ESL (English as a second language) students. She supports students directly, but does not enroll a class daily. She is known throughout the district as a union activist and leader who pursues issues affecting women and children such as community poverty and violence.

Rationale for activist work

She centrally understands her activism as “promoting a more just and democratic system in education for teachers and for students,” and is involved in social justice issues through feminist, anti-racist, environmental, and anti-homophobia education initiatives. Her general goal is “to raise awareness with the people she works with and students [she] deals with about what’s happening in the wider world,” and pursues this goal “almost as much with teachers as with students” (I: 8-13).

Most of her work with students, colleagues, the union, and community groups is informed by strong feminist values. She motivates and re-motivates feminist gains constantly. She has played a leadership role in the local union for many years with the Status of Women Committee in promoting and organizing job sharing, just maternity leave and childcare at meetings. Provincially, she is part of the Feminist Caucus within the teachers’ union. She represented Canadian feminists at the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing; has been active with an organization called Women for Women in Afghanistan, which promotes human rights for women and girls; and is on the board of the Canadian Harambee Education Society, which supports girls’ secondary education in Kenya and Tanzania. Most recently she was involved in a feminist response to the situation in the town of Bountiful, B.C., where a fundamentalist Mormon sect promotes polygamy involving teenaged girls marrying older men. These are some examples of her feminist approach to life, which grounds her activist work.

Activism has long been a part of her personal history, and feminist ideals have informed her consistent motivation over time:

I've always been that way. I am a child of the 60s. I was in high school and university when it was considered quite the thing to be a radical, to be involved in politics. Fighting sexism has been [central]; I grew up with it; that's part of my age group. Younger people are discovering it now as [if it were] a new thing! (I: 184-189)

Her family introduced her to union activism, and so she feels that her deep involvement with the teachers' union comes naturally:

My father was a trade unionist, he was an activist in his union, and was a staff representative. I remember him going to union meetings and being involved in the strikes. He worked politically [and] we always had people involved in politics around the house. Tommy Douglas was our MP, so we would go and see Tommy Douglas together. It was a working class Burnaby neighbourhood. (I: 187-195)

Although eventually becoming a teacher, given her activist upbringing, it was not surprising that when pursuing post-secondary education, she first studied planning: "I was totally into social planning; I would have become a social planner if I hadn't gone into teaching" (I: 204-205). She went into teaching accidentally, but there found a home for her talents and interests:

A lot of people were going into teaching that were in my field, and they weren't hiring planners at that point, so I thought I'll go try teaching, and I really, really liked it! It was a fluky thing. I thought: "I'll never make it, I'll never be a teacher, but I'll just go and try it out." (I: 232-236)

From the onset of this new career move she "became an activist in teacher education and teacher politics, and in protecting public education" (I: 239-240). To GJ, public education is "the absolute cornerstone of democracy. If we lose it I think we will have chaos" (I: 241).

Areas of activist work

She is an activist with colleagues, students, the teachers' union, and feminist community groups. The most important of these is her work with colleagues.

Activist work with colleagues

Formal leadership roles within the school currently include chairperson for the school-based team (which enables the school to meet special student needs in a coordinated fashion), staff rep to the local union, and memberships on the professional development committee and the staff committee (I: 117-118). In terms of promoting a progressive agenda among teachers, though, the informal avenue she uses most is curriculum resource selection and sharing. In her selection and sharing of resources she encourages colleagues to use the content to open their students' eyes to social justice issues:

When you don't have [your own] class, all you can really do is say "there are my resources, let's plan a unit together." I can't tell another teacher what they're going to do. I have everything all prepared. (I: 314-318)

She also assists colleagues in the ordering process of print resources for the school:

When we [order] novels [I insist] they absolutely have to have non-sexist stories. I usually try to promote female characters because I figure [the students] are not going to get them anywhere else. [My colleagues] are quite happy to let me order the novels and pick out the books. For example, I've got a set called the "Forbidden City," which is all about Tienamen square in China. We've got three sets of books from the Afghan series... and we just did "Underground to Canada" which is the anti-racism history of Canada. (I: 319-327)

She actively looks for opportunities to share resources: "I always just make a point of just throwing my stuff at other people," and since she is nearing retirement, she says "here, just have it! I'm on the downslide... I'm divesting" (II: 552-554)! More importantly, her sharing of resources shows an inclusive and generous stance on the issue of collegiality:

The climate of sharing is a given in teaching. I think teachers see that the resources that are developed are meant to be used, and that if you share, then you benefit from other people sharing as well. I do facilitate it, because I am the resource teacher. So, if I see something that is going to benefit someone in another grade, there is no risk to me, so I share that, [but maybe for others] there is a feeling of the danger of 'stealing somebody's thunder.' If you were to do their pet project two years before they get the [same] kids, then that doesn't work. (III: 284-292)

This generosity extends well beyond books and other print resources to AV materials and special speakers:

I always provide videos, I love film; I always have lots of film and video that people can add on to their units. I've always got speakers who'll come in and visit, and whenever [someone interesting comes to] town [I get them to speak at my school.] (I: 314-331)

Involvement in school functions is important, and cannot be abandoned in favour of activist work. In this way she gets support of the other teachers, and also supports them:

I still do a lot within the school; I don't stop everything that I do in school as part of the staff because I do union work, right? I may not take on [coaching] teams, but I do my share of work in the school. (II: 160-162)

She invests time in motivating colleagues for activist work "because...not everyone is on board. [I am] always bringing people on board, making things palatable for them [so] they can be a part of it" (I: 155-157). Significant time is also given to combating apathy. For example, in the recycling and composting program at her school, she notes that some teachers resist participation:

They have all sorts of reasons, like 'there's bugs, it's dirty,' or this or that; but they haven't thrown the program out, nobody has had enough gall to say they don't want to do it at all. The kids know we should be doing it. (II: 47-50)

There are always people who are kind of "anti," right? They don't want to do anything extra... so that's definitely a constraining factor. But that's not generally the case; most people [think] "well, if that's your thing, then you can go for it. You're not doing damage, it's adding to the school." (I: 472-477)

GJ particularly emphasizes the importance of having a group of supportive colleagues working closely together:

I like being at a school where there is a core group of people; most of my career I've had that, it's always easier to operate that way. In the early 80s, [I remember] there was a whole school [full of these types of colleagues], and I didn't really appreciate it until after I left. They were totally aware of what we needed to do in terms of community involvement, teaching kids about democracy and responsibility; we had a student council that included everybody in the whole school, grades one to seven. They were totally into democratic decision making, lots of involvement of kids, parents, and respectful [too]. (I: 68-76)

Having supportive colleagues is especially important because this is what centrally facilitates her activist endeavours.

You do need to have people, you have to have a critical mass of people who are interested before it can happen; you can't really be the one person on staff, you have to have at least support from different people. (I: 464-467)

The ideal situation is to work with a core group of committed activists.

Activist work with students

One of her long term goals has been the promotion of student environmental education and action. She gets directly involved with students in concrete projects within the school:

I help with recycling; I used to run it but it was taken on by one of the other teachers. We do composting, recycling, looking after the gardens, and grounds; we try to have a green school, but it's really difficult. You have to teach kids how to recycle; they don't get it unless you do, so that's really one I can't let go of. (I: 145-151)

GJ works at a local and practical level with students, while also keeping an eye on more global thinking.

Another area is promoting an interest in global issues with grade sixes and sevens who are "ready to look at different areas of the world" (I: 26). She believes that teachers have responsibility to raise tough issues creatively and openly in order to engage student awareness about, for example, "poverty and what happens to people because of poverty. I really like to bring it in through novels, the kids can really relate; or bring it in through stories and film [or] newspapers" (I: 168-171). When kids need resources for projects or activities, they come to her for information, and she also willingly shares with them:

I'm the resource person as far as human rights; in my school we are doing public speeches, and I've had students come and get resources from me on anti-racism, because they know I have all that stuff in my room. Kids who are doing projects on

Afghanistan, they know I'm involved in a group supporting women in Afghanistan, so they can get resources. (I: 133-138)

Other involvements are with students throughout the district and at various grade levels who are involving themselves as activists on certain issues. For example, she worked this year with "the labour and environmental alliance part of the green teacher network in Surrey. It was a meeting with [secondary] students and the labour education and environmental [liaison]; it was health and safety training for secondary kids" (I: 127-131).

In the area of feminism, direct work with students is also important. For many years she helped organize a series of popular and successful grade seven conferences, which brought pre-teen girls together to explore ideas about entering their teen years. The emphases were self esteem, self awareness and career path options for girls.

Activist work through the union

This involvement started early. "I've been a staff rep ever since I got hired in the district. It was by fluke; the teacher that I was replacing went on a maternity leave, and since she was a staff rep, the staff just decided that I would be the staff rep seeing as I was the person replacing her" (I: 95-99). "I started [my union involvement] more in professional development, organizing conferences, getting speakers; I've been involved in organizing the Surrey teachers' convention" many times (I: 101-103). She has also been active on committees and task forces and in political lobbying within the union. At the moment she sits on the local executive committee, chairs the status of women committee, and has long been involved in the local labour affairs committee (which facilitates links with other unions) and the professional development committee.

