COLLABORATION AND CONSTRAINT: WOMEN ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' POLITICAL IDENTITY FORMATIONS

by

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Abstract

This study examines tensions in female elementary teachers’ political identity constructions as social agents. It focuses on teachers’ experiences with discourses and structures in social fields and analyzes the ways these influence their capacity to practice from principles of social justice.

A collective case study of four elementary teachers was used to explore the ways contexts influenced identity formation. Specifically, over a six month period I interviewed, observed, and gathered artefacts regarding four elementary teachers and the conditions in which they worked. I spent one day per week shadowing each teacher. The data were analyzed using socio-cultural, feminist, and political theories, within and across cases. Themes were generated from open coding along with constant comparison. This iterative process enabled examination of nuances and tensions both within and between the cases.

The findings indicate that teachers construct ambivalent identities and individual notions of agency through their engagements in societal and educational fields. The gendered and dominant neo-liberal agendas permeating society are embodied in the teachers and influence their understandings of ‘self’, agency, and change. As such, change is recognized as an individual process and thus, institutional structures are left unquestioned. However, I also found that collaboration offered teachers opportunities to construct themselves against dominant neo-liberal and gendered agendas. In this space,
teachers were able to foster active trust, and in turn, question assumptions and practices in constructing themselves as social agents. As such, generative momentum emerges and supports teachers in understanding themselves as social agents.

I suggest theories informing teaching for social justice ought to consider the enduring constructions of passive bodies that women teachers carry, and that society perpetuates, and the ways these may influence uneven actions for justice. The teachers' ambivalent identity formations offer a way to explore how reflections can lead to identities that act to reshape the field.

In addition, I argue that teacher education ought to increase: (1) conversations about the ways neo-liberalism and gendered constructions permeate society and education to influence identities and practice: and (2) opportunities for teachers' collaborative inquiry that explores taken-for-granted assumptions and supports political identity formation as social agents.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Elementary teachers are situated at the nexus of multiple education and societal agendas, some of which position them as gendered, passive technicians transmitting ‘objective’ knowledge to students. At the same time, movements aimed at social justice and transformation in education call for teachers to take stances as critical educators in their daily practice (Ayers, 1998; Cochran-Smith, 1991, 1999; Greene, 1988; Kelly, Minnes Brandes, & Orlowski, 2003-2004; Regenspan, 2002). The latter perspective assumes that schools are part of society where broader social, political, cultural, and economic power struggles are expressed. In addition, teachers can play pivotal roles in social movements that create socially just spaces for all children (Cochran-Smith, 1999). This dissertation research emerges out of the contradictions that teachers face on a daily basis. Its purpose is to examine the tensions women elementary teachers negotiate in forming political identities as agents for social change in schools amidst social, cultural, political, economic, and historical contexts of schools and society. Given that the school and societal conditions underpin this study, the next section explicates details of the current educational space in British Columbia.

1.1 Contemporary Context

One enduring influence on Western contemporary society and education is the Enlightenment project. This seventeenth century movement holds notions of autonomous
agents who can know the world through rational processes that dissociate mind from bodily experience (Apple, 2004). Thus, disembedded rationality was the process through which one could objectively ‘know’ the world. This philosophical movement had political and economic ramifications both emphasizing hierarchical constructions between mind/body, public/private, and male/female as dualisms with privilege granted to the former term relative to the latter (cf. Coole, 1993; Dillabough, 2000).

Classic liberalism in its political and economic expressions of ‘freedom’ and ‘individualism’ emerged from this project (Olssen, 2000). Politically, classic liberalism held notions of a citizen “organized around male experience” of “autonomy and mobility” (Evans, 1997, p. 25) with the capacity to make decisions, organize, and shape society. In opposition to this, all that was feminine became coded as “antithetical to qualities of citizenship, humanity, reason, culture and civilization itself” (Coole, 1993, p. 1). As a result, women’s experiences were excluded from notions of citizen and from the public domain of active involvement in shaping society.

In conjunction with philosophical and political ideas about the individual as an autonomous agent, economic implications of earnings reinforced ideas of hard effort and individual merit. Thus, together these ideas fostered individuals’ efforts toward furthering their own interests and future rather than those of the community. These liberal tenets held individuals as free and unfettered agents with the capacity to shape the contexts of their lives (Dillabough, 2000; Weir, 1997). Furthermore, this vision, which was premised on historical constructions of males as capable of determining their future and organizing society, and females as passive, is pivotal to this project. It points to the potential depth of entrenchment symbolic and material structures have in Western
society. These gendered individual and collective ideas of female, male, knowledge, knower, merit, and citizen have been transmitted through history and endure in rejuvenated forms today. They are carried through economic, philosophical, and political interests to inform institutions such as schools and the organization of society.

Despite waning public support for these perspectives in the early twentieth century, they have, in the past few decades, received renewed interest and are referred to as neo-liberal agendas (Apple, 2004). Like its classic form, the neo-liberal perspective disperses ideas symbolically and through structures about the potential of autonomous actors using individual effort to shape their future. Furthermore, this perspective accepts the illusion of a 'level playing field' and as such, considers outcomes to be merit based (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). This renewed expression of liberalism focuses on individual interests and achievements rather than those of groups and equal access as the levelling premise from which merit can be determined (Apple, 2001; Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Olssen, 2000).

More recently, the neo-liberal agenda has been joined by neo-conservative calls for a return to an education system that emphasizes students’ skill development, content knowledge acquisition, regulation of teaching, and education as part of free market economics (Apple, 2004). According to Apple (2004), this alliance of the two agendas influences curriculum, assessment, evaluation, and school organization. This is expressed through movements such as: (1) standardized content information and testing; (2) regulation of teachers’ work; and (3) increases in market driven education choices such as privatized schools (magnet schools) (Apple, 2004). The mandated use of standardized curricular documents and student assessments foster conceptions of teaching
as formulaic and technician oriented (Sawyer, 2004). These dynamics contribute to forming the conditions of teachers’ work.

This ‘technical approach’ dissociates teaching from creative and intellectual activity that connects teachers’ work to student learning and participation in broader society. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) capture this in the metaphor of a funnel depositing authoritative knowledge into the field for teachers who are to transfer it without question, to students. Similarly, Freire (1970) compares a technician approach of teaching to banking education in that teachers deposit information in students. Furthermore, the emphasis on standardized student examinations often lead to teaching aimed at outcomes, techniques of test writing and fixed content knowledge rather than creating an inquiry space for students to grapple, question, and engage with ideas.

In British Columbia (BC), the Ministry of Education publishes integrated resource packages with student learning outcomes which teachers are expected to work toward in their practice (BC Ministry of Education, 2005a). In addition, the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT) recently published a document regarding standards and regulations of teachers and teaching (BCCT, 2004). Due to the newness of these standards, their implications on teachers and teaching remain unclear. However, in some preliminary research, Phelan, Erickson, and Kind, (2005) explore the standards asking questions about the ways engaging with them influences their practices as teacher educators. They suggest the standards have potential to foster “inquiry in teacher education” (p. 1). Yet, this possibility relies on teachers’ engagements with the standards as prompts for asking questions about practices and processes.
The aim in “setting the market loose on schools” (Apple, 2004, p. 17) is to foster ‘effective’ schools inspired through competition. Within the Canadian context, this agenda is expressed through student choice regarding schools they attend and funding for schools, calculated based on student enrolment. As a result, guardians are able to shop for the school that suits their child and their perspective of education. However, this argument of choice fails to account for economic, political, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2000) which enables some guardians more options than others about the schools their children can attend. It contributes to inequalities¹ by offering opportunities to certain students while limiting others’ educational experiences and future. According to Connell (1993), this imbalance is problematic for all children involved because “an education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education, even as it gives him or her a social or economic advantage” (p. 15). At the same time, the child whose opportunities are restricted may be disadvantaged economically or socially.

Together, policies based on ‘free choice’ and ‘market driven school models’ privilege interests and experiences of individuals who are part of dominant groups in society (i.e., white, middle class, heterosexual, and able, thin bodied) at the expense of others. Within social institutions such as schools, this combination of agendas contributes to greater disparity between those who have and have not. This occurs within a context that holds individuals solely responsible for their success or lack of it. Together these educational agendas contribute to perpetuating imbalances in society based on

¹I use this term when referring to imbalances or unequal conditions between individuals. I explicate my understanding of this term in section 1.5.2.
power relations while also positioning teachers as passive and complicit in sustaining these dynamics.

Numerous education scholars have and continue to critique neo-liberal and neo-conservative agendas regarding inequalities of schooling that emerge out of relations of power and privilege. In addition, they call for movements for more socially just education and society. According to Cochran-Smith (1999), these are primarily drawn from broader political and intellectual movements such as: critical perspectives from the Frankfurt School (e.g., Marx); Liberatory projects in Latin America such as in the work of Paulo Freire; North American critical education theory (e.g., Apple, 1990, 2000, 2001; Giroux, 1992); Anti-racist perspectives (cf. Gloria Ladson Billings, 1998); multiculturalism (cf. Banks, 2001; cf. Banks & McGee Banks, 1997); critical multiculturalism and social reconstructionism (e.g., Nieto, 2000a; Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995); and critical socio-cultural and gender studies of language, learning and schooling. Although not included in Cochran-Smith’s (1999) list, I add feminist political theories (e.g., Fraser, 1995a, 2000; Young, 1990, 2000) which inform current debates and research regarding justice in schools. It is difficult to construct a list that adequately accounts for the diverse bodies of work informing critical approaches to education research, especially since the field continues to grow in vastness. Despite the diverse perspectives grounding these works, one thing that remains common to all is a commitment toward constructing more socially just schools and society.

Within education, scholarly writing aimed at fostering social justice in schools, frequently includes visions of teachers as intentional actors with the capacity to contribute to making schools better places for all children (cf. Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn,
1998; Cochran-Smith, 1999; Connell, 1993; Gale & Densmore, 2000; Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001; Simon, 1992). I elaborate on the research inquiry regarding this conception of school and society in chapter two. At this point, I offer only a brief overview of the topic.

This field of study is shaped by writing from various approaches. For instance, a number of scholars write conceptually about the topic emphasizing the necessity of teachers practicing from a critical perspective in schools (e.g., Giroux, 1992, 1997; Greene, 1988; McLaren, 1998; Oakes & Lipton, 2003; Schniedewind & Davidson, 1998). There is also a large body of research examining the ways beginner teachers can learn to question their assumptions and take up a critical stance in their classrooms (e.g., Britzman, 1991, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 1991; Gore, Griffiths, & Ladwig, 2004; Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001; Michie, 2003; Regenspan, 2002). Furthermore, there is research conducted by practicing teachers who engage in critical inquiry into their practice (Michie, 1999; Peterson, 1998). They ask questions of themselves and schools to challenge inequalities in the status quo and teach for social justice. Some of these studies of inquiry into practice occur in the context of graduate education (e.g., Minnes Brandes & Kelly, 2004). These works contribute to understandings about the approaches teachers can use in their efforts for social justice in schools and society.

However, following Zeichner (2005), I suggest that despite the increased research and efforts in teacher education aimed at fostering teaching from social justice perspectives, there remains little evidence of wide spread change in schools or teachers' practices. This position echoes other writing on the topic (cf. Gore, Griffiths, & Ladwig, 2004; Zeichner, 2003). With this in mind, I am arguing that closer examination of
complexities in how teachers make sense of themselves as having the capacity to act as an agent influencing social change may offer insight and direction to understand and address this phenomenon.

1.2 Rationale and Research Questions

While there is growing body of research regarding teaching for social justice, there is an assumption that teachers can construct themselves as social agents. There has been less empirical investigation regarding teachers as embodied and the daily tensions they negotiate in constructing themselves as critical social agents (cf. Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). This is especially true in terms of female elementary teachers. This is noteworthy because although teaching is often considered to be women’s work (Acker, 1995; Connell, 1985), I contend that this gendered construction becomes exacerbated for teachers of young children. Teaching is frequently associated with mothering, which carries a historical association with nurturer (Acker, 1995; Biklen, 1995; Grumet, 1988; Thompson, 1997).

Teaching has a historical construction of being ‘natural’ for women as it is an extension of their mothering work in the home. According to Blackmore (1993), women have historically been considered ideal for teaching because of their compliancy and the lower wages they require. This association of teaching with passive mothers is compounded by education movements of standardization and regulation that deskill and position teachers as passive transmitters (Hargreaves, 1994). For elementary teachers who are also female, associations of their work with mothering, care-giving, and nurturing may be further entrenched by societal discourses and materialities emphasizing women as passive and inactive, while men are active shapers of society (Isaacs, 2002).
These complexities in the field of teaching lead me to question how female teachers negotiate these tensions to understand 'self' as having agency. I am suggesting that this positioning of elementary teachers and more specifically, women who are elementary teachers, as passive, creates a contradiction when they are asked to take an active stance as an educator who creates social change.

My interest lies in examining the tensions influencing the ways women elementary teachers form political identities as social agents for justice. To do so, I put forth the following questions to guide my research study:

**In what ways do female elementary teachers construct their understandings of 'self' as social agents in relation to cultural, economic, social, and gendered contexts of their work?**

**How do these understandings influence their agency for equity in curricular initiatives?**

**How do teachers’ past experiences of agency influence their thinking and actions for justice in schools?**

Although the research questions act as a rudder to steer my thinking, they are intentionally malleable allowing responsiveness to the specific contexts of the field. This flexible approach is suitable to the inquiry, which occurs in a complicated contextually bound space, where women elementary teachers construct political identities. In order to make sense of the teachers within their work contexts, I consider it necessary to enter their work space in order to walk alongside them (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). For this reason, I select a collective case study methodology (Stake 1995) because it enables the utilization of multiple perspectives for interpreting how teachers’ understandings are influenced by space.
Specifically, this project focuses on four female elementary teachers over a period of six months. During this time, I spent one day per week shadowing the teacher and participating as a volunteer in her classroom. My approach to this study is distinctive in four major ways: (1) I examine political identity formation with a focus on the practicing teacher as a constrained social actor. (2) I enter into the field of teaching and thus, spend time observing and speaking with teachers in their work environment (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). This adds richness of nuanced dimensions to the interviews. (3) This research is not connected to evaluation in a course of study and therefore, the power relation is researcher-teacher without a compounding one of teacher-student. In no way am I suggesting this eliminates a power dynamic in the relation, but instead, I propose my interaction with the teacher does not include a formal evaluation. (4) This project occurs in the elementary school context which is frequently overlooked in studies regarding teachers as agents working for justice.

1.3 Interpreting Terms

At this point, it is necessary for me to clarify my use of terms such as discourse, materiality, identity, self, and agency. Drawing from Stuart Hall (1997), I understand a discourse to be a “way(s) of referring to, or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice” (p. 6). Discourses can form “a cluster (or formation) or ideas, images and practices which provide a way of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (Hall, 1997, p. 6). There may be multiple and competing discourses for a particular topic or agenda. According to Kelly (1998), discourses are mutable and temporal, they “conflict and change over time” (p. 226). In terms of this inquiry, this means that multiple ideas
about gender and teaching permeate society, yet they are susceptible to shifts depending on the interests of certain dominant groups in society.

With regard to the term materiality, although it has been used by feminist poststructuralists (i.e., Butler, 1990, 1993), it is also often employed by socio-cultural perspectives (cf., Rahman & Witz, 2003) as a “social ontology of gender and sexuality” (Rahman & Witz, 2003, p. 244). The latter approach offers more flexibility than the previous sociological term, ‘material’ which seems frequently limited or ‘rigid’ in its reference to economics of society. Thus, throughout this dissertation, I use materiality because it is a robust notion accounting for context and experience or, ‘the sociality of matter’ (Clough, 2000, cited in Rahman & Witz, 2003, p. 245).

1.3.1 Gendering Agency

Agency, has “an active component” (Mead in Beijaard et al., 2004) which is an expression of an identity of ‘self’ as a human agent (Dillabough, 1999, 2000). I understand ‘self’ to have coherency without being fixed. It is, as Mishler (1999) suggests, a momentary expression of aspects of an individual’s multiple identities. This concept is captured in the response to the question, “Who am I at this moment?” (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 108). In the present research, the teacher is the individual or social agent who engages in action toward socially just schools and society. Borrowing from Dillabough (2000), I use the term political identities to refer to teachers’ constructions of ‘self’ as social agents. It is crucial to note that the construction of a

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2 I use single quotations around ‘self’ to indicate I trouble conceptions of it as monolithic. Rather I understand it to be an expression of an intersection of various constructed identities that shift in reaction to conditions. Thus, it is situated.
political sense of ‘self’ becomes complicated as individuals negotiate social constructions of gender, class, race, and ability.

My use of the term ‘agency’ in a project that is informed by feminist and socio-cultural perspectives requires clarification due to historical tracings to the late Bronze Age which expose interpretations of males as active agents bringing rational order in opposition to females, as passive, formless, recipients (Coole, 1993). Given the gendered association of this word, my use of it includes an understanding that all thinking, experience, and actions are contextually bound.

1.4 Situating Myself

My understanding of the world influences my interpretations throughout this research project. In addition, my perspectives and mere presence also shape the research space (Olesen, 2000). I approach this project from a feminist perspective that considers there to be an unequal social formation in society that expresses a devaluation of women (Kenway & Modra, 1992; Whelehan, 1995). Furthermore, this gender imbalance is exacerbated as it intersects with social hierarchies of race, class, sexuality, and ability. I understand feminism not as a monolithic theory but rather, as plural perspectives linked by a common assumption that there are systemic societal power relations that act to subordinate women’s interests to men’s and inform the organization of society.

Power dynamics that shape investigations, interpretations, research relationships, and representation are frequently under tension in feminist scholarship (cf. Olesen, 2000). Throughout this project, I question these issues and ways to represent the teachers’ voices while drawing from critical perspectives. I strive to create ‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway, cited in Olesen, 2000) in the blurred space between researcher and participant.
In chapter three, I discuss the relation between power dynamics of research and representation as they pertain to this study. With these complexities in mind, I share a brief background of my own experience as a way to situate myself in this research project. Specifically the intention is to describe how life and work experiences have contributed to my understanding of 'self and the world around me.

During the late 1980's I was a student in the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Toronto in Ontario and practice taught in urban schools serving students of diverse backgrounds. My teaching jobs were all in and around London, Ontario which is a mid-sized, conservative city. I grew up in this city experiencing it as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, Roman Catholic, female. Over the twelve years as a classroom teacher, two years as a vice principal, and one year as a principal, I worked in a number of schools (core city, suburban, and rural) with students with varied experiences and backgrounds.

I frequently struggled to make sense of my role as well as differences between my experiences and those I observed of many of the students. For years and still to some extent today, I wrestle with contradictions between a liberal upbringing where I was immersed in the approach that hard work provided a ticket to achievement and the everyday situations I was experiencing with students. The liberal perspectives entrenched in me from
childhood were part of my bodily knowledge about the world (Bourdieu, 1977). These were difficult to alter because they were taken-for-granted or commonsense. In the early years of teaching, I believe my attitude was one of saviour where I thought that through hard work I could change children's life conditions or teach them how to alter them. I now realize this logic was premised on a liberal illusion of 'freedom' (Dillabough, 2000) and a level playing field. At the time, I thought this approach was part of doing my best for children and their families. Now I consider this perspective to be an expression of my 'unthought' (Britzman, 1995) position of privilege.

Another aspect of my educational career that had an impact on my thinking about schools, teachers, and learning, is my experience as an administrator. The best part of this position was working with teachers. I had and have the utmost respect for what they do for kids on a daily basis. My decision to step away from the role as a school leader came out of tensions I felt regarding my capacity to be the leader I believed the teachers and school community needed/deserved. The weight of the responsibility kept me awake but not in the alert state Maxine Greene (1988) describes, but rather one that gnawed at my insides, leaving me feeling vacuous and incapable of action. I wanted to find out more about
how one might negotiate life's conditions, while at the same time, feeling capable of influencing them - hence, my interest in agency.

My point in exposing these perspectives is not for catharsis (Pillow, 2003), but instead to explain how I came to this topic. In my first few years as a PhD student I struggled with what sort of journey I would walk in terms of my research. One day I attended a talk given by a visiting scholar who suggested graduate students ought to research something that keeps them awake at night. This comment provoked me to think about the reasons I left my administrator role as well as the things I loved about it, such as working with teachers. I decided that understanding how teachers think of themselves and their capacity for agency would be my work toward supporting this endeavour. All of the experiences I share contribute to my dissonance in understanding 'self', my work, and the capacity to alter social conditions. This 'discomfort', as Megan Boler (2004) refers to it, endures in me. I try to acknowledge it without becoming paralyzed by it because I believe its presence helps me recognize and respect human frailty as I enter the research space.
1.5 The Theoretical Framework

Broadly speaking, my thinking is informed by pluralistic feminist socio-cultural theories pertaining to identity construction, agency, and social justice. I draw from intellectual writings that speak within and at times, across these contested fields in examining female elementary teachers and their identification with working toward justice in schools and society.

Notions of embodiment, identity, and agency are central to feminist thought because of historical constructions of gender in the organization of society (McNay, 1999b, 2000; Witz, 2000). As such, throughout this project I largely draw from feminist political, sociological, and philosophical perspectives as they pertain to theories of identity and agency as well as in examining social justice. In what follows, I explore habitus, field, and practical knowledge as described by Bourdieu as well as feminists’ extensions of these concepts.

1.5.1 Constructing Political Identities

Sociological and cultural perspectives (henceforth referred to as socio-cultural) that recognize individuals as situated in historical, societal contexts contribute to the theoretical frame through which I read identity construction, subject formation, and agency. Specifically, I suggest Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of habitus, field, and practical knowledge offer helpful theoretical and analytic tools for studying teachers as embodied social agents, their identity formation and possible implications of agency. Although Bourdieu’s writings that account for gendered relations in society are limited (i.e., *Masculine Domination*, 2001) many feminists have and continue to engage, debate, and

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3 Following Witz (2000), I use the notion of embodiment to refer to a socialized ‘self’ mediating the body.
extend his ideas to examine social formations (Dillabough, 2004; Kenway & McLeod, 2004; McNay, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Lovell, 2000; Reay, 1995, 2004). Following these scholars, I draw upon Bourdieu’s concepts to make sense of gender as well as other dynamics in processes of identity construction and social action.

Habitus, field, and practical knowledge (Bourdieu, 1977, 2000) are pivotal interrelated conceptual tools which are helpful in examining the ways individuals and groups form embodied identities and potential for human action. In more recent years, these concepts have received increased attention from certain feminist scholars who have engaged with them to explore their fruitfulness for explaining socio-cultural constructions of gender (Lovell, 2000; McNay, 2000, 2003c; Reay, 1995) as well as culture and class (Dillabough, 2004; Reay, 1997). Although it is the relation between the concepts that offer the generative potential for identities and action, I begin with an examination of each.

According to Bourdieu (1977, 1998), habitus refers to a system of durable yet mutable dispositions which are inculcated into bodies. In this way, habitus represents one’s embodied knowledge of the world. Bourdieu states, the agent “feels at home in the world because the world is also in him [sic] in the form of habitus” (p. 143). This comment reveals habitus as “the product of social conditionings” (Bourdieu, 1977) carrying history of the past in the form of tastes, distinctions, and ways of thinking about the world. It also indicates habitus refers to deeply rooted understandings and ways of engaging in society which are passed through social agents, time, and space. McNay (1999a) suggests that Bourdieu’s habitus as embodied dispositions, works to bridge the mind/body split of Cartesian logic. Thus, the body and mind carry the conditions of the

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4 In Bourdieu’s earlier works, the pronoun ‘he’ was used to reference all individuals.
field. In this way, women elementary teachers carry the past constructions of women and
elementary teachers into the present through their thinking, perspectives, and actions.

The field refers to a social context with a nexus of power, where interactions of
various individuals occur (Adkins, 2002; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The social world
is composed of numerous, overlapping fields of action (i.e., economic, political, cultural,
social etc) in which social agents\(^5\) relate (Adkins, 2002). In the present study, schools
and classrooms can be considered social fields of interaction.

Although the field structures habitus, it too can be structured through dispositions
(Bourdieu, 1977). This is a process whereby discourse and materialities of a given field
contribute to shaping embodied knowledge, while at the same time being shaped by
individuals' practices. McNay (1999a) describes the structuring of the social field as
giving it 'sense and value' (Bourdieu cited in McNay, 1999a, p. 100), meaning that the
behaviours of individuals reinforce or work towards adjustments in it.

The notion of a constrained agent in relation to a field is intended by Bourdieu to
overcome the "moments of subjectivist and objectivist (which) stand in dialectical
relation" (Bourdieu, cited in King, 2000). This occurs because although individuals are
shaped by social fields, the dispositions they engender are within the bounds of
imagination understood by the field. This is "the durably installed generative principle of
regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78) or, bounded options that are
understood by the social field of engagement. This means that certain tastes, habits, and
practices are recognized within the social dynamic of the field. For example, elementary
teachers engage in practices that are recognized within the contexts of their particular
school environments. However, identities and subjects are at neither extreme of

\(^5\) Bourdieu refers to individuals as social agents. This captures the embodied way of being in the world.
determined or constructed voluntarily. Rather, they are constructed and constructing. However, the construction remains within the bounded imaginary of the parameters of the field.

Furthermore, through their practices in social spaces, individuals, in this situation, teachers, influence the conditions of a field which in turn, influences future dispositions. In this way, the relationship between the habitus and the field is mutually informing (Bourdieu, 2000). It is a reciprocal and dynamic relation where a shift in habitus alters the field and visa versa. As such, it offers a generative process of identity and subject construction (McNay, 2000). In the context of education, I understand teachers to be both influenced by their social fields of school while also influencing the fields through their habits.

Despite the attempt to overcome “structuralist determinism” (Nash, 1999, p. 176), some scholars have suggested the relation between habitus and field to be too tightly bound and constraining (Butler, 1999; Lovell, 2000). Although I agree that this critique might be applied to some earlier writings, in Bourdieu’s later writings, he articulates a less constrained relationship between habitus and field in comparison to his earlier works (cf. Bourdieu, 1977, 1993, 2000). This is done through explication and demonstration of the flexibility of the concepts. In this way, they are conceptual tools (cf. Reay, 1995), open to reshaping and developing.

Individuals and groups shape their embodied ways of ‘knowing’ through practice. According to Bourdieu (1977), experience in social fields leads to practical knowledge. This is “the consequence of our immersion in the world” (Schirato and Web, 2002, p. 257) and it is a pre-reflexive way of ‘knowing’ it. This knowledge is carried through our
bodies. We incorporate the structures and tendencies of the world around us into our commonsense ways of thinking.

To illustrate the concept of practical knowledge, Bourdieu often uses the metaphor of a game. For example, experienced tennis players have a feel for the game in that they no longer have to concentrate on the mechanics of swinging the racquet or when to move to the net. This is in contrast to a neophyte to the sport who thinks through details of the swing, and body position. Through practice in the field individuals develop ‘le sense pratique’ (feel for the game) (Bourdieu, 1977), and have bodily knowledge that enables them to transfer knowledge from previous games into anticipatory action. Thus, they have a sense of when to go to the net or drop back. They carry this with them through their dispositions, even in different games and against different opponents or players (Bourdieu, 1977). The alignment between field and habitus is sufficient enough that the individual’s actions are largely consistent with the field.

For elementary women teachers, through their engagements in fields such as their school, school board, and classroom, they are immersed in enduring ideas about teachers and teaching and form understandings of themselves, in relation to these. Thus, it is through practice that conditions of a field are carried forth or perpetuated. Bourdieu (2000) clarifies that although the dispositions are influenced by the field, “the agent is never completely the subject of his practices” (p. 138); there are variances in the alignment to aspects of the field. In this way, the agent constructs ‘self’.

Bourdieu (2000) suggests that when occasional ‘blips’ or ‘misfirings’ between habitus and field occur, individuals negotiate, adjust, and improvise their dispositions within the continuum of tendencies of the field. In this situation, the “relationship of
immediate adaptation is suspended in an instant of hesitation into which there may slip a form of reflection” (p. 162). The momentary reflection is according to Bourdieu, constrained and often results in ‘taking stock’ (p. 162) and resetting alignment as opposed to reflexive potential for intentional action. Through this process, the past constitutes the present in that fields are gradually framed over time to recognize different tendencies or habits. Lovell (2003) explores this gradual shaping process of habitus and field in trying to explain human action aimed at social change. She suggests that since the dispositions and social context must be somewhat aligned, for change to occur, it must be within the realm of what is understandable to the field. As such, societal conditions must be prepared to accept major shifts in practices.

Within the context of the present study, I propose that teachers form understandings of themselves in relation to past and present dispositions or ways of being, expressed within their fields of engagement. Altering these identities occurs through construction processes within the bounds of imagination in their fields of interaction. Thus, for teachers’ actions to lead to social change in education, the altered ways of being must be recognized as possible or within the bounds of imagination. I suggest that teachers efforts toward social change that do not lead to transformation, may contribute to preparing the field for such future change.

Bourdieu (1990; Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992) discusses a theory of reflexivity where individuals examine the social conditions within a field. However, his articulation of this process refers largely to scientific and other academic fields rather than human action (cf. Schirato & Webb, 2002). This is because these fields recognize reflection as a tendency of the field. McNay (1999a) suggests that Bourdieu neglects to fully explore
discord in the relation between habitus and field. Yet, discord is important because this misalignment opens possibilities for reflexivity and intentional action. In McNay’s (1999a) reading of discord and gender formation she posits that, “although he is undoubtedly right to stress the ingrained nature of gender norms, he significantly underestimates the ambiguities and dissonances that exist in the way that men and women occupy masculine and feminine positions” (p. 107). In extending McNay’s point beyond gender, I contend that disjuncture between an individual’s dispositions and the dominant ideas of the field holds potential for reflexivity, identity formation that moves against the dominant grain of society. This may lead to action for change. However, the ambiguities in habitus mean that the action is inconsistent and occurs in varying ways thus, it has implications for gendered identities and uneven social action in times of detraditionalization (McNay, 1999a).

Building on McNay’s position, it is my contention that these ambivalences are part of all aspects of identity construction (e.g., political identities) and contribute to uneven human action. In the situation of female elementary teachers, these complicated identities may influence their positioning in practice. By this, I mean that individuals, who do not recognize their capacity to contribute to socially just schooling and society, may be more likely to accept the status quo of inequities. This stance not only maintains unjust conditions within their schools, but potentially perpetuates them by neglecting to teach all children of their capacity for shaping society.