Her activism through union involvement is related to provincial and national issues as well. She perceives herself working more broadly “because the women’s network operates that way. It is a national movement with chapters in the provinces. For example, the ‘Women’s March 2000’ has carried on, and is a nationally based movement” (III: 147-151). She wants to share her expertise with other feminist organizations at a national level, and does so.

One of the reasons why I wanted to run to [be a provincial representative] to the CTF (Canadian Teachers’ Federation), was because they are looking at how their women’s network in Ontario, for example, is functioning. So it would be really good to connect with those people as we reestablish our networks here. (III: 153-155)

Involvement at the provincial level was initially in the Status of Women Network of the BCTF. After a rearrangement of priorities and programs in the BCTF, the Network became part of the social justice section of the union. In response to this restructuring, feminist activists “did a sort of end-run” in order to get their agenda served:

We created the Feminist Caucus, which is outside the union. In some ways it was more freeing, because nobody had any control over it except us, and it grew on its own [because] people wanted to be connected and stay involved, and know what was going on. Luckily there was enough support, because [the BCTF executive] could have shut it down if they had wanted to, but in some ways it was useful, because we were doing important work. (III: 170-175)

She believes that the Feminist Caucus is quite influential in the BCTF because:

we actually focus on issues, we involve more people, we cross the ‘party lines’ but at the same time the women who are involved in the caucus support each other. We try to stick to the issues, whereas the other caucuses, in my opinion, are so focussed on who’s running and getting the [executive] positions, that that becomes a major part of the work they do. (III: 180-185)

The Feminist Caucus implements its ideas through a strategic process of:

individual members bringing items [forward to the larger body] through their local. The FC decides there will be a certain issue coming to the Annual General Meeting. The individual members bring it up at their five or six locals and get the motion brought forward. They know that they are going to get support from other locals to get their motion passed. For example, on the issue of childcare; we did a whole program on “raising the rates” for social service ... the BCTF likes to use the term social justice to describe their union, but they have to have something to show for it! (III: 206-210)

Another example of an issue that the Feminist Caucus has successfully championed was the restructuring of funding priorities within the BCTF. “We’ve got them to come around to see that we need to fund the action groups. These [activist] groups focus on individual topics,” and teachers are involved in them because they are personally motivated on a particular issue (III: 194-196). “The umbrella type of structure doesn’t provide any kind of direction whatsoever,” and so they don’t succeed fully (III: 197).

It wasn’t anybody’s fault who was involved in [the umbrella structure groups,] it’s just that it was really hard to get action. People would say ‘we want to do this, we want to do that’ and without any networks, without any conferencing, without any structure to get that out to the members, it was pretty impossible. [Now perhaps] the people in the action groups will meet together to plan the priorities for the year, and divide up which groups are doing which work. There is some cross-over, right, for example, poverty of course has to do with women and children. At the same time, the anti-poverty group has done some amazing work and should be applauded. (III: 198-203)

Her propensity to share resources extends to union work as well. I know her as a colleague through the union, and know that if I want information about an issue or want to find a connection, GJ will be able to tell me who to call. She always carries an address and date book, as well as various timely resources, and if a topic or person comes up in conversation or during a meeting, she pulls out her bag and is able to provide a pamphlet or a phone number. It is uncanny how many connections she has and how many issues she knows about.

GJ has been a union representative and active in the local and provincial union for many years. She sees both the value and challenge of being a union representative in a school:

It’s not easy, and for 12 years of my career I was at a school that had [a really difficult situation.] I wasn’t the only staff rep, there were 3 or 4 of us, and there were 2 of the staff who really stuck their necks out to follow the contract and make sure people were treated fairly...they had to work quite hard at it. (I: 560-564)

To this activist, the staff union representative role is as an agent of change:

Even if a staff rep doesn't have the personal activist bent, you are always bringing stuff in, it is coming from the union; it's information for members. As the professional development person, [I'm always] looking at different aspects of education as training for teachers and involvement for teachers. I am also always letting people know what is going on in the world as well. [Of course] there are some people who don't want to hear it. (I: 368-375)

Working to break the apathy of colleagues and to get more of them involved, and then supporting their involvement, creates work, but is worth it in the long run:

It's better to have more people involved, and have to deal with them, than not having them involved.... Because if [we] don't then it's at our own peril, because when the crunch comes there's nobody there, nobody with any kind of connection, or training, or gumption... there has to be both. I think every penny they spend on staff rep training is worth it, and they could do more of it. (II: 430-443)

Upon examining her union work over the years, GJ also brings up several points about her frustrations with her union's structures, priorities and trends. Part of her activism is therefore within the union itself, working to improve union structures or direction. She has a concern that the union needs to think more creatively and thoughtfully, and plan strategically for the future. Through several specific examples, she shows how the direction and focus of the union needs to be improved.

If the members have something that they want dealt with, and [the union] turns around to them and says 'that's not covered in the contract, so then we can't deal with it,' well, that limits people's activity. For example, say certain groups of teachers are being taken advantage of, perhaps different teachers have different class sizes, and people don't see that there's an avenue to protest that, or resist it [through the union] because it has been written it into a contract, then that is a real problem. (II: 68-75)

Another concern is with the union's lack of regard for teachers who depend upon child care. Not paying attention to such details amounts to a regressive step backward in terms of feminist thinking.

[Regarding] women teachers with children, we have completely gone back to where we were 15 years ago, where there was no childcare and no supports. We used to always make sure that meetings would finish by a certain time, because we knew that people had to go and get kids from childcare, and [the union] doesn't even worry about that anymore. (I: 314-318)

Women also need the training that encourages and supports them in taking on broader leadership roles in the union:

There used to be specific training, for the bargaining [team] for example, with a quota, indicating there must be so many women in the training, and they would apply through a program called “women in negotiation.” These women would do the training, and then [later] many of those women became presidents of their locals, because they had that confidence from the training, and they felt support from other people in other locals to take a leadership role. (III: 227-232)

However, perhaps her largest concern is that the change in structures and priorities is jeopardizing the union’s future. She thinks there needs to be a succession plan, and believes the union is only as strong as the members who are involved:

If they don’t bring in more members, and this huge group all retires, your union is pretty much hooped. The networks were how people got involved and got training. They cut that off [a few years ago,] and the union is suffering from that. That is something a union always has to be working on. Constant work is getting new people, new ideas, and making people feel that the union is doing something for them. Their issue, something they want to deal with.... I see it as sort of a natural role that people would come in to be involved in certain issues, see that there’s more that they could be involved in, and take more leadership. (III: 216-221)

Community-based activist work

In the wider community, Gail is involved in peace education, women’s outreach-centers, as a photographer, and in groups such as Women for Women in Afghanistan and the Canadian Harambee Education Society. She explains:

Women’s issues are worthwhile, so I do that through the community, the BCTF and the BC Federation of Labour. There’s a core group of us trying to get the union and community groups to work together. Our Surrey group is focused on ending violence against women, working with police and transition houses. (I: 511-516)

“There are definite things that I do as a community activist that don’t play out in the school system, yet in some ways all of these things I do in school are included in the community stuff. There are some personal viewpoints I have that I don’t take into the school, but all of the school activism that I do is included in the wider work” (I: 16-21). For example her views on electoral politics are kept out of the classroom:

[The] partisan political stuff, I don't bring that to school. I'll talk about voting, but I don't think teachers should be the ones to tell kids how to vote, to encourage them to vote the way they do; I've actually seen that happen, and I think "what if I had a child who was in a class of a teacher who had a totally different political view than me, I certainly wouldn't appreciate it." So I think it's through issues that you raise their awareness. (I: 162-167) You have to be careful as a teacher, that you're not seen as indoctrinating kids; you want them to be exposed to different situations, but you don't want to be standing at the pulpit, telling them what they should be thinking. (I: 20-23)

In reflecting on her activist photography she says "I love watching people interacting. I think it is one reason why I am a photographer; I'm kind of like the watcher" (I: 207-208). She considers photography a part of her activist career, "definitely!" (III: 40), and so photographs public events such as demonstrations and political meetings because of their historical significance; to this end she is also involved in the Pacific Northwest Labour History Association. The events she covers are pro-choice actions, teacher marches, meetings, strikes, rallies, and other related events. Another reason for her photography work is to show support for the participants in the event. She believes that to see a photo of yourself at a rally or meeting is to know that your presence was valued. Photography also sometimes serves safety and surveillance purposes at political marches.

I have my archives, especially for all...of the pro-choice marches, where I was partially working as security, and partially recording the events historically. When Anne Thompson wrote her book [The History of Choice in Vancouver], a lot of the photos in there were photos I took when we were checking out who was in the marches or watching from the sidelines. [We wanted to document the marches, to record who was at them] because that was when the [abortion-providing] doctors were being murdered. (III: 41-50)

She takes photos for the Teacher Magazine, and "also always makes sure to give photos away to other groups or other unions" (III: 59-60). "Mostly the union pays for it, but I'm sure I spend a fortune on it myself, [because] for women's groups, I just give them to them. You can't really expect them to pay for them" (III: 70-72).