Through McNay’s (1999a, 2000, 2003b, 2003c) extensive engagement with Bourdieu’s concepts, she extends his notions of identity formation and human action to

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6 I use this term to refer to a lack of fairness in distribution. I explicate my understanding of this term as a facet of justice and describe how it fits within perspectives of social justice in section 1.5.2.
develop a theory of identity formation that accounts for its instability and the unevenness in agency. Although McNay (2003c) argues that the relation between habitus and field accounts for symbolic and material conditions influencing a generative process of identity construction, she maintains it is insufficient for attending to the role social interactions play in it. For this reason, she draws from both Bourdieuan (socio-cultural) and Habermasian (intersubjective) perspectives in offering what she calls 'situated intersubjectivity' to explain ambivalences in identity constructions that account for inconsistencies in human action. I draw upon McNay’s perspectives of incomplete constructions to examine how disjunction between teachers’ dispositions and those of the field offer possibilities for mutable identities while also perpetuating historically entrenched ideas in individuals’ dispositions. That is, discord in alignment leaves teachers open to recognize alternative ways of being in a given field. However, the aligned aspects of dispositions contribute to the ‘naturalness’ of certain societal organization and notions such as, elementary teaching as gendered work and women as passive.

At this point, I discuss theories of justice, that inform my thinking about what society and schools might look like if they were to account for the interests of all. Using lenses of justice in this project assists the analysis of the stance of an educator working from such principles.

1.5.2 Theories of Social Justice

Social justice is a contentious and debated term with numerous interpretations and uses. To explicate my use of the concept and how it contributes to my thinking about teachers as social agents, I briefly examine some of the intellectual history influencing
writing in North America during last half-century. I explore the formation of facets of the concept and how these have been taken up by various educational scholars.

John Rawls, an influential 20th century writer of social justice, refers to justice as fairness characterized through principles of liberty and difference (1971, 2001). Broadly speaking, these attend to the distribution of goods, services, and intangible values to individuals based on merit or need (Rawls, 1971, 2001). To illustrate justice as fairness, Rawls suggests we imagine a society we create when we do not know what position we hold at the start or end of the process. This approach is intended to encourage individuals to consider what is equal and fair to all in terms of needs.

Thus, the perspective that distribution that is the same to all (equal) may not be socially just in that it neglects to account for different starting points. However, Rawls’ (1971) perspective of distributing goods based on merit or need (equity) may also be incomplete. For numerous political scholars, even if one assumes the possibility of equal starting points between individuals, the notion of ‘merit’ remains questionable (cf. Bacchi, 1991; Meehan & Sevenhuijsen, 1991). By this, I mean that merit is premised on a relative perspective against a norm, rather than questions asked regarding the original premise itself. As an example of these problems, for many feminist political scholars, justice grounded on a premise of sameness is problematic because it fails to account for the structural inequities in society and thus, maintains women’s unequal status (Meehan & Sevenhuijsen, 1991). At the same time, the concept of difference has also been demonstrated to be problematic for women because they continue to be measured against a standard of men’s privilege. For instance, Bacchi (1991) puts forth a situation regarding legal ramifications around pregnancy and maternity leave. She suggests that
accepting the need to decide between the dualism of sameness versus difference fails to
challenge the premise of the organizational structure of society (Bacchi, 1991).

Debates such as these, bring to the fore interlocking issues of recognition of
certain groups of people and what constitutes ‘just’ distribution of goods (e.g., job
security) in relation to this recognition. I consider social justice that is understood as
equality to be based on neo-liberalism and inadequate because sameness is the goal and
thus, it overlooks societal power dynamics that constrain full participation and
opportunities for individuals and groups. In addition it assumes the premise of a norm
against which sameness is determined. This perspective does not account for differences
between individuals and the power dynamics that create the uneven playing ground of
society. Although equity attends to difference by understanding distribution based on
merit or need, questions of who gets what and how the distribution is decided remain
unaddressed. In this way, although equity as fairness, also referred to as redistribution is
part of social justice, I consider it incomplete. There is also a need to account for
questions of ‘who’ is included and ‘who’ gets what in terms of recognition. Thus, both
distribution and recognition are aspects of social justice (Fraser, 1995a; Young, 1997a).

Feminist political scholars Nancy Fraser (1995a, 2000) and Iris Marion Young
(1990, 1997a), have both proposed theories of justice which account for facets of
distribution and recognition in order to overcome the perceived dualism between them.
These theories are part of their vast scholarly writing on a breadth of topics and
substantive contributions to feminist theoretical debates over the years. Their
engagements with theories and scholars have converged and diverged over the years.
Some of the similarities between the two scholars include intellectual roots in socialist
feminism with a shift to materialist feminism. Other similarities between the scholars include multiple engagements with writings of theorists such as Habermas (e.g., Fraser, 1997b; Young, 1997b) and Foucault (e.g., Fraser, 2003; Young, 1997b), as well as with postmodern and poststructural perspectives (cf. Benhabib, Butler, Cornell, & Fraser, 1995; Nicholson, 1990).

In terms of Habermas, they both question his dualistic perspective regarding public and private spheres and his lack of accounting for dynamics such as gender within his perspectives (Fraser, 1997b; Young, 1997b). Young (2000) does acknowledge that Habermas’ more recent works refer to the necessity of accounting for social difference within processes of “public discussion and decision-making” (Young, 2000, p. 109). In addition to engaging with Habermasian concepts, these scholars have explored Foucault’s perspectives regarding power (e.g., Fraser 2003; Young, 1997b). As just one example of Fraser’s engagements with Foucault’s concepts, she examines his disciplining power in relation to Fordism as a social mode of regulation (Fraser, 2003). Ultimately Fraser (2003) asks questions about how power might be understood to operate in today’s globalizing society. Young (1997b) also engages with Foucault’s conceptualization of power in her analysis of the ways surveillance and discipline is utilized in targeting and treating pregnant addicts. In addition to these similarities, Young and Fraser have both explored postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives. Although I understand these

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7 There seems to be diverse interpretations of terms such as socialist and materialist, as well as disagreements regarding the categorization of particular feminists. However, my understanding is that socialist feminism moves away from Marxist economic reductionism, questions private and public spheres and the impact of capitalism and patriarchy on a theory of gender. I understand materialist feminists question the ways material, social, and historical conditions contribute to shaping social arrangements such as gender. They are interested in the dynamics within private/public spheres as well as ways to overcome this dualism.
perspectives to be different from one another, in some writings the term postmodernism is used as a broader notion that includes poststructuralism or at other times, the terms are used interchangeably in referring to similar scholars and concepts (Weedon, 1997). For instance, Young (1997b) draws upon Derrida’s deconstruction to examine what this might mean for community and justice. This writing appears in Nicholson’s (1990) *Feminism/Postmodernism*, yet I understand deconstruction to be associated with poststructuralism. My intention is not to get into categorizing what counts in each perspective because I do not think making a labelling distinction helps my thinking or is in keeping with the perspectives themselves.

My aim in briefly referring to just a few of many works by these scholars is to acknowledge some similarities in their intellectual history and theoretical engagements. Although both of these theorists engage with justice questions regarding struggles for recognition as well as redistribution (cf. Fraser, 1995a; Young, 1990, 1997a), I am not suggesting that they work together or agree on theoretical approaches to their project. Rather, they engage in debate regarding their perspectives (cf. Fraser, 1997; Young, 1997a). Each suggests the other’s perspective fronts a particular facet of justice rather than attempting to incorporate both.

Fraser (1995a, 1997, 2000) proposes a theory of social justice where recognition as social status is interconnected with redistribution. This means that “what requires recognition is not group-specific identity but the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction” (Fraser, 2000, p. 113). If ‘social subordination’ or

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8 Broadly speaking, I understand postmodernism as a critique of modern notions such as absolute truths and grand narratives. As a distinction, I understand poststructuralism as a move away from structuralism’s associations of meaning in language. In this way, meanings in language are multiple because they are continually deferred.
someone “being prevented from participating as a peer in social life” (Fraser, 2000, p. 113) occurs, this is misrecognition and to redress the situation often requires redistribution. Ultimately for Fraser, justice requires establishing parity of participation among individuals (Fraser, 1995a, 1997).

Contra Fraser, Young (1997a) also attempts to bridge recognition and distribution in arguing “it is theoretically and politically more productive to pluralize categories and understand them as differently related to particular social groups and issues” (p. 149). In this way, recognition becomes a method through which “economic or political equality” is established (Young, 1997a, p. 156). Thus, Young (1997a) understands social justice as “institutional conditions for promoting self-development and self-determination of a society’s members” (1997a, p. 33). These conditions require individuals’ inclusion in decision making processes where the outcomes affect their lives.

The perspectives of both Young and Fraser contribute to how I think about social justice and read teachers’ expressions of agency and their struggles to negotiate conditions of their daily work. I understand social justice to include facets of distribution and recognition. I find Fraser’s (1995a) theory of status, compelling and useful in drawing together recognition that is based on parity of participation with redistribution in working toward this vision. In addition, I also find Young’s explication of the faces of oppression (1990), inclusion, self-development, and difference (1997b, 2000) helpful in thinking about particularities of recognition as an aspect of social justice.

For Young (2000), recognition across difference based on inclusion and self-determination are necessary for deliberative processes and social justice. Oppression, according to Young (2000) emerges out of a lack in these conditions. More specifically,
it refers to “systematic, institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people’s ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen” (Young, 1990, p. 38 cited in Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 21).

In this project I extrapolate and sculpt Fraser’s notion of status as a way to bridge recognition and distribution alongside Young’s perspective of recognition across difference in deliberative processes to explore women teachers’ understandings of their capacities to foster both these facets of justice in their daily work.

Within the education context, Gale and Densmore (2000) draw together Fraser’s and Young’s perspectives to suggest a theory of recognitive social justice. This concept is grounded on three conditions: “fostering of respect for different social groups through their self-identification; opportunities for their self-development and self-expression; and the participation of groups in making decisions that directly concern them through their representation on determining bodies” (Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 19). Young’s intention of accounting for social difference and democratic processes underpins Gale and Densmore’s (2000) perspective; yet, they acknowledge their desire to not abandon questions of distribution. Although this approach still seems to be caught in the tension of multiple facets of justice, the work offers a conceptual and empirical bridge through their examination of social justice in the context of schools and teachers. These scholars focus on analysis of education issues regarding recognition and redistribution of high school contexts and high school teachers’ perspectives; however, it is their mapping of both facets of justice to education that informs my thinking about elementary teachers.
In my effort to attend to recognition and distribution in understanding tensions facing teachers, I heed Gewirtz's and Cribb's (2002) two cautionary notes about engaging in education research that focuses on social justice perspectives. First, they suggest that such research frequently bring together notions of recognition and distribution without attending to tensions between these facets. Second, these scholars contend that all too often academic critiques are given without consideration to the daily struggles teachers negotiate in attempting to address issues of justice in schools (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002). In response to the situation, Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) call for additional research that is not only sensitive to the possibilities of tensions between claims for recognition and those for distribution, but does so in a way that is helpful to the project of making schools more just for all students. With these cautions in mind, I move forward to study female elementary teachers in the midst of their everyday struggles of supporting students to "develop and exercise her or his intellectual, social, emotional, and expressive capacities" (Young, 1993, cited in Greene, 1998, p. XXIX).

1.6 Outline of the Chapters

In this chapter I have described the field of educational work in which my research is situated. I have identified a gap in research regarding female elementary teachers and their constructions of political identities when they are considered to be embedded in social contexts. My approach to the concept of teaching aimed at more socially just educational and social spaces is to examine tensions in constructions of female social agents.

The theoretical frame of this project draws upon feminist and socio-cultural perspectives of identity construction and agency as well as feminist theories of justice.
Feminism as a pluralistic theory that runs across both socio-cultural and justice perspectives, weaves through this work because I consider society, and educational institutions as part of society, to be gendered. In particular, elementary teachers’ work is associated with women who as I discuss, are historically constructed as other to male rationality and agency. This becomes an important premise framing the project and a lynch pin for my examination of the tensions female elementary teachers negotiate in forming ‘self’ as social agents. The second chapter is a review of bodies of literature surrounding my research project. In particular, I focus on education research regarding teachers as social agents working from just practices. To do so, I examine literature regarding critical feminist pedagogies and teaching for social justice.

Chapter three describes the collective case methodology employed in this study. I explore the processes of organizing this study and collecting data. My selection of a collective case approach follows the research questions about tensions influencing teachers. As such, the teachers in their school contexts offer settings to study tensions they negotiate in constructing their agency. In specific, I explicate my methods of participant observation, informal conversation, and semi-structured interviews. In chapter four, details of the cases are presented to center the teachers and the conditions in which they work.

Generally speaking, chapters five through eight are data analysis chapters in which themes emerging from the research are presented and examined. The interviews and observations both provide support and illustrate the arguments. Throughout the chapters the focus of discussion shifts from using cases in explicating processes to reading between cases as examination of tensions in identity formation. In this way,
chapters five and six draw from particular cases as examples of identity formation and notions of justice. From an analysis of these processes, I move toward examining the ways contexts and constraints influence the teachers in making sense of themselves and their capacity to act for social change. To do this, I read tensions within but also, across cases.

More specifically, in chapter five, I focus on teachers' lack of identification with the ideas and language pertaining to social justice in education and society. In chapter six, I draw from studies with Michelle and Stacey to examine the individual and social processes of identity formation that occur within educational spaces. I examine alignment and discord between habitus and field along with practices that contribute to identity formation.

Chapter seven is a focus on the ways the teachers' political identity constructions are influenced by daily conditions of the field of education. I draw primarily from Jen and Annette's experiences in examining how political agendas of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism contribute to their 'self' and thinking about agency in practice. In particular, issues associated with curricular initiatives taken by the schools, the local school board, and province offer context for many conversations. I also examine how teachers' work and its gendered construction influence their understandings of 'self' and their potential for contributing to shaping society. I illustrate how elementary teachers, in particular, are associated with mothering and the ways language and actions perpetuate these constructions.

Chapter eight draws together all of the findings as I sketch out how critical collaborative inquiry processes can support elementary teachers' formations of political
identities as capable of working for justice in schools and society. I explicate by drawing from observations and interviews across all four cases, practices that foster and sustain critical educators and those that act as barriers.

Chapter nine is a conclusion in which I review findings of the project and speak to my original research questions in terms of my insights. I elaborate on strengths and limitations in doing this sort of research project, the implications of the findings, and possible future research directions that emerge from this study.
Chapter 2: Teachers as Social Agents: A Review of the Literature

2.1 Overview

The present study about the formation of female elementary teachers' identities as critical educators is situated in the midst of overlapping fields of education research regarding critical and feminist pedagogies, teaching for social justice, teachers' work, teacher thinking, and identity formation. In this chapter, I examine scholarly works within and across these fields. Due to the breadth in each of these traditions, I primarily focus on landmark studies which are central to the intellectual journey of each field and speak to teacher identity construction. In doing so, I create concentric circles within these fields and then threads between them in order to situate this study. Throughout the review, my explication moves from general to specific studies. This process clears space for me to demonstrate the ways this research contributes to broader fields of education studies. In the next section I examine research informed by pedagogical perspectives that consider teachers to be capable of making schools more socially just for all students.

2.2 Pedagogies – Social Visions in Practice

Before examining literature pertaining to pedagogy, I explicate my understanding and use of terms. Following others (Gore, 1993; Kenway & Modra, 1992; Lusted 1986; Simon, 1987), I understand pedagogy to refer to processes through which knowledge is produced. These include the ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘why’ of teaching (Gore, 1993). Lusted
suggests, “knowledge is produced, negotiated, transformed, and realized in the interaction between the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge itself” (cited in Kenway & Modra, 1992, p. 140). In this way, pedagogy is “a more complex and extensive term than teaching, referring to the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, a time and space for the practices of all those strategies and techniques, and evaluation purposes and method” (Simon, 1987, p. 371).

Common to these views is the idea of pedagogy as a shift from teaching as a technical process to “teaching that demands attention be drawn to the politics of those processes and to the broader political contexts within which they are situated” (Gore, 1993, p. 5). This conception of pedagogy includes instruction as well as social vision (Gore, 1993). Thus, pedagogy is political (Simon, 1987).

2.3 Pedagogical Practices for Justice

The scholarly studies that examine teachers’ critical practices within a stance for justice are primarily drawn from broader political and intellectual movements. As I mentioned in chapter one, Cochran-Smith (1999) suggests these larger fields include: critical perspectives from the Frankfurt School (e.g., Marx); liberatory projects in Latin America such as in the work of Paulo Freire; North American critical education theory (e.g., Apple, 1990, 2001; Giroux, 1992); Anti-Racist perspectives (cf. Gloria Ladson Billings, 1995b, 1998); critical multiculturalism (i.e., Banks & McGee Banks, 1997; Nieto, 2000a; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995); and critical socio-cultural and gender studies of language, learning and schooling. Although not included in Cochran-Smith’s (1999) list, I make two additions: (1) feminist political perspectives (i.e., Fraser, 1995a, 2000; Young, 1990, 2000) that inform many current debates and research studies regarding
justice in schools. Education scholars frequently draw from aspects of these different conceptions of justice determined by recognition and distribution. (2) Feminist pedagogies (i.e., Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1992; Kenway & Modra, 1992; Lather, 1998, 2001), which are numerous in approach and may be informed by a social vision or political commitment.

It is difficult to construct a list that adequately recognizes the diverse works informing research which questions, critiques, and calls for change in education, especially due to proliferation within the field. The writing does not necessarily fall neatly into a category but frequently crosses boundaries. Thus, it can sometimes be problematic to categorize this type of intellectual work. Yet, with caution I engage in this process because it enables me an organizational frame to examine the intellectual history that shapes this field of study. In doing so, I am able to situate my work within the complicated field of teaching for change, and point to ways this project contributes to these conversations.

Therefore, in this section I discuss the research within the aspects described above that most directly relate to my work. Specifically, I focus on critical and feminist pedagogies, critical multi-cultural and anti-racist pedagogies, and teaching from a stance for justice. Each of these bodies of work is examined as a puzzle piece offering a different perspective toward understanding an overarching inquiry. Following this, I draw across the concentrations of research to illustrate how they merge to create part of the intellectual space where the present project sits.
2.3.1 The Teacher as Agent: In Critical and Feminist Pedagogies

As I previously mentioned, broadly speaking, critical pedagogy has its theoretical roots in the Frankfurt School (i.e., Marx); liberatory projects in Latin America (i.e., Paulo Freire); and North American critical education theory (i.e., Apple, 1990, 2001; Giroux, 1992). This field emerged in part, in response to inequities in society and the potential role schools and teachers could play in changing this condition.

Paulo Freire's (1970) well known *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provides a landmark work which I argue galvanizes much of the writing and practice of critical pedagogy in North America. He calls for teachers to take a position of critique toward life and engage as learners alongside students. Together Freire and Shor argue for dialogue and critique as a method to inspire critical consciousness in individuals and collectives (Freire, 1970; Shor & Freire, 1987). Like Freire, Henry Giroux (1992, 1997, 2001) has contributed conceptually to the field of critical pedagogy through his posit that teachers ought to consider themselves to be “transformative intellectuals” (Giroux, 1992, p. 21). This position relies on teachers having a sense of self as able to contribute to changing social conditions of schools. In an attempt to read teaching and school practices through a lens of critical pedagogy, Peter McLaren (1986) conducted an ethnography which examined elementary teachers in urban Toronto, Canada. “Schooling As a Ritual Performance” is an exploration of the ways power relations, mediated through rituals, act to regulate students (McLaren, 1986). Building on this work, McLaren (1994) reflects on his own teaching experiences by examining his complicity as a teacher in perpetuating power imbalances and hegemonic practices in schools. Years later, drawing from his conceptual engagements with race, class, and culture in schools, McLaren (1998) calls for educators to challenge the “struggles in the larger theatre of
social and political life” (p. 23). Beyond his early ethnographic research, McLaren’s writings, like those of Henry Giroux, are largely conceptual, and contribute to shaping the field of critical pedagogy.

Scholars such as, Sylvester (1994) and Peterson (1998) have conducted empirical examinations which implement these conceptualizations of the teacher as agent in critical pedagogy. Both of these researchers employ critical approaches to explore inequities within their classrooms and encourage students to act with agency to redress them. For example, Sylvester (1994) uses an economic model of a city to support his students’ embodied experiences of life in an urban neighbourhood. He argues that it is his responsibility as an inner city teacher to educate economically disadvantaged students “about the structural obstacles to their success, and that with strategic planning and collective effort these obstacles are surmountable” (p. 331).

Similarly, Peterson (1998) uses dialogue to encourage students to challenge their assumptions and to act against sites of injustice in their lives. For Peterson (1998), teachers ought to “make connections between what the students talk about and the curriculum and broader society” (p. 89). It is my contention that both Peterson and Sylvester position the teacher as autonomous to the struggles of society and thus, able to know what is best for others. Neither teacher speaks of how their own assumptions might influence the classroom dynamic, class discussions, or their perceptions of events. In addition, although there is much discussion around class, there is little mention of gender or race in the previously discussed writings of critical pedagogy.

The positioning of teacher as an autonomous actor who knows what is ‘best’ for others and is “omnipotent” (Gore, 1992, p. 57), has come under scrutiny of numerous
feminist education scholars (Davies and Hunt, 1994; Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1992; Lather 1998, 2001; Orner, 1992). Although feminist perspectives of pedagogy are not singular, they do share points of agreement. For instance, they converge regarding their concern about the gendered construction of society and schools as perpetuating conceptions and materialities of gender inequalities (Kenway & Modra, 1992). In reaction to critical pedagogy they share concern for patriarchy of authoritative, objective emancipator in critical pedagogy (Gore, 1992; hooks, 1994; Lather, 1998, 2001). However, there are points of divergence between the perspectives regarding certain theoretical concepts such as, the causes and responses to gender inequalities and the role of discourse and materialities in subject and identity construction.

bell hooks (1994) acknowledges limitations in the field of critical pedagogy including a lack of attention to gender and race. Yet, she maintains that Freire’s critical approach continues to underpin her practice for freedom. She engages in theory and practice that rubs at boundaries between critical pedagogies and feminists’ critiques of them. hooks (1994) argues that positioning herself as critically aware and engaged is necessary for teaching with political commitment of justice. Further, she suggests that teachers ought to enter classrooms as whole mind, body and spirited beings, learning alongside students. hooks’ (1994) proposes a feminist pedagogy in which teachers recognize themselves as critical pedagogues who are embodied and entrenched in power dynamics of the classroom while continually questioning and teaching students to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and understandings.

To discuss power dynamics in relation to teachers’ practices and positions unleashes questions regarding voice, authority, and agency (Britzman, 1995; Delpit,
In a watershed research piece for critiques in feminist pedagogies, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) analyzes her attempts to engage with tenets of critical pedagogy. She concludes that teachers are never impartial or all knowing in that her interpretations as well as her students are always "valid – but not without response" (p. 305). They are always shaped in dynamics of power that teachers may reduce, however not eliminate (Ellsworth, 1989). This is the pedagogical unpredictability that teachers accept when recognizing the presence and their complicity in classroom power dynamics. This means that the teacher is an embodied part of the dynamics of power and voice in school practices (Ellsworth, 1989, 1997; hooks, 1994; Orner, 1992). Similar to Ellsworth, hooks (1994) recognizes voice and silence as reflections of power dynamics at play in classrooms. However for hooks, if teachers commit to engaging with mind, body, and spirit in classrooms they can alter power relations and encourage dialogues where all voices are heard.

Oyler (1996) also takes up questions of power dynamics in classrooms, exploring it as relational and the potential this holds for shared authority between teachers and students. She argues that elementary teachers are commonly granted positions of dominance due to their status as adult in relation to their students. This relation is complicated by race and class in that many teachers are white and middle class and thus, granted greater capital in comparison to students (Howard, 1999; Regenspan, 2002). According to Walkerdine (1981), although society grants female elementary teachers a less privileged power position relative to males, often the social hierarchy of power in terms of race, age, and class ensure their higher power positions compared to students. From these studies regarding power dynamics in classrooms, it is clear there are on-going
struggles that permeate classrooms and influence teachers’ understandings of themselves as capable social agents. Additional research regarding power dynamics as a method for fostering democracy is examined in an upcoming section.

2.3.2 Critical Perspectives for Diversity: Multicultural and Anti-racist Pedagogies

By the second half of the twentieth century, growing political and economic disparities between various groups in society and schools led to multicultural movements. These were multiple educational approaches intended to better meet the interests, experiences, needs, and desires of all students. Some of the more liberal of these approaches worked from a deficit logic where any students not white, middle class, able bodied, or of European decent, were considered to be lacking (Valencia, 1997). In this approach, the aim was to help the student overcome their deficiency in order to fit into the dominant group. Some approaches worked from a perspective of sameness while others celebrated difference. These perspectives left intact constructions of white, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual, rational, masculine dominance. In doing so, all individuals not ‘fitting’ into the socially constructed ‘norms’ become marginalized.

Critical multiculturalism, which draws upon both critical pedagogy and multiculturalism, emerged to counter these more liberal perspectives toward diversity by working to reconstruct society. This perspective calls for teachers to engage in pedagogical practices that challenge socio-political traditions that privilege white, middle class, rational ways of knowing, interests, and experiences and in doing so to work toward social reconstruction (McLaren, 1995; Nieto, 2000a; Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001). The approach rejuvenates the 1930’s project of social reconstructionism which called for education and schools to
embrace the aim of social justice through social reformation (cf. Flinders & Thornton, 1977).\footnote{George Counts' call for schools and teachers to be agents in the process of social reconstruction is articulated in, Dare the schools build a new social order? (cf. Flinders & Thornton, 1977).}

Drawing upon critical race theory (CRT) Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) examines the impact racism has on schooling for students of colour. She too considers that pedagogical perspectives cannot merely celebrate difference but instead must tether race constructions to broader societal dynamics that perpetuate hierarchies and privilege. Generally speaking, whether the approach is informed by critical multiculturalism or critical race theory, the researchers call teachers to recognize diversity of their students and society and examine how systems and discourse contribute to inequities based on difference (Nieto, 2000a; Sleeter, 1995).

In teaching for diversity, Gay (2000) suggests teachers ought to be culturally responsive while Ladson-Billings (1995a), argues for culturally relevant practices. Although these approaches are frequently referred to interchangeably, following Nieto (2000a), I suggest that Gay’s (2000) cultural responsiveness draws the diversities of students’ experiences and backgrounds into the curriculum, but neglects to situate them within structures which perpetuate inequities. This offers limited potential for changing systems of injustice.

Alternatively, Ladson-Billings (1995a) suggests culturally relevant pedagogy in which teachers not only draw students’ cultures into the curriculum they “help(s) students accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 466). In trying to explain the association between student diversity, as well as economic disadvantage and
school failure, Nieto claims that neither Gay nor Ladson-Billings fully account for 'structural inequality' of educational organizations, policy, and curriculum that perpetuate the uneven playing field of society. In this way, I see Nieto’s perspective of social reconstructionism situating Ladson-Billings’ teacher as a culturally relevant pedagogue within broader social, political, economic, and organizational dynamics.

These perspectives put into practice Delpit’s (1988) position that students from non-dominant groups ought to be “taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream” (p. 100). According to this approach, the teacher takes a position of critical educator who teaches students to question power that is mediated through societal organizations to oppress based on diversity. Students “learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relations they represent” (Delpit, 1988, p. 100), so they can recognize, challenge, and work toward changing the dynamics.

2.3.3 Teaching from a Social Justice Perspective

Weaving across these various ways of thinking about the teacher as working for justice is a connection between actions of critique and those for transformation. This concept of merging the present and future is captured by Ayers (1998), in the following statement about teaching for change,

*Teaching for social justice demands a dialectical stance: one eye firmly fixed on the students – Who are they? What are their hopes, dreams, and aspirations? Their passions and commitments? What skills, abilities, and capacities does each one bring to the classroom - and the other eye looking unblinkingly at the concentric circles of context-historical flow, cultural surround, economic reality.* (Ayers, 1998, pp. xvii)

According to Ayers, the teacher committed to justice, works from a position or stance. This perspective informs my thinking about teachers having political identities as change
agents because it draws attention to the dynamics in teachers' work and their struggles to negotiate them. Some of the more recent empirical research regarding teachers working for social change explores the dynamic and tension in schools using frames of justice. In many situations the research in this field draws not only from critical perspectives of pedagogy, but also from political theories of justice.

As I have discussed in chapter one, the writings of Nancy Fraser (1995a, 1997) and Iris Marion Young (1990, 2000) inform many empirical education studies regarding teaching from justice principles (Gale & Densmore, 2000; Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002; Kelly, 2003; Minnes Brandes & Kelly, 2004). For the present study, I am most interested in aspects of research pertaining to the ways teachers question practices and address struggles for recognition as well as equitable distribution of goods. In addition, I pay particular attention to the processes in which the pedagogical space unfolds as well as how educators can teach students to participate toward shaping a more socially just society.

Deirdre Kelly and Gaby Minnes Brandes have generated a program of work that explores and supports teachers embracing a stance of justice in their practice (Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001; Kelly et al., 2003-2004; Minnes Brandes & Kelly, 2004). Their research draws from critical pedagogy and political theories of justice in speaking of teachers “shifting out of ‘neutral’” (Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001, p. 437), in order to work from principles of justice in practice. These scholars call for teachers to understand themselves as situated within broader societal dynamics that maintain inequities while concurrently educating students regarding their potential to shape a more just society (Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001; Minnes Brandes & Kelly, 2004). Generally speaking,
for Kelly, Minnes Brandes, and Orlowski (2003-2004), teaching for social justice means that teachers examine their own assumptions, question inequities in the status quo of society, take a stand toward shaping a more just society, and educate students regarding their capacity to shape a more socially just society. Throughout this dissertation, I draw from this vision of teaching for social justice as I seek to understand the ways teachers make sense of their capacity to engage in these aims. Thus far, I have explored research regarding teachers who draw upon critical, feminist, and multicultural perspectives in their practice. In the next section, I delve more deeply into the field of teaching for justice by examining research pertaining to the teacher using democratic processes in practice as well as teaching students ways to participate in creating a just society.

2.3.4 Educators Take a Stance for Deliberative and Participatory Democracy

Given that the scholarly field regarding democracy in education is vast and my interest is teachers’ identity formation, I limit my focus to research pertaining to teachers demonstrating commitment to democracy as either a process for, or outcome of, social justice. By this, I am referring to teaching using deliberative processes or fostering students’ capacity for participating in constructing a socially just society (cf. Ayers et al, 1998; Goodman, 1992; Kelly, 2003).

Extending Young’s (2000) perspectives into the field of education, I understand deliberative democracy as a process involving dialogue\(^1\) and decision-making where “all those affected by it are included in the process” (p. 23). In this perspective, participants recognize one another as differently positioned within dynamics of power and privilege.

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\(^1\) I understand Young (2000) to use the terms discussion and dialogue interchangeably (p. 6). However, my preference for the notion of dialogue is because I consider it to suggest generative, sharing, and construction of ideas. I argue that my understanding of it seems to reflect the notion of deliberation Young proposes.
Within education this would occur through a social space of dialogue where all voices are equally represented and problems are explored through engagement of individuals "across their situated positions" (Young, 2000, p. 7). This dialogical space is one that embraces tension along with respect for different ways of thinking. It is a dynamic space of engagement where understandings are constructed and yet, open to on-going debate.

As I mentioned in the section on feminist pedagogy, dialogue is one pedagogic means through which to explore power relations while encouraging student voice (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Peterson, 1998; Shor & Freire, 1987). In this section, I return to the concept of dialogue. Yet, this time my intention is to extend my exploration of dialogue to include research employing it as way to support democratic processes. Returning to Oyler's (1996) study of power dynamics in elementary classrooms, she observes a teacher's efforts to explore class dialogue, power circulation and sharing of authority. This is done to encourage student voice and democratic processes. Furthermore, she adds (Oyler, 1996) that although teachers can work to negotiate power and share authority, the circulation of power endures in classrooms.

There are questions about the extent to which dialogue might contribute to practicing teachers' thinking about their capacity to influence social change (Regenspan, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 1994). These research studies frequently include the teacher educator's reflections on a course they teach to practicing teachers. For instance, Regenspan (2002) engages in what she calls 'parallel practices' to explore how she might teach about issues relating to social justice and agency. Her approach is grounded in Dewey's notions of 'wholeness of labour' (Regenspan, 2002, p. 25) and 'purposeful action' (Regenspan, 2002, p. 41). In addition, she draws from Sleeter and Grant's (1994)
multiculturalism and social reconstructionism in striving to move toward a more just society. This approach offers space to challenge social and structural inequality based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability within the context of cultural pluralism (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Within these perspectives, Regenspan (2002) uses dialogue to challenge her students’ ‘naturalized’ ways of knowing and encourages them to do the same with their students. What is not discussed in Regenspan’s (2002) agency are the ways her authority as the teacher and evaluator of students influences both the ‘open’ dialogue she thinks they are having, as well as their agency.

Alongside research regarding dialogue as a way to foster deliberative and participatory democracy, and ultimately, social justice, some researchers express concern regarding limitations of this potential (Boler, 2004; Ellsworth, 1989, 1997). For example, the possibility of open dialogue in a classroom setting is challenged by Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) who suggests it to be a “mode of address” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 49) to which there are “rules and moves and virtues” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 49). As such, it is not a neutral activity but rather, it is permeated by power relations (Ellsworth, 1997). Teachers are always situated in a position of power relative to the students (Ellsworth, 1989). As both Ellsworth (1989, 1997) and Oyler (1996) conclude, it is possible for teachers to work to alter the ways power is deployed (Ellsworth, 1989; Oyler, 1996) but it is problematic to think there will be a space for ‘open’ dialogue. The dynamics of power relations rooted in intersecting identities (i.e., race, class, sex, gender, ethnicity, and ability) (Ellsworth, 1989), as well as social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1998), places the possibilities for democratic dialogue into question (cf., Boler, 2004). The struggles in fostering dialogue, where all voices are included, and considered to be equal, are
important considerations for teachers working for social change. It may lead to questions regarding assumed associations between dialogue, altered power relations, and democracy. Yet, I return to Young’s (2000) proposal of a deliberative democratic space where social groups recognize the differently positioned individuals who are expressing ideas within power dynamics. Within this perspective, individuals recognize power and differently positioned individuals rather than working to consider everyone as equal. Using such an approach within education would mean that social dynamics for group decisions (i.e., classes, staffs) are continually under tension; yet, a deliberative democratic space may be possible.

Dewey’s perspectives about individuals as shapers of society (cf. Dewey, 1901, 1966) underpin certain education research advocating participatory democracy as an aspect of teaching for justice (Ayers, 1998; Goodman, 1992). According to Goodman (1992), this approach considers teachers to be moral agents who foster students’ desires and commitments to create a just society (Goodman, 1992). To do this means teachers must negotiate a dialectical tension between actions to promote “values of individuality and of community” (Goodman, 1992, p. 2). The ways in which students can, through deliberative democracy, foster an understanding of their capacity to work for change is taken up by Kelly (2003). She extends Nancy Fraser’s notion of “subaltern counterpublics” (Kelly, 2003, p. 125) to read and explain actions of a teenage parents’ program in a Canadian public high school. Through the use of feminist networks within and beyond a school, the students in Kelly’s study (2003), who are marginalized, are able to construct their identities with and against dominant social groups. Counterpublics “educate and encourage individuals to engage with the wider public world” (Kelly, 2003,
p. 127) and ultimately, contribute to reshaping it. In this way, I suggest counterpublics offer opportunities for deliberative and participatory democracy.

Together scholarship associated with critical pedagogies, critical multiculturalism, anti-race pedagogies, critical feminist pedagogies, political theories of justice, as well as deliberative and participatory democracy, scaffold a perspective of teachers having political identities as agents committed to a socially justice society. The research that explores various ways of supporting teachers in working from this stance indicates a tendency for teachers to position ‘self’ as neutral (Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001) or struggling to work ‘against the grain’ (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Simon, 1992). I contend that in addition to these works, there is a need to hear from the teachers themselves about the tensions they face on a daily basis in educating students in the 21st century. These voices need to be read, examined, and situated amidst broader debates regarding education and societal aims. In the next section I examine the field of research regarding teacher thinking and identity formation. Particularly, I study this research and consider how it might contribute to broader conversations of social change.

2.4 Teacher Thinking and Identity Formation

Teacher thinking and identity formation continue to be growing fields of research (Beijaard et al., 2004). These investigations deepen our understandings about the processes influencing the ways teachers think and make sense of themselves, their work, their role in education and society in relation to daily messages (Acker, 1995; Araujo, 1999; Biklen, 1995; Cammack & Phillips, 2002; Casey, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Connell, 1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Dillabough, 1999; Middleton, 1993; Miller Marsh, 2001, 2002; Munro, 1998; Nias, 1989;
Throughout this section, I frequently mention the context in which the research is conducted to illustrate the international research interest in this field and the similar tensions regarding education occurring in different countries.

2.4.1 Narrative Understandings of Teachers: Individual and Social Processes

Within the Canadian context, Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly have been instrumental in galvanizing studies of teacher thinking. Together, these researchers (1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) in collaboration with colleagues (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Connelly et al., 1997; Whelan et al., 2001) have developed a program of inquiry focused on exploring teachers and the storied ways they make sense of themselves and their practices. The educational landscape is the well recognized metaphor for exploring the epistemological perspectives of teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). These researchers argue that ‘objective’ knowledge is transmitted via an organizational conduit to teachers’ landscapes. Following an examination of this process, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) suggest that teachers are expected to receive and without question, transmit the information passed through the conduit to their landscape. This is the way that teachers receive messages that their “own agency with regard to the decontextualized and denarrativized material would amount to incompetence or disobedience” (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995, p. 11). In turn, teachers’ thinking about these authoritative ideas influence the ways they construct understandings, their identities, and their options for response.

In their review of research regarding teachers’ professional identities, Beijaard and colleagues (2004) suggest that although many scholars do not explicitly clarify their
meaning of teachers’ experiences, their thinking and identity formation they implicitly assume an interrelationship between them in their writing. In the present study, I will follow the definitions set out in the introductory chapter and assume an association between experiences, thinking, and identity of ‘self’.

In general, research regarding teachers’ professional identity formation focuses on processes of formation (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Samuel & Stephens, 2000) and/or the identity itself (cf. Beijaard et al, 2004). Based on their review of studies, Beijaard et al. (2004), suggest that more research is needed that examines the relationship between societal contexts and the influences on teachers’ sense of ‘self’ in identity formation. These works contribute approaches to the field of teacher education and professional development that aim to better understand teachers and teaching and improve students’ learning.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999), as well as others (Whelan et al., 2000), consider the use of narrative to be a mediator of teacher thinking and identity formation. In other words, the teachers’ experiences of telling stories provide them a method for thinking about and through the narratives to create understanding. Stories mediate teachers’ construction of a plot-line for sense-making. This process draws personal and professional knowledge and experience into identity formation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). As an alternative to the study of individual processes of identity formation, some researchers have turned to social construction processes (Casey, 1990, 1993; Middleton, 1993; Mogadime, 2003; Munro, 1998; Whelan et al., 2001). For example, building on the work of Clandinin and Connelly, Whelan and colleagues (2001) examine the ways telling and retelling of stories encourages teachers to think about their experiences from
different perspectives. This work reveals a social construction of identity because the audience influences the method, content of stories, and understandings of ‘self’.

Recognizing the complicated way narrative influences identity formation is important for the present study because the narratives the teachers create in making sense of their contexts may greatly affect their identity formation and their positioning in practice.

Within narrative, biographies as well as life histories have become popular approaches in many Western countries (e.g., United States, Canada, and New Zealand) for studying teachers’ social formations of identity and their role in education (Casey, 1990, 1993; Middleton, 1993; Mogadime, 2003; Munro, 1998). Within the U.S. context, Casey’s (1993) well known study of the relation between the lives of progressive women teachers and political action contributes some initial understandings of the potential for this method in the field of education scholarship. She uses life histories to focus on the social environment of teaching and celebrate women within the history of education, as agents working for social change. Her intention is to situate the women teachers into a history which has often overlooked their presence and participation in shaping education and society.

Similarly, Munro (1998) also draws on life histories of teachers to explore “narrative strategies women utilize to create a self (as a form of agency)” (p. 2) and the impact this process has on practice. She finds that gendered notions of elementary teachers and teaching emerge in the comparisons teacher make to care giving and compliancy (Munro, 1998). Interestingly, although the teachers in these studies do not choose the language of ‘agent of change’, they describe actively constructing their own professional futures. This reveals teachers’ identities as ambivalent in that they do not
see themselves as social agents; yet, their actions also suggest they are not passive receptors of others’ decisions.

Life histories as a method for researching teachers’ identities are also evident in the New Zealand education context. For example, Sue Middleton (1993) uses life histories to study feminist educators working to negotiate class and ethnicity. Her focus is women in higher education and their experiences as academics. She draws from her own doctoral experiences in the 1980’s and explicates the contradictions that arise as a feminist scholar. She merges her experiences with those of other feminist scholars in order to examine the relation between identity, feminism, and academy experiences.

Biklen (1995) approaches teachers’ identities from a perspective of different historical moments. She examines women elementary teachers’ understandings of their capacity to shape their work and society. To do this, she analyzes archives, historical records, along with ethnographic data collected in the early 1980’s to understand the ways teacher culture and school culture is produced. The study highlights tensions between relations and independence in teachers’ work (as autonomy) (Biklen, 1995). Biklen (1995) describes this complication stating, “teaching is in many ways a constant being-in-relations with children, even though teachers gain a certain kind of independence by teaching in rooms away from other adults” (p. 105). It is in these contradictions that teachers form their identities about their professional selves and capacity for agency. According to Sachs (1997), Biklen’s work neglects to situate teachers’ attitudes and thinking about self and work into the broader societal dynamics of the 1980’s. Thus, the teachers’ sense of agency remains disconnected from the political
and social dynamics that permeate education policy, organization, curriculum, and discourse.

A cautionary note about using life histories in research is put forth by Goodson (1997). He suggests that although they offer a dynamic story and enable the situating of experience, there is a limit in the lack of contextual data and analysis. In this way, this tends to lead to an over-focus on the celebration of micronarratives while losing sight of societal tensions (Goodson, 1997).

2.4.2 Teachers’ Understandings in Relation to Societal Contexts

In addition to social contexts, teachers’ identities as they are mediated by historical, cultural, political, and material conditions have been studied (Acker, 1995; Connell, 1985; Dillabough, 1999; Nias, 1989; Samuel & Stephens, 2000). Dillabough’s (1999, 2000) analysis of women teachers’ identity formation attempts to account for political as well as social dynamics in formation processes. She draws from empirical work and theory to examine common notions of professional identity that leave unquestioned gender as a construction. By illustrating liberal, masculine, rational, perspectives as underpinning concepts of professionalism and professional, Dillabough (1999) argues, “the gendered ‘self’ is constrained” (p. 390) and this influences teachers’ political identity constructions as well as their capacity to “make claims to agency” (p. 390). In an attempt to move away from this limited conceptualization of women and agency, Dillabough (1999, 2000) draws from Habermas’ *intersubjectivity* as a way to make sense of individuals within social and political relations.

Acker (1995) also attempts to account for contexts beyond the social in teachers’ understandings of ‘self’. She uses ethnographic methods to examine identity as it is
informed by daily social, cultural, and material conditions of teachers’ lives. According to Acker (1995), the teachers are caught in tension between identifying with notions of mother and martyr. In other words, they think of students as their children with their responsibility to make the best of limited materials. Moreover, in constructing their identities as caretakers of other people’s children, they are complicit in maintaining gendered notions of teaching. Acker’s (1995) finding depicts the sense of teachers’ altruism that Grumet (1988) speaks of in her important piece of work, ‘Bitter Milk’. This mothering position is also explored by Vogt (2002), in her study of primary school teachers. When the teachers are asked to examine photos, draw pictures, and engage in conversations, they speak of themselves as caretakers using words of mothering, parenting, physical affection, relatedness, and commitment (Vogt, 2002). Similarly, Cammack and Phillips (2002) find teachers associate their work with care-giving, women’s work, and service in responding to what it means “to wear the label ‘teacher’” (Cammack & Phillips, 2002, p. 123).

Within the British context, Nias (1989) examines what it is like to be a primary teacher. She shares teachers’ voices in conversations about their work. Nias (1989) does find that there are silences around gender-related issues; however, she intentionally refers to these “only when teachers have raised them” (p. 4). At these times the teachers speak of caring for children or their work. From these findings Nias (1989) argues that teachers are socialized into isolation in their work and as such, there is self-investment in their work. They make sense of themselves in relation to emotional shifts, physical demands, mental exhaustion, as well as social, historical, and cultural traditions of work (Nias,
1989). On-going processes of reflection mediate the primary teachers’ formations of understandings of themselves in relation to their job.

Broadly speaking, research pertaining to teachers’ identities, gender, experiences, and perspectives of agency, reveals their identification with notions of compliance and mothering in their work. These gendered perspectives of ‘self’ rub up against teachers’ efforts to form and sustain political identities for social agency which are often associated with masculinity. The result, as Dillabough (1999) suggests, is that women are left “incapable in many social circumstances of achieving the kind of agency they have described themselves as possessing” (p. 390).

In contrast to examining the tensions in women’s agency, Noddings (1992) contends that teachers ought to recognize and embrace identities as care-givers and nurturers. This means associations of teachers with caring mothers are illuminated and celebrated. This perspective reclaims more essentialized notions of women (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and centers it as a desired educational approach to foster connectedness mediated through relation. The impact of this approach will be further examined in the following section which focuses on social and political contexts that influence educational changes such as the professionalization and feminization of teaching.

2.5 Teachers’ Work: Gender, Feminization, and Professionalization

Dominant social perceptions regarding the purpose of education influence movements, organization and curriculum in education and teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Kim Fries, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Zeichner, 2003). Therefore, it follows that reform and changes in governing procedures shape teaching and teacher
education. Like students, teachers are affected by educational movements that filter from the Ministry of Education, and ripple through faculties of education, school boards, and schools. Using the literature, I outline the contemporary educational movements such as professionalization which also act to feminize teaching, and in doing so, eschew the potential of women elementary teachers as political agents for justice.

Following Connell (1987) and others (Hargreaves, 1994; Nias, 1989), I understand the term 'teachers' work' as a reference to all that makes up the duties of teachers in the context of their job. It is a job: “a set of tasks and human relationships that are structured in particular ways” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 13) which occur beyond the classroom, in the school space. Movements of regulation, standardization, and professionalization contribute to shaping the conditions in which teachers form understandings of themselves as intentional actors. Government initiated education movements filter to teachers and society through reforms in curricular initiatives, school processes, organization, teacher education, and professional development. These movements both shape and are shaped by dominant social ideas about the future of society and the purposes of education. In what follows, I examine literature regarding each of these aspects and discuss them in relation to teachers' identity formation.

Research studies regarding reforms such as standardization and regulation are not abundant within the Canadian realm. I suspect this lack in scholarly writing may be associated with the provincial governance of education which results in fragmenting conversations to local issues and changes. The interests in movements for change remain specific to each setting and thus, may derive less national attention. In addition, some regulations and standards which impact programs and structures are currently being
implemented (BCCT, 2004; Hall & Schulz, 2003), however, they are recent. To date there is little research regarding the influences on teachers (cf. Phelan et al., 2005). Therefore, research studies from the neighbouring United States are used in this review. According to Hargreaves and Earl (2001) Canadian educational policies are often informed and borrowed from U.S. sources\textsuperscript{1}. Examining literature regarding education reform provides the local context influencing the conditions of work for teachers in the present study. This supports analysis of how education movements currently occurring in Canada and more specifically in British Columbia, influence teachers’ thinking about their political identities and capacity to work for just practices.

2.5.1 **Standardization of Curriculum and Its Impact on Teacher Agency**

In terms of curriculum and instruction, Canadian provinces have standardized the formal or written curriculum\textsuperscript{12}, requiring teachers to address pre-determined curricular outcomes. Drawing from a comparative study between England and Canada, (Manitoba), Hall and Schulz (2003) argue that curricular documents inform teachers of the obligatory ‘what’ of teaching along with suggested ways of ‘how’ (i.e., teaching strategies, assessments, and teaching resources) (Hall & Schulz, 2003). According to the teachers in this study (Hall & Schulz, 2003), educational movements that require them to act as technicians, leave them feeling less in control or professionally involved in the teaching process. In addition, they believe that many extra duties are being added to their job, while a lack of time is given to supporting them in collaborating opportunities. For Hall and Schulz (2003), fixed and constraining curricular goals limit teachers’ perceptions of

\textsuperscript{1} Although much of the research is within U.S. context it is my contention that the situations are common to the Canadian context and therefore various sources of materials are used.

\textsuperscript{12} I use the terms formal and written curriculum interchangeably in referring to the grade specific teaching and learning (K-12) expectations.
themselves as capable of thinking and acting dynamically. Time, work, and the relation of these to the culture of teaching, have been examined within a Canadian context by Andy Hargreaves (1994). From interviewing Ontario teachers in the late 1980's, Hargreaves, determines that time acts to constrain teachers' sense of collaboration and contributes to the isolation, intensification, and deskilling of their work. This finding supports the perspective that preparation time fosters teachers' involvement in collaborative planning and school-wide curriculum development.

Similarly, Falk (2002) and Sawyer (2004) refer to a technician perspective of teaching which underpins recent agendas for teacher proof curriculum. The researchers describe movements that encourage teachers to adhere to curricular scripts, removing their "professional judgment" (Sawyer, 2004, p. 12). Instead, the teachers become transmitters of authentic and authoritative knowledge that is constructed outside of the pedagogical space. This approach focuses on pedagogy as a performance of strategy and transmission of information. Moreover, the teacher is understood a technician who is not (1) rational; (2) does not have the capacity for intentional action; nor (3) contributes to shaping changes in education (Dillabough, 1999; Reid & O'Donoghue, 2004; Sawyer, 2004). This positioning of the teacher limits agency; it is antithetical to an active teacher who constructs knowledge with students in order to create a more socially just society.

At first glance it may seem that Canadian education contexts do not share the constraints previously discussed (e.g., scripts for teachers). However, it is my contention that although in the Canadian context the constraints may seem less extreme, they are nonetheless present. One example of this presence is the interconnection of assessment and reporting with teachers' decisions and practices regarding curriculum, at the
provincial and local level (Rowell & Ebbers, 2004). The emphasis placed on provincial

tests can lead teachers to focus on content and practices that will support students in
performing on the assessment rather than engaging in inquiry and exploration.

In addition, the content of the integrated resource packages used in provinces such
as British Columbia, draw upon various competing discourses (Rowell & Ebbers, 2004).
However, the emphasis is a neo-liberal, authoritarian perspective of concepts with few
opportunities for critical questioning or diverse interpretations (Orlowski, 2001). For
teachers who have been and remain immersed in a society permeated by European-
descended, white, middle class, able-bodied, masculine dominance and neo-liberal views,
it is understandable that they draw upon these views in making sense of prescribed
learning objectives (Orlowski, 2001). This interconnection between individuals and the
broader social field is an example of Bourdieu’s (1977, 2000) habitus and field which I
explore throughout this document. However, at this point, I continue to explicate the
contextual space in which teachers in this study work in order to examine the ways
standardization and regulation influence their understandings of themselves and potential
for acting toward change.

2.5.2 Regulating Teachers and Its Impact on Agency

More recently, in addition to standardization of curriculum and instruction in
education, there has been increased attention given to the governance of practicing and
student teachers (BCCT, 2004; Phelan et al., 2005; Sachs, 2003a). These standards are
sometimes discussed as a move toward professionalization, understood as improvement
in: (a) the performance of teachers; (b) the on-going professional learning of teachers;
and (c) the standing of teachers in society (BCCT, 2004; Hall & Schulz, 2003; Sachs,
Like curriculum, teacher governance is a provincial state responsibility. Within the BC context, there has been recent implementation of standards to govern teachers and teaching (cf. BCCT, 2004). As I previously mentioned, to date the debates regarding the impact of these standards on student and practicing teachers remains largely philosophical. Drawing from some initial analysis of the standards in their practice, Phelan and colleagues (2005) share their plural interpretations regarding the ways the document might support practice. Further investigation is needed to determine the potential and limitations of the standards.

In a critical examination of teacher standards in Australia, Sachs (2003a) expresses scepticism that claims made about improving professional standards will be realized due to the use of top down regulations. These movements position the teacher as a technician or as Dillabough (1999) argues, an “instrumental actor” (p. 375), who transfers rational ‘objective’ knowledge to students. As an alternative, Sachs (2003a) suggests that teachers be given time to “think about their work, classroom activities and professional identity” (p. 185). This is intended to support their construction of a political identity. It is important to consider the standards for teachers, teaching, and teacher education because of their potential impact on teachers’ perceptions of themselves as active contributors to shaping education and society. If standards for teaching promote a passive technician approach to practice, which is compounded by fixed, regulated curriculum, this limits the potential for teachers to construct themselves as dynamic forces for justice. Contradictions between perspectives of dynamic and passive teachers and information are underpinned by what Arnot refers to as ‘gender codes’ (Dillabough & Arnot, 2001) which perpetuate the feminization of teaching.
These codes, which are bound in the history of movement of women into teaching positions, especially as educators for young children, occurred during the nineteenth century and coincided with a shift toward more bureaucratic controls of education whilst men remain in positions of decision-making (Blackmore, 1993; Thompson, 1997). As teachers, women were paid lower wages than men and considered to be more compliant in terms of directions. The division of labour, according to Connell, can be considered “a consequence of interlocking of the gender order with the ‘gender regime’ at the institutional level” (cited in Blackmore, p. 28). Gender regimes refer to the state of sexual politics in schools which are expressed and perpetuated through sport, lessons, play, classroom discipline, administration etc.

According to Thompson (1997), it was also thought that women would, like mothers, be responsible for children’s socialization. This perspective held an assumption about the naturalness of women for the work of teaching children. Like mothers, women teachers are expected to selflessly give of themselves for their students while caring and nurturing them (Acker, 1996). The notion of care has been claimed by certain feminists who argue for women’s ways of engaging in society (Belenky et al, 1986). In education, caring has been moved to the center of certain feminist arguments for organizing schools, curriculum, and pedagogy (Noddings, 1992). Identifying with the notion of care is altruistic for teachers because like ‘good’ mothers who sacrifice for others, they privilege students’ needs over their own. The teacher’s capitulation to the desires and needs of others is passive and therefore, a defensive position as opposed to an active stance necessary to enact change.
Education movements that position teachers as passive technicians or teachers who position themselves as passive, code the work as feminine, without potential to contribute to constructing knowledge and society. This is problematic because it positions women teachers as complicit in perpetuating this perspective and thus, their own subordination. Further, according to Isaacs (2002), it puts women in a struggle to construct themselves as agents to overcome their own marginalized position. This tension becomes complicated for women elementary teachers who want to work for more socially just education and society yet, are themselves in a subordinated position within the organization and society. This contradiction, as I see it, is the rub in the field of education scholarship that calls elementary teachers to form political identities and act for justice with fewer conversations about how this pushes against dominant, and prevailing, historical constructions of teachers as passive mothers and women as incapable of influencing to societal movements.

2.5.3 Professionalization: Debates and Reform in Teaching and Teacher Education

Standardization of curriculum and pedagogy, in conjunction with the regulation of teachers' work are concepts associated with debates regarding the professionalization of teaching. The notion of professionalization refers to changes in teachers' roles toward increased complexity, skill, and professionalism (Hargreaves, 1994). More specifically, some scholars contend that standardization and governance foster professionalization while others remain sceptical and suggest this to be an illusion (Darling-Hammond, 2000). This latter perspective argues that standardization of teachers' work is a move toward a technician process that deprofessionalizes teaching (Apple, cited in Sachs, 2003b; Cochran-Smith & Kim Fries, 2001). The latter group holds that increasing
control and rigidity in teachers’ work acts to ‘teacher-proof’ and deskill it (Apple, 1986; Hargreaves, 1994). This debate has social, political, cultural, and organizational ramifications for teachers, their work, and their understandings of themselves. The outcomes of these struggles shape the spaces in which teachers engage with students along with societal perspectives of educators and the value of their work. In turn, these education movements have implications for reform of teacher education which for Zeichner (2003) can be organized into three categories: (1) regulation; (2) deregulation; and (3) social justice. In what follows, I use Zeichner’s approach as a frame to read each of these agendas while drawing perspectives of other scholars’ into the conversation.

Regulation of teacher education is a product of professionalization agendas which according to its advocates, emphasizes knowledge of teaching, teaching methods, philosophy, and curriculum in teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Kim Fries, 2001; Darling-Hammond 2000; Zeichner, 2003). In her synthesis of thirty years of research regarding teacher education, Darling-Hammond (2000) concludes, “researchers have found that teachers who have greater knowledge of teaching and learning are more highly rated and are more effective with students, especially at tasks requiring higher order thinking and problem solving” (p. 167). It is a perspective that envisages the teacher as a professional learner who continues to learn while teaching rather than one that considers learning to have been completed prior to teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2000). This is a perspective of teachers as intentional agents with the capacity to shape education and society, instead of passive vessels of transmission.

Drawing from her review, Darling-Hammond argues that student teachers who take extended coursework express feeling satisfied with their preparation. This outcome
could mean that student teachers feel confident with their capacity to actively engage with their students in creating knowledge in the classroom. These teachers may resist movements that position them as passive. However, Zeichner (2003) cautions that changes in teacher education based on the agenda of professionalization have yet to adequately incorporate research regarding pedagogical practices that meet the needs of all students (i.e., culturally relevant pedagogy) into teacher education programs. In addition, there has yet to be an increase the cultural and racial diversity of teachers entering into teacher education programs. Thus, although there are aspects of the regulation agenda which benefit certain teachers, there remain issues regarding how to improve teacher education for students. More specifically, diversity of teachers and students remain outside of the agenda of professionalization as it is described above.

According to Zeichner (2003), the deregulation agenda, also known as the reformist agenda, is associated with privatization of K-12 schools. This perspective argues that teacher education preparation does not correlate to better teaching or increased student learning. Further, preparation is considered by some to be “irrelevant to academic teaching” (Koerner, cited in Zeichner, 2003, p. 503) As such, this agenda challenges the need for university affiliated teacher education programs and instead, proposes privately managed ones.

In an analysis of the arguments for deregulation, Cochran-Smith and Kim Fries (2001) share that advocates for deregulation suggest teachers learn through practice in the field. In this way, teachers are considered to be technicians who learn through apprenticeship (Cochran-Smith & Kim Fries, 2001). This perspective disassociates theory from practice and frames teaching as a skill. This is in contrast to a perspective of
teaching as emerging from, while also generating theories in order to examine, reflect on, and reshape practice.

The third major agenda Zeichner (2003) proposes is social justice, which is promoted by certain teacher educators and organizations such as “Rethinking Schools” (Zeichner, 2003, p. 490). In an earlier section of this chapter, I examined research and approaches of many teacher educators committed to these principles however, to situate this agenda into larger contexts, I now review the premise and tensions. This agenda hinges on teachers embracing their political identities as social agents working for a just society. Numerous universities have teacher education programs or classes (depending on the institution) that attend to issues of teaching for social justice. This includes teaching that is committed to equity, diversity, and democracy. Despite these efforts, recognized scholars in the field of teacher education maintain that broader systemic impact of these efforts remains limited (Gore, 2001; Zeichner, 2005).

In an attempt to bridge these three agendas and draw together interests such as, discipline and pedagogical knowledge, an interconnection of theory and practice, apprenticeship opportunities, and principles of justice, Gore (2001) proposes a model for teacher education reform. She suggests, ‘productive pedagogy’ (Gore, 2001, p. 127) as a framework to “unify teacher educators” (p. 124). It emerges from, while being responsive to, classroom events. The guiding tenets of this approach are: “intellectual quality, relevance, supportive classroom environment, and recognition of difference” (Gore, 2001, p. 127).

The attempt to create a critical mass for teacher education reform that accounts for many interests and traditions may be intriguing for educators; however, as Gore and
colleagues (2004) express, it can be overwhelming for student teachers. They found that while attempting to map the frame of productive pedagogy, the student teachers attend to central concepts while nuances fall to side (Gore, et al., 2004). The teachers focus on what they see as their basic needs for surviving practice teaching. From these findings, I suggest that while the frame Gore and colleagues offer is comprehensive and contributes to shaping possible directions for teacher education, larger dominating societal discourses and education structures need further examination. Systemic shifts require readied conditions, which occur through changes in policy and institutional organization.

Sachs (2003b) takes a different approach to rethinking teacher education by drawing from debates regarding teachers' professional identities in conjunction with those of teacher professionalism. In doing so, she attempts to reconstitute a version of teacher professionalism that is built on a premise of teacher activist for social transformation. According to this perspective, teachers embrace activist identities that are “based on democratic principles, negotiated, collaborative, socially critical, future-oriented, and strategic and tactical” (Sachs, 2003b, p. 134). These are fostered and sustained through collaboration, trust, and critical inquiry amongst teachers and teacher educators. In thinking about both Sachs’ proposal and the frame by Gore and colleagues (2004), I draw from Lovell’s (2003) perspective of change in suggesting that these efforts contribute to preparing society to accept such shifts in recognized dispositions. This means educators must continue to work “to create the political and professional conditions where new cultures can emerge and be sustained in schools, education bureaucracies and faculties of education” (Sachs, 2003b, p. 153).
2.6 Situating the Research Study

In this review, I have examined research from the fields of critical and feminist pedagogies, teacher thinking and identity formation, teaching for social justice, and education agendas informing teachers' work. Within each of these discussions, my focus has been the identity and perspective of the teacher. Common to the studies I have explored is a call for teachers to recognize themselves as agents able to question, critique, and act for more socially just education spaces while teaching students about their capacity for civic involvement. However, from the research I contend that this perspective rubs up against agendas regarding: (1) the feminization, standardization, and regulation of teachers' work that positions them as passive technicians; and (2) gendered notions of teachers as compliant mothers who gently nurture and socialize children into the status quo of society. This latter point is exacerbated for teachers of young children (i.e., elementary). The contradiction I put forth is further compounded when read in conjunction with historical constructions associating women with passivity and being incapable of intentional action (Coole, 1993).