She is active in the community on feminist issues as they arise, too. For example, recently she was involved in organizing a conference in Creston, B.C., in an attempt to focus British Columbian society's attention on the plight of young girls in polygamous marriages with older men. Although the original inspiration for the conference was to challenge the hegemony of the Mormon Fundamentalists, it transformed into a feminist conference that addressed other provincial concerns.

The whole thing was excellent, and there were women who attended from Bountiful, which made it quite interesting for everyone who was there. The main focus was the cutbacks in childcare and status of women, and the court challenges program. Also we looked back at women's struggle for rights in Canada and how they were now being eroded; raising people's awareness and trying to get them to take action to fight the cutbacks. (III: 116-121)

Facilitating and constraining factors

GJ is a member of many committees and organizations. Networking is a defining feature of her activism, in that she actively builds and nurtures connections amongst people. However, there are a number of constraining factors on her activist networking. Time is always a major concern. But she has learned to bring more balance into her work, and has now obtained a position that frees her time somewhat:

I'm lucky in the position I'm in now. I don't have much marking, hardly any. I have paper work that I have to do, I have IEPs [individual educational plans] to write, parent meetings, school based team and stuff like that, but I can do that on my own time. So in some ways that's one of the ways I balance being able to do what I do. (II: 173-776)

She believes that there is "at least one" activist in every school who feels deeply about a particular issue (II: 423). Sometimes that person may feel isolated as "it takes a person with inner strength to stand up alone, and be a lone crusader for an issue." But, she asserts, "sometimes you just do it" (I: 467-468). A particular frustration or roadblock that she has figured out how to overcome is the process of getting people on side.

For example, getting a staff to take a position; sometimes it is really difficult. You just have to let people go through that process. Teachers are good at talking, so that helps.

Luckily I was on staffs where there were people that would get the group together, would sit down and work on a position, and people would come out pretty united. I am talking about job action, and standing up to administrators, defending what's right for kids, and so on. I've been fairly lucky, to be working with people who can see the [bigger picture] of what was happening, and were prepared to speak out. (I: 551-558)

The ease of doing activist work in a school depends in part on the attitude of the administrators: "If your administration is sympathetic, you can pretty well do whatever you like, [but] if you've got an administrator that's not supportive, then you have to be way more careful about what you do" (I: 461-463). This lack of support can contribute to a climate of fear when "management doesn't seem to be supportive, even of positive things that are being done" (I: 604-605). This is a result of the unfortunate "division between administration and teachers" (I: 569):

When I started teaching, administrators were part of the [teachers'] association, and if we were going for something for kids, for example [trying to reduce our] our class sizes, administrators would be part of that.... We would write a letter, the whole staff, the administrator would sign it, we would send it off to the board; [but] now...the administrators, who are technically the leaders, say nothing. (I: 570-576)

Often, though, administrators are in a bind as well, which GJ points out sympathetically:

It's always that polarized position. And [administrators] know they [could be] hauled up on the carpet or they [could] end up in a worse school or a smaller school or whatever, if they're seen as being somebody who sides with teachers. (I: 602-608)

Curriculum change also affects the latitude teachers have in pursuing various issues. For example, she believes that the narrowing of the curriculum makes it more challenging:

Curriculum is becoming narrower, and it is harder to deal with things that are happening currently, because you feel like you are boxed in a lot more. When I first started teaching, you taught what the kids were interested in... if there was something happening like the tsunami, or if there was a relief effort that was happening in Eritrea, it would be on the news and would be something the kids were interested in....Now [teachers] are just so busy trying to get their prescribed learning outcomes [done]. When I try to do stuff with the environment, it's "Whoops sorry, don't have time for that, it's not in my curriculum." (I: 26-36)

Some point to the fact that many teachers are overworked, with more special needs students, more complicated classes, or more ESL students, which might leave them unable to do the extra, to take on these issues. However, GJ asserts that the problem

is totally the curriculum. I think teachers would find it more interesting to teach things the kids are interested in. It would make teaching much easier and more interesting.

Nowadays there is so much interest in the environment, but I've heard people say "oh, I can't do that, I'm too busy, and that's not my PLO [Prescribed Learning Outcome]. I have to work on my PLOs." (III: 298-305)

This curriculum press produces stress in teachers, which in turn influences the students.

She believes the teachers and the kids are having less fun learning than they used to:

It used to be...you taught, and it was fun; you actually expected to have fun when you were teaching and you expected the kids would enjoy it. ...When I did training, we actually thought kids should enjoy school! We planned how kids would enjoy their learning, [but] now it feels like we are shoving skills down their throats all the time! (I: 339-344)

The main constraint on activist work is the employer's attitude:

When you have a board that's reactionary, you are always aware of what the board is up to. If you're in a school board where they're progressive, and the board is into social justice and promoting equality, then you're going to have an easier time of it; [it's harder] when you've got a repressive political board who attacks teachers, which is what we've had [here] for years and years and years. (I: 394-399)

A school board's actions can create a climate of fear in which teachers become cautious.

She provided a personal example of community and board reactions to a union initiative against homophobia:

There were demonstrators out in front of the schools, calling the kids "faggot lovers," and [so] I wrote a letter to the editor [of the newspaper] saying that the board had a responsibility to protect those students, and that those people shouldn't be in front of the school yelling at kids. Somebody took issue with [my letter]. I was at home on a medical leave with a broken shoulder, and the school board sent me a letter of discipline by courier, saying that I had to come in right away for a disciplinary hearing. I said "no, I wasn't going anywhere because my shoulder was really very painful," so when I came back to work, we had a discipline hearing. The complaint was that I had attacked a member of the school community by making these comments against the parents who had been part of this protest. (II: 221-231)

However, “at the end of the hearing they decided that they weren’t going to go ahead with discipline...so that was the end of it,” but the whole process was intended to intimidate social justice activists (II: 234-235). She comments that:

It’s a newer tactic that they’re trying to use, to intimidate staff [representatives,] to intimidate activists.... Everybody has to be nice and keep quiet. And it bothers me, [because] even people who are in their last year of teaching, who have absolutely nothing to lose, will still not speak out. [They think], “why rock the boat?” (II: 238-241)

She points out that this is not necessarily the case in other places: “There are districts where [these things] don’t happen. People look at you [if you are commenting about these things] and they go “Oh!” [because] they don’t work in a district where people are attacked” (I: 602-604).

A last constraining factor is the trend towards greater surveillance and quantifying of teachers’ work, and the increasing emphasis on standardized testing. She points out the consequences of these trends not only for kids and their learning, but also for teacher stress. For instance:

The other day I had to deal with a poor student who was absolutely devastated by one of those FSA (foundation skills assessment) tests, you know, a special ed. kid that was having a really hard time, but nobody could go over to her in the testing situation and say this is how you do it. She was close to tears; she almost had me in tears! I just wanted to say, “shut the book! Don’t bother!” But at the same time her classroom teacher is feeling totally pressured, because our school hasn’t done as well as should be expected on the FSA’s. The grade 3/4 teachers are feeling like they’ve got the screws to them. (I: 39-53)

The major facilitating factor for activism for GJ is the non-competitive environment among teachers, and its culture of sharing, in which GJ participates actively. She has a position that is comparatively flexible in terms of how she spends each hour of the school day, which helps her communicate her ideals to her colleagues and to be available as a resource to teachers and students. She works in a unionized workplace, which protects her rights as an autonomous professional, as well as offering many opportunities for involvement. Sometimes it is alienating having to be out of the

classroom so often to do union work, but GJ has “always been lucky, having a partner, or a substitute who would come in on a regular basis; [and she] could keep her program going fairly smoothly” (III: 255-257).

Impacts of activism

GJ sums up her activist career as “always stimulating. If you are doing the activist work, it keeps you going and keeps you interested in what is going on, as far as the bigger picture in teaching. Sometimes it is difficult, you feel like you are giving up part of your teaching because you are so involved in the activist work and the union work, but at the same time you are benefiting the school” (III: 247-252). She sees herself as having an impact in the school, school district and the broader community. For example:

I worked on the committee to get the teachers [union] into the BC Federation of Labour for years. I always thought that was something really important and I still do. I think teachers are a huge resource, because we have so many talents. There is a long list of resources and skills we have that other unions don't have [in their membership]; we could share these and benefit everybody. [I am speaking of skills] such as being media savvy, and knowing how to get the word out, and taking the time to do that. But teachers need to know a lot more about labour history. I don't think they know what the struggle has been, to get the rights people have for unions and social rights. (III: 267-275)

One of the negative personal impacts relates to family responsibilities:

Sometimes it's hassle with family, especially when [activist work] involves weekends and summers and every spring break. It's probably more difficult to balance the family stuff than the school stuff... because you are required to be at school, you've got [only] so many hours at school, whereas family sometimes gets third shift. (II: 166-170)

Summary

GJ is an activist who fully integrates her activism with her teaching and community work. She is able to simultaneously focus on long term or 'big picture' goals, such as reducing violence against women in Canadian society, or having feminists in positions of leadership in the teachers' union, and then realizing the work needed to reach these goals. She works as an activist on many levels simultaneously, at her school with

students, with colleagues in her school and district, in issues-based committee work, in local union executive work, in provincial and national committees, and with any new acquaintances. She constantly puts effort into creating and sustaining networks and other activists, helping both to be successful. GJ's reliance upon, nurturing of, and belief in networks as effective vehicles for making change show her to be an example of Sachs' activist teacher professional. She works strategically. For example, over the problem of "the effects of polygamy and child abuse in the fundamentalist Mormon community" in Bountiful, B.C., she used her teachers' union resources and networks to help organize a feminist conference in nearby Creston, B.C. (III: 112-114). The conference and the planning process achieved several gains. These were: drawing attention to the plight of the women there, nurturing a new generation of feminist activists in the union and the local community, energizing the networks, helping direct the focus and response of the union on these issues, and making current once again her beliefs and leadership.