Agency, on the other hand, is associated with males who are understood to be active contributors of society. Thus, based on these complexities, I argue it is problematic to theorize and map approaches for teacher agency without taking into account the tensions and constraints limiting those in positions of subordination (i.e., women elementary teachers) to form identities as active shapers of society (Isaacs, 2002). As an example, the literature regarding teaching for social justice draws from various pedagogical and education theories and practices; yet, there is little research or conversation regarding the tensions facing women elementary teachers in forming
identities as agents. Moreover, much of the investigation in this field involves student or practicing teachers of high school leaving much more exploration needed regarding elementary teachers.

As I have mentioned, scholars such as Ken Zeichner (2003, 2005) suggest that despite the efforts to foster teachers as social agents for justice, there remains little widespread change in teaching and education practices. Thus, I am arguing that more research is needed to examine the tensions and contradictions teachers negotiate in forming themselves as social agents for change. The present project addresses this need by examining ways women elementary teachers form political identities as social agents capable of influencing social dynamics of school amidst the contemporary, complex agendas of their work. Further, we need to hear from teachers about tensions they experience and grapple with on a daily basis. This offers a frame to rethink critical pedagogical theories as well as teacher education that fosters active shapers for a just society. In this way, theory and practice will be mutually informing.

The research shaping this field of study focuses on the practices and positioning of the agent in working for justice. As previously stated, it is informed by critical, feminist, multicultural, and justice theories. Despite these contributions, there remain assumptions that with desire and encouragement teachers can form themselves as agents. There is little explicit analysis of teachers as embodied and how this influences the tensions they face on a daily basis and their identity formation as social agents. To address this gap, I use sociological lenses of Bourdieu and McNay pertaining to identity, subject formation, and agency. These offers lenses to read and make sense of the ways individuals, who are constrained within the dynamics of the social world, construct their
identities. The use of these perspectives to make sense of teachers’ formations of political identities expands conversations of teaching for justice to account for complexities and contradictions facing the agent and consider what this means for social change in schools.

This research study deepens perspectives of pedagogy and agency to account for women elementary teachers who are often not considered to have agency. Further it contributes to policy and practice in the field of teacher education by exploring tensions in fostering educators as agents for justice in schools and society.

2.7 Summary

Threaded through this review of the literature is my interest in understanding the female elementary teacher’s capacity to work for justice in schools and society. It underpins the examination of what the teacher looks like within three broad fields of study. Initially, I focused on the teacher as read through lenses that merge theory and practice. I discussed pedagogies of critique; more specifically, I examined research informed by critical, feminist, and multicultural pedagogies as they speak to educating for social justice. In addition, I explored literature of deliberative and participatory teaching practices and analyzed the role of the teacher within these works.

The second major field of work explored was that of teacher thinking and identity construction. The focus was teachers constructing professional and political identities. My intention was to examine the tensions and variances women elementary teachers negotiate in forming identities. The final large field of scholarly research studies was teachers’ work. My main interest was the institutional conditions that influence teachers’ understandings of themselves. Therefore, I limited my attention to concepts of
standardization of curriculum and teaching, the regulation and governance of teachers, and debates of feminization and professionalization as they impact teachers’ perspectives of ‘self’. Although each of these fields of literature is broad, I limited the examination to works that inform my thinking about teachers’ identities in relation to social change.

In chapter three, I describe the methodology and methods I use to study the ways women elementary teachers negotiate tensions in their work and make sense of their capacities to shape schools and society.
Chapter 3: Sustained Engagements in the Field: Methodology and Methods

3.1 Pilot Study

The guiding questions, methodology, and methods used in the present research project were informed by an exploratory pilot study I conducted the year prior. In the pilot project I used qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews to explore teachers’ perceptions of the educational agendas influencing the contemporary elementary teaching space. I was interested in learning more about the current dynamics of the local education context from the perspective of classroom teachers. Since my own elementary teaching experience was in Ontario, I believed this inquiry would offer me an opportunity to engage in conversations with teachers and learn more about the contemporary education dynamics in and around Norton.

I interviewed seven elementary teachers (six female and one male) working in the Norton area. The focus of the interview was primarily their interpretations of a notion I called ‘individual achievement’. I chose this term to express the interconnections of the concepts individual and achievement. For the teachers, the term seemed to conjure up complicated and conflicting educational ideas and we discussed ways in which they aligned and did not align with them. Open coding using the computer program,
ATLAS.ti was used to analyze the data. The teachers expressed tension and dissonance regarding their involvement in perpetuating educational and societal discourses and educational procedures (e.g., grading procedures, report cards) that emphasize individualism and outcome through competition. They all expressed a preference to encourage students to consider achievement as a process of growth. Many of them described efforts to emphasize alternative notions of achievement that pushed against ideas of competition and marks.

The findings of this initial research project led me to questions about the tensions teachers negotiated in their practice and their sense of a capacity to work toward changing dynamics in school they believed to be unjust for students. In addition, although I found semi-structured interviews enabled exploration of a concept through dialogue, the one time interview led me to more questions regarding teachers’ thinking about education and their participation in shaping it. I wanted to spend time with teachers in order to get a better understanding of the ways their specific contexts were influencing their agency.

3.2 Qualitative Inquiry

The selection of qualitative research methodology emerged from my questions regarding the interactions between socio-political-cultural contexts of teachers’ work and the complex ways teachers’ form identities as intentional social agents. Qualitative inquiry is an approach to research that “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). For this project, it enabled

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13 ATLAS.ti is a software computer program designed to support qualitative research analysis. It acts as a work area with tools the researcher can use to organize and navigate data.
me to explore the nuances and contradictions of processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

This said, the term qualitative inquiry does not refer to a single methodology but rather, is an umbrella term encompassing a number of approaches (Creswell, 1998).

To select an appropriate methodology for this inquiry, I considered my interest to understand and critically examine teachers’ thinking about themselves, the conditions of their work, and tensions in identity formations. This required an approach and tools to facilitate a sustained engagement with teachers in their work settings. Therefore, I selected the tradition of case study and in particular, what Stake (1995, 2000), refers to as, collective case study as an appropriate methodology for my inquiry.

3.3 Collective Case Study

For the present research inquiry, one approach to understand the ways teachers construct their identities, while constrained by conditions of their lives and work, is to examine them in their everyday environment. This enables close analysis of ambiguities and tensions influencing processes of sense-making. To study a case involves in-depth research of a ‘bounded system’ (Creswell, 1998). This means that the parameters of specific cases have time and location parameters which act to frame the inquiry project. The boundaries of the present research study are described in an upcoming section.

Following Stake (1995), I use the term, ‘instrumental case study’ (p. 3) where the case is a means, or instrument, to understand a particular concept. In this study, the cases or particular teachers, offer the means to study tensions in teachers’ political identity formations. This approach differs from an ‘intrinsic case study’ (Stake, 1995, p. 3) in which the researcher seeks to better understand the object of the case, as an end in itself. For instance, this approach is helpful if I am interested in an in-depth study of a particular
teacher. In contrast, the present research is a critical interpretive process of making sense of aspects of teachers’ work and the association to human action. The process unfolds through chapters five through eight during which I examine teachers’ thinking as a way to understand tensions and processes they negotiate in making sense of themselves.

I am not suggesting that there exist fixed ways in which teachers’ work spaces influence their identities. Rather, I recognize there are myriad of different ways school and societal contexts (both past and present) unfold in the daily lives of teachers. Thus, my aim in working with a small number of teachers was to examine identity formations from different perspectives. Although I expected there to be similarities in aspects of teachers’ work (i.e., all teachers would be working in elementary urban setting and from the same school board), I suspected from my own teaching experiences, there would be distinct particularities to each situation. Furthermore, studying these different processes of sense-making concurrently, offered the opportunity to look at these processes as varied perspectives on the same concept. This is a form of crystallization (Richardson, 2000), whereby, multiple perspectives contribute to sense-making of a particular concept. I am not suggesting that, as in triangulation, there is a single ‘objective’ way to make sense of tensions in teachers’ work. Instead I consider there to be multiple ways, depending on the viewer’s perspective. Examining concepts from multiple perspectives is further explicated in relation to validity in an upcoming section.

According to Creswell (1998), determining the number of cases requires careful consideration of the desired depth of examination in each case. Decisions such as case number and boundaries are addressed in the next section. Specifically, I explicate
processes of recruitment, data collection methods, negotiations in the field, analysis, and representation.

3.4 Recruiting Participants

After acquiring approval from the University of British Columbia (UBC) Ethics Review Board and the Norton School Board Ethics Review Committee, recruiting female elementary teachers was done from October to December 2004. My use of criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Preissle, cited in Merriam, 1998) although broad, did stipulate my search was for female elementary teachers working in urban settings with an interest or commitment to redressing inequities and working for social change in schools.

I decided to work with elementary teachers for three reasons. First, having been an elementary teacher and school leader for over a dozen years, I continue to feel an alliance with elementary teachers and respect for their daily efforts for students. Furthermore because of this experience, I believe I carry embodied understandings of the expectations, perspectives, and environment.

Second, to reiterate what I have mentioned in chapters one and two, gendered constructions of teachers as mothers, especially for those working with young children, hold images of them as capitulators to perceived authority sources as they transmit concepts and engage in the socialization of children (Connell, 1985; Thompson, 1997). This perspective is captured by Lather (1987) who states that “teachers stand at the juncture of nurturing and sending out, preparing children to go from the private to the public world” (p. 245). As such, I contend that the work of elementary teachers is dissociated from a masculine notion of active shaper of society.
A third reason for studying elementary teachers is that I found little empirical research engaging in a critical analysis of teachers' political identity formation which draws from the perspectives of elementary teachers. These three aspects inform my questions of how educators embedded in educational organizations which imbue messages of teachers as technicians, construct identities as capable actors for social change. In addition, I question the extent to which this dynamic is compounded for women, given the gendered society in which they are immersed.

Urban schools, like the cities in which they are located, express disparities and power struggles of race, class, ethnicity, and economics (Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002). Thus, it is important to study the ways teachers working in these contexts form their understandings of justice and themselves as able to work toward it (Minnes Brandes & Kelly, 2004). I sought elementary teachers working in urban schools in Norton, a large city in Western Canada.

Norton is a city with diversity in race, ethnicity, culture, and the presence of large economic disparity. I elaborate on the school contexts and their implications for this study in chapter four. However, at this point, I mention this disparity as it pertains to the present study to emphasize the importance of understanding the dynamics shaping the environment in which the teachers make sense of themselves and their capacity to influence the world around them (Minnes Brandes & Kelly, 2004; Oakes et al., 2002).

To recruit teacher participants, I used a combination of informal and formal processes. I spoke informally with UBC educators, as well as educators working for the local school board where I had ethics permission. In addition to informal contacts, I targeted contacts and participants through: (1) Educators in the Community of Inquiry for
Teacher Education (CITE) program which is cohort within the UBC Teacher Education program for elementary educators; (2) Executive members of the Norton Elementary School Teachers’ Association. I contacted members of the executive and had them put my contact information in their newsletter; (3) Instructors in the UBC Urban Learner Cohort (This UBC Masters of Education program centers on teachers working in urban settings as inquirers of their practice). Within this program there was a cohort specifically aimed at teaching from a social justice perspective; (4) Teacher contacts from my pilot study.

An email was sent to educator contacts within each of these four areas which included information about me and my search for female elementary teachers who had an interest in addressing inequities and fostering social change. I found contact names by word of mouth through educators I knew associated with these various programs. I attached a copy of the letter of information (see Appendix 1) introducing myself and describing details of the research study to the email message sent to the contact people. I met or spoke with these educator contacts to collect any names of teachers they might know who fit the criteria (LeCompte & Preissle, cited in Merriam, 1998). Specifically, I asked if they knew and would suggest a female elementary teacher working in an urban school who, in their opinion, acts to foster equity and justice in their practice. Although asking someone to identify another educator as interested in working for equity and justice in their practice is a broad request, my desire was to be open to the field. I wanted to understand the tensions facing everyday, committed teachers, interested in just practice rather than focusing on a study of exemplars.
Email letters were sent to teachers who were recommended to me along with a copy to the educator who gave the reference. This was done in order to be explicit regarding all information about participation and contact procedure. In the email note to teachers, I introduced myself, explained how I received their name and some details about the study. An example excerpt from an email is: “I am conducting my thesis research on women elementary teachers who work in urban settings and are committed to addressing inequities related to curricular initiatives in schools. My aim is to shadow teachers in order to understand in an in-depth way, how they think regarding inequities and educational possibilities” (taken from the email I sent to teachers). I also attached a letter of information (see Appendix 1) regarding the study and their role as participants in it. Last, I requested fifteen minutes to meet with them to introduce myself and tell them, in person, about my study.

I met with potential teacher participants at their school and brought copies of the letter of information and letter of consent (see Appendix 2). I intentionally left the letter of consent with teachers to re-read so they could contemplate their participation and with less pressure by my presence. By December 2004, four teachers agreed to participate. I began the project with one teacher in December and the other three in January.14

Although my original intention was to work with three teachers, I met two of the teachers at the same time and they both agreed to participate. They knew each other professionally as well as personally and were equally suitable for the study. Further, I thought working with four teachers might provide cushion to the study, if one teacher was unable or unwilling to complete the project.

14 Jen was recruited first and was available to meet in December. I wanted to demonstrate my interest and appreciation of her inviting me to her room so I began as soon as she was willing. The recruitment timing of the other three teachers made it easier to start in January 2005.
3.5 Integrating ‘How’ and ‘Why’ with ‘What’

*How should interpretative methodologies be judged by readers who share the perspective that how knowledge is acquired, organized and interpreted is relevant to what the claims are? (Altheide & Johnson, 1998, p. 284, original emphasis)*

In recent decades, qualitative researchers have increasingly moved away from positivistic methodological criteria of internal or external validity which rely on a belief about the potential objectivity in research (Lather, 1994; Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Olesen, 2000). Concepts such as ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘authenticity’ offer alternative frames for assessing validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 158). According to Altheide and Johnson (1998), this means that researchers do not rely solely on technical processes of what was done to make claims about knowledge, but instead they must include explicit detail of “how knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted” (p. 284).

‘Trustworthiness’ refers to the integrity of the processes of the project and the adequacy of methods for addressing the research inquiry. I use the term ‘authenticity’ somewhat like the traditional notion of external validity, in referring to researchers’ claims to knowledge.

The approaches taken to account for ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘authenticity’ continue to be explored and debated; however, as Olesen (2000) suggests, they remain dependent on researchers’ approaches to inquiry and positioning within the research study. In their efforts to rethink validity within qualitative approaches, Altheide and Johnson (1998) draw from various criteria (e.g., Hammersely, 1992, cited in Altheide & Johnson, 1998). They suggest reflexivity as a frame to account for the interaction between the researcher,
researched, and sense-making. Over the last quarter century, reflexivity has become an integral aspect of enacting and debating research in social sciences.

For feminist as well as other scholars, reflexivity (cf. Lather, 1994; Mauthner & Doucet, 1994; Patai, 1994; Pillow, 2003), along with issues of voice, and representation (cf. Fine, 1994b; Lather 1997; Olesen, 2000) are frequently the foci for discussion and methodological debates. Central to these conversations is how these concepts are shaped by power dynamics in research. For instance, working from a poststructural feminist perspective, Patti Lather explores validity and proposes a deconstructionist approach she refers to as ‘transgressive validity’ (1994). She proposes concepts that continually question representation, difference, authority, and reflexivity, using terms such as, ironic, paralogical, rhizomatic, and voluptuous validity (Lather, 1994, pp. 40-47). She draws upon these notions in her empirical analysis of women living with HIV/AIDS, and calls into question the power dynamics at play in research (Lather, 1997).

In the present study, I extend Altheide and Johnson’s (1998) perspectives of reflexivity in ethnography which situates participants and researchers into historical, social, and cultural location while concurrently interrogating relationships, interpretations, and representation, to collective case study. These enable me to examine teachers by situating them and myself within the power relations of broader societal dynamics. In addition, similar to other researchers (Fine, 1992, 1994a; Lather, 1997; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Mauthner & Doucet, 2002) I engage in reflexivity and question dynamics of power, voice, and representation, in an on-going way throughout this collective case study. For instance, following Mauthner and Doucet (2002), I understand reflexivity to include “issues of social location, theoretical perspective, emotional
responses to respondents, and the need to document the research process” (p. 418). This is combined with “more neglected factors such as, the interpersonal and institutional contexts of research” (p. 418). In this study, examples of these latter concepts are organizational issues and dynamics within the schools, local school board, and province that influence the research. For instance, in chapter four I examine the provincial political contexts and in later chapters reflect on how these may be influencing the dynamics of the study.

To emphasize all of these perspectives I use an iterative inquiry approach, explicating the how and why of data collection, analysis, and representation alongside the ‘what’ of the project (cf. Mauthner & Doucet, 2002). In this way, questions of how and why become threaded through descriptions of what in the methodology of the study. This method enables me to delve into the nuances of the study while attending to the rigor of the process, the power dynamics of my relationship with the participants, broader socio-political tensions, and claims to knowledge. I present the term ‘iterative inquiry’ to describe the on-going reflexive questioning of both process and intention. Working for trustworthiness and authenticity is reflexive and iterative because I circle back to earlier questions and ideas and reposition them within my shifting ways of thinking.

Like other researchers using socio-cultural perspectives, time, location, and broader societal dynamics anchor experiences in the field (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). As such, through decisions about data collection and analysis, I aim to examine nuances and contradictions of political identity formation of elementary teachers. In the next section, I describe data collection processes of participant observation, interview, and artefacts.
3.6 Negotiating the Field

The six month data collection phase of this study, from January - June 2005, was intentionally designed to align with the elementary school year. Multiple sources of data supported an in-depth examination of teachers in their school settings (Creswell, 1998). During the data collection phase, I spent one day per week with each teacher engaging in participant observation and informal conversations. I arrived prior to the morning bell and followed the teacher throughout the day. During teaching time, I observed and jotted notes. When students worked I acted as a teacher assistant, helping students as needed. At recess and lunch breaks, I continued to shadow the teacher whether that meant attending a meeting, eating with other teachers, going to lunch, supervising students, etc. Chapter four has details of the typical day I spent with each teacher. In addition, four semi-structured interviews were done with each teacher at the start, first quarter, third quarter, and end of the study. One teacher, Jen, provided me copies of her learning portfolio for a course she was taking. This document contained her ideas about teaching and learning. Furthermore, I collected artefacts regarding curricular initiatives, goals, and demographics, from the provincial, school board and school public-access web sites. I also gathered any pamphlets and newsletters from the schools and teachers. My purpose in gathering such artefacts was to learn as much as possible about the contexts of the teachers' work and the curricular initiatives taken up by the province, school board, and school (see chapter four). Curricular initiatives provided the context for some of my conversations with teachers about learning for all children and just practices.

15 One exception to the six month period of the study is with Jen. I spent half a day and interviewed her in December 2004, prior to beginning the weekly visits. Thus, I knew her over seven months as opposed to the others I studied for six months.
During my time in the field, I noticed that the original guiding research questions seemed mutable; they became contoured in response to the teachers, their approaches, and the nuances of the settings. Conducting research in this type of dynamic space required me to be flexible about the shape the study would take. Factors such as my relationship with teachers and the teachers' comfort with talking about their own lives and practices were influencing this ever-evolving shape of interpretations we were constructing. These processes, in conjunction with reading of theory, influenced my understandings of teaching, social justice, women in education, and agency. As a result, my original guiding questions shifted throughout the process in ways that reflected reconstructions in my thinking, interests, and understandings. For instance, upon entering the field, one of my research questions emphasized the teachers' understandings of their agency in relation to educational initiatives of teaching and learning. Although this interest continued throughout my project, my attention focused on the teachers' constructions of 'self' in relation to broader societal and educational discourses and materialities. I attribute this increasing interest in situating teachers amidst broader societal dynamics to my reading of theory (e.g., socio-cultural, feminist political) while collecting, reflecting, and analyzing the data. My interpretations of the inquiry space as well as theory I read influenced the shape of the entire project in an on-going way. This process of changing perspectives illustrates Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field in that my ways of thinking shifted because of my immersion in theory and practice of justice, schools, and teaching. In what follows, I explicate processes of each of these methods of data collection to situate it as an important source of understanding and interpretation.
3.6.1 Participant Observation

Four, multi-faceted assumptions influenced my decision to spend a day with each teacher, every week. First, I assumed that I needed to understand the contexts and teachers’ daily engagements in them in order to make sense of their thinking and constructions of self. A second assumption I made was that spending time with the teachers would support our getting to know one another and facilitate discussions of complications and tensions in thinking. It was important to experience some of the teachers’ environment with them. According to Bogdewic (1999), participant observation enables “richness and complexity of the human condition (to) be more fully appreciated and understood” (p. 49). Third, although I consider there to be no one way to ‘know’ the teacher, her thinking, and the tensions influencing her identities, spending time in the field enabled me to engage in analysis of the contradictions, nuances, and grey spaces. My aim was to do this in a way that offered a representation of the teacher that she would recognize. Fourth, I wanted to give something back to participants and I believed that as an experienced teacher, I would be able to offer time and physical assistance.

My role with each teacher ranged from supporting students to supporting the teacher (e.g., photocopying). I participated in class trips, class activities, school-wide activities, school board professional development sessions, and staff meetings. I tried to be inconspicuous, while also helpful to the teacher. My way of doing this was to keep some distance from the teacher while in the class because I understood the teacher’s focus was the students. Thus, I worked to fit into the dynamic of the group by moving around the room and working with students.
On observation days, in addition to participating in class activities, I jotted field notes in a black, bound, book. I specifically chose this type of book for note taking because I considered it to be somewhat nondescript, and I hoped it would not capture the attention of too many people. I wrote shorthand notes during teaching time with the class; however, I did not take notes while I was moving around the room helping students or in staff gatherings (e.g., staffroom gatherings, or teacher meetings). One teacher participant commented that she wondered what I chose to write. After seeking guidance from my committee members about the issue of field notes, I offered the teachers the opportunity to see my notes in order to be explicit in my approach (Anthony Clarke, personal communication). Generally speaking, the teachers did not take me up on the request and expressed that my jotting notes did not distract them. Only one teacher quickly glanced at a page in my book. Two teachers said they did not notice.

Each evening I typed the notes in detail as a way to facilitate reflection on the day, the teacher, and the whole context of that teacher's space. Reflecting and writing on each individual teacher as well as across the four cases, was to support questioning of my interpretations of the field and in teachers' thinking. These reflections became the impetus for follow up questions for teachers and the research. The process frequently led me back to the literature where I read and engaged with theory to try and make sense of my thinking or observations. In this way, the data collection phase became a complex critically hermeneutic (Ricouer, 1992) process of praxis because I was weaving, reading, and enacting both theory and practice.

Recording field notes is not without its tensions and complications. Many qualitative approaches assume the researcher to be part of the research field (Mishler,
1999; Olesen, 2000; Weiler, 1988). As such, the researcher must question the representation of self as well as participants within field notes (Warren, 2000). I quote Warren (2000) because of her clarity on this point,

...the fieldworker may consciously conceal or not-write parts of the setting or self that she does not want read by another. She may choose, at other moments, to inscribe aspects of her self; or she may give off the expressions that mark such personal qualities and activities as ethnicity, sexuality, body, drinking, smoking, thinking, and dreaming, without necessarily intending to. (Warren, 2000, p. 187)

With this in mind, I continually questioned my notes in terms of the extent to which inclusions, exclusions, and interpretations were informed by my personal and theoretical biases, experiences, and perceptions of teachers and education. For example, generally speaking, I consider teachers to be hard working, committed to their work, and often overextended. These perceptions framed the lens through which I interpreted their words and actions. My daily notes included comments about the teacher being busy and seeming tired or worn out. Attributing body movement to tiredness and to overwork reflected my interpretation of their commitment to the job. I was ever conscious at all stages of note taking and writing about inscribing certain complicated three dimensional actions and actors into two dimensional representations. This might result in readers interpreting my writing in unintentional ways. Drawing from various sources of data in conjunction with reading theory helped me interpret the field from different perspectives. For instance, engaging with observations, interviews, and artefacts from four different teachers, while reading research literature, left me continually grappling with my understandings of constraints and possibilities of agency.

In this study, participant observation was closely tied to informal conversations and semi-structured interviews. As such, I contend that my time spent in the field...
supported the conversations I had with teachers (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). I say this because the teachers often referred to specific incidents that occurred when I was in the room or to students or school based initiatives that I knew about from my time in the field. I firmly believe that having interviews connected to observations enabled the teachers and me to engage in deeper and more nuanced conversations than might have occurred without participant observation. The teachers and I shared common experiences with students and other teachers in their work environment. Teachers were able to refer to specific individuals and contexts of their work when speaking with me. I knew their students, the staff, the contexts, events going on at the school, and frequently, I was present during an event being discussed.

It is not my intention to romanticize the time I spent in teachers' classrooms or the process of participant observation. The entire study period was filled with negotiation, both spoken and unspoken, between the teachers and me. I elaborate regarding my perspective and interpretation of these tensions and processes in an upcoming section of this chapter, negotiating relationships (see section 3.8).

3.6.2 The On-going Conversation

Stacey, one of the participants, described our sixth month research communication and relationship as an on-going conversation. This phrase struck me because it captured the ways the teachers and I interacted. We would have conversations and ‘chats’ that would start-stop-and-continue, as we weaved in and out of topics. At times, our informal dialogues would be interrupted by the hustle and bustle of the day or we would just shift to another tangentially related topic. We discussed issues related to certain situations and frequently returned to them at later points in the year, maybe
discussing the same issue, but within different contexts. As I learned more about the teachers and their lives, and tried to situate their perspectives within broader societal power dynamics, different or further questions about their thinking regarding certain contexts emerged.

In addition to informal conversations, I interviewed each teacher using a semi-structured format at four points throughout the study. The first interview occurred at the start of the study, the second was at approximately the quarter point, the third, at the half point, and the fourth was near the end of the study period. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by me within 48 hours of the interview session. My intention in doing this was to reflect on, and begin analysis of, the interview while I was still in the field.

Prior to the study, I created general interview guidelines which were later tailored to the specific situations of each participant (see Appendices 3 through 6 for general and specific interview guides). For instance, although I engaged in conversations with each teacher about curricular initiatives taken up by their schools, the actual initiatives discussed reflected the distinctiveness of each situation. In addition to these types of changes, I altered questions to reflect the on-going conversations and relationship with each teacher. By this, I mean that certain topics might be discussed informally with one teacher and thus, when it came up in a semi-structured interview, I might skip that one or ask a slight variation of it.

Yet, another layer of specificity came in the moment of the interview process. This moment I refer to as the dynamic space of the semi-structured interview. Fontana and Frey (2000) suggest that it is the dynamic flexibility that offers semi-structured
interview method its power as a research tool. During the interviews I tried to create a conversational space where the teacher and I could talk about issues and aspects of their work. My aim was to provide an open, relaxed ambiance so the teachers could express ideas and tell their stories. During this process, I listened intently to follow the teacher’s thinking, and probe these ideas further while still creatively working in some of the pertinent pre-set questions. The interviews complemented observation time; it was an opportunity for teachers to discuss, and me to attempt to understand, how they “manage and resolve tensions and contradictions in their lives” (Mishler, 1999, p. 108). This was not merely a matter of me listening to their stories but rather a power dynamic where the teachers and I created our contextually-bound understandings.

Open ended questions were used during the interviews to encourage teachers to share their perspectives and experiences. Narrative is considered to be one way that individuals make sense of their experiences (Bryne, 2003; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Davies, 2003; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Kerby, 1991; Mishler, 199; Smith, 1993). Narratives include isolated acts, sequences of events “placing particular events within a framing context or history” (Kerby, 1991, p. 3). Teachers were invited to share their stories as a way for them to organize events, express their understandings of it, and themselves in relation to it (Byrne, 2003; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Polkinghorne (1995) uses the term analysis of narrative to refer to the process whereby participants tell stories that are then dismantled in analysis as researchers look for themes within the stories. In this way, stories or narratives are an epistemological process for the participant; they are a means
to express understandings. My examination of teachers’ stories is taken up in an
upcoming section on analysis.

Drawing upon social construction perspectives, I suggest that within the context
of teachers telling their stories they positioned themselves and me (Frith & Kitzinger,
1998; Mishler, 1999; Riessman, 2002; Whelan et al., 2001). They forged identities of
‘self’ against these positionings and constructed notions of how they understood others
and believed themselves to be understood (Frith & Kitzinger, 1998; Mishler, 1999;
Riessman, 2002; Whelan et al., 2001). For Mishler (1999), this “dialectic interplay” (p.
18) occurs in our social construction of ‘truth’. This phrase reveals the researcher, not as
a passive consumer of the interviewee’s stories, but an active co-constructor of them.
Thus, as I discussed in chapter one, the way I positioned myself and was interpreted to be
positioned by the teachers, influenced the interviews and thus, the project.

In addition to the constructed nature of ‘truth’, Holstein and Gubrium (2000)
suggest that individuals construct themselves with and against others. There is a storying
of self that occurs as others take the place of a looking glass, reflecting back onto the
individuals, facilitating self construction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). In applying this
perspective to the interview process, I suggest that throughout the interview, the teachers
were making sense of themselves in response to how they perceived me and my reaction
to them (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). I was conscious of this possibility and how the
dynamic was influencing the research project. Thus, as I discussed in chapter one, my
positioning of self and the participants’ positionings of me, mattered to the research
project. My response to this issue shifted during the transcription process. For example,
at times, while transcribing interviews, I would question how my reactions, or lack
thereof, were influencing the responses of the teachers (Mishler, 1999). Therefore, I varied my reactions during interviews by sometimes responding by saying less and other times, nods or small comments. I was conscious of offering teachers as much opportunity to share their thinking as possible. I did not want to interrupt or shift the flow of their thoughts.

I trouble this aspect of the interview process because as Mishler (1999) argues, individuals make identity claims on the basis of the ways they understand themselves in relation to others. In this way, the teachers’ positionings of themselves in the interviews and throughout the study shifted as a result of their perception of our relationship and the power dynamic between us. To extend this logic, I would expect that I too was shaping ‘self’ based on this shifting relationship. Therefore, I kept a journal or research log which became as Bogdewic (1999) says “a historical record of the entire fieldwork experience” (p. 62). I used it to explore my thoughts about my role as researcher, agent, and educator throughout the research process. In addition, it was a tool to assist me in reflecting on the changes in my thoughts as I sought to situate them in relation to my interpretations of this research. It was a thinking space where I reflected on my perspectives of the day, engaged with theory to read observations or thoughts, made note of questions or comments to explore with teachers. In terms of this last point, the log helped me generate on-going informal questions for teachers as well as reshape more formal questions for upcoming semi-structured interviews. I rarely reference this log throughout the data analysis chapters because writing through and about my experiences permeated all aspects of the process and product.
3.6.3 Journals

In the letter of information, I stated that I would invite teachers to keep a journal of any dilemma or decision making educational situation that they experience and want to think about or further discuss. Once in the field, I made the decision not to insist on teacher journals. This was based on my sense of the teachers’ busy and stressful work lives. I did not have the impression that they would be open to writing journal notes for me to look at. I did however tell the teachers that if they thought of anything that they wanted to discuss, they could jot it down or just mention it to me the next time they saw me. One of the teachers, Jen, was taking a course that involved writing a learning portfolio. She wrote and submitted it twice to her course instructor and shared it with me both times. This became a helpful piece of information that added an additional way to understand Jen’s thinking about herself.

3.6.4 Artefacts

I studied the public websites of the British Columbia Ministry of Education, the local school board, and each school. I was interested in the goals and curricular initiatives being taken up by the province, school board, and schools. These were the initiatives that I discussed with teachers to understand their thoughts about equity and justice. In addition to studying the websites, I collected information booklets or notices from the schools that had information about initiatives, mandates, or programs being offered by them, the school board or province. These provided contextual information for my discussions with and interpretations of the teachers.
3.7 Teachers' Lives

Throughout the project I was cognizant and reminded of teachers' schedules as well as their fatigue at different points in the year. Contra to teachers complaining to me about this, they were always welcoming and willing to share their time. I make this claim regarding teachers' lives based on some non-verbal clues such as physical demeanour and illness. These are contextual understandings that arose from participant observation in addition to interviews (Altheide & Johnson, 1998).

Interviews sometimes needed to accommodate teachers' lunch or preparation periods. I felt uncomfortable using these times for research because, I knew from experience, this was possibly the only moment of quiet or preparation teachers would get that work day. I was especially concerned about this situation toward the latter part of the school year when teachers seemed quite tired and busy. Yet, their hectic days meant these breaks were often our only time to chat. Therefore, if at the end of an interview there were questions that I did not get a chance to ask, I forwarded them for the next interview or I tried to work them into weekly informal conversations with teachers. My point is the details of each teacher's situation were very important to this research process. Another aspect influencing the interview content and dynamic was my relationship with the teachers (which I talk about in an upcoming section), our past conversations, and the on-going events within the lives of elementary teachers (e.g., report cards, concerts, meetings with teachers, meetings with parents, phone calls etc.).

My desire to recognize and respect the distinctiveness of each teacher's work setting, demands, personality, and approach meant that throughout the data collection phase I engaged in an on-going process of reflecting on and critically analyzing each
teacher’s thinking; the socio-cultural-political conditions of her work; scholarly writing about social justice, teachers’ work, and agency; my own understandings of agency and justice; and the conditions of elementary teachers’ work in urban British Columbia in 2005. What complicated matters during this phase, was the risk I faced of getting stuck in the minutia of each case without pulling back periodically to consider tensions across cases (Loutzenheiser, personal communication, Feb 5, 2005).

3.8 Negotiating Relationships

Relationship building and maintenance required time, energy, and on-going reflexivity. This was a large and important aspect of the data collection process. The cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1998) I had as a teacher was only able to take me so far. I felt as Hill Collins (1986) describes, the “outsider within” (p. S14). This refers to an individual’s positioning of being included in certain cultural circles and while at the same time remaining outside the boundaries of the group in other ways (Hill Collins, 1986).

What I mean, is having taught in urban elementary classrooms, I was considered to ‘understand’ the life of a teacher. I had some of what Bourdieu (1998) refers to as cultural capital and thus, remain a card carrying member of the elementary teaching profession. However, since my experience was in Ontario rather than BC, I remained outside the current local teaching culture. Further, my time spent in administration also removed me from the club because I had crossed into ‘Other’ territory.

As a side note, although I was forthright about my administration experience, I fronted my teaching background to strengthen my relation with the teachers. According

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16 I understand reflexivity as a process of examining the ways my assumptions, perspectives, experiences, and social location were influencing the research process.
to Fine (1994b), the hyphen between self-Other “separates and merges personal identities
with our inventions of Others” (p. 131). Drawing from this perspective, my attempt to
align with teachers and interpret them was related to my understanding of ‘self’. I am
saying that the ‘who’ I was, influenced ‘who’ I understood the four teachers to be. This
became an important aspect of this project in that my identities as researcher, teacher,
administrator, women, and student, all rubbed up against my interpretations of the teacher
participants. This was a major tension I grappled with throughout the data collection,
analysis, and representation phases.

In addition, since I did not know the teachers or any of the teachers at their
schools, it took time for the teachers and me (essentially strangers) to get comfortable
spending so much time together. With this in mind, I initially gave more space to the
teachers and tried to ask just casual, technical, or procedural questions about their day
(e.g., outline of day in terms of subjects taught, student supervision at lunch time). I
quickly realized that I needed to take responsibility for my role as researcher. I was
trying to step outside of it to be considered one of the teachers. It is interesting to me that
I thought I could do this, given my interest in feminist methodology which argues against
this possibility (Fine, 1994a; Weiler, 1988). Just as I can never step outside my
experience as a woman, I was unable to do so as researcher, teacher, or administrator
(Weiler, 1988). Thus, asking a teacher a question as we are walking through the hall
such as, she has tried yoga might lead the teacher to question why I was asking that and
how her response will impact my interpretation of her in the research study. However
innocuous the question might seem to me, I came to realize that to the teacher, I remained
the researcher and all my questions and comments were read through this lens. In chapter four, I describe each of the teachers and my relationship with them in more detail.

3.9 Data Analysis

Generally speaking, to make sense of the data I used what Wolcott (1994) suggests is a process of weaving back and forth between collection, description, analysis, and interpretation. According to Wolcott (1994), blurring these phases recognizes the dialectic process of research. In this study, I examined the particular within each case while also striving to maintain a holistic perspective. I focused on curricular initiatives encouraged by the government, society, education traditions, school board, school, and the teacher. I gathered as much data as possible about the social, political, cultural, and material conditions related to these initiatives and teachers’ work.

My aim in analysis was to critically examine within and across cases: (1) the contexts influencing teachers’ work; (2) how these aspects were interpreted as barriers or supports for agency; and (3) how teachers made sense of themselves in relation to the contexts. To do this, I coded and studied data in various ways and a multitude of times. I questioned the data with a critical eye toward the ways participants’ perspectives and tensions might be informed by broader societal power dynamics. My intention throughout the process was to stay as close to the data as possible, for as long as possible.

3.9.1 Coding

In the initial phase of analysis, I used open or free coding for data of observations, interviews and artefacts (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This was done as soon as possible after the data were collected and interviews were
transcribed, while they were fresh in my mind. It was a process that enabled reflection on the codes while I was still in the field. This action shaped the data collection phase and the project because it led to further questions and puzzlements that I took back into the field and the literature. This approach was informed by Wolcott’s (1994) perspective of the interconnectedness of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Specifically, to create open codes I read transcripts and notes and copied into a separate word document any words, phrases, or sentences (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) that referred to the socio-cultural conditions of work, the teachers’ thoughts about ‘self’ or curricular initiatives, and social justice. These open codes were then cut out and placed onto coloured cue cards. Each teacher was assigned a colour. For instance, Jen was blue, Annette, yellow; Michelle, white; and Stacey, green. I glued one open code on each card and then sorted the cards based on similarities of statement content. In some cases, there were many cards in a group, while for others, only one.

Each card was assigned one code to keep the codes flexible. This way I could move them into different groups. The cards were a visual depiction of the teachers; I saw the whole teacher every time I saw the colour of the card and read the code. Doing this was my way of keeping the teacher connected to the comment. I decided that disembodiment of participants from their statements would remove the teachers from the process. Patti Lather (1997) discusses this concept in relation to her efforts to recognize the wholeness of the participants and bring them into the spirit of the process and product. Similarly, I wanted the cards to still be fluid because I did not want to fix a code into any category too early in analysis.
To ensure I was not fixating on grouped ideas that were forming, I selected the word or phrase to describe the item before I put it either into an existing group or created a new group. Eventually, through constant comparison and pattern recognition, item code themes began to emerge (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). These themes were like coordinate points on a map through the process of inquiry. They prompted further questions and explorations. At times, I returned back to the original written observational notes or interview transcripts to reread and put the ideas into holistic context.

Following Ryan and Bernard (1999), once I identified some tentative themes such as offering students tools, collaboration, and care, I tried to critically question how they might be read within broader societal dynamics. In addition, I explored possible associations or connections of these codes and themes with one another and between cases. This is axial coding (Creswell, 1998) and it is a process of building connections between and within categories to form sub-categories. In this iterative process, I examined across multiple sources of data from interviews, observations, and artefacts to determine the nuanced ways they supported the themes initially generated. In this way, I conducted cross-case analysis looking for similarities, differences or intersections. This was a continuation of constant comparison and cross referencing described by LeCompte and Schensul (1999). Codes were posted on walls and throughout my office, existing themes were supported by codes, new themes sometimes emerged, or themes shifted. Through this process, I began to see tensions and nuances within them. Once again, this brought me in circular form to Richardson’s (2000) crystallization concept because I began to form ideas about my inquiry regarding tensions in teachers’ identity formations.
However, these perspectives were all dependent on the view used to understand the teachers and their contexts.

At a point when a sense of being stuck in the complicatedness emerged, I remembered a professor’s words about how writing can be a helpful method for thinking through sticking points (Kelly, personal communication, 2004). Thus, as a tool to support me in stepping back to examine across themes and through contradictions, I turned to writing as a method of analysis.

3.9.2 Writing through Thinking and Visa Versa

For Richardson (2000), “writing is a way of knowing—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it.” (p. 923). In the analysis, I used the themes that emerged from constant comparison and cross referencing (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) as jumping off points for writing. It was a method that supported efforts to front the teachers while also pushing me to watch for tensions across cases. I attended to contexts shaping teachers’ constructions of ‘self’ and complexities emerging in constructions of teachers’ agency. This process assisted me through sticking points while helping me avoid paralysis in the overwhelming amount of data. It was a way to dive into the data and swim around in it while still having some broad sense of direction. This method "honours and encourages the trying" (Richardson, 2000, p. 924) and thus, it allowed me to spend time with my data without having to commit to particular analysis. It became a way to ‘try on’ perspectives. As much as possible, I tried to hear participant voices as I wrote. This meant following directions as they emerged. For instance, when writing, if ideas arose I tried to listen to them. It was a constant tension for me to distinguish listening from procrastination.
3.10 Points of Tension in Analysis

In analyzing actions and participants’ perspectives, I grappled with how to talk about the tensions teachers negotiate without taking a neo-liberal perspective of blaming the individual (Sleeter, 1995). Periodically, it seemed as if the time in the field acted to limit my ability to ‘see’ the teachers. I was ever conscious of their generosity of time. Thus, I carefully examined all parts of their work and their expressions of agency, while at the same time, bringing into the light my own perspectives as an educator and researcher.

3.11 Complicating Identities in Representation

While utilizing writing as a method of analysis, many questions emerged about how to possibly represent the complicatedness of teachers’ political identities in this dissertation. I worried about how I could center the teachers, while at the same time, taking ownership of my representations of them and their identities. The writing represents my interpretations of our co-constructed understandings (Mishler, 1999). There are many levels of interpretation represented, not the least of which are decisions about what gets included and excluded in this dissertation (Lincoln, 1997).

Thus, in the next chapter I describe the teachers and the conditions of their work in order to invite the reader to enter the space of inquiry alongside me. Through the analysis chapters (5 through 8 inclusive), I strive to bring the teachers’ tensions to life. To do this, I use the interviews, observations, and artefacts in two interconnected ways: (1) they become the scaffolding which supports my arguments and themes; and (2) they offer illustrations of the points I am making as I speak across cases and themes. My aim in this twofold perspective is for Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey, to be present as
embodied, complex beings in their stories. They are present as I walk the reader through my interpretation of their tensions and the complications in their identities. This dynamic is a lynchpin from which I speculate regarding the ways their identity formation relates to practices of social justice.

3.11.1 Representing Teachers’ Voices

The representation of participants’ voices is frequently an issue under tension in feminist scholarship (cf. Olesen, 2000). Within the present study, this leads to questions regarding ways to express the multiplicity of voices and complications within these in representation. This is an example of Fine’s (1994b) hyphen between researcher and ‘Other’. In this dissertation, I share my perspectives of the ways Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey make sense of their work, identity, and agency. What I present is a representation of not only five women but, because of my interconnectedness between the participants, in addition to two participants knowing one another, a pluralistic interpretation with myself included in the product. Fine (1994a) suggests that researchers ought to account for the power relations between themselves and their participants. In Kincheloe’s (1997) view, researchers often fail to recognize the ways power shapes how they position themselves and are positioned in relation to the texts they produce.

Although I seek to address this issue of power and representation, according to Olesen (2000), there is no easy way around the dilemma of how to express the women’s voices without distortion. For Fine (1994a), researchers who fail to acknowledge the role they play in the research process and representation, become ventriloquists (p. 17), speaking for others while pretending to be invisible. There is always mediation that occurs whether it is in the questions asked or the interpretation of responses and
observations (Lewin, 1991, cited in Olesen, 2000). Yet, while the concept of voice can be problematic in research, it can also offer potential for researchers to support “counter-hegemonic analyses of institutional arrangements” (Fine, 1994a, p. 20). As a case in point, Kelly’s (2003) writing regarding a teenage parents program in school, speaks about the program while also supporting it as a counterpublic of democracy. Thus, I suggest that for researchers, centering participant voices while at the same time, acknowledging their own positions, offers a rich way to examine the dynamics or organization in institutions that influence individuals. In chapter nine, I discuss the researcher’s influence on the research process.

In this project, examining the contradictions and similarities in elementary teachers’ perspectives offered a way to explore the ways forces in educational institutions shape teachers’ lives and thinking. Throughout the writing phase, I drew from teachers’ voices and theory to lodge questions at education and societal systems while contributing suggestions to the education field and broader theoretical debates regarding teacher agency.

I conducted member checks, offering teachers opportunities to speak about and to the research. As I mentioned previously, during the research process the teachers were offered an opportunity to see my field notes pertaining to them. Other than one teacher briefly glancing at a page in my book, the teachers declined this offer. Following within and across case analysis of data as well as the completion of a first draft of the dissertation (Jan 2006), I made contact with the teachers (three through email and one through telephone) and extended invitations to read and offer reactions regarding data (e.g., observations, interviews) pertaining to them and my analysis of these. I chose to
send each teacher only data and analysis pertaining to her and the discussion of the study in general. The reasons for this decision were twofold; (1) I wanted to ensure the privacy of all teachers because not all had given their feedback at the same time; and (2) to preserve anonymity because two of the teachers knew each other.

All four teachers indicated interest in reading the document and agreed to receive the document via email. I delivered the document to one teacher who did not have a personal computer. After a few weeks, the teachers contacted me to offer feedback. I had face to face conversations with two teachers at their school, one teacher over the telephone and the fourth, both over the telephone and through email exchange. The teachers and I engaged in dialogue regarding any points of clarification they wished to make regarding my observations, their reactions from reading statements they made during the study, and their perspective about the analysis. The majority of requested changes pertained to clarification regarding details about them, their history, or a situation. After reading the analysis, one teacher clarified her intention of a comment (see section 5.3.2). I present the reinterpretations (the teacher's and my own) as an example of plurality in understandings.

3.12 Summary

This chapter threads questions regarding the interrelationship between the participants, me, and the conditions of schools through a description of the process (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). Continually circling back to each point throughout the data collection and to items in the analysis was a process of reflexive inquiry. These actions

17 My intention in using email is that they would read the document online and write a response. After meeting with teachers I wondered if giving each teacher a hard copy document would have been more helpful to them.
and perspectives also involved drawing together my interpretations of theory, from the field, and processes of grappling with data. The on-going critical questions and reflexivity were aimed at working toward integrity in the process and claims regarding the findings.

Together the teachers and I are constrained co-constructors in this research project (Mishler, 1999; Riessman, 2002). Thus, in chapter four, Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey are fronted with descriptions about them, their schools as interpreted through my experiences of them, the broader setting of the school, school board, and community. In particular, I focus on curricular initiatives taken up at each of these levels because they are the basis of many conversations I have with teachers. Further, contextual information about curricular initiatives is shared because these initiatives also shape the events, attitudes, curriculum, and pedagogy at the schools. As an influencing member of the research project, I include some information about myself which supplements previously shared information about my experiences (chapter one). Last, it is important to note that all particular identification details about teachers, schools, and school boards have been altered to offer anonymity. Pseudonyms are used for all names of people and places other than for my committee members and me.
Chapter 4: Contexts and the Cases

4.1 Overview

This chapter introduces and describes the teachers, their work settings, and the agendas influencing these spaces in order to provide the reader context. Given my desire for the teachers to be understood as situated within the conditions of their work and lives, this chapter focuses solely on descriptions of the teachers within social spaces. Chapters five through eight provides in-depth analysis of teachers’ thinking and identity formation as social agents.

Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey are the four teacher participants in this study. I begin with the teachers to center on them as embodied beings in classrooms, schools, and the education system. Following this, I describe their classrooms and the schools to bring readers into the complicated dynamics of their particular contexts. Next, I step further back to frame the collection of cases by situating the teachers and their particular work settings within the broader setting of British Columbia (BC). The curricular initiatives of the province, school board, and schools are explicated because they contribute to forming the conditions of teachers’ work. As such, they contribute to mediating teachers’ thinking, actions, and experiences.

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18 All names of teachers, schools, school boards, and city have pseudonyms.
19 I make this point about my study taking place in urban British Columbia while other parts of the province are forests and mountains which remain primarily in their natural state. The province is a juxtaposition of manipulated and undisturbed nature.
4.2 Jen

Jen is a grade three teacher with approximately six years of teaching experience.

Prior to being a teacher Jen spent more than a dozen years as a nurse. She describes her entry into teaching stating:

I’ve been interested in teaching for a long time. I just got sidetracked. I went off to India for what was going to be a year’s trip and then I kind of got this save the world through nursing kind of thing. I came back and went into nursing and did that for thirteen years. But it never really grabbed me. I was in a rut, a good paying rut but it was a rut nonetheless. So I finally managed to extract myself from the rut and get back into teaching or go into education. (Interview, #1, p. 2)

Being a teacher is something Jen always saw herself being and yet, her experiences with her own teachers were less positive. She and I discuss her teacher role models:

Karen: Was there a particular teacher that you felt you connected with or that influenced your thinking at elementary school?

Jen: No.

Karen: Is there any particular teacher who you had a negative memory of?

Jen: Oh yeah. We got a lot of duds up in the Territories. People who couldn’t handle it or wanted to try things on kids they weren’t supposed to try. We got a lot of those teachers.

Karen: But no one in particular who you remember who stands out?

Jen: I’m not a good historian. I don’t have a good recollection of anything about growing up. It was a pretty narrow little town. Unless it involved beer it was not important. (Interview #2, p. 4)

Jen’s short responses and tone when speaking give me the impression this topic is not one she wishes to pursue. However, Jen is willing to tell me about her current school and teaching practice. For instance Jen expresses her excitement in taking part in a
professional development program because she believes it aligns with her perspective of teaching through a particular framework. She explains:

*I was looking for a framework to teach with. I was trying to pull together all my empirical observations and not with any formal research to try and figure out what it was that held it together. What was my belief system? What was the cognitive framework that I would use to teach from?...[...]... Anyway, this came along and it was...somebody’s done it...and not that it’s going to be a perfect match like that (intertwines fingers). But even to look at what somebody created out of years of in-depth research. From what the research says about learning and teaching in the area of literacy, it’s phenomenal.*

(Jen, Interview #1, pp. 9-10)

For Jen, this framework allows her a way to make sense of her thinking and practice. She refers to gathering data and *“always doing this thing where I evaluate everything I do and say, did that work, did the children respond? Did they seem engaged? Are they taking this home with them through their talk?”* (Interview #1, p. 5). Although I examine Jen’s reflection in relation to her sense of ‘self’ as an agent in an upcoming chapter, at this point, I focus solely on expressing her understanding of it, as part of her practice. She often talks about her desire to feel as though she is influencing students’ learning. She articulates this perspective in the following:

*In my classroom I really look for what works because always in my head is what makes a difference here. Is this having an impact on their thinking, on their learning, on their socializing? ... Mostly I’m thinking what should we do about this, what could we do about that. It is always about evaluating and changing, evaluating and changing. It is always built into what I do at this classroom level.* (Jen, Interview #2, p. 9)

These statements express Jen’s perspective that she needs to have an impact on her students’ thinking and practice. Yet for Jen, this evaluation of her work also includes the time she invests. For instance, she states: *“I’m absolutely determined I can be a better teacher than I am now and work less. I know it’s possible, I just don’t know how, totally yet”* (Interview, #1, p. 7). This means that *“everything that I do goes through a filter. Is*
it effective for my time, for their learning” (Interview Transcript 1, p.7). Jen makes it clear to me at many points that she does not like to ‘waste time’ and finds it frustrating to engage in activities that she thinks squander it. In addition to Jen telling me about her desire regarding time, the school principal describes Jen as extremely efficient.

4.2.1 The Classroom Environment: Jen

Entering Jen’s classroom for our initial meeting (Dec 2004), I notice that her desk is near the doorway. The first half of the room is an open space with a few, small round tables. The other half of the room has students’ desks facing the front in rows of three or four. At the front of the students’ desks is an open space with a chair. Over the months, I realized that the area at the front of the students’ desks was the gathering area where they sit on the rugged floor and Jen sits on the chair. Jen shares her intention behind the set up of the room. She explains,

People assume, they look at the desks and think, oh that’s really bad, rows. No, it’s great. I would go crazy if I had to face you all day and do my work. I’d go nuts, I need some space. If there are words on the boards I want to be able to see them. I don’t want to have a sore neck. But there are places to work, like the carpet. ... [...] The whole room is here to work in, use it. (Jen, Interview #1, p. 11)

For Jen, it is important that students “know what they need in order to learn. So I need to give them some space so they can discover it, some validation so they can discover who they are as learners” (Interview transcript 1, p. 11). According to Jen, the whole room is available to students to conduct their work. She says, “If you need to work at a table, work at a table. If you need to work at your desk work at a desk. Just work, just figure out what you need and work ...[...] If you need to lie on a table, lie on a table” (Interview transcript 1, p. 11).
Jen holds that students need to have space to engage as learners in ways that resonate for them. I notice Jen rarely stands and teaches with students sitting at their desks. Most of the time the students are gathered at the rug and then after a lesson they disperse to spots of their choice in the room, to work. For Jen, the aim is for students to learn in ways they choose rather than the teacher controlling students by having them sit at their desks.

4.2.2 Parkland Elementary School

Parkland Elementary School is a kindergarten to grade seven school located within a few blocks of a commercial street. According to Jen, the school is in a middle to upper middle-class, urban setting. She does not consider Parkland Elementary to be as diverse as many other schools in the city. The school offers both a full French Immersion and English speaking program for students in grades six and seven.

The underpinning philosophy of Parkland Elementary is that students are decision makers who have choice and responsibility for self. According to Jen, this perspective is undergoing change. More recently, she as well as other staff members have voiced concern about the climate of the school that they believe has emerged from students being given a great deal of freedom. She thinks that the school focus on the individual has resulted in a tendency to overlook the good of the community. Through our informal conversations, Jen shares that the staff members are working to add structures into the school organization to encourage students to recognize themselves as part of a larger school community. To this end, they have chosen to focus on a school goal of social responsibility as a way to encourage students to think beyond individualism. According to Jen, the school is “built out of many strong, individual, independent teachers”
(Interview #1, p. 16) who agreed upon an interest in working toward a more socially responsible community. She explicates that they decided to work on something simple and thus, chose to focus on safe orderly movement in the halls and at school gatherings (school assemblies). According to Jen this is a good starting point for the school however, this is a goal the school is still working toward (Interview #1). It will continue to be a goal for the school community next year as well.

In summary, Jen speaks of herself as a teacher who examines her practice (Interview #1) and strives for impact (Interview #3). She articulates her perspective about teaching in stating, “I suspect that teaching should shake the world but then the teacher has to be willing to stand on shaky ground” (Interview #3, p. 13). The instability that Jen is prepared to negotiate is explored in chapters six and seven.

4.3 Annette

Annette is a kindergarten teacher with over a decade of experience at Hillcrest Elementary School. Annette has taught kindergarten for most of these years, but only in the last few has the class been a full day.

According to Annette, she grew up in an area of Norton with many immigrant families, mostly of European background. She grew up speaking both Italian and Hungarian because her parents are Italian and her family lived with her Aunt who was Hungarian. Despite knowing two languages when entering elementary school, Annette felt she needed to get ‘caught up’ to other students. Therefore, she devoted effort to learning English in order to “be like the other kids in the classroom” (Interview #2, p. 1). Once she did this, she had a great school experience. Annette speaks fondly of friends she made in elementary school with whom she is still in touch.
Annette speaks of loving learning and this has inspired her to complete a graduate degree in Education and participate in local research studies. She is currently attempting to teach her students the letters of the alphabet using varied approaches that include multi-linguistic, kinesthetic, art, and cross curricular inquiries.

Annette is a school leader in a number of activities. She is a curricular leader for early literacy and organizes the school-wide professional support activities for the staff. In addition, Annette is also involved in coaching many sports at school which she suggests is a great way to get to know students in other grades.

Spending the day with Annette requires moving quickly in order to follow her. She does not initiate conversations as we move through the halls and, after our first interview, shares that she is uncomfortable with being asked about her thinking or herself. To increase Annette’s comfort, I attempt to initiate informal conversations as we move through the hallways. However, during one of these exchanges she mentions that she is not sure which questions will be used in the research. Thus, I decrease the amount of casual chatter I initiate in order to ease anxiety caused by my presence. Over time, Annette seems more comfortable during interviews and while being shadowed.

4.3.1 The Classroom Environment: Annette

Annette’s classroom is located in the basement. The cold room temperature is a frequent topic Annette and I discuss. Trying to increase the temperature of the room is an on-going issue that Annette brings up with the principal and custodian. In chapter seven, I examine Annette’s understanding of herself as able to address this situation and the conditions in which she works.
Annette’s room is joined via a storage room to another kindergarten room. There are two full day Kindergarten classes and one half day class. Annette and the kindergarten teacher next door often plan activities for the classes together. The teachers tell me that for students to be eligible for full day kindergarten they have to be designated by the school board as ESL, First Nations, or special needs. Both of the classes in the basement are full day and the half day class is located on the upper floor of the school building. According to Annette, most of her students speak languages other than English at home.

The classroom is large and Annette has set up many centres for student exploration and learning. For instance, there is one for art, puppets, reading, puzzles, math tubs, science, and house activities. At the entrance of the room is a cloak area where students hang their jackets and knapsacks. The first fifteen minutes of the day I visit, are for students to work with manipulative learning activities. They enter the room and work either independently or in partners. A timer is set, and during this time Annette moves around the room interacting with students and completing classroom organizational tasks. The latter are tasks that support the management of the classroom. They include collecting forms, library books, notes from guardians etc. When the timer goes off the students clean up, music starts and the teacher gathers with students in a circle on the floor. The students join in singing as they all gather and begin the more formal part of the day. This circle is a space where students gather not only at the start of the day but after recess, to start the afternoon, and to close the day.

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20 Annette states that the routine changes depending on the day of the week (member check interview).
21 Classroom tasks are sometimes referred to as housekeeping items. Teachers complete duties that are associated with maintaining order of the institution. From my own experience, teachers often refer to these as creating extra demands on their teaching time.
4.3.2 Hillcrest Elementary School

Hillcrest Elementary School has more than 300 students from kindergarten to grade seven. According to Annette, most of the families are working class and many parents work at night (personal notes, 25-01-05). During one of our class neighbourhood walks, Annette told me that many families rent parts of the houses in the area. Most of the students are of East Asian background (Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, Filipino, and Vietnamese).

According to the school website, the school strives to support student achievement within a safe, caring, socially responsible environment. The curricular goals at Hillcrest Elementary are literacy, numeracy, and social responsibility. As Annette explicates, the staff feels social responsibility should always be a goal and not given a one-time emphasis.

*It is funny, teach social responsibility? No. It is all around you it is everything that you do. I struggle with the fact where they've got social responsibility goals. Well isn't it always your goal? Is it just your goal this year? So many schools have social responsibility as their goal. Okay so you've got a three year plan and then social responsibility is out the window because you are going to focus on something else; to me it needs to be part of your program continuously.* (Annette, Interview #2, p. 9)

For Annette, social responsibility needs to permeate the school rather being designated as a specific activity. However, at the end of this project Annette mentions that the staff members have decided to keep it as a school goal next year and she speculates that there may be specific school wide attention given to planning activities to emphasize it.

Throughout this section, I have shared Annette's perspective about herself a learner who teaches (Interview #1). Her aim is "to instil in them (students) that they just don't do things here because of teacher approval or teacher praise. It has to be intrinsic and so they start to value that and continue that in life as well" (Interview #2, p. 2). To
do this, Annette strives “to put a lot of responsibility on them (students) even at a younger age” (p. 2) and asks them to select what represents “their personal best” (p. 2). Throughout my time with Annette, I notice her encouraging students to be involved in classroom activities, make choices about their learning interests, and confident in themselves.

4.4 Michelle

Michelle has taught for ten years and kindergarten for most of these. She currently teaches all day kindergarten at Hampton Heights Elementary. Michelle refers to herself as a “Chinese, south-east Asian” woman; “definitely a minority” (Interview #4, p. 7). She was born and raised in Norton, primarily by her grandmother, in a house not that far from Hampton Heights. According to Michelle, she was an ‘ESL’ child whose first language growing up was Cantonese. Michelle says that her family in terms of socio-economic status was very similar to the demographic currently at Hampton Heights School. Her mother worked for minimum wage at a sewing company and her dad was away working (Interview #4).