Ideologically, GJ has focused her activism in the area of feminism but sees other areas as important too. She sees connections across issues, finding that they flow into one another. Feminism, environmentalism, encouraging renewal and training among activists, and strengthening the union all are in constant interplay for GJ, and all are also enacted at a practical level too. Her constant involvement with the practical side of activism - with constant phone calls, reading, writing articles, photography, meetings, pamphlets, protests, curriculum materials, etc.- puts GJ in the middle of the action, where she likes to be.

As a teacher nearing retirement, she fully lives the integration of activism and teaching. Speaking with her about this topic is fascinating because she will often in the

same breath reflect on links between issues, encourage me as a younger teacher to involve myself further, give a history lesson from her past, and summarize current crisis points.

Chapter Four Analysis

What do we learn about activism from these four teachers? This chapter analyses similarities and differences across the four activists, provides a composite image of their activism, and accounts for the similarities and differences.

Similarities and Differences

This section compares their perceptions on the following topics: rationale for activism, formation as activists, strategies, constraining factors, and facilitating factors. Comparisons within each topic focus on some of the major similarities and differences.

Rationales for activism

Each of these activists has a strong sense of moral purpose and mission for his or her teaching career. GJ reports that her life work is to “promote a more just and democratic education system, and to defend public education” (I: 8-10). DK believes he “has a responsibility to expose the students to other realities beyond the corporate consumer celebrity world that we live in; where people know the details of [celebrities’ lives,] but can’t identify any species of trees or plants around them; they don’t know about struggles around the world or the effects of their own behaviors on the ecosystem” (I: 219-223). JF is committed to making the system safer for GLBTQ teachers and students. He believes that “if you work within the system, and you have supportive people at the highest levels of the system, then you can make amazing change, because [by having anti-oppression policies in place,] this gives people permission to legitimize the social justice issue” (I: 566-570). AL feels being an activist for aboriginal justice “really has to be part of [her] DNA as a professional,” and sees it as her job to disrupt or

challenge the status quo, and to help others to do so too (I: 16). These purposes serve to frame and integrate most aspects of their work to such an extent that activism is embraced as a way of defining their professional identities. They see themselves as agents for change; not as teachers who do some activism, but as teacher-activists, and activist-teachers.

Their personal ideology and goals are grounded in much broader progressive social justice movements such as anti-consumerism and the environment, feminism and women's equality, gay (GLBTQ) rights and anti-homophobia, and aboriginal rights and anti-colonialism. They see themselves as part of these larger movements and changes in society, even if they feel isolated as minority voices in their own schools. They have a strong discomfort with the status quo, and differentiate themselves from the conservative and replicating nature of the teaching profession by actively challenging its values and practices.

All have a sense of efficaciousness that motivates. They believe they can and do make a difference, and don't have self-doubts about their impacts. From classroom conversations and projects, to creating and implementing policies within the union or school board, to influencing provincial and national politics, these activists perceive themselves as part of successful movements. They also recognize the privilege and opportunity that working in schools affords them, and are professionally respectful of the responsibility inherent in working with other people's children.

Formation as activists

All describe childhood experiences and /or parental modeling as influencing their becoming activists. In the case of GJ, she reported that her father was a trade unionist who often entertained prominent activists at home, and she later felt part of the sixties

generation where it was “the thing to be a radical, to be involved in politics” (I: 185).

DK’s parents were social justice activists in the Unitarian Church, after having emigrated from two different volatile countries. They raised him with the notion that trying to make the world a better place was normal and indeed expected. AL reports that her mother brought her children up in a very protective manner because of her own experiences at residential school. She feared her children could be taken from her if an incident happened that in some way could be construed by authorities as improper. Because of family experiences in the oppressive colonial system, AL inherited a strong sense of justice and a passion to combat oppression, as did siblings who are also involved in progressive activism within their professions. JF describes his family as socially conservative, and so becoming an activist was not expected of him; however, his childhood experiences of being bullied were formative in his emergence as a teacher-activist. He pointed out that “people who do social justice work do it because of some personal passion,” often the result of having experienced injustice or oppression (I: 505).

In terms of their formation as activists, the four subjects followed different paths. They were not initially headed toward teaching as a profession. In the case of GJ, she only tried teaching after learning that it would be difficult to find a job in her chosen field of community planning. DK was a medical researcher who wanted more purpose in his life, and went into teaching out of a “sense of service, enthusiasm for learning, and for nature” (I: 268). JF happened upon teaching while working in the field of agricultural research, and liked it. AL was employed as a child care worker but realized teaching offered more opportunities for leadership and impact, despite her earlier negative experiences in the school system.

All were transformed by teaching into more focused activists. First, they became known as excellent teachers who consciously focused on developing critical thinking in their students. As they grew in the profession, they walked more and more with the power that came with that authority. Because as teachers they were always on stage, their ideas were open to question and sometimes criticized by students and parents; but with maturity, they became more able to answer the questions, and so became more confident. As well, teaching was excellent preparation for public speaking and thinking on one's feet, qualities that are intrinsically useful in activist work; skills learned while organizing groups and preparing materials were easily transferable to the planning of campaigns or political strategizing. The collaborative nature of teaching also contributed to a sense of efficacy, as did the relatively high status accorded to teachers by society. In these ways being a teacher prepared and honed their inclinations to be effective activists. This was true for all subjects of this study.

Although two of the activists had parents who were involved in activist endeavours, two did not. In the case of JF, his conservative parents were not engaged in social justice projects, and neither was he as a young person. It was only after he became a teacher and witnessed kids taunting other kids, that he saw himself as a person who was able to do something to stop it. At first it was like he was a child again, re-living the experience of being a helpless victim, but then he realized the implications of his new position, and transformed himself into an effective anti-oppression advocate. This process took several years and a lot of personal examination. In the first couple of years of teaching, for example, he couldn't respond effectively when kids said "fag" in the hallway because of his own horrified recoil; now he talks with the students either in a

group situation or one on one, asking them why they would want to treat another person that way. Now he's not personally offended, and can separate himself enough from the situation in order to debrief it (I: 357-361). In the case of AL, although she had strong modeling from her mother to defend her own and her children's dignity, her primary wellspring to question and disrupt status quo assumptions arose from her being a First Nations member of Canadian society; this history of oppression, marginalization and outsider status continues to be intrinsic to her critical thinking process.

Strategies

They use existing structures to promote and support their activist work. These structures range from school, district, union and provincial committees, programs, and professional development workshops, to non-school organizations. For example, after a long fought battle to achieve job-sharing rights, GJ worked through existing district committees to clarify and implement these policies, crucial for many women.

These activists work primarily with students and colleagues. All enroll others, not only just to support projects, but so that they may also become effective activists themselves. This strategy of continuously nurturing and creating a community of activists around themselves is not selfishly motivated. GJ invites younger teachers into committee work that interests them, and then encourages them to seek leadership roles in whatever way appeals to them. She sees it as a "natural process that people would [first] come to be involved in certain issues, [before] seeing that there is more that they can be involved in, and taking on leadership" (III: 225-227). DK collaborates with another teacher at school, and through personal invitation recruits new members and strongly encourages leadership for Earth Save, the other organization he is involved with. Since the beginning

of his activist work, JF has worked with allies in the local union and in GALE. AL supports and encourages other aboriginal teachers to take public stances on relevant issues and to become leaders within the profession.

Of the four, JF is the most focused on policy creation and implementation as the primary strategy. His approach is layered and very strategic. Initially he helped transform GALE into an effective advocacy organization beyond its traditional member support role. From there, he organized activists to build union support for prioritizing anti-homophobic policies. Union support was strategically won too, with the advice and tactics of feminist allies within the organization. With the union's legal and financial help, they were then able to bring a book banning issue in a school district to a successful conclusion in the Supreme Court of Canada. From there he went on to be instrumental in developing queer-friendly / harassment-free policies, and professional development workshops for school districts. He even had the deliciously ironic experience of delivering an anti-discrimination workshop to administrators among whom was a person who had discriminated against him in the beginning of his teaching career. Long term planning is also his strength; he works on materials, for example, in the summer when he has time, and then later in the year he uses them when needed. People are amazed that he finds the time to do so much, but it is because he plans ahead, thereby reducing stress. He also acknowledges the importance of an inclusive attitude towards others: he thinks activists have to "temper their own enthusiasm, ... learn what other people are passionate about, and support their work too, so that when you need them they will be there to support you" (II: 602-610).