Material goods were not abundant and throughout the project Michelle shares stories about the constraints facing her family. In chapter six, Michelle’s identity formation in relation to her life conditions are examined. Michelle has many siblings and frequently mentions them, as well as her parents. They all live within a few miles of one another and she speaks about the time they spend together each week (e.g., weekly meals).
As a kindergarten student, Michelle has vivid memories of not understanding English or what was going on in kindergarten, and as a result, being very scared. Yet she shares that she loves learning and "loved school" (Interview #2, p. 2). Michelle has won numerous awards over her academic career. Michelle won the overall award at her high-school and the opportunity to be a Senate Page in Federal Government. Thus, although she went away to begin university, she missed her family and returned to complete her studies at a local university. Michelle also completed her Bachelor of Education degree at the local university, winning the silver medal for being head of the graduating class of the program. Michelle has since taken courses in English Second Language (ESL) training and other professional development opportunities.

For Michelle, it is important to give back to her community which is one reason why she chooses to work in this part of the city. Michelle is actively involved in professional development and regularly gives professional development workshops for teachers all over the region. Many practicing and student teachers come to observe Michelle teach. They heard about Michelle through the 'professional grapevine' or have attended one of her workshops. Many of the teachers speak of their admiration and respect for Michelle. In addition, Michelle has been involved in a large scale curricular research project with the local university and worked with Annette during it.

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22 I elaborate on Michelle’s experiences at school and the influence on her identity formation in chapter six.
23 This point about Michelle leading professional development workshops and its impact on her identity is explicated in chapter six.
24 Through member check feedback Michelle clarifies that she and Annette were friends prior to their work on the curriculum research project.
4.4.1 The Classroom Environment: Michelle

Michelle’s class is one of three full-day kindergarten classes in the school. This year all of her students are ESL and one of her students also has a classification of hearing impaired and learning disability. Michelle has a student support worker (Wendy) in the room to assist her in meeting the needs of the special needs student. In addition, the teachers’ union investigated the students’ needs of Michelle’s class and fought for her to receive extra support. Therefore, for the last few months of the school year Michelle was receiving support for a few periods per week.

Michelle’s students are and have been primarily Cantonese speaking Chinese. The ability to speak Cantonese helps Michelle communicate with many students and guardians. Early in the year when the students speak less English, Michelle calls upon students in her own and other classes to translate for her with students who speak languages other than English or Cantonese.

Michelle’s classroom has many learning centres set up around the room (e.g., science investigation, writing, paint, reading and listening areas, house activities, and a sand table). At the entrance of the room is a cloak area where students put their coats and bags. There are tables with chairs around the room which serve as students’ work stations. At the front of the room is a big square marked in coloured tape on the rug with a rocking chair at one corner of it. In the square are taped rows indicating to students where to sit. There are big windows which are in covered in some kind of film but through which one can see a playground area. Students’ work is posted on the classroom walls.

After the morning bell, the students are welcomed and brought into the school by either Michelle or Wendy (student support worker). When the students enter the
classroom in the morning they get out big picture books and they ‘read’ (independently or with a partner) for fifteen minutes. The next activity is always calendar, during which students follow a routine of activities to learn months, seasons, days of the week, counting, sounds, etc. Two children act as helpers for the day leading most of the calendar activities. The entire routine which takes approximately forty-five minutes is important to Michelle. She states:

_I mentioned to you I spend a lot of time...even my student teacher was saying to me that she was so surprised how much time I spend with the kids and how much time they can sit. Not all the kids can sit that long, but I keep the kids stimulated through song, chanting, clapping, whatever it is we are doing, just to keep their interest up._ (Interview #1, p. 2)

The visual, active, oral, and listening activities offer children opportunities to practice sounds and numbers and for Michelle, are important in making "the lesson more successful" (Interview #1, p. 2).

For Michelle, visual teaching strategies are very important, especially for students who come to school speaking languages other than English (Interview #1). She states: "I know for myself, being an ESL child, visuals, pictures, and all those things really helped me" (Interview #1, p. 2). She contends that visual cues helps students understand what is happening so they can participate and not feel excluded or unsure of events that are happening.

Michelle is very welcoming whenever I arrive. She greets me with a hug and talks to me as though I am part of her day. For example, she tells me what we are going to be working on with the students that day. Michelle talks openly about herself and her family as we move through the halls and is always willing to answer questions about work and her thinking. She introduces me to staff members whom we sit with at recesses
and lunch. They too are friendly and welcoming. The week day I visit Michelle’s is staff treat day and so the staffroom at morning recess is a lively snack-rich environment.

4.4.2 Hampton Heights Elementary School

Hampton Heights is an elementary school with an inner city designation and an enrolment below 400. The inner city designation means that the school has extra funds to use to buy material or human resource support. In addition, students all receive hot lunches and the school has an informal breakfast program, meaning that teachers can send hungry students to get something to eat (e.g., yoghurt, apples, etc.). Michelle notes this stating, “I realized that in this area there are a lot of lower income families, a lot on social assistance and a lot of single parent families” (Interview #1, p. 6).

Hampton Heights used the money they are granted as an inner city school to buy time with the youth and family worker. They are currently discussing the addition of a part time speech and language pathologist at the school. Some of the designated money also supports school field trips because there is only one fund raising activity per year done at the school. Michelle said that she sees imbalances arising out of this situation because “we are a lower socio-economic neighbourhood and the parents asked to have only one fundraiser and we do this.... And raise maybe four or five thousand dollars...[...]...people are raising twenty or thirty thousand dollars” (interview #4, p. 4). She said the result is that many teachers end up spending even more of their own money relative to teachers at more financially well off schools25.

According to the school website and from talking informally to Michelle, a large number of the students are of East-Asian background. For many students languages other

25 The issue of economics of a school community and teachers’ work is explored in chapter six.
than English are spoken at home (e.g., Cantonese; Mandarin); thus, English is not their first language.

The curricular goals selected by the school staff this year are literacy, social responsibility, and technology. Social responsibility is taken up as a school project with monthly foci on what the school refers to as virtues such as, courtesy, peacefulness, kindness, respect, tolerance, fairness, self control, and co-operation. Every Friday, the teachers work with a group of students from all grades on activities related to the monthly virtue. This is supplemented by whole school activities such as concerts, plays, and guests that conveyed messages pertaining to the virtues. According to Michelle, some staff members want to leave kindergartens out of the activities next year. However, Michelle argues that they are part of the school and need to be included. As a final decision the teachers have agreed to keep the kindergartens in the program for the upcoming year.

Central to Michelle’s perspective of her role and teaching is her desire for students “to be excited about being at school and learning” (Interview #2, p. 5) and to “love school” (p. 5). In addition, “a big thing too is developing independence, not being so reliant on me or somebody else, and making decisions on their own” (Interview #2, p. 5). Thus, Michelle recognizes herself as needing to create an environment to support these aims.

4.5 Stacey

Stacey teaches a multi-grade class with students in grades three through five. She has taught for approximately five years. Stacey has worked at other schools in the Norton School Board however, she returned to Sherwood Elementary in this fall.
Stacey was raised in Norton and completed all of her undergraduate and graduate studies at the local university. Stacey speaks of her interest in studying her practice and cooperative learning (Interview #1). In talking about her studies Stacey concludes, “I learned a lot about myself and my practice” (Interview #1, p. 4). She describes her relation with students stating, “we are a team” (Interview #2, p. 5) and her efforts toward achieving congruency in her thinking, words, and practice.

Stacey is part of the school professional development team. At staff meetings, I observe her leading and working with her colleagues to support them in developing themselves professionally. In addition, Stacey is an athletic coach at her school and participates in school-wide social events. Chapter six is an examination of the ways Stacey’s interest in collaborating with colleagues influences her identity as a social agent.

4.5.1 The Classroom Environment: Stacey

Stacey’s classroom is situated on the top floor of the school. The room has large windows from midway up to ceiling along one side of it. There are tables arranged informally around the room. Stacey’s desk is in the far back corner with the student support worker’s next to it. The location of Stacey’s work space changes when she has a student teacher because she hands over her desk and sits on a chair in the opposite back corner of the room. In the far front corner from the door is a gathering area with a chair at the front of it for Stacey to sit on and talk with the students. Behind the teacher’s chair is a white board. The only other writing space is by the entrance which has a homework chart on it. The walls are filled with students’ work. During one of our informal chats Stacey tells me that it is important to her that the students have ownership of the room, and therefore, she insists that it is their work on the walls rather than pre-made posters.
Frequently, the students are in the classroom during breaks or before school time. They play cards, draw, do homework, chat or crochet\textsuperscript{26}. Some greet me by name when I enter and I feel comfortable in the space. When the bell rings, the students move to the gathering area and sit. The day begins with Stacey personally greeting each child and each child having an opportunity to respond directly to her and the class (personal notes; 27-01-05). Stacey outlines for students the events of the day and discussion follows. Beyond this time, most of the day is spent working with students in the partner class (Stacey’s teaching partner, Susan).

Stacey speaks about collaborating with Susan, her teaming partner. In addition, I notice Stacey and Susan worked together to complete report cards and ESL forms. Because of the inclusive approach at this school where students receive ESL support within the classroom, the teachers are required to complete documents regarding this practice. They are also to collect samples of students’ work and organize files.

During this study, student teachers from the local universities practice teaching in Stacey’s room. These student teachers were at the school at different times. Since Stacey and Susan team teach, when the student teacher from Susan’s class falls ill, Stacey or Susan team teaches with the other student teacher. The number of student teachers in Stacey’s room and the large amount of time they teach mean that Stacey is often involved in team teaching or observing. I chat informally with the student teachers to minimize any discomfort they might feel about having another adult in the room when they taught.

Along with practicing teachers, support workers are assigned to students within each class. In Stacey’s class there is a student with fetal alcohol syndrome, and in

\textsuperscript{26} Stacey taught the students how to crochet and it seemed to really take off. For the last few weeks of my visits the students (boys and girls) were often seen crocheting.
Susan's class one student has Autism. With the student teachers, the classroom teachers and the student support workers, there are often adults coming and going in and out of the class activities. Stacey does not react to these movements and her calmness with them seems to influence students’ comfort. In my personal notes I mention that no one seems distracted by movements or adults. In addition, I notice that adults move readily in and out of one another’s rooms throughout the day.

4.5.2 Sherwood Elementary School

Sherwood Elementary School has more than 400 students and Stacey describes the families as largely working poor. The school has a partial inner city designation and a hot lunch program for students. There is breakfast available for students who arrive at school hungry.

The school has twenty-six language groups represented and the website describes the school to be culturally diverse. Classes are organized into what Stacey refers to as ‘family groupings’. These are grade clusters that span three years (e.g., a class may be made up of students in grades 3, 4, and 5). There is minimal student removed for ESL or special needs support. According to Stacey, the teachers choose this approach because they believe that in their commitment to inclusion they need to teach all students and that every student ought to be included as a member of equal status in the class. Human and material resources are organized in a way to support this practice. For instance the teachers have fewer students in their classes in order for them to teach all students rather than work on management strategies.

According to the school website, the school philosophy emphasizes mutual respect within a child-centered environment. In addition to the website, Stacey explicates
that this perspective is manifested in school organization, school-wide team teaching, non-graded reporting procedures, and an open door policy for children and parents (Interview #1). Stacey explains that “through multi-age grouping, children have the ability to work to their own natural level. Instead of putting them in artificial grade levels, they work as a larger group.” (Interview #1, p. 1) According to Stacey, “part of the way that happens is at this school, as teachers and administrators we try to walk the talk, everybody goes by their first name with the kids, principal, secretary, we’re all on a first name basis. So the whole idea of respect and that we’re all hear learning together is emphasized” (Interview #1, p. 1). The team teaching approach goes beyond teaching a lesson together (also known as platooning) to include planning, teaching, and assessing across disciplines. Team teaching is part of the school philosophy and thus, teachers agreeing to teach at the school must make a commitment to embrace it (personal notes from observations at staff meetings).

The staff members meet weekly at 7:45am and this meeting rotates between teacher led discussions of school-wide events, grade group meetings where teachers meet to formally discuss the needs of students, and professional development sessions led by the professional development committee (Pro D). The grade group meeting is designed for teachers to get input from colleagues regarding approaches to meet students’ needs. For instance, if a teacher is unsure of how to best meet the needs of the student, they ask their colleagues for ideas. This is a formal process and is done as an intermediate step before the teacher seeks support from the School Based Team27.

27 The School Based Team refers to a District group of specialized health, teaching, and learning professionals such as psychometrist, counselor, and special education teacher. The purpose of a team such as this is to determine how the school board can help provide the child with a learning environment that best meets his/her learning needs.
At Sherwood Elementary, the day starts with a 7:45am teacher meeting that I attend with Stacey and this is frequently followed up with other meetings at recess and/or noon. Stacey includes me in her day and calls out to me to include me whenever she sets out to move through the school. We chat as we walk and Stacey tells me she is open to answer any questions at any time. She explains that she takes this project seriously and enjoys having the opportunity to reflect and talk about her practice. The other staff members at Sherwood Elementary School are all friendly and welcome me as at meetings. Susan, Stacey’s team teacher, is also welcoming as are the students in both Stacey’s room and Susan’s room.

To summarize Stacey’s understanding of herself in her work space, I share a comment she makes about her perspective of her role: “I always use the word child centered because it is focused on the learner. Everything I do is trying to help motivate them to enjoy learning and to want to learn and push themselves and to become independent.” (Interview #2, p. 2) She aims for students to feel pride and ownership. However, she adds, “if I do too much for them then they don’t feel ownership, they don’t feel that they have accomplished anything” (Stacey, Interview #2, p. 2). I notice that Stacey calls upon students to get involved in organizing and leading class activities.

Throughout this chapter, I have described Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey and the school conditions influencing their work. At this point, I scan wider to include a description of the provincial and local education agendas in order to share the broader contexts influencing local school board initiatives, schools, teachers and their work. It is important that the reader understands the contexts shaping the dynamics in which the teachers’ work and make sense of themselves. I share this information at this point so
that throughout the present study the teachers are considered in relation to the social, cultural, political, and material conditions of their work. Next, I describe the provincial agendas and the influence on curricular initiatives. After setting this broader context I focus on the particularities of how these agendas contribute to shaping the initiatives taken up by the local school board in which the teachers’ work. The information shared in this section is drawn from public websites.

4.6 Provincial Curricular Initiatives and Regulations

Education in Canada is provincially governed and although some commonalities exist across provinces, prescribed curriculum and teaching regulations are determined at the provincial level by the Ministry of Education (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2005). In British Columbia, there are integrated resource packages (IRP) for subject disciplines (e.g., mathematics, science) with learning outcomes that teachers are required to work toward in the classes. These documents contain pedagogical strategies to support teachers in addressing the expected learning outcomes (cf. B.C. Ministry of Education, 2005a). In addition, the Ministry has also set ‘Performance Standards’ for teachers’ optional use. These describe professional judgements of BC educators about reading, writing, numeracy, social responsibility, as well as information and communication technology integration. The Performance Standards are rubrics designed to support teachers as a criterion referenced approach to teaching, assessment, and evaluation.

Teaching in British Columbia is regulated by The British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT) which is a statutory body mandated to “regulate the education profession in the public interest” (BCCT, 2004). The purpose of this legislated group is to ensure classroom teachers are competent and have the capability to do the job. The
College of Teachers has created ‘The Standards for the Education, Competence, and Professional Conduct of Educators in British Columbia’ which are “intended to honour and advance the profession by highlighting the complex and varied nature of educators’ work. They articulate the knowledge, skills and attitudes that professional educators should possess as well as the responsibilities that accrue to them as professional who hold the public trust” (British Columbia College of Teachers, p. 4). The implementation of these standards remains at the discretion of the local school board and school principal. According to the BCCT website (2004), further development of these criteria over the next few years will assist operationalization of them.

4.7 The Local School Board and Urban Context

The teachers participating in this study work in a large, urban and multicultural school district which has a range of affluent and impoverished urban neighbourhoods. The local school board claims to be one of the most diverse and complex in Canada and argues that an urban environment such as Norton, offers students a breadth of different experiences. While at the same time, the school board acknowledges that certain students experience exclusion and limitation of choice or opportunity due to poverty or other conditions. The dynamics, diversity and disparity that are part of many large urban Canadian communities are expressed in The Norton School Board.

According to the municipal government (Coalition of Progressive Electors, 2005), the inner city school projects have been established in communities with a concentration of incomes below the poverty line and living in poor housing conditions. In these situations, schools that are designated as ‘inner city’ receive additional funds to purchase material or personnel resources in order to support student learning.
4.7.1 Educational Goals and Initiatives: Social Responsibility

Each year the BC Ministry of Education selects educational goals and the school boards in the province are expected to follow suit and set goals for the district. In turn, school communities select yearly goals that will act to guide and give curricular focus. These goals come to life through school-wide programming, activities, and curriculum.

Teachers are asked to align their classroom activities with the school aims. Given that the schools’ goals must meet approval of the school board, schools frequently align their goals with those of the school board. Based on my reading of the local schools, school board, and provincial government websites, I suspect that a similar alignment occurs between the Norton School Board’s goals and those of the Ministry of Education.

In 2001, the BC Ministry of Education released a document outlining a framework for a concept they refer to as social responsibility (BC Ministry of Education, 2005b). It includes four interconnected components. They are: (1) contributing to the classroom and school community; (2) solving problems in peaceful ways; (3) valuing diversity and defending human rights; and (4) exercising democratic rights and responsibilities (BC Ministry of Education, 2005b). A rubric for social responsibility is included in the Performance Standards which are created by the province for voluntary use by boards and schools. According to the Ministry of Education, the rubric is intended to support teachers in assessing and evaluating the components of the concept.

In the school year 2004-2005, the goals of the local school board included social responsibility and literacy. Although both goals reflect those of the provincial government’s agenda, I focus much of my attention on the goal of social responsibility because of its components pertaining to diversity and democratic practices. Since my interest lies in understanding the tensions teachers face in forming their identities as able
to work for justice in education, I concentrate my attention on observations and questions pertaining to these facets of social justice.

According to the local school board’s public website, social responsibility is part of the school growth plan of over three quarters of the schools in the district. The teachers in this study all work at schools that demonstrate an interest in social responsibility. It is a school goal at three of the schools (Jen’s, Annette’s, Michelle’s); while the fourth school (Stacey’s) argues that social responsibility underpins their school philosophy and is part of everything they do. Broadly speaking, the interconnected components that are included in the provincial and school board umbrella of social responsibility are discussed in academic circles by scholars studying how social justice principles can become part of school and teaching practices (e.g., Ayers et al., 1998; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Minnes-Brandes & Kelly, 2004). However, upon scrutiny I argue that the interpretation of social responsibility and the framework documents from the province, school board, and some of the schools in this study, seem to be quite broad and draw upon more neo-liberal perspectives.28

To make sense of the BC Ministry’s, Norton School Board’s, and schools’ current interest in and interpretation of social responsibility, I draw from Bourdieu’s (1977) interrelated notions of habitus and field. Given that education is part of broader society, I consider the perspective of the local field to be linked to the surrounding one. In this way, the local perspective of social responsibility reflects broader societal interests. Thus, societal debates regarding contemporary economic, social, and political disparities

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28 I do acknowledge that I attended a workshop regarding diversity and social responsibility supported by The Norton School Board. The keynote speaker advocated for diversity that includes an examination of power and dominance however, the workshop sessions I attended all drew from a more neo-liberal approach to the topics.
(e.g., poverty, health care, war) as well as ecological issues (e.g., global warming, ozone depletion) also are present in local school boards and schools. I contend that these concerns have emerged from the twentieth century emphasis on individual rights, freedom, autonomy, consumption, and competitiveness (i.e., neo-liberal and neo-conservative notions). The provincial government’s (Ministry of Education) response to these contemporary social dynamics is captured under the broad umbrella term, social responsibility. This response is informed by dominant neo-liberal perspectives which permeate society. As such, emphasis is on individual rights, inclusion, and celebration of difference. Yet, the hierarchical structures of power that have created the contemporary societal dynamics remain unquestioned. In addition, the use of a rubric is intended to support teachers in measuring the concepts. In keeping with the increasing emphasis on measurement and accountability, having methods to assess, evaluate, and share with community lends credence to having such goals in schools.

Following the BC Ministry, The Norton School Board also takes up social responsibility. The notion of diversity is described as recognition and understanding of ‘Others’. The relation between ‘self’ and ‘Other’ relies on individuals imagining, empathizing, and putting themselves in the situation of ‘Others’ (Young, 1997b). This perspective overlooks positional differences and experiences between individuals that makes such knowledge impossible (Young, 1997b). In addition, there is little evidence of critique of the privilege granted white, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual, gendered dispositions. Moreover, as with the provincial interpretation, there is no indication of altering current hierarchical power dynamics that have led to the initial concerns regarding disparities.
To continue with the habitus and field relation (Bourdieu, 2000) I am suggesting that the vague, somewhat neo-liberal perspectives of social responsibility, as they are interpreted within broader educational spheres, reflect those of schools in this study. The concepts described in the framework lend themselves to vast interpretations that can easily leave the status quo of dominant perspectives unquestioned. Reading this speculation through a Bourdieuan lens, I suggest this process is occurring because teachers and school leaders are immersed in the contemporary neo-liberal society. It is an example of a fish not noticing the weight of the water (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). By this, I mean there is an alignment between individuals’ dispositions or ways of thinking and the notion, social responsibility as it is interpreted by the province and local school board.

School goals come to life in a school through curriculum and they influence many of the events and the organization of the school in a given year. Through my observations and conversations, I explore how teachers interpret these initiatives of justice by the school board and schools. In turn, I examine the ways these understandings influence their perspectives of ‘self’ as a social agent.

4.8 Summary

Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey have now been introduced as educators situated within multiple and complex contexts. My intention in describing the teachers, their schools, the Norton School Board, and the educational agendas of the province, is to bring the reader into the social space in which the teachers form understandings of themselves. In the following three chapters, I analyze teachers’ statements and my
observations to understand how the teachers' political identities as social agents are mediated by environmental contexts.
Chapter 5: Social Agents and ‘Regular’ Teachers

5.1 Complications of Construction: An Overview

One theme that emerges in this study is the teachers’ lack of self identification with being social agents, critical educators, or working for equity, diversity, or social justice. This finding is surprising given the teachers’ interest in participating in the project.

In this chapter, I examine two main areas of tension in teachers’ understandings of themselves in relation to social agency. These are: (1) the ways teachers distinguish between their everyday work in the classroom and being an activist who “waves signs” in working toward equity, justice, and social change; and (2) the use of language by the practitioners in this study29 and how it differs from language used by academics regarding social justice.

In examining teachers’ identifications with working from a commitment for justice, I explore constructed meanings and associations. Further, I consider how teachers’ political identities can be situated within broader contexts of elementary teaching. In terms of the second aspect, I focus on language and speculate regarding possible explanations for the distance between teachers’ words and academics’ words. First, I suggest that the ubiquity of certain words (e.g., equity, diversity) in society and

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29 I make the distinction that I am referring to the language used by practitioners in this study because the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) calls itself the social justice union (BCTF, 13-03-06).
their appropriation by government, school boards, and schools have resulted in varied interpretations and usage. Second, based on the findings I suggest that being critical seems negative to teachers and as such, many do not identify with this image. Rather, I argue that teachers have entrenched ideas about the value of positive, supportive behaviours which are contra to their perceptions of questioning the status quo in schools. Third, I suggest that discussing one’s perspective of political action may threaten certain people and, for this reason, it is a sensitive topic of discussion and investigation. I speculate on what this might mean for teachers’ identifications of agency and for research that tries to understand such processes as well as teachers within their fields of work.

5.2 Social Agents as Sign Wavers

For Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey, identification as a social agent working from a social justice perspective is problematic because they consider themselves ‘regular teachers’ (Stacey). As a case in point, I share an excerpt of a conversation Stacey and I have regarding her identification with working from a perspective of social justice, equity, and democracy.

**Stacey:** Social justice just seems serious. Inclusive doesn’t have the connotations that social justice has, in my mind. So I’m happy to have somebody tell me that I’m an inclusive teacher but that I’m a socially just teacher, I think oh my, am I really?

**Karen:** When you say connotation, what connotation does it have?

**Stacey:** The word social justice?

**Karen:** If I say, you have a socially just approach, what connotation are you getting?

**Stacey:** For me, it’s that you are an advocate. You are a strong, strong, advocate who is going out there and doing lots of extra above and beyond the 3pm things that a regular classroom teacher doesn’t do on a regular on-going basis.
Karen: Would you say it has a connotation of activist?

Stacey: Yes.
(Stacey, Interview #1, p. 3)

For Stacey, the term activist and advocate are similar and both connected to working for social justice. She chooses the word activist when speaking of working toward social justice but clarifies that her preference is the word ‘inclusive’ (see above) rather than the phrase ‘socially just’ to describe her approach to teaching. In speculating on Stacey’s understanding of ‘self’, I put forth two readings. The first interpretation is that Stacey is expressing a liberal/pluralist perspective of teaching (Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001). According to Kelly and Minnes Brandes (2001), in this approach teachers see themselves as neutral and interested in helping “students appreciate multiple perspectives” while assuming they “compete on a level playing field” (p. 438). This differs from teaching from a social justice perspective which necessitates ‘tak(ing) a stand’ (Ayers et al., 1998; Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001; Kelly et al., 2003-2004). Stacey’s choice of the phrase “strong advocate” (see above) suggests that she recognizes this difference in positioning and is unsure the latter resonates with her. Therefore, the “serious” (see above) term of social justice as a descriptor of practice is replaced with “inclusive” (Stacey, Interview #1). The distinction made between the two expressions holds social justice as an active position of commitment (Ayers et al., 1998) while inclusion is understood by Stacey as a passive, open space, free of judgement (Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001).

Another possible reading of Stacey’s comment is that she believes her actions are limited to the school day and thus, not ‘worthy’ of activist status. This is illustrated in her comment that activists do extra public activities that ‘average’ teachers might not do
beyond school hours to promote just social spaces. It is expected that teachers do this work in school with and for children and in this way, they are inclusive. The activities that occur outside the school space and work day not directly involving children shift the behaviour to that of activist. These actions require public political statements regarding moral judgements (Greene, 1998). Further into the conversation Stacey adds,

_Because when I think of a socially just society – I think of the struggles in South Africa, the struggles of large groups of people to be free, the struggles in gaining abortion rights; that for me is social justice activism._ (Interview #1, p. 3)

According to Stacey, 'regular' teachers do not engage in these sorts of serious commitments or outwardly public activities. For Fine (1994a), activist is a stance which necessitates, “being engaged as critical participants” (p. 23) in “power-sensitive conversations” (Haraway, cited in Fine, 1994a, p. 23). Similarly, Kumashiro (2002) suggests that activists not only voice support for a position but he includes, their actions aim “to bring about change” (p. 11). Thus, drawing from these scholars, I understand an activist for justice as one who challenges and speaks out against social injustices while also engaging in action toward social change. What complicates Stacey’s distinction between a regular and an activist teacher is where she places the line separating the two. For instance, one day I notice Stacey wearing a button on her jean jacket with the message that she did not like mean people and a picture of the provincial premier encircled with a line through it. This ‘sign’ is Stacey’s public display of a political message. The button, which is on the outside of her jean jacket, is not just worn at school; Stacey wears it outside the school location and day. Thus, she is taking a political stance on education outside the school boundaries, which according to her original distinction, reflects an activist’s position.
The contradiction is that Stacey demonstrates her comfort by wearing a button which conveys her stance in view for all, while at the same time, does not recognize or acknowledge her action as one of political agency. Thus, this act embraces a position of plurality and possibly, neutrality (Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001). Unfortunately, I did not follow up on this situation with Stacey so my thoughts remain speculative. The tension struck me later though when I was thinking about Stacey and her thoughts about activism.

Like Stacey, Jen also expresses her lack of identification with working for a more socially just society. Initially, when I am speaking with Jen and words of equity, justice, diversity or social change are used, she suggests that I am studying the wrong person. Her reason is that “it is not her” (Interview #3, p. 8). Jen’s response acts as a conversation constrainer in that it leaves me feeling like I am dancing around points of discomfort while at the same time, trying to encourage conversation. The following is an excerpt in which I probe Jen to find out more about what motivates her response.

Karen: Your first thing was you’re interviewing the wrong person. Why?

Jen: Because I think you probably want to be interviewing somebody who is a social activist, out there waving signs or something.

Karen: Why?

Jen: I don’t know and that’s certainly not me. Yes I’ve done lots of that stuff but. [...] The whole thing about agents of change and it’s like yah right, I don’t know if you’ve got the right person here. [...] Equity, inequity; I’m looking for a kind of teaching that makes a difference to everyone I teach. And that everyone can participate in; it doesn’t matter if they are Aboriginal or whatever. There really has to be some things that will fit us all and I don’t mean that it’s so rigid that it’s one size fits all and we have to squash all. But that it is so malleable and so flexible and so personable that people find themselves in the learning. That would make more sense to me.

(Jen, Interview #3, p. 8)
For Jen, outward acts aimed at working for social change are not part of her current practice, yet, she wants me to know that she used to do this ‘stuff’ (see above). I speculate that Jen’s reaction reflects defensiveness in that although she used to act a certain way she no longer does, whether because of other concerns and personal constraints on her time (which she mentions in another conversation). Similar to my interpretation of Stacey, I am suggesting that Jen does not see her actions as worthy of being called those of a social agent.

Like Stacey, Jen takes a stance of openness. She expresses a desire to find “a kind of teaching that makes a difference to everyone I teach” (Interview #3, p. 7). For her, this will occur in an approach that is “flexible” enough that “people find themselves in the learning” (see above). Jen’s perspective suggests that students have the responsibility to adjust themselves to a program as opposed to a program shaping itself to the learner. By this, I mean that the structure does not accommodate to the shape of the students but rather, remains outside of them and somewhat indifferent to them. This is not the “dialectic stance” Ayers and colleagues (1998) describe where teachers are ever watchful of students as well as the power dynamics of society. Rather, it is one that places the responsibility on students to work to be part of it. According to Young (2000), inclusion is a necessary condition for justice. However, she argues that the system must be altered to adjust to people. In this way, the people are centered not the system.

Jen articulates her opinion about words such as, equity in the following conversation:

Karen: When you hear the word equity what does that mean to you?

Jen: I don’t know, those sort of buzz words aren’t part of my package.
Karen: Let’s just say we are sitting at a table and I ask you how would you define equity?

Jen: I don’t know because I immediately start to feel resistant...I don’t know what I’m feeling resistant to actually.

Karen: The language?

Jen: No. Probably the assumptions that I think are in there that aren’t even in there. I don’t know; I have to sit and think for a minute. (pause)...I think there is a real part of me that is a pull up your bootstraps person. I was trained that way and so those voices come in pretty loudly too. Like, just get on with it; just make something of it. You can pick up. So there is definitely that piece of who I am. At the same time, I won’t be voting Liberal which is kind of that mentality of if you just work harder, if you just try harder. Well there are a lot of people who are walking around the streets that they just can’t for mental illness or whatever reason. I’d be quite happy to give some of my taxes to those folks so they could have lunch tomorrow. But ... (Jen stops talking and sits quietly)

Karen: So, is it the tension of those things...