Some of the basic methods that these activists use do differ. GJ prefers networking, gradually moving her agendas forward through personal contact and strategic initiatives. She has a strong sense of history, especially in terms of the responsibility to preserve and re-motivate previously won feminist gains. JF works strategically, with policy creation and implementation as his primary tools. For implementation, he nurtures allies and guides them in their support roles. He values the efficiency of getting the work done where you can, and not trying to achieve gains where the obstacles appear to be insurmountable. The legal challenge he took to the Supreme Court of Canada gave him a public profile, and the experience of having gone through that process has focused his work as an activist. DK works mainly in the school with students in his club, and his outside involvements sustain him for that work. AL now works as an assistant program director within the teachers' union, which makes her activism a daily job. She takes her tendency to interrogate and interrupt into the context of internal union politics. There she works to bring aboriginal issues to the fore, and is sustained in that task by the Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee. In turn she then assists the union to be more authentic in its declared support for aboriginal teachers and students. Surprisingly, all are minimal in their use of electronic media, although DK and GJ post information on the Green Teacher electronic bulletin board, which is available to all district teachers through their e-mail program and JF contributes to national websites such as EGALE. They primarily rely upon face-to-face contacts and policy development.

As expected, these people have different emphases in their activist strategies. GJ is a supreme networker, spending time with others in committee meetings, planning feminist initiatives and strategizing for organizational change. JF concentrates on policy

development, working with like-minded activists in various groups. DK spends time on his in-school club, which takes place at lunch hour meetings, after school, and on weekends for projects and events, and is also heavily involved in outside organizations in leadership roles. AL's full time role as a union organizer allows her to network and strategize with aboriginal teachers for policy creation and implementation. At first she felt like a fraud who didn't belong in the "big house" but she has found ways to bring her transformational purpose to the union director job.

Differences are also evident along gender lines. The two men see their work in more individualistic and heroic terms, although neither works in isolation. GJ and AL invest in and rely heavily on networks and the processes of committee work. They aren't typically out front and centre, as JF is, or trying to carry the load primarily by himself as does DK. AL says she doesn't feel like "[she's] the 'queen' or the 'be all and end all' of the aboriginal education scene" (II: 93). GJ is modest about her achievements and always careful to share credit with other leaders. Both GJ and AL are interested in preserving and keeping current the awareness of collective history; GJ wants teachers to not forget feminist gains, such as maternity leave, and AL challenges her colleagues to be aware of past and present colonialism.

Constraining factors

All complain about time constraints and the stress of over-commitment. For three of them their roles as teachers are full time, and as a consequence they spoke of the toll on family life and the threat of burnout. However, they have achieved some balance in terms of workload. GJ has sought and obtained a resource room teaching position. Because of this, when required to be at union meetings, for example, her absence is not as

disruptive as it would be if she had her own class, and she often gets the same substitute teacher to replace her, which helps with continuity.

They also complain of administrators who were at times not fully sympathetic. Sometimes it seemed the principal shied away from effective supportive leadership, occasionally directly harassed or just displayed an attitude that conveyed the message: don't burden me with more work. DK feels his extra curricular contribution to the school's culture is undervalued, although he does receive occasional kudos from the administration for his club's work. JF resents having to show administrators how to support him (as he did when some parents tried to withdraw their children from a gay teacher's class.) GJ says that, when changing teaching positions, she tries to select a school with a supportive administration. Although she is critical of administrators who stymie her activist work, she has also worked with others who are supportive, and acknowledges that when they are on board, many things can be accomplished.

They speak of the process of getting and keeping colleagues on side as taxing. GJ reports that she spends "almost as much time working with teachers as with students" (I: 13). JF notices colleagues' discomfort with engaging with anti-homophobia initiatives, and is discouraged by the amount of time and effort it takes to effect small changes with them. DK is disgusted with their lack of involvement in school initiatives and it wearies him to reflect on how he does so much important school-wide work on his own. AL gives considerable time encouraging conservative aboriginal colleagues to understand that their teaching is political, helping them engage more fully so that their leadership role may be deepened. However, all four activists value their connections with colleagues, and report that working with others on initiatives is exhilarating.

They speak of a climate of fear that sometimes arises in schools and districts. GJ explains that her school board has at times created this climate through rancorous bargaining, gratuitous grievances, attacks on individual activists, and relationships of mistrust. She described an incident when she was reprimanded by her employer for speaking in public on an issue. JF was also disciplined for speaking in public, and lost several weeks of pay; he is now more mindful of teachers' expected behaviour, and doesn't always say what he feels. He is also cautious about choosing a worksite, and first attempts to find out if the administration is known to be homophobic, so he can avoid them. DK worries about being perceived by parents and colleagues to be indoctrinating students. AL's cautious, non-confrontational style in astutely addressing colonial legacy issues of race and rights is born of her childhood experiences and fears as an aboriginal woman.

Some constraining factors are not shared across the activists. Although GJ and JF are both committed union supporters, they are frustrated by what they perceive as a lack of long term vision and progressive priorities among union leadership. GJ believes that prescriptive curriculum and testing leave teachers with less time to incorporate creative activist lessons into their teaching. By contrast, both DK and JF accept recent curriculum changes as adding impetus and validity to their activist work. They cite the new social responsibility goals, for instance, as reinforcing their work; JF says it is good that people are so "buzzed up about social responsibility performance standards" because they are an excellent tool for social justice pedagogy (I: 315-317). JF reports that he "always justifies his activist work through its connections to the curriculum and to the program he is teaching" (I: 489-90). Finally, AL is bothered by non-aboriginal colleagues who operate

with “unearned privilege” (II: 263), as they jump to conclusions or make assumptions about aboriginal realities without understanding all of our “collective shared history” and responsibilities arising from it (I: 307).

Facilitating factors

All believe that the school system allows them freedom to do activist work in the context of their jobs, and gives them access to students, parents and colleagues who in turn benefit from, and largely support that work. Their status as teachers provides a large sphere of influence, and the unionization of the school system enables them to operate in a professional and stable environment. JF says that support from the union and its various committees in his district was instrumental in his remaining a teacher, pointing out that “had he not been in this school district, in the union [local he is] in, [he] would not have been as successful or felt as supported and validated as a gay man” (II: 712). AL does her activist work primarily in the union head office, and is supported by an Aboriginal advisory committee which actively debates policy and positions; she feels confident that “any one of [the committee members] could come in and pick up” the leadership role (II: 484).

They enjoy the collegiality inherent in teaching and have supportive colleagues in their schools or through broader network or committee involvements, in a non-competitive environment. GJ believes that “there is at least one activist in each school,” and this community of activists gives strength and hope (II: 423). Appreciating the importance of the presence of this community is common to all four.

They also recognize student curiosity and openness to ideas as a facilitating feature in their activist work. In the case of DK he primarily feels personally supported

and encouraged to continue the work by the kids' involvement. When other pressures get him down, he thinks of the club and the kids who are involved, and this gives him a reason to enjoy his work. All use their positions as teachers to do activism that is age appropriate and pedagogically sound. For example, GJ is a resource room teacher who stocks the room with progressively minded resources, and helps teachers implement them in their classes; kids come to her for resources for projects. JF teaches primary classes, and tailors his message to their grade level without shying away from social justice topics; for example, he teaches the concept of sexism in kindergarten classes, pitched carefully so they can understand. DK teaches senior math in a high school, and makes his "classroom a place where kids can receive non-standard messages" about how to live in this world (I: 495). His work with the club also features shared leadership among the teachers and students involved, and he believes that hands-on activities are effective because students like to see the immediate results. AL had her grade seven class host an all-candidates debate during a municipal election; she facilitated the transformation of a traditionally formal event into a multilayered activity that was cross-cultural, facilitated language learning, had important aspects of community outreach, involved higher level thinking, and was primarily student-led. For all four educators, the energy and inspiration for both teaching and activism are reciprocal, in that without teaching they would be disempowered as activists, but without activism, teaching would be deadening.

Outside school involvement re-energizes these activists. As well as union or professional committee work, they have personal support networks and are engaged with organizations outside of schools.

Composite image

Comparisons of the similarities and differences across these four teachers give rise to six themes that suggest a general composite image of these activists. The most obvious theme is that they work out of a deep sense of moral purpose extending beyond the narrow confines of their classrooms. They are interested not just in maximizing student learning in terms of the curriculum, but also in changing aspects of the school system itself and promoting social justice in the broader community. Although their specific causes differ (i.e., women's rights, aboriginal rights, gay rights, and environmentalism), these individuals have a clear commitment to what needs to be changed and how their talents can be deployed in that direction. Although they have a clear and focussed purpose, they are also aware of the toll this work takes on their personal lives and energy, and therefore strategize the use of their time and skills. This balancing of activist work also ensures that it is effective over time.

A second theme is that they have persistence even though their broad goals are long term and never fully achievable. They see themselves as successfully nudging individuals (students and colleagues) and institutions (schools, districts and unions) in the direction of those ideals. Their diligence in pursuing their social justice goals is episodic, as they tend to concentrate their efforts on one or two campaigns at a time, yet they always have larger goals in mind. They work where it is possible and effective to do so. All work with students and colleagues, promoting their ideals in appropriate ways. They also learn as they go, using new strategies to move forward. Their prominence as activists is mostly due to this persistence, not as may be assumed, to their radicalism. In fact their activist work is not radical.