Jen: Yah.

Karen: ...where that word fits? You say you struggle with that word.

Jen: Probably and I really resist. I really feel as teachers that we have a tall order and I think we should aim for it. I really think we’ve been asked to do a humungous job and we should try but at the same time when people tell me I should do that my back goes right up because I feel so overloaded. I feel like the job is so big, that to meet everybody’s needs in here is impossible. If it’s not impossible there are days like today when I’m just worn out. I can’t do it. I’m certainly trying nevertheless. I haven’t given up. I probably never will.

(Jen, Interview #3, p. 9)

Initially, Jen comments that the language of equity and justice are “buzz” words (see above) that lack meaning to her. With some probing into what she means by this, Jen shares that her perspective may be influenced by growing up immersed in liberal ideas telling her to “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” (see above). However, she also seems to be indicating that there are structures that constrain certain individuals. Thus, I read Jen’s statements as indications that she is struggling with reconciling these notions.
Jen’s immersion in a childhood environment filled with notions that individuals are solely responsible for their outcome, contributes to her thinking about herself, others, and her practice (Bourdieu, 1977). In this way, her identity is formed in relation to the spectrum of dispositions within her social space of engagement. The perception that individuals can dislocate themselves from the conditions shaping their lives is part of Jen’s embodied way of engaging in the world. Consequences of this perspective include notions of teaching and learning as behavioural dynamics, internally controlled. Jen looks to herself and her students as responsible for student learning outcomes to be achieved. As such, any lack of noticeable change in learning outcomes are attributed to a deficiency of effort by students and/or the teacher, without consideration of broader societal and structural dynamics. These ideas become perpetuated through her practice of them in teaching.

Jen’s reference to her liberal upbringing is one of the few times she talks about her childhood experiences and how they shape her thinking. This comment and its influence on her ways of understanding ‘self’ is examined and discussed in chapter seven. At this point, it is important to note that Jen is struggling to negotiate tensions between her past and present experiences. By this, I am referring to contradictions between her entrenched ideas about individuals working hard to make the best of things and the daily reality of children’s lives. Jen is left to ask questions about how ideas of equity align with her liberal ways of thinking. The result is a struggle to make sense of ‘self’ while being concerned with positioning. She indicates this in comments such as, “maybe I feel like I am going to get stuck in a box that I don’t feel like I fit in” (Interview #3, p. 10). Statements such as these indicate Jen’s frustration and desire to seek a different ways of educating students. Yet, as Britzman (1992) suggests, many teachers have deep
investments in available ways of thinking. For Jen, these lead her to struggle to reconcile inconsistencies between her own ways of thinking with her daily experiences in the field (Bourdieu, 1977). She is actively working to construct a 'self' that she can be comfortable with however, her worry about being constrained or restricted suggests she remains uncertain as to what it is.

Stacey and Jen distinguish between their work as 'regular' teachers who try in an on-going way to meet the learning needs of children and the work of activists who "wave signs" (Jen, Interview #3, p. 8). What also remains striking is that although teachers put up detours and blocks to self identification with justice, no one ever asks to leave the project. I take this as a sign that the teachers and I will together explore this topic with my role being one of negotiating this process without them pulling away. I engage with this issue in a recursive way throughout the dissertation.

5.3 Speaking Across Academia and Practice

I propose that one reason teachers do not identify with the words such as justice, equity, diversity, social change, democracy, and critical is a discord in the language used in the academy versus that used by practitioners. There are some terms such as 'pedagogy', as an example, that are used by education scholars more so than elementary teachers. I offer my own experience of coming to the graduate school after over twelve years of teaching and administration experience. Despite having taken many curricular professional development and leadership courses, I felt like I was learning to read and speak a 'new' language. In what follows, I propose various possible reasons for this phenomenon.
Michelle speaks about her actions as part of her everyday teaching; yet, her colleagues argue this practice is anything, but everyday. I notice at least twelve teachers from other schools coming to spend a half day observing her. This leads me to think that her language and ideas resonate with her colleagues. In addition, Michelle also shares that teachers come to observe her on days when I am not there. Some years she has close to forty people come to observe her teach (Interview #4), many of whom have attended one of her language or math workshops. She invites teachers to visit so “they get a sense of some of the activities I shared in the workshop and what it looks like in the classroom” (Interview, #4, p. 1). All of the visitors I speak with praise Michelle expressing their admiration and amazement by her work with children. The teachers’ statements and actions reveal the high professional esteem they have for her. This comment further supports my perspective that the language Michelle is using in practice, aligns with, and is supported by, dispositions of the field (e.g., those of her colleagues) (Bourdieu, 1977).

In examining Michelle’s habits, she describes herself as progressive. Yet, she does not think about herself as fostering equity or social change.

_I never thought of myself as an agent of social change or someone who tries to promote equity in the classroom but as I’m talking I’m thinking oh my, I do that everyday. It is something that we do everyday by the different experiences that we provide them; we provide them equal opportunity to these experiences. But I know they are going to take different things from it._ (Michelle, Interview #3, p. 17)

Based on Michelle’s comment, I suggest that during the conversation itself, Michelle is altering her construction of herself. In the process she speculates that although the words of equity and social change were unfamiliar to her, she has been acting as a social agent. While pondering aloud, Michelle determines that she does work for equity but the word is not used by teachers. To this end, she is unsure whether any teacher would identify as
a social agent because the language of social justice and social change does not resonate
with teachers. In the following conversation excerpt Michelle and I discuss teachers
identifying as working for social change.

Michelle: Definitely with teaching you make huge differences in the lives of lots of
children of course, like huge. You are a big influence on them. But I don’t think of
it as, I don’t know, I never really had those discussions. You know, Karen, I’m just
thinking. You know when people are asking ‘oh what are you doing your PhD on
and you say it don’t you get that reaction, ‘oh what do you mean?’

Karen: Yes.

Michelle: ...Because we don’t think of ourselves that way. You know what all of us
are probably agents of social change but we don’t think of it that way and there are
probably some people that do it more than others.

Karen: And in different ways.

Michelle: I know for me I’ve really changed a lot, I’m less concerned about the
curriculum and more concerned about the kids and that being successful and
having positive experiences. When I first started teaching I thought, oh I’ve got to
cover this, this, and this. Now I know how to cover it in my program and the
activities are way more meaningful and hands on then they were before. There
were things I was doing because I had to cover it and I don’t think I did it in as
meaningful a way. (Interview #3, p. 17)

Michelle makes it clear that teachers she knows do not use words of social justice. Yet,
because they contribute to change in lives of children, they are agents of social change.

For Peterson (1998), being a critical educator working for social justice includes these
actions as well as critical dialogue with students regarding power dynamics in society.
Nieto (2002) too speaks of the necessity of educators working from a justice perspective
to make associations with their students to broader socio-political societal issues.

Having made the point that teaching for social justice necessitates an action of
engaging with students in examinations of society, I return to Michelle’s comment about
teachers not using language of justice. The field does not recognize the language of
equity and justice. Perhaps in part, this is due to the dominant language of society and by extension, education organization centering on equal opportunity. Too often these are neo-liberal notions that relegate change as an individual responsibility. The teachers are immersed in this pervasive perspective and frequently align themselves with it.

I posit that as education scholars committed to fostering teachers working from a critical stance for social change, it behooves all educators, those in higher education and elementary schools, to consider Michelle’s perception and the extent to which the social field of education is permeated with these neo-liberal notions. In order to reduce dichotomizing the two teaching spaces, we need to ask ourselves why there exists a gulf between the language of justice employed in the academy and the language used by some elementary teachers. Furthermore, we might explore how this gap could be bridged in ways that foster communication and momentum toward just schools.

I am arguing against a hierarchical relation between the academy and the elementary field of practice. Instead, what I am suggesting and continue discussing in the following section, is communication that merges theory and practice and as such, pushes back against dominant societal waves of neo-liberalism and anti-intellectualization in elementary teachers’ work.

5.3.1 The Language of Schooling: Watering Down Messages

The educational and curricular initiatives that are given time and financial support in the province and school board inform the language of schools and teachers. These movements involve language that Clandinin and Connelly (1995) argue is funnelled into the educational landscape. I am suggesting that the language and ideas associated with these movements permeate the social field of education. In turn, teachers construct their
language and perspectives of teaching, while immersed this space. Other ways of thinking become marginalized and less clear against these dominant education movements. Moreover, following Bourdieu (1977), the teachers’ practices contribute to shaping not only their own dispositions but those of the educational environment. As a case in point, I offer the curricular initiative of social responsibility that is taken up by the BC Ministry of Education, the local school board, and the schools in this project. The language of the movement informs and is practiced in the landscape of the schools in this project. Therefore, based on what Clandinin and Connelly (1995) argue about the funnel of ideas and language filling the educational landscape and Bourdieu’s (1977) perspective that individuals form themselves against their particular social space, I am suggesting that teachers will be using the language of social responsibility as it is understood by the Norton School Board.

The language used in the school board’s curricular document and workshops for implementation, refers to diversity as extending beyond tolerance to recognition of different voices and equal rights. Drawing from Nieto (2000a) and Sleeter (1995), this relational perspective is part of diversity; however, it neglects to situate difference in relation to power and privilege in societal structures. The Norton School Board document for social responsibility does emphasize that valuing diversity and defending human rights is ideally expressed in fairness and “just treatment for everyone”.30 Thus, this indicates a possible connection between social responsibility and social justice. Yet upon scrutiny, I notice that equal opportunity is emphasized with little question about the many dynamics influencing justice. Thus, a more liberal perspective of justice prevails.

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30 I am unable to provide a specific reference for the phrase because it will disclose identification of the school board.
Furthermore, under the aspect of exercising democratic rights and responsibilities, the aim is for elementary students to make connections and demonstrate ownership to their community along with action to make the world a better place. Despite these curricular guides, there is wide variance in interpretations and implementation between schools. In other words, there is an institutional communication issue.

The phrase social responsibility is bandied about in educational institutions and government like “intellectual hairspray” (Hey 2003, cited in Reay, 2004) with widespread use and few clarifications of meaning and usage. For instance, in two of the schools where the staff members set up specific school-wide plans to address social responsibility, they are using the term to mean different things. In one situation, when I ask about how they are using the curricular document to guide them in working toward their goal, the teacher shares that they are not using the Ministry or school board document. In addition, she does not know what the components of social responsibility are in terms of the Provincial Ministry of Education’s or the Norton School Board’s definition. This surprises me because, this teacher and I attended a Norton School Board sponsored conference where the keynote speaker talked about the aspects of social responsibility and we received a printed document about it. Moreover, we also both attended a smaller workshop where we sat with teachers to discuss the rubric of performance standards for diversity, democracy, and school community.

I posit that the phrase ‘social responsibility’ is becoming ubiquitous to the point of being meaningless. Borrowing from Gore (2001), I argue that the more critical perspective of diversity and democratic practices that calls for action is being “watered down” (p. 124). This acts to encourage more liberal perspectives of justice as
opportunity. Gore (2001) contends that “diversity has come to mean giving special attention to groups characterized as everything from low socioeconomic status groups to gifted and talented groups” (p. 125). This perspective of diversity acts to “avoid any hierarchy of differences, instead treating them within the one broad slogan of diversity” (Gore, 2001, p. 125). In terms of the word ‘equity’ this watering down results in it being reduced to “individualistic notions” of sameness rather than “structural concerns” (Gore, 2001, p. 125) regarding distribution.

What Gore (2001) describes happening in teacher education is what I argue also occurs in school boards and schools. As an example, when I ask Jen about equity she responds, “it is certainly not equality, that’s what people say anyway, equity is not equality” (Jen, Interview #3, p. 7). Annette’s response to the same question is, “Equity versus equality?” (Annette, Interview #3, p. 5). With regard to diversity, Stacey states that she thinks of teaching “not really for diversity but in a diverse manner, so it is an opening up and you include everyone” (Stacey, Interview #1, p. 7). In current elementary education circles words such as diversity, social responsibility, and multiculturalism have joined equity to become what Jen refers to as a “buzz word” (Interview #3, p. 8). According to Zeichner (1993), sometimes diverse perspectives of the same word can result in them seeming like slogans or being meaningless (cited in Gore, 2001). The wide variation of interpretation of the components of the phrase social responsibility is having the result of increasing public recognition and use while at the same time, leaving it vacuous in meaning for teachers and students.

One implication of this process is that teachers become positioned as passive perpetuators of inequities in education through neo-liberal notions of sameness and
celebration of difference. The power dynamics in the social world of education encourage these ideas and their perpetuation.

5.3.2 Identifying with 'Critical'

In addition to watered messages, I suggest that the social field of education influences the perception of working “against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 280) and the notion of critique. For instance, in the following conversation Annette articulates that the term ‘critical’ has a negative connotation:

Karen: To what extent might you question what is included in the written curriculum, for instance the IRP and to what extent do you question what is not in it? So that would be an example of being critical of the content of the curriculum.

Annette: Being critical or being creative. (I ask her to explain what she means). I think critical has a negative connotation to it that you are criticizing someone’s work that you are critiquing it, that you think that there needs to be change. Where I think creative is a different approach to it where you’re looking at it and you can be creative with it. Someone comes up with this. Great! Good idea, but how is it really going to work? How is it really going to function? It’s that whole thing about okay let’s take this and think about it in a different way. So you are thinking outside the box. So you are more creative with it. You are challenging it. You’re questioning it. I always say I like the sort of disruption of curriculum that you don’t have to always say of this is what we are going to do. Is there a different way of doing it? To become a critical teacher is someone who questions things. (Annette, Interview #3, p. 3)

Annette states her preference is to be recognized as creative rather than critical. I suspect this perspective draws upon socially constructed, entrenched ideas of elementary teachers whose daily work with children involves encouraging and rewarding children’s positive, supportive, and co-operative behaviours and attitudes. It reinforces notions of accommodating behaviours without questioning the status quo. After reading the quote and my analysis of it, Annette wishes to clarify her intention of the statement during our member check conversation. She offers an alternative interpretation of her comment.
Annette posits that "creativity does challenge status quo in the ways you are thinking about things" (member check meeting, 16-02-06). She contends that within the classroom there can be movement against and beyond boundaries. However, when asked again about being critical, Annette maintains that she understands critical to be a negative term and does not align herself with it. Although this reinterpretation offers an example of plurality in perspectives, I maintain the interpretation from my initial analysis.

According to Thompson (1997), schools continue to be charged with socializing responsibilities traditionally associated with the home. They are "entrusted with fostering both individual growth and social harmony" (Thompson, 1997, p. 315). The teachers in this study spend a great deal of energy and time working on student relations. They claim it is of utmost importance that children learn to get along with others and be supportive of one another in learning. As an example, Michelle states,

*When the kids get into incidents with one another I make them apologize to each other. I teach them how to apologize and they have to give each other a hug.* (Michelle, Interview, #1, p. 8)

The language Michelle uses is consistent with the components of social responsibility that refer to social interactions with others. Michelle recognizes herself as teaching her students ways to communicate their emotions to students. Children are congratulated for being good friends when they assist one another (field notes, 09-02-05). For instance, when one student helps another Michelle asks all the students "*What do we call it when someone helps another?*" In chorus they respond, "*team work*" (field notes, 09-02-05).

As another example, Stacey often speaks about the importance of student inclusion, co-operation, and collaboration. In describing her experience with working with colleagues on this concept, Stacey states,
...just feeling that as a team we are stronger, more perspectives, more ideas, more insight as a team versus as an individual, so that was our reasoning for the whole social justice. (Interview #1, p. 5)

For Stacey, co-operative approaches both in her classroom and with colleagues offers a way to foster inclusion and recognition of all participants’ experiences, ways of knowing, interests, and voices. She considers it important that students have a say about their experiences both in school and beyond. Stacey uses co-operative activities to encourage students to express themselves and listen to others. She understands co-operative learning as a way to promote students’ self-expression and self-development. Thus, drawing upon Young (2000), it could be suggested that Stacey understands herself to be working to provide a social space for students to learn, share, and contribute as full members in their community.

In many conversations and all interviews, Stacey spoke about inclusion and co-operation (Interviews #1, 2, 3, and 4) and articulated that inclusion is an important aspect of teaching for social justice (Interview #1). I understand Stacey to be using the term inclusion to refer to an environment where all students can participate and learn in ways that reflect their interests, experiences, and areas of capability. My reading of Stacey’s perspective regarding the relation between inclusion, co-operative learning and social justice is that co-operation is the method of working toward inclusion as an aspect of social justice. For example, Stacey contends that a co-operative approach enables all members to contribute both individually and as a team, and in doing so, fostering self-development and the shaping of community. It is one way she and her colleagues on staff work toward social justice in their classrooms.
For Annette, the emphasis on positive relations and support of others at the
elementary level contradicts that of ‘critical’. According to Stacey, critical educators
question their philosophy and practice so it is “more inclusive, to help those kids that are
forgotten or on the fringe” (Interview #3, p. 2). They engage in an on-going examination
that Stacey refers to as “an internal monologue” (Interview #3, p. 2). Stacey’s
description reveals the active presence of the critical teacher. Yet, although she refers to
on-going questioning of perspective and practice, there remains little said about the way
systemic power dynamics contribute to shaping these ideas. Thus, I suspect that the
perspective of the term ‘critical’ illustrates what Peterson (1998) refers to as a
progressive stance.

Following a close examination of teachers’ interpretation of language such as
critical, equity, and social justice, I propose that dominant liberal discourses continue to
deflect attention from structures to individuals. As a result, critical is emphasized as
individuals closely examining their own actions without questioning policies of the
system. These more liberal dispositions of the educational field, and broader society,
become engrained in individuals and collectives (Bourdieu, 1977). As they become more
entrenched over time, they become taken for granted. I posit that the teachers are
accustomed to certain ways of being and interacting in the social field of education and as
such, they no longer notice their behaviours (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant,
1992). Through immersion in such a space, the teachers have taken the dispositions into
their bodies (Bourdieu, 1977). In this way, the dominant neo-liberalism of society
permeates the social field of education and in turn, is carried by people through history.
It becomes common sense to hold individuals responsible for their outcomes without
connection to societal discourses, processes, and materialities that constrain, marginalize, and oppress certain individuals while attending to the interests of others.

However, this is not to suggest teachers can not construct themselves “against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 280). When the social surroundings change, individuals may become aware of their behaviours or ways of thinking. I refer once again to Michelle’s statement that our discussion of equity has made her aware of (and rethink) her actions. As a result, she re-positions herself by referring to working for equity and taking up the expression. My point is that the conversation draws her attention to a previously ‘unthought’ (Britzman, 1995) action and in turn, leads her to re-think and re-label it. However, I did not notice any change in her behaviour as a result of the change in language. A gap between an articulation of an altered perspective following reflection and a corresponding expression in action was also found by Clarke (1995) in his investigation of student teachers’ reflective practices. In extending Clarke’s (1995) findings into the present inquiry, I suggest that there is a temporal dimension associated with shifts between teachers’ engagements with ideas, their ways of thinking, and expressions in actions. In terms of Michelle and all the teachers it would be interesting to continue conversations and observations over a longer term (e.g., years).

5.3.2.1 The ‘Good’ Student to the ‘Good’ Teacher

I speculate that being positive, co-operative, and getting along with others are dispositions these four teachers have entrenched in them prior to teaching. These ways of being are initially fostered through teachers’ past student experiences where adhering to the status quo receives affirmation as being ‘good’. Later, as teachers, elementary school settings provide a social space where these ideas are expressed as common sense ways of
being. What I mean is that teachers work in places where their previously constructed ways of being make sense and are reaffirmed. The teachers engage with others (e.g., students and adults) in this space and in doing so, perpetuate these ways of thinking (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992). For example, the teachers all share that they did well as students and enjoyed school. Specifically, Jen refers to herself as a student who was a hard worker and pleaser.

*I was a keener, a perfectionist, a hard worker. I did not want to miss school. I was a pleaser and there isn’t much more to say. That pretty much just sums it up; I just swallowed.* (Jen, Interview #2, p. 3)

She skipped grades but says it did not have any impact on her experience. Similarly, Michelle says, *"I know I loved school; I’ve always loved school”* (Michelle, Interview #2, p. 2). As previously mentioned, over Michelle’s school career she has received numerous academic awards. Also expressing her enjoyment of school, Annette comments, *“I just remember growing up. It was a good feeling going to school and being surrounded by people who were almost like family”* (Interview #1). Stacey talked fondly of teachers who really ‘got’ her (Interview #2).

For these teachers, having good experiences in school is associated with doing well. As students, they learned the tastes and dispositions that were dominant and most readily accepted and recognized with awards, privilege, praise, high marks, and respect in the social space of schools (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998). Practicing these actions leaves them feeling good and being ‘successful’. Frequently the students who eventually become teachers have had good school experiences and therefore, one might suspect adapt themselves to the dispositions of the field. According to Samuel and Stephens (2000), student teachers’ identities as educators are influenced by their experiences as students.
Similarly, within the context of the practicing teachers in the present study, I suggest that they perpetuate their deeply embodied ways of relating to education, knowledge, and learning through their daily teaching practices. Furthermore, schools offer social fields where these habits are affirmed and encouraged as desirable. This reinforces the ongoing shaping of teachers' experiences and their ways of being.

5.4 Vulnerable Identities

Based on the tensions, hesitancies, and inconsistencies in comments Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey make about 'self' as agents of change, I contend that the topic is highly charged and deeply sensitive. The teachers' reactions indicate vulnerability in feeling that their deeply held understandings about habits of practice, personal experiences, and social spaces of engagement are being questioned. Our discussions and my interest in these intentions regarding perspectives of justice, tease out ideas that seem inconsistent with their entrenched 'good' student/teacher notions of getting along and being ever positive and supportive. This may be why the idea of critically questioning seems contra to elementary teacher behaviour. It rubs up against social constructions that perpetuate notions of teachers as responsible for students' socialization (Thompson, 1997). Asking teachers to engage in such conversations generates dissonance within them and thus, avoidance.

As Cochran-Smith (2004) states, teachers who “work against the grain” (1991, p. 280) and question justice in relation to dominant ways of thinking about practices and initiatives, frequently struggle with tension and dissonance. These teachers face working “both within and around the culture of teaching and the politics of schooling at their particular schools and within their larger school systems and communities” (Cochran-
Smith, 2004, p. 28). Some teachers may feel that questioning the practices and initiatives in terms of student diversity and equity leads to a reputation of being negative and difficult to get along with in the school board. There is a perception that the teacher is not a 'team player' and this runs counter to teachers’ entrenched ideas about the value of demonstrating commitment to the team.

Furthermore, I propose that teachers who are given positive attention by school boards are often those who promote and publicly support the institution’s philosophy. Thus, taking a critical inquiry stance toward educational policies, organization, and practices, might be considered as a position that is at odds with certain school board, school, and Ministry initiatives and act as a career limiting move. I am suggesting there may be a potential rub between dominant perspectives in education regarding teacher professionalism and challenging the norms or practices of the education system. The situation may lead to teacher dissonance in trying to reconcile both perspectives.

These findings indicate the field of teaching is complicated. This can pose difficulties for researchers studying aspects of teaching that stir up dissonance for individuals who question the social space within which they work. Moreover, these tensions reveal teachers’ constructions of ‘self’ are fragile and tenuous. They are situated in the space of work and shift in response to changing conditions. Therefore, studying teachers in their contexts of work requires gentle treading. I had not anticipated nor was I prepared for the complexity of tensions that influence the ways teachers understand themselves.
5.5 Summary

Although the teachers were very interested in participating in this study, they did not identify with the language of social justice, equity, or social agency. Instead they saw themselves as everyday teachers who do their best for students, but do not engage in public protest. Interestingly, four months after the data for this study were collected the teachers were involved in a provincial-wide job action where they waved signs and told the public they were taking a stand for education. Although I did not speak to the teachers in this study about their thoughts of themselves after the strike, I find it important to note. It provides the reader with insight to the social and political context at the time of the research. This tension is taken up in greater discussion in chapter nine.

In examining the teachers' perspectives of themselves, I suggest that they are drawing their ideas of 'self' from some of the dominant notions of teaching that permeate the education landscape. These ideas include education agendas of social responsibility and diversity however, they remain disconnected from structural changes. Instead the language focuses on inclusion and acceptance of difference by the dominant societal groups. In addition, I propose that teachers do not identify with the word 'critical' because it seems to set them against the dominant ideas about elementary teachers as complacent supporters. As previously mentioned, gendered associations of teaching are examined in detail in chapter seven. The next chapter is an analysis of the ways teachers negotiate contexts individually and socially in constructing their identities as intentional actors for social change.
6.1 Overview

This chapter examines processes by which teachers make sense of their dispositions in relation to various social fields of interaction, and the impact on the formation of their identities. I notice that for Michelle, Annette, and Jen, there is relatively greater emphasis on individual processes, while for Stacey the emphasis is on social interactions in identity construction. Bourdieu’s habitus and field along with McNay’s (2000, 2003a, 2003c) engagements with these notions, are conceptual tools I use to examine how identities are mediated by alignment and/or discord of individuals’ dispositions and particular social fields. The processes I analyze reveal a constrained and contradictory relationship between individuals and societal conditions as well as a generative potential for agency explicated by Bourdieu (2000) and others extending his work (e.g., Adkins, 2002; Dillabough, 2000; Lovell, 2003; McNay, 2000).

In what follows, I draw primarily from Michelle’s and Stacey’s experiences as exemplars to support exploration of the ways teachers negotiate contexts in identity formation. In the first section, my focus is individual construction of identity and to illustrate this, I draw primarily from Michelle. I examine the ways her experiences of race, ethnicity, and economics rub up against dominant ideas in social fields of home life and education. The second section focuses on Stacey’s experiences and the ways her
social interactions with staff members influence her understandings of ‘self’ as an educator with the capacity to influence change. I explore how this process supports teacher agency.

Examining influences of contexts on teachers’ thinking is not a straightforward process of causal association. As Mishler (1999) suggests, it requires merging thoughts from conversations and inferences from observation to create a mosaic of understanding. Thus, throughout this analysis I construct an understanding of processes shaping teachers’ identities of ‘self’.

6.2 Childhood Experiences Shape Teachers’ Identities

Michelle frequently shares stories of her childhood experiences, growing up in what she refers to as a traditional Chinese home speaking Cantonese with her family. The social, cultural, political, and economic conditions expressed in her family home can be considered to be a social field (Bourdieu, 1977). This social space contributes to Michelle’s ways of thinking and behaving. Yet, as Michelle describes, these ‘ways of being’ (Bourdieu) become challenged as she engages in different social fields.

I remember in grade two, Miss Turner who I had for grade two and three and I loved. I loved everything we did but I still remember, she read us a story and a monster was coming into this cave and it was going to eat you up. I remember her asking us what would you do and I remember because I think about this a lot. I don’t know what it is...I don’t think it scared me but...I remember specifically because it was almost like we all did the same things. So she wanted half the class watching the other half the class. A monster was coming into the cave and it was going to eat you up what would you do? I remember one of the things I did was pretending I was crying. I remember because that’s what everybody was doing. I remember she yelled at us and said ‘Why can’t you guys think of a different idea you are all doing the same thing? Would you not get down on your knees?’ I remember her lifting her skirt a little bit because she had these long skirts. Lifting her skirt a little she went down on her knees and said, “Would you not go down on your knees and pray to God to help save you?” For me, because I grew up Buddhist I
thought it was so bizarre but in hindsight I think it was kind of interesting. 

...[...]... I remember thinking what? Why would I go on my hands and knees? (Interview #2, p. 3)

Michelle’s story illustrates her confusion and the incongruence that can occur between an individual’s perspectives and those of a particular social field. The understandings she learns in her family and home life social fields are rubbing up against those of school environment.

Miss Turner, the teacher in this story, readily invoked the power of God based on her taken for granted perception that a belief in God was also held by her students. The teacher’s taken for granted or ‘unthought’ (Britzman, 1995) assumption that it was common sense for students to suggest they would get down on bent knee to pray to God for salvation indicates it was also the dominant idea at the school, and likely the school system. She has incorporated these perspectives of the school, and society by extension, into her ways of being (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992).

The discord between Michelle’s ways of thinking and those of the dominant ideas of the school is an example of what Nieto (2002) refers to as cultural mismatch between home and school. In Michelle’s situation, the teacher does not make the curriculum culturally relevant for each student as Ladson-Billings (1995b) suggests, but rather expects students to adjust their ways of thinking and behaving to align with the dispositions of the school. Michelle’s experience illustrates a situation where her religious perspective was not recognized within the space of the classroom. This past experience contributes to Michelle’s current understanding of ‘self’. As expressed below, she carries these experiences in her body and through her practices in current fields brings the history of her past into the present (Bourdieu, 2000).
I have lots of very positive memories but the things that stick in my head and come to me some days are negative. [...] I think if I still remember this as an adult 30 years later and I still remember some of these negative things; I think I'm a little more cautious. (Michelle, Interview #2, p. 3)

Michelle’s experience of discord between her ways of thinking and the dominant expectations of the school field lead to confusion about why her ways of making sense of the world are being rebuked and generate anger in the teacher. The repetition of “I still loved everything we did but I still remember...” (Interview #2, p. 3) indicates that in the discord, Michelle adapts her dispositions to those of the classroom. Yet, there is discomfort in realizing that certain ways of thinking, imbued in her family life, do not count in her school life.

The tension in the incomplete alignment Michelle describes may be a manifestation of ambivalence that occurs in some shaping of habitus and field (McNay, 1999a). Michelle does not fully adapt her habitus to the dominant ideas of the school field. This mis-alignment contributes to her ability to reflect on the tension of the experience. For instance, her words of loving the teacher and everything they did while at the same time including a ‘but’ points to her acceptance of the ideas of the teacher with some reluctance. The ambivalence of the dispositions offers Michelle not only possibilities to reflect but, also draw on alternative ways of thinking in reshaping her perspectives. These altered ways of understanding contribute to her current constructions of ‘self’ and teaching. For instance, three decades later, Michelle still remembers the incident and says it influences her perceptions of her students’ home experiences, her role, and school.

In addition to Michelle’s understanding of ‘self’ being influenced by discord in school and home experiences, it is also shaped by experiences where understandings in
various social fields intersect. In this way, constructions of identities occur across social fields, blurring boundaries between them.