Third, they all have strong feelings of being partial outsiders, even though they work on implementation of values that are already espoused formally or informally by the school system. They are doing the leg-work. A majority of educators, for example, believes in the value of recycling paper, and yet when DK tried to facilitate this further in his school he was seen as over-zealous. No teacher would admit to approving of bullying or harassment, but when JF promoted homophobia-free-zones for schools, many educators responded with discomfort. GJ helped bargain job-sharing into the collective agreement, and then made sure it was a reality for women teachers, by motivating job-partner meetings. AL promotes consideration of aboriginal people's interests in all aspects of the union's work, which sometimes causes some discomfort. When these activists bring forward actionable plans to promote justice, these are not always immediately embraced, and so they have to work strategically over time to gain acceptance.

Fourth, their childhood experiences provided a base from which they grew into the activists they are. Although the four had completely different upbringings, a common value or personality trait they all now have is an unwillingness to let injustice continue unfettered. They attribute this to their parents' inculcation of values in them, or to the indelibility of childhood experiences such as abuse. We see in the cases of DK and GJ, activism and making a difference in the world were expected of them. In the case of AL, as a First Nations woman, along with many in her community, she is struggling with the legacy of colonialism. In the case of JF his own experiences as a child and young gay man were so hurtful that he could not let similar situations proceed on his watch.

A fifth theme is the importance and influence of the supportive communities to which all these activists belong. The communities include issues-based committees that are both within and outside of teacher-specific organizations, specialist associations, colleagues in their school, teacher union groups, and family and friends. They are very aware of the importance of these connections to their work. All of them, compositely, do not see themselves as isolated individuals; they have forged networks to support their goals, or have tapped into existing networks for that support. In all cases they have also been influential in changing the networks to better support their work. These networks serve a purpose in their strategy for change and for personal support.

A last theme is that these activists have integrated teaching and activism as fully engaged professionals. They put their ideologies into practical action within the context and constraints of professional teaching. By so doing, they enhance the level of professionalism in their schools, inspiring other teachers to integrate themselves more fully, too. They see teaching as a dynamic world, a place alive with ideas and creative decisions to be made. Far from seeing teaching as simply a technical skill, they experience it as a pursuit where they can wholly commit themselves intellectually and politically. It is a place of passion and purpose, with many opportunities to influence change and to embark on a voyage of life long engagement. Becoming able to understand issues and to see possible ways to move forward occurs through active engagement, not just theorizing. As teachers, they are constantly in the role of leader, making decisions that may affect large groups of people; as activists, they use this skill in decision making to speak up articulately when the time is right to make an impact on an

issue. There is a lot of power resting with a person who can speak without fear, and recognize the best moment for action.

Discussion

How do I account for the similarities and differences across these four activists?

We have seen that although there are common themes among these activists, they are very different people and are thus very different activists. Beyond some general themes, there is not much of a common pattern that emerges. There are several reasons why this is the case. The first reason is methodological. With only four activists considered in the study, the sample size is too small to be able to make strong claims about all activists. In fact the sample was deliberately diverse in age, teaching experience, gender, and area of activist work. Second, there are cultural and organizational reasons that encourage dissimilarity. The culture of teaching provides huge freedom for activists, which is illustrated in terms of the scope, focus and style of their work. The scope of opportunity is broad because teachers can theorize, plan, and creatively act on so many issues within the range of what is acceptable in public schooling (e.g., feminism, environmentalism, anti-racism, etc.). Foci for activism are multiple, because teachers can orient their work to the classroom, school, district, professional organizations, provincial ministry, teachers' union, or even to external organizations. They can work with groups of students within or outside their classes, with colleagues, parents, many publics, and in the public political sphere. In terms of style, teachers enjoy autonomy as they interpret the curriculum, access the resources, and teach their students in their own particular way. Given this range of scope, focus and style, one would expect an eclectic diversity in activism too.

Although autonomy is an intrinsic feature of teacher culture, allowing for almost limitless creative expression by activists in their work, that same freedom also may hinder if it facilitates privatism and isolated individualism. These activists' feeling of being partial outsiders speaks to the difficulty of trying to bring change where colleagues' autonomy can have the effect of freeing them from obligation to the group. Some of the differences among these activists may be explained by their need to work in areas where they could find allies; they concentrated their work where there was opportunity through the existence of sympathetic colleagues and existing networks. For example, JF wanted to work to implement policy that would protect GLBTQ students and teachers in his home district, but found that the socially conservative environment there was not conducive to that work. So he worked with allies in an adjoining district that had a more progressive school board, and was able to develop and implement policy, which subsequently served as a model for other districts. Another reason for activists choosing particular locations or foci for their activist work was simply because in response to needs apparent to them and expressed by students in their school. DK found himself teaching in a working class suburban school where he felt the students were not exposed to alternative ways of thinking of the world, and so he introduced them to an anti-consumerist / environmentalist mindset. In the conservative context of schooling, activists modeled possibility by moving ahead with projects and ideas, thus opening peoples' minds to change.

A further explanation for both similarity and difference among these four is the nature of their shared context. They worked in two large urban school districts within the populous lower mainland area of British Columbia, in dynamic schools bustling with the

children of recent immigrants. These schools were characterized by lots of change, staff and student turnover, and crowded conditions; the mix of cultures enabled fresh thinking, and the turnover of staff offered ongoing possibilities for new alliances.

Another contextual feature was the opportunities available for teachers. Although teaching is commonly seen as a flat profession unless one joins the management ranks, teachers in large urban areas have opportunities to diversify their experience. Both AL and JF, for example, have worked as faculty advisors for a year in the teacher-training program at a local University, and both currently have staff positions at the provincial union office in program director roles. It may be easier to be an activist when a large urban context offers many options.

Most importantly they were involved to some extent with the teachers' union, either locally or provincially. The union was a venue for finding allies. Its monthly newsletters featured stories about teacher activists' work, and analysis of educational issues by other activists. There were also many prominent activists working through the union structures who were models of possibility and ideas for other activists. There were structures in place, such as standing committees on issues, and grants available for activist initiatives, which enabled activist work. In short, even when the four teachers felt isolated in their own school at times, there was a union context to support them.

Chapter Five

Conclusion, Discussion, and Implications

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how four social justice activist teachers theorized their work within the public school system. The focus was on their understanding of the meanings, motivations, constraining and facilitating factors, and the impacts of their work. Through case studies, this study explored the lived experiences and reflections of prominent activist teachers who are a small minority in the teaching population. The term “social justice activist teacher” referred to one who advocates for the rights of minority groups, challenges widely held attitudes and assumptions about curriculum and teachers’ roles, and works for change beyond the confines of one’s own classroom. Understanding these teachers may be helpful, not only to researchers interested in school culture and change, but also to policy makers in unions and schools in terms of valuing and facilitating these people’s work

The central question in this study was: How do social justice activist teachers theorize their work within the public school system? More specifically, this question included the following sub questions:

1. What do these teachers define as their activist work?
2. What are these teachers’ past and ongoing motivations to do this work?
3. What are the facilitating and constraining features of both their workplace and profession?
4. What positive and negative impacts result from their activist work?

These prominent activists considered activism to be central to their understanding of their roles as teachers; being teacher-activists did not consist of

extracurricular add-on activities, but was a key feature of their own identities. Each of these teachers defined their activist work as focussed primarily within one or two theme areas (e.g., environmentalism, anti-consumerism, feminism, aboriginal issues, anti-homophobia). Their sense of responsibility went far beyond a classroom of students to the school system and to the broader society. They all pursued social justice goals by working with students, colleagues, administrators, the teachers' union, and community groups; their key targets, however, were students and other teachers. Apart from their own classrooms, many avenues were used such as school clubs, school and district committees, and leadership within union projects and politics; one of the activists also used the courts, curriculum development and policy creation.

Motivations were based on strong moral purposes and a sense of mission within their teaching careers. These were people with a big vision for how schools and society can be made better, and were notable for their persistence in their pursuit of goals for change beyond their immediate situations to broader future improvements. They believed they could bring about change and that their activist work was effective, which in itself was motivating. It kept them going and was continually inspiring and provided them with meaning. The activism that formed their identities as teachers and as individuals had its roots in childhood experiences and upbringings. Two were brought up by parents who modelled activist behaviour, whereas two had childhood experiences of oppression which moulded their adult anti-oppression stances.

All of these activists found the education system to be a place where effective activism could take place. Facilitating features ranged from the privilege accorded to teachers and their status in the community, to the autonomous nature of teaching and the supportive collegial environment. All worked through support networks. Constraining factors ranged from personal overload and stress, to colleagues or administrators hostile to their aims or initiatives, or to wariness or reluctance on the part of many teachers about pursuing activist goals.

All four activists felt they were successful in impacting students, colleagues, and the culture of their schools. Three of them encouraged changes within the policies and practices of their union, and one helped create and implement policy changes within school districts. Although they sometimes felt thwarted or unsupported, these four activists had a good understanding of the factors that led to success, and above all, were persistent. Persistence is what made them prominent.

Discussion

In the empirical, conceptual, and anecdotal narratives outlined in Chapter Two, the writers highlighted many aspects of teacher activism that were consistent with the experiences of my participants. The empirical and anecdotal data, for example, highlighted the fact that activists worked in supportive coalitions and groups to accomplish their goals, included activism as part of teacher professionalism and focussed their energies on particular issues. They emphasised strategic planning to accomplish their goals, and paid careful attention to the processes of selecting strategies, building relationships and alliances, anticipating problems, and recruiting supporters. They saw the building of new networks and the using and renewing of

existing ones as major vehicles for change, not just to advance particular projects, but as places where people could become engaged in thinking through alternative ways to tackle problems.

The conceptual data are more relevant because they provide concepts applicable to framing my findings. Giroux's (1991) conception of the transformative intellectual, Sachs' (2003) activist teacher professionalism, and Fullan's (1993) change agency are all brought to life in these four activists.

The transformative intellectual

Four aspects of Giroux's (1991) conception of a transformative intellectual fit these activists. First, they lived in a constant process of thoughtful analysis, action and clarification. They were critically engaged to such an extent that, for example, AL saw her activism as "part of her DNA as a professional" (I: 12-14), and characterized her experience as an ongoing self-analysis of "critiquing whenever [she] becomes complacent or complicit in [her] stance" (II: 205-207). Similarly, after going through a long process of self-discovery, JF came to see himself "not as a victim, but as someone who can effect change" (II: 282-284).

Second, they questioned authority of the status quo, distanced themselves from oppressive power relations, and did so from a place of being partial outsiders. DK saw his students as kids who really needed his example "because they were in a large working class suburban school where the consumerist status quo was rarely challenged" (II: 151). JF wanted to teach kids to be critical thinkers, and believed "teaching 'activist topics' is part of just teaching kids to become responsible citizens... [who will be] part of the planet, and [able to make] positive contributions"

(I: 176-177). He was fully aware that as a result of his teaching, students were “going to question things” and that some of his colleagues may not like it because “when those kids go to the next grade they may question” the teacher and classroom practice (I: 49-50). However, he was willing to live with the anticipation that when you “challenge the status quo you get action and reaction,” because he wanted the “kids to become actors instead of reactors in their own lives” (I: 28). JF also questioned administrators about how social justice concerns were being addressed in the school (I: 463-464).

Third, they defined the school as a democratic space. Illustrative is GJ’s description of her life’s work as “promoting a more just and democratic system in education for teachers and for students” (I: 8-9). This was evident in her long service as a union representative, helping many teachers through grievances, and in her many activities promoting equity for girls’ educational experiences. AL told her students: “we already live in a world we can’t control, so let’s create a classroom that is a place that really prides itself as an anti-oppression place to be” (I: 89-92). She believed that “introducing students to some activist experiences,” such as an all candidates debate hosted by students, “is what teaching is all about” (I: 416).

Fourth, all four activists spent time educating and encouraging others to take the risks needed to “alter the grounds,” for seeing how things should be. (2005, p. 90). They were fully engaged, and through their activist work, they modelled possibility. DK saw his activist work in the school as an example from which parents and colleagues could “restore their faith in schools; they’re not just factories turning out university prospective candidates, full of standardized tests” (I: 515-519). JF also

spoke of the importance of being an example, of always “sticking with your principles because [that’s] what brings people on side to social justice issues.... [this way] they see you as a person, and then accept change over time” (II: 86-92). He saw it as his role to coach newer activists, and to nudge reluctant colleagues to confront homophobia by engaging in small concrete actions such as putting up a poster in their classroom. He clearly saw himself as “a facilitator and a guide for allies, to give them a comfort level so they can make change in safe ways” (II: 95). AL also educated others to take risks, as she shepherded the Aboriginal Education Committee through their work of policy creation. She purposefully facilitated their training so that “any one of them could come in [to her role] and pick it up because they know what the pressing issues are” (II: 485-487).

The activist teacher professional

Sachs’ (2003) conception of the activist teacher professional was also exemplified by my subjects. They acknowledged that the community’s traditional trust in teachers provided a platform for their work; their status as teachers gave authority to their activism. They also understood that active trust, created by working effectively with others, could not be taken for granted because it needed to be constantly generated within networks of support and action. It was through networks that responses to issues could be generated, thereby illustrating Sachs’ notion of generative politics. Although all four activists were clear examples of Sachs’ protocols for activist teacher professionalism, I will show how in two cases their work illustrated the processes she outlined.

One of the first things JF did in his activist career was join and transform, with others, the Gay and Lesbian Educators Association. When he first joined, he and others “tried to open up GALE to make it more democratic ... there was a lot of work internally, changing the organization” (II: 241-242). He points out that “the activist teacher has to be seen as a professional teacher before you can get anyone to buy into your projects” (II: 826-828). Traditional trust was soon transformed into active trust as the group worked on initiatives designed to raise the profile of the organization by clarifying its purpose as advocacy for GLBTQ teachers and students; the group consciously chose this larger perspective and course of action. Some people left the group, finding the changes threatening, and others joined, partly because it was starting to be more relevant as an advocacy organization. They then deployed their active trust into generative politics by seeking to raise awareness of homophobia in the union. Because they planned their campaigns purposefully, working carefully through networks and alliances, they generated change within the union. That impacted many teachers to a better understanding of homophobia as part of bullying. Throughout this process, JF understood that networks and alliances need constant maintenance and re-inspiration. He strategically planned his ambitious goals, and found a way to implement the work to make real change. For example, he worked with administrators, colleagues, union and government officials, and school boards, which was frustrating at times, because he believed that “if you work within the system, and you have supportive people at the highest level of the system, then you can make amazing change” (I: 566-567). He understood that policy development and implementation are very important because “if [teachers] know that the district has an

anti-racism and multiculturalism policy, then they won't be scared to do the [anti-racist] work" (I: 571). Policies gave support and validation to the colleagues who were already doing the work with the students.

GJ was also deeply committed to working within networks to bring about change. She had clear political goals motivated by strong feminist values, and her understanding of the need for maintenance and renewal of alliances made this work a major part of her activism. She created active trust with colleagues by sharing resources and ideas, and by "doing [her] share of work in the school" (II: 162). She gave considerable time to "bringing people on board, making things palatable for them so they could be a part of it" (I: 156-157). She believed that "it is better to have more people involved...because when the crunch comes" you need people there with "training and gumption and connections" to be able to act (II: 430). Whether working with students and colleagues, in the local union as a prominent activist, in the provincial union, or with community groups, GJ spent time nurturing others' involvement, thereby moving active trust to generative politics through purposeful planning to effect change. For example, working within the Status of Women Committee which she chaired, she involved her colleagues in planning and participating in a district-wide grade seven girls' conference. Activists and teenage girls were asked to give workshops at the conference, thus providing a venue for re-motivating their feminist ideas. GJ paid attention to active trust, always inviting and cajoling colleagues to involve themselves in making ideals a reality. Instead of just protesting the patriarchy, or discussing the need for women's rights, she planned

events and actions that moved people to understand the world differently. Hers was a generative politics.

Change agency

Fullan's (1993) change agency was vividly brought to life through these activists' self reflective understanding of their role in the change process. All four of his requisite capacities – personal vision building, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration – were evident in their work.

Personal vision building was strongly apparent in each activist's high moral purpose for their activist work. DK believed in the importance of “exposing kids to a variety of ideas, a variety of realities and ways of seeing the world,” and thought he was positioned as a teacher with “a great opportunity to connect with youth” (I: 390-391, 265-267). He believed he would “leave the earth a slightly better place” for having been here (I: 209); students have remarked that “having listened to him has really changed the way they see things” (I: 375-376). Similarly, JF described how people “who do social justice work do it because of some personal passion” (I: 505). AL described her process of working for change as a process of “facilitating a constant questioning of the world we live in” (II: 29). She theorized her activist work as working between cultures with a transformational purpose: “I see myself as a cultural broker, a change agent.... I can move comfortably back and forth between communities, in between spaces” (I: 376-377).

Constant questioning or inquiry also characterized these four activists. In particular AL's strategy of using questioning to get people to change their thinking

extended to herself. She commented upon her self-analysis saying: “for me it is about critiquing when I become complacent or complicit in my stance” (II: 205-206).

Mastery, which is the process of behaving one’s way into new ideas and skills, not just thinking one’s way into them, also is alive in these activists. GJ was “a union representative ever since she got hired” as a young teacher (I: 95). She learned while doing, and believes that involvement helps people to know more and more about other issues. JF started his teaching career closeted, to protect himself from homophobia, but later, through activist experiences, he walked tall and confidently as a gay man. He was conscious of what it takes to accomplish change, when he commented: “you need to have a quiet, calm determination, to stick to your principles...this way they see you as a person and accept change over time. Change takes a long time for lots of people, so you have to acknowledge everything they do...and give them a comfort level so they can make change in safe ways” (II: 86-97). AL believed that people’s ideas can change through action; for example she advocated public acknowledgement of traditional First Nations’ territory at the beginning of meetings, even though “it is on some level tokenistic,” because people change their understanding bit by bit through constant exposure and practice (II: 317).

Most prominently, of all the capacities required of change agents, these activists effectively collaborated. All four worked actively to maintain, create, sustain, and develop networks and alliances. By so doing, they all felt part of a bigger purpose, and deployed their talents to make changes beyond where they worked. Despite feelings of being partial outsiders, they forged spaces to do their work, and in so doing inspired others to join them in effective relationships.

What surprised me was how these people's work cannot be considered radical in any educational sense, what makes them prominent is their persistence in pushing the school system to live up to its espoused values. They do the legwork to implement such things as recycling, to develop opportunities for girls to succeed, to promote anti-racist attitudes among teachers, and take concrete steps to stop homophobic bullying.

Implications

Because activists are important to the school system as advocates for and leaders of change, the system needs to find ways to value and support these peoples' passions. First, more value can be laid on the work that they do. Their activities should be celebrated as much as those teachers who go beyond their job descriptions in coaching sports or sponsoring clubs. Another way to value activists is to simply ask them what support they could use, thereby treating them more as the professionals they are; simple forms of recognition, for example, may include business cards, and functional telephones and computers in the classroom. As well, administrators could consult with activists about decision implications or problematic situations in the school, thereby utilizing their experience to deepen collective understandings. Recognizing their value increases their effectiveness. When a person feels excluded in the work environment, with colleagues reacting negatively to suggestions for change, he or she may decide that it is time to move to a different school. However, efforts should be made to retain them because of their commitment, understanding and leadership on local concerns over the long term. What we want is productive activism, where highly moral people can find the supports they need to be able to deploy their talents in the schools to bring about changes.

There are implications for teacher-candidate recruitment and training. People who aspire to a teaching career should be asked before entering teacher-training what they have done to make a difference in the world. If we want more activists in teaching, they need to be actively recruited and trained, and then encouraged to find the space to do effective work. Teacher activists should be recruited to host pre-service teachers during their practica. As student teachers witness the daily routines of activist teachers, and the importance of strategic planning for change, this experience can be formative to their own future practice and may also help them reflect on the many layers of teacher professionalism. Being asked to host student teachers may also help value the activist teachers' roles in the school.

Schools need to hire people with a strong sense of purpose and possibility. Teaching tends to be socially reproductive and conservative. Because all four activists said it was important to have supportive colleagues, principals could match new hires with activists; in this way schools could gradually create supportive cohorts of activists who over time help change the culture of the school. As well, recruitment of administrators should include some progressive activists, who question the social justice status quo, because it is important to distribute these peoples' understandings and skills throughout the system. If visionary leadership is needed in management ranks to give school systems the depth of talent needed to meet the demands upon them, a diversity of styles and ideas is required, including those of activists.

More empirical studies of activists and their work are needed. One way to better understand this group and their contributions is to study the perceptions of their colleagues. For example, what do non-activist teachers value about activists? What do

they see as the characteristics of effective and ineffective activism? What are the concerns? The views of colleagues are important because they may be affected negatively and positively. Another study may concentrate on those students who are involved in the activists' work as members of their clubs and classes, or as activists in their own right. What were the effects of activist teachers on these students' ideas about how problems could be addressed effectively? What capacities, attitudes and strategies were learned from them? In what ways did these students change their views about schools and teachers as a result of their contact with the activist teacher(s)? I would also like to know the extent to which, and the reasons why, early career activists may drop out of teaching, or if they stay, how their sense of moral purpose may develop over time.

Epilogue

My motivation for doing this research sprang from my own experiences as an activist teacher, which were both rewarding and frustrating. I wanted to find out how prominent teacher activists sustained their activist work year after year. I have found that the research itself has been an important chapter in my teaching career and my activist career, because doing the interviews and analysis became a vehicle for my own maturation as an activist, allowing me to gain valuable perspective.

I feel more peaceful and less angry about the obstacles we activist teachers face, but at the same time I feel better equipped to continue the struggle for social justice and have a heightened sense of its importance. The main thing I learned from these activist teachers is the importance of strategy and persistence in the work. I am more sure of the importance of social justice activist leadership in the school system, and as I go forward

in my teaching career, mentorship of younger teacher activists will be a focus of my work.

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Appendix A: Letter of Initial Contact

[Date]

[Name of potential participant]

Dear [Name of potential participant],

I am writing to ask if you are willing to participate in my master's degree study of teacher activists. I am an English teacher at Fraser Heights Secondary School in Surrey, and I have taught in Surrey for eleven years. I describe myself as a teacher activist and have a long-standing interest in teacher activist work in schools.

The purpose of my magisterial research is to study teacher activists in the public school system. My main research question is: How do social justice activist teachers theorize their work within the school system? Sub questions that will help me nuance this are:

1. What do these activist teachers define as their activist work?
2. What are activist teachers' past and ongoing motivations to do this work?
3. What are the facilitating and constraining features of both their workplace and profession?
4. What positive and negative impacts result from their activist work?

I am contacting you because I am familiar with your activist work, or I have had your name passed on to me through my activist networks. If you agree to participate, I will schedule two interviews with you at the time and place of your choice, some time between May 2005 and December 2005. The interviews will be semi-structured – guided by general questions about your experiences of being a teacher activist. The interviews will be tape recorded by me for the purposes of analysis. The second interview will build upon concepts explored in the first.

I will do my best to present you and your ideas with honesty and confidentiality. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcripts before I use them, and all sections of the final thesis that refer to you. It will be your decision whether I refer to you by name or pseudonym. You will also have the option of withdrawing from the research at any time.

I estimate that the interviews will take one hour each. You may also need up to two hours to review the transcripts and sections of the thesis, for a total time commitment of four hours.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact me by e-mail at (_____), telephone at (_____), or by post at (_____) If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, or my research supervisor, Dr. Walter Werner, at (_____) or by e-mail at (_____).

I really appreciate your consideration of this participation and look forward to hearing from you.

Appendix B: Interview Consent Letter

[Date]

[Name of participant]

Dear [Name of participant],

Thanks again for giving me permission to conduct research through interviewing you. This letter will explain the purpose of my research, how I will conduct it, and how I will ensure that I represent you and your ideas correctly. At the end of this letter is a consent form, which I need you to sign.

The purpose of my research project is to study teacher activists in the public school system. My main research question is: How do social justice activist teachers theorize their work within the school system? Sub questions that will help me nuance this are:

1. What do these activist teachers define as their activist work?
 - What do these activist teachers understand as their role in the school system?
 - What do they consider to be activist work?
 - Is this work individualistic or part of a larger project / movement or collaboration?
2. What are activist teachers' past and ongoing motivations to do this work?
 - What is their rationale for activist work?
 - What key life experiences led to this work and worldview?
 - How do they see themselves as "agents of change?"
 - What rewards do they seek and receive from their activist work?
3. What are the facilitating and constraining features of both their workplace and profession?
 - How do they negotiate the time, space, support and legitimacy to do this necessary work?
 - What frustrations have they experienced and overcome in their activist work?
4. What positive and negative impacts result from their activist work?
 - for themselves, both personally and professionally
 - for the school / school system
 - for the kids

To conduct my research I will be interviewing you twice. That means I ask your permission to interview you at times and places convenient to you and to audiotape the interviews for the purpose of analysis.

I want to explain how I will make sure your identity is kept confidential if you want it to be. I will transcribe all the tapes myself and will keep them and the transcripts in a locked filing cabinet. Computer files will be password protected. You will have a choice either to be identified by name or to have your identity kept confidential through the use of a pseudonym. You can revisit your decision regarding the pseudonym at any time during

the study. You will have the chance to read the transcripts of your interviews and sections of my thesis that refer to you, so that you can make sure I do not misrepresent you.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardizing yourself or the research.

Please indicate your consent to participate in the research by signing the form below, returning it to my attention in the enclosed self addressed envelope. I enclose a copy for your own records. If you have any concerns about this study before or after the interviews, please feel free to contact me, or my research supervisor Walter Werner. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at (_____).

Thanks again.

Julia MacRae
M.A. student
Dept. of Curriculum Studies
Tel. (_____)

Dr. Walter Werner
Research Supervisor
Dept. of Curriculum Studies
Tel: (_____)

Your signature below indicates that:

1. You consent to participate in the study
2. You consent to the interviews being audio taped
3. You have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Participant signature

Date

Printed name of participant

Preparatory questions

Please reflect on these theme areas before our interview.

1. What is your activist work as a teacher?
2. Why do you do your activist work?
3. How have you figured out a way to do this activist work in the school system?
4. What are the results of your activist work?



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Werner, W.	DEPARTMENT Curriculum Studies	NUMBER B04-0853
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT		
CO-INVESTIGATORS: Macrae, Julia, Curriculum Studies		
SPONSORING AGENCIES		
TITLE: Social Justice Activist Teachers' Understandings of Their Work in Schools		
APPROVAL DATE MAR - 8 2005	TERM (YEARS) 1	DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL: Feb. 27, 2005, Consent form / Nov. 22, 2004, Contact letter / Questionnaire
CERTIFICATION: The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
<p><i>Approval of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:</i></p> <p>Dr. James Frankish, Chair, Dr. Cay Holbrook, Associate Chair, Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair Dr. Anita Hubley, Associate Chair</p>		
This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures		



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services and Administration
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Werner, W.	DEPARTMENT Curriculum Studies	NUMBER B04-0853
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT		
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