_When I was in grade 12 I was at the airport and a bunch of my friends were there and my mom and dad. I remember when I was saying good bye to them we were all hugging each other. I hugged all my friends and at the very end standing there were my mom and dad. So of course I was hugging everybody and I thought I should hug my mom and dad but I had never hugged them before and I was 17. Growing up in a traditional Chinese family my parents never hugged us or said I love you even though they showed it in different ways, it just wasn't their way to show it. I remember hugging my mom and she didn't know how to hug me back. Her hands were like this (demonstrates arms at sides). And I did the same thing to my dad. I took one arm and hugged him and I remember saying “okay, fine” in Chinese and walking away toward—you know when you walk away and you can't see them, toward the plane. I started crying because it was the first time I hugged my mom and dad. For me, that was a huge thing. I'll never forget that I waited until this late in my life to hug my mom and dad. I've always been a huggy person. I know when I started teaching I really wanted to make sure that these kids...I know there are a lot of Asian families...I chose to teach in Norton. It was my choice. I was born and raised in Norton. I want to teach in Norton. I really wanted the kids to get hugged, feel love, and feel important. That's why we do the group hug thing._ (Michelle, Interview #1, p. 8)

Michelle describes herself as ‘a huggy person’ and expresses that this is an important part of who she is as a teacher. Yet, she also recognizes this way of engaging is not part of the accepted ways of acting with her parents or family. The disposition lies outside the bounds of imagination in the field (Bourdieu, 1977) and as such, I suggest that Michelle constructs herself as ‘a huggy person’ outside of the habitus of her home space.

Michelle’s understandings of herself as someone who hugs in certain social fields, yet not in others (e.g., family), come under tension at the airport. This occurs when interactions with her friends, with whom she hugs, occur alongside encounters with parents for whom ways of engaging do not include hugging.
Michelle’s action of hugging her parents invites them to recognize and embrace the possibility of alternative ways of making sense of oneself and engaging in society. This discord between habitus and field offers as McNay (1999a, 2000) proposes, potential for reflexivity and reformation. Michelle not only recognizes the potential for action but in taking it (in the form of a hug) asks her parents to do the same. They do not. One reason for this may be because it is a disposition that they do not recognize for themselves. Michelle shares the emotion and pain of this experience in her description of crying as she walks away. She faces dissonance between entrenched ways of acting understood with her family at home and those she experiences in other spaces.

For Michelle, this interaction with her parents is a pivotal moment in which she recognizes she has altered her ways of thinking about herself. It becomes an important narrative that contributes to her construction of ‘who’ she is as a teacher and how she engages in her practice. For instance, as I describe earlier in this dissertation, at school Michelle gives daily hugs to each child and the adults with whom she works. I too was given a hug on arrival and departure as was the classroom student support worker. Analysis of the implications of dispositions, such as hugging and caring in relation to gender in education, occurs in chapter seven.

6.2.1 Economic Constraints Mediate Understandings of ‘Self’

Over the six months, Michelle frequently refers to growing up in a 'traditional Chinese' home. In addition to Michelle’s current perspectives being influenced by Chinese traditions of her family and the experiences at school, they are also shaped in relation to economic materialities both from her past and present. In the interview
excerpt below Michelle associates her own experiences with the ways she makes sense of herself, her students, and the conditions of their lives.

Michelle: Growing up we were very similar to the population here, low socio-economic. My mom was making minimum wage, I don’t know if she was even making minimum wage. She worked for Mustang sewing company so basically it was all third world labour. A lot of the people that worked there were Asian, southeast Asian or East Indian. And then my dad we never saw. I remember growing up we had very little. My mom reminds us of all the time. I don’t know if I told you, but she would bring home scraps.

Karen: Yes you did.

Michelle: We were called the orange people. Our pencil cases our bags were all orange. My parents were both born in China then they moved to Hong Kong, they had three kids there and when they moved here, then they had the last four. So Cantonese was my first language and then I learned English after that. So kindergarten, grade one and two, I went to the ELC, English Language Centre, because you’re quite needy in terms of language and it would be like a pull out service. So maybe a few times a week I would go see a separate teacher for like an hour to get more individualized service on language. (Interview #4, p. 5)

As an ‘orange’ person Michelle is marked with others in a group called the ‘orange people’. However, as I mentioned previously, according to Michelle, she was indifferent to this marginalized position because even as a child she knew how hard her mother worked and that her mother was doing her best to provide for Michelle and the other children. At the time, Michelle understood that her mother was ‘making do’ in using resources she could find. Today she appreciates this quality. I put the phrase ‘making do’ in single quotes because it draws attention to gendered notions of women’s role as caretaker of the family (Acker, 1995). In chapter seven I analyze gendered constructions of teachers’ thinking and the impact on identity and agency.

Michelle’s descriptions of growing up poor and feeling uncertain because of not knowing how to speak English play a large part in contributing to her ideas about where
she wants to teach (i.e., inner city schools), the sorts of communities she wants to work in (i.e., diverse), and what is important in terms of her practice (i.e., students enjoying learning).

### 6.3 Childhood Experiences Shape Teaching Dispositions

Michelle’s choices in work reflect her perceptions of ‘self’ and a political identity. She recognizes that decisions regarding work location, approach, curriculum, and stance in the room, can shape the way children grow to understand themselves and their capacity to shape the world.

*I know for myself, being an ESL child, I know visuals, pictures; all those things really helped me. So when I started teaching I realized that the kids were so ESL I thought, that’s what I need to do.* (Interview #1, p. 2)

Michelle’s comment indicates she draws from her experiences as a student to construct her perspective and practice of teaching. The economic and cultural contexts of Michelle’s childhood are similar to her current teaching experiences. The reference to being “an ESL child”, like many of her students, reflects Michelle’s belief that her experiences align with the everyday social field in which her students interact. She remembers what it was like to feel uncertain because she did not speak the language used in practice. However, Michelle’s identification with students could lead to making assumptions about them. In this way, variances in students’ experiences or the conditions in which they live, may be overlooked or essentialized as being the same.

Michelle’s identity formation is not without complication. For example, she describes being marginalized as a student because of being poor and not speaking the dominant language (English) when starting school. These experiences indicate that at the
time she has little economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1998). Yet, on the other hand, Michelle expresses that she ‘loved’ school and tells me about winning academic awards and scholarships. This suggests a relatively large amount of cultural capital referring to the privilege granted based on perceptions of knowledge about the world. Thus, in relation to her school-mates, Michelle may have had relatively little economic capital; while at the same time, she had a great deal of cultural capital. These experiences contribute to Michelle’s perceptions that she is capable of influencing others toward change.

Similar to Michelle’s formation of herself as a hugger, her understanding of ‘self’ is constructed across boundaries where in relation to some markers she is part of the dominant group (in academics) and in other ways (economically), outside of it. This complexity offers an example of the tensions Michelle negotiates as a child and adult. They contribute to her embodied understandings of her role and capacity as a teacher that she brings into social fields of engagement (Bourdieu, 1977, 2000).

Michelle carries a forged perspective that opportunity resides in the norms of the dominant groups’ interests and as such, it is thought that access to these groups enables an equal starting point on a level playing field. For example, she speaks about recognizing the varied languages of students by not discouraging their use of languages other than English in communicating with others and cultural histories by having students share their family heritage and traditions with classmates. However, the emphasis of

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31 Bourdieu suggests there are various types of capital individuals can exercise in a given field which relate to the relative hierarchical positions. Cultural capital refers to knowledge about the world that one is understood to have and can draw from. Economic capital is the amount of money and good one has and social capital refers to the number of social contacts an individual has in a particular field (cf. Gale and Densmore, 2000).
sameness is a liberal multicultural perspective (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2001) that dissociates race, class, and gender from dynamics of power and privilege that maintain inequities. This is problematic because it communicates to individuals that success and achievement are within everyone’s grasp, if they only work hard enough. The broader significance of this is that there is systemic focus on individuals and a lack of acknowledgement and accountability of inequalities in organizational structures of society. Thus, individuals are recognized if they succeed within the system structure and in turn, blamed if they do not.

Michelle reacts to students’ diverse experiences and backgrounds in a responsive (Gay, 2000) rather than relevant way (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). She wants students to maintain their sense of their home language and/or ‘cultural competence’ (Ladson Billings, 2000). From her experience as a student with an inability to participate because the language she spoke was not valued in school, she considers it important for students to maintain “the ability to function effectively in one’s culture of origin” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 210). By this, I mean that Michelle takes into consideration students’ languages, races, ethnicities, and cultures as she adapts her approach to draw them into the pre-set curriculum. In contrast to this somewhat liberal approach of equal access to existing dominant norms, Ladson-Billings, (1995b) argues for a culturally relevant approach where the curriculum is created to be meaningful for the multiple languages and experiences of students.

Teaching aimed at offering students tools to access the dominant groups in society without any critique of the power dynamics that maintain the social hierarchies, is a liberal approach to addressing difference in school. This is the perspective from which
Michelle is drawing when she speaks about teaching students the English language and academic skills required for achievement in British Columbia's schools without questioning the dynamics that construct the skills as important. For Delpit (1988), Ladson-Billings (2000), and Nieto (2002), teaching students academic skills for succeeding in North American society is only part of just practices. They contend that students also need to be taught about the broader social structures and practices that produce inequities based on race, class, and gender (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2002). Following Sleeter (1995), I contend that teaching that does not account for the social construction of curriculum perpetuates power dynamics that privilege some students’ experiences while calling others to adjust themselves to fit within the norms.

Thus far I have focused on Michelle’s experiences of economics, religion, ethnicity, and culture independently, as I illustrate in what follows, they often intersect to influence individual’s perspectives of themselves and their ability to act with intention for social concerns.

6.4 Intersecting Norms and Materialities

I am at Michelle’s school and we (the class) are getting ready to go on a field trip. Michelle steps out of the room to run an errand and Wendy is transferring students’ lunches from their knapsacks into a large bag we (supervisors), were to carry. Wendy expresses concern to Michelle about the food parents and guardians have sent for the
children to eat today\textsuperscript{32}. She suggests that perhaps the guardians do not realize that today is a full daytrip and thus, have included children's snacks without a lunch. Michelle explains to Wendy that for some students, the bun that they have brought is their lunch and it is a common thing for Chinese children to have as a cold lunch.\textsuperscript{33} She then tells of her own experience of having this kind of food for lunch. Wendy continues to argue that she is worried about the lack of nutritional value in white bread. Michelle responds that although in some situations food with little nutritional value such as chips should be questioned, the type of bun the student has is commonly eaten by 'Chinese people'.\textsuperscript{34} During this interaction, I remain quiet trying to respect their comfort level with one another and also curious to hear Michelle's perspective. At times when Michelle is talking she uses language such as 'we' in reference to something done by Chinese people and at other times she uses phrases such as, 'food that you or I or we would eat'. I read this as her complicated understanding of herself in

\textsuperscript{32} I make the clarification that food is sent for lunch today, because the regular routine is that students receive hot lunch on schools days. Today is an exception because of our trip.
\textsuperscript{33} Although I did not take notes during this exchange I am trying to capture the ideas shared as closely to what I heard as possible.
\textsuperscript{34} I put quotations around this phrase because it is written as I remember it said.
relation to an identification marker of 'Chinese'.\textsuperscript{35} Drawing from Loutzenheiser (2003), I suggest that Michelle's identity is complicated in that in some ways she sees herself as Chinese, yet her experiences differ from those of her parents or what she refers to as 'traditional' Chinese. Her positioning may shift depending on the situation.

Michelle's perspective of identity seems contradictory because at times she uses the term Chinese in an essentialized way, as though there is one way of being shared by all Chinese people. While at other times, she expresses an understanding that individuals within any group have different experiences and identities. I understand Michelle to be expressing a 'coherent' or gestalt-like (Mishler, 1999) identity as a situated representation of herself as complicated.

During the trip, the conversation about food arises again when we are sitting and eating. Wendy and Michelle talk about a type of spread on a child's sandwich. I am quiet because I am trying to respect the privacy of the conversation. Although I find the tension interesting for my research, I feel it is not ethical for me to include myself in their conversation and then use it as an opportunity to further my own project. I am also uncomfortable about how this child's food, and by

\textsuperscript{35} I put quotations around this word to trouble the potential of there being an essential notion of Chinese.
extension the child, is being examined as exotic (Said, 1978). I sit and eat at the table chatting with the other children. I understand Michelle and Wendy’s conversation to be rooted in tensions about whose perspective counts in matters of appropriate food for children at school.

While we are on our trip, Michelle mentions her interaction with Wendy. Taking advantage of what I see as an invitation into the dialogue, I ask Michelle questions to understand her perspective. Michelle speculates on the situation:

Michelle: So growing up, and even now I think my parents are probably I don’t know if we would be low-middle but the kids support the family, my mom and dad. Karen: I remember you telling me about that. It’s a cultural thing you said.

Michelle: It is definitely a cultural thing. It is not rent because we are all moved out and even if you have kids you still give money. It’s a respect thing; you give money back to your parents. And that’s why I was mentioning to Wendy and I don’t blame her. We have to be careful that we don’t impose our cultural Western norms on what these kids eat. Pop and chip junk food, most cultures know that those foods aren’t really that nutritious but when I see those little buns and things like that, that is something that we would have for lunch if it wasn’t hot so that’s why I was saying oh we have to be very careful. (Interview #4, p. 5)

Michelle draws upon the financial constraints of her childhood experience into her reflections about her discussion of food with Wendy. She describes her family’s cultural traditions such as giving money to her parents that occur outside of economics. Furthermore, this becomes the jumping off point from which she grapples with the interconnection between food choice, nutrition, race, and culture such as, who decides what foods ought to be eaten? The relation between these aspects is complicated and
although briefly questioned by Michelle, remains largely unexamined. In the interview excerpt that follows, Michelle explicates her thinking about how her understandings might influence her stance in the classroom.

Karen: Regarding the buns, you said this is something you would have for lunch as a child in an Asian home.

Michelle: Totally; because they don’t see it as a sandwich. Most Chinese people don’t. But if you go to Hong Kong, you wouldn’t just have a sandwich, you’d have a bowl of rice, or a bowl of soup or you’d have those Chinese buns as your lunch. And fruit…it is expensive. We never ate fruit or vegetables as a snack. We never ate salad or anything like that or had desserts.

Karen: Was that culture or expense?

Michelle: It could be expense but I know most Asians...(pause)...I know growing up, we never had stuff like...we never ate salads; it just wasn’t something that was part of our...(pause)...We had a lot of vegetables but it wasn’t something we would just have.

Karen: Like a green salad?

Michelle: No, no.

Karen: Even if you were in a wealthy Asian family?

Michelle: I don’t know if they would. I know meat and fish is the delicacy because it is more expensive. Fish is huge especially because it is for luck. Even fruit and vegetables for snacks…I don’t know. We always had those snacky like crackers and things like that, like these kids eat, all those Chinese ones.

Karen: So it is a different diet; more of a carbohydrate one

Michelle: It is and I wonder if it’s because of the availability like fruits in Hong Kong and China. I don’t know. They grow vegetables and I don’t know where they’re getting their fruit from. (Interview #4, pp. 6-7)

Michelle wrestles with questions about the types of foods that are eaten and economics. Her pauses and ponderings act as moments of reflection and occur at gaps between ways of understanding the world and the social context (Bourdieu, 2000; McNay, 1999a). The
brief conversation is our foray into how broader power struggles over socio-cultural
dynamics shape commonsense ideas about seemingly banal issues such as food choice.

The dialogue Michelle and I are having illustrates our attempt to examine how
difference can be situated into socio-political struggles (Nieto, 2002). Michelle states 'I
don’t know' (see above) a few times and I move from the point although it continues to
perplex me throughout the remainder of the study. I read Michelle’s response of not
knowing what she thinks as an example of the entrenched understanding and taken-for-
granted assumption that individual’s choice of foods is dissociated from broader issues,
such as economics (Bourdieu, 1977).

As I mention in the previous vignette, throughout these and other conversations,
Michelle’s sense of identity is complicated because at certain times, she refers to herself
as part of a Chinese tradition and at other times, uses words such as ‘our cultural Western
norms’ (see above comment). In this way, Michelle understands ‘self’ both within and
across different social spaces. As an example, Michelle sometimes speaks as though she
understands the attitudes and actions of certain students and families at the school or that
there is one way of behaving or thinking for ‘all’ Chinese people. I consider this to be an
essentialized perspective of assuming that there is one identity shared by a group without
considering the varied experiences and social positionings shaped by intersecting
identities of race, economics, ethnicity, ability, gender, and sexuality.

Michelle draws from her own childhood to read the familiar behaviours she sees
in her own students. However, since the time of her childhood, Michelle has experienced
other social fields and thus, she speaks about the culture and traditions of her Chinese
family as though she can step outside of them. What follows is a conversation where Michelle describes reading a situation through a different lens.

Michelle: Just little things that Chinese parents do. Things get wrapped up in plastic (Karen chuckles). I don't know you don't want to get things dirty. I remember Vera or someone getting upset because their shoes were dirty and they'd get in trouble. It's true you know how a lot of Caucasian kids I remember, they'd go into the playground and they'd get all dirty. I thought oh my mom would be horrified; we were not allowed to get out and get dirty like that. You'd be in so much trouble if your clothes came back dirty. And I see that, kids being careful for their clothes to not get dirty and you just wonder if it's their parents telling them. You know, I hear about people playing out in the rain and I think we'd never be allowed to do that.

Karen: We played in the gutters when it rained.

Michelle: You'd never be allowed to play in the rain. You just couldn't. That's why I say it's funny you just see a lot of Chinese things and I think oh my God that's so Chinese. I think it is very special just being born here, being born in a Chinese family, speaking Cantonese and then working with kids who are Chinese. I think it is quite amazing, not even just Chinese; even for kids who are in a minority culture. I think a teacher is a great role model for them. (Interview #3, p. 13)

Although Michelle remembers vividly the norms and expectations of her home, she now sees these through different eyes because her experiences in different fields expose her to alternative perspectives, thinking, and attitudes. Her dispositions are altered and realigned to fit her current social fields, such as school and personal life (Bourdieu, 1977).

Using McNay's (2000; 2003c) perspectives of construction, I propose that Michelle's identities that contradict dominant ideas of the fields form in moments of disconnect between her habits of practice and social fields of engagement. Although it is tenuous, the moment of dissociation between habitus and field can offer creative and generative potential for agency. Following McNay (1999a), I propose that the disjunction offers possibilities of envisioning alternatives for 'self'. However, as I have previously stated, the imagination for re-creations is bound within parameters of options.
recognized by the field (Bourdieu, 1977). Thus, agency is always constrained by the
everyday power dynamics at play in social fields of interaction.

Thus far, I have focused on the ways identity formation occurs through individual
processes. In what follows, I explore the ways social dynamics within a particular school
space mediate one teacher’s identity construction.

6.5 Identity Constructions through Social Dynamics

To examine the ways social processes can contribute to political identity
formation, I primarily draw upon Stacey’s experiences because she spoke about the
importance of these processes and I observed them in her practice. As the dialogue
below illustrates, that social dynamics of staff member interactions are important
components influencing Stacey’s thinking and positioning as a critical educator.

Stacey: People who are here are really driven because they believe in multi-age
and an open teaching style that is very inclusive. We are always hunting for ways
to make it better and so the staff is dedicated and that is why there is so little
movement in and out of this school. Because it is a belief system and as you’ve
noticed it’s a lot of work because there are so many things happening here
constantly and you are sort of always running. You hit the ground running here
and you cannot stop, which is good.

Karen: I also hear from you that there is a wave of momentum that helps you in
the troubled times like when you are tired.

Stacey: Yes. And it’s staff unity. It really is. When it comes down to it, although
we teach in slightly different ways we have the same belief in children and
ourselves as learners. I think everybody here is a critical educator. They are
always changing. They are always talking. They are always trying to get better by
hook or by crook. And it is such a positive atmosphere you know, you come into the
staff room and all the talk is positive. Shop talk is ‘Oh my gosh we did these great
things today.’ It is such a refreshing change because it does not happen at all
schools. You are constantly buoyed up or held aloft by other positive things that we
see by teaming with each other and hear when we have the professional
development days were teachers share what they’ve been doing, or their big
discussion about philosophy and things like that. (Interview #3, p. 3)
Stacey expresses that her colleagues are dynamic and motivating. Her interactions with them challenge, reinforce, and influence her thinking, philosophy, and ultimately her practice. Through her engagement with colleagues, Stacey wrestles with ideas and forges understandings of herself as part of a community that questions practice as 'critical educator(s)' (see above). Bourdieu’s field analysis (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Gale & Densmore, 2000) is a helpful concept for the complicated social dynamic that involves not only negotiated meanings mediated by language, but also by the materialities that are conditions of the space. As I illustrate throughout this next section, social fields contain power dynamics that relate to broader fields of power and act as mediators of individuals’ relational positions and their dispositions (Gale & Densmore, 2000).

6.6 Practicing Habits of Social Construction: Counteractive Momentum

It is 8:00am on a Thursday in April and I am sitting with Stacey and some of her colleagues who teach kindergarten through grade three. The teachers all look tired. I attribute it to them being in the midst of the final term and organizing spring school-wide events. Ruth, one of the teachers, shares her observations of a child and asks for advice about how to create a learning space that is appropriate for the student. As the teachers are clarifying and brainstorming one teacher mentions an approach used by a certain doctor. Based on hearing other teachers referring to him as well I conclude that they all seem to know
of the philosophy of this doctor. Until this meeting I had never heard of the doctor who has written on teaching for learning in ways that resonates with these teachers. I write his name phonetically in my mind because I have told myself that I will not take notes at this meeting in order to respect the privacy of students and the trust of teachers. Then, one teacher suggests that since they all seem interested in the theories of this doctor, why don't they read his book and then talk about it as a group. Once again they are calling on the power of the group to examine information.

I expect that teachers will say “forget it”, but instead they all seem to think this is a super idea. One person gets the book from her shelf and they discuss how they can arrange chapters for each person to read and share with others. I presume they will work at this over time. But my thoughts are interrupted by one teacher who asks others whether they might be able to push through the entire book before the end of the year so they can try to implement some of the ideas for next year. I am stunned because these teachers who are meeting in the morning every week before school, who also have report cards ahead of them, all resoundingly agree that this is a great idea and very
doable if they each take a chapter, summarize it and teach it to the others. They pick another meeting date each month when they will discuss the book which means they have now increased their meeting numbers but no one seems to notice. I look around the group to see if anyone seems uncomfortable with this and to they all seem in complete support of the plan. (Personal Log, written from observation, 29-04)

Every Thursday morning staff members at Stacey’s school gather to grapple with questions regarding what, how, and why of practices at their school. Based on the interaction described in the above reflection, and those witnessed every week, I begin to think the social dynamics in Stacey’s field of work are influencing her understanding of herself.

Stacey intentionally selects school communities (her practicum placement school and her current school), that imbue a philosophy that resonates with hers. These provide a social space where her interest in examining her practice is mirrored by others. What this means for Stacey is that tensions, questioning, and critique are embraced in the school space. This type of dynamic holds possibilities for deliberative democracy and socially just practices (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Young, 2000).

Stacey’s school community and its institutional structure offer deliberative scaffolding for her and others to formulate perspectives of teaching as political and ‘self’ as a social agent. For instance, in addition to critiques in discussions at staff meetings around issues associated with school concerns, as described in the previous vignette, the
staff members meet in grade group clusters (e.g., teachers of grades 2, 3, and 4 meet) to
discuss teaching and learning for all students. In this collaborative inquiry space,
teachers discuss students for whom they would like advice regarding ways to support
their learning. The members converse and make suggestions based on their experiences
and readings. This process occurs in a smaller setting than the larger staff; however, it
remains a place for critical professional questioning about the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of
curriculum.

During the project, Stacey views all the teachers at the school as ‘critical
educators’ (Interview 3) whose perspectives and practices are supported and reaffirmed
through professional interactions. The community of learners with whom Stacey is
surrounded supports exploring contradictory messages that filter into the educational
landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). According to Stacey, the teachers’ critical
questioning of their practices and the processes of school organization ‘constantly
buoy(s)’ (Interview #3, p. 3) her. It seems that she draws energy for her undertaking
inquiry into her practice from these processes. I suspect this contributes to her formation
of ‘self’ as an intentional actor who questions assumptions and challenges the status quo.

Stacey states:

The more you talk and the more you socialize at lunch and you share what is
going on. I think that is vital, lunch time, recess time, before school, after
school. Other than that a lot of people go in and close the doors to their
rooms and you don’t know what is happening and you can’t be motivated by
other people’s successes. So giving teachers a chance to talk to each other
and that professional development time such as Pro D days where we don’t
have to go learn about a new teaching technique but we share what is going
on, that motivates us to change because we see such a positive outcome in
another classroom and that influences more than just ourselves, everyone.
(Stacey, Interview #2, p. 6)
Stacey’s comments indicate that through interactions with colleagues, teachers can construct knowledge about teaching that responds to students. Knowledge is no longer simply funnelled into the landscape from an outside authority. Stacey articulates an understanding that the teachers at Sherwood Elementary School have the capacity to challenge educational spaces and create learning opportunities for all students. In this way, knowledge is contextually situated and relevant to learners.

Stacey’s colleagues are sources of inspiration and motivation to her. Moreover, she suggests that teachers’ actions can influence other staff members and this dynamic of sharing creates a ripple-like effect. It “influences more than just ourselves, everyone” (Interview #2, p. 6). This generative process counteracts ideas that teachers are passive technicians lacking the capacity to construct knowledge or engage as critical intellectuals (Giroux, 1992). It acts as counteractive momentum that will support the teachers in questioning and actions for change.

The teachers have forged what Nancy Fraser refers to as a “subaltern counterpublic” (cited in Kelly, 2003, p. 125). These are “discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses which, in turn, permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities” (Fraser, cited in Kelly, 2003, p. 126). For instance, based on my observations of the staff and conversations with Stacey, I contend that the teachers at Sherwood Elementary School understand themselves as educators who not only question current practices and perspectives but also take an active role in shaping curriculum, school organization and practice with the aim to educate all students. In addition, the teachers encourage students to participate in working toward a more socially just school and society. The teachers’
desire to teach in grade groupings, using team methods, with students involved in
decisions about curriculum, demonstrates to students a perspective of knowledge as
collaboratively generated and not solely held by an authoritarian source. Approaches
such as these, act to counter traditional notions of teachers as transmitters of authoritative
knowledge, created outside the school space.

The teachers at Sherwood Elementary School do not simply receive and distribute
messages. Instead they have managed to create their own dynamic inquiry space where
few ideas coming into the landscape remains unquestioned. Based on observations of the
dynamics between staff members, I argue they are able to generate momentum to sustain
a critical space of inquiry. The staff community is a space in flux because questioning is
on-going and knowledge is considered to be dynamic. The energy harnessed acts to
sustain teachers (Stacey, Interview #3) through tiring, stressful times.

The teachers are generating momentum through social processes to examine
social conditions and form alternative identities. In his writings of reflexive sociology
Bourdieu (1990) proposes that understanding social life and human action only occurs
through examination of the ways structures of society are interpreted and negotiated.
However, this is the type of reflexivity demonstrated by teachers is what McNay (1999a)
argues remains under-explored in Bourdieu’s work. Using this perspective, I contend
that Stacey and her colleagues are struggling to create spaces to question the field and
thus, at sites of discord, alter their ways of engaging in it. Below, Stacey describes the
active construction that can emerge from collaborative inquiry:

We do one staff meeting a month a morning just on professional development
and one Friday afternoon a month after school. It is a lot of hours. We did
our Friday one just this past week after that morning session, we did one the
next day. I mean, it is not easy but it is so amazing to be on a staff that is so
motivated to change and to not give in and take the top down, this is what you are going to do, these are the performance standards, evaluate your kids like this. We believe that we have to look more carefully at our philosophy and make changes to the performance standards, come up with our own rubric. You don’t catch any other staff doing it this way or at least that I have been on or talked to. (Stacey, Interview #2, p. 6)

The teachers’ intellectual engagements of continually examining their philosophy and making changes to their habits of practice are, for Stacey, an active stance taken by her colleagues. According to Giroux (1992) and Cochran-Smith (1999), this approach to practice is necessary in order to work toward social justice in schools and society. From my observations, at staff meetings, hallway meetings, and recess gatherings with all of the staff members, the collaboration at Sherwood Elementary School offers Stacey social environment to critically question and construct a curriculum that expresses her philosophy.

6.6.1 Social Practices Constructing Democratic Environments

With Stacey, I attend meetings in which teachers discuss the importance of reflecting on their school philosophy. However, because I do not take notes at the staff meetings out of respect for the privacy of these interactions, it is not possible to provide direct quotations from these conversations. I can state that the teachers discuss their commitment to democratic education and desire to maintain it as an underpinning philosophy for school principles and organization. The teachers believe that a key to their critical collaborative approach is the commitment all staff members have to democratic education (personal log). This enables school and classroom organization based on this perspective. In what follows, Stacey elaborates on her use of the phrase

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36 Based on my experience talking with teachers, I understand Stacey to be referring to staffs at other schools
'walk the talk' (Interview #1, p. 1) to describe the collective effort for democracy at her school:

It's an attempt to foster social responsibility and a sense of community and show kids how that is done. So, part of the way that happens at this school as teachers and administrators is we try to walk the talk. Everybody goes by their first name with the kids, principal, secretary, we are all on a first name basis. The whole idea of respect and we are all learning together is emphasized. (Stacey, Interview #1, p. 1)

Stacey argues that as part of an effort to foster democracy, she and her colleagues attempt to not only speak it, but enact it. This is their attempt to 'take a stand' (Kelly et al., 2003-2004). They demonstrate and teach students to recognize their capacity for active involvement in shaping the school space and society. According to the school website, their intention is to foster students as self-determining and self-developing. In writing about deliberative democracy, Young (2000) understands self-determining as individuals, in this situation, teachers and students, being able to participate in “determining one’s action and the condition of one’s action” (p. 32).

Self-development, according to Young (2000), refers to conditions for “all persons to learn and use satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings” (p. 31). The school philosophy at Sherwood Elementary recognizes Stacey, the other teachers, the students, and the community, as actively participants who shape decisions at their school (Stacey, Interview #1; also school website). For teachers, this supports their development as capable shapers of community. In the same way, the teachers try to engage in this process with students.

School spaces such as Stacey’s are not without their struggles. Although I present the potential of the collaboration to explore the social influence on identity formation, my intention is not to romanticize the environment. There are tensions embedded in using
deliberative democracy processes to organize and operate schools. For example, I suggest an environment where staff members are always challenging the status quo of educational practices can be draining. It takes time and energy to always be asking questions that can lead to 'discomfort' (Boler, 2004) and pedagogical practices that are filled with 'uncertainty' (Britzman, 1992).

I have mentioned that the staff members meet every week at 7:45am, in addition to other meetings, throughout the day. For many teachers, this time commitment may seem daunting and unrealistic given other obligations and constraints in life. Further to this, within the meetings the deliberative process is time consuming and can be frustrating for leaders and teachers who are trying to balance negotiating and dialogue with having to make decisions. In addition, the school philosophy of collaborative learning and teaching hinges on teachers teaming (as I have previously discussed). The teachers are asked to make a two-year commitment to this partnership. From talking with Stacey, it is not always easy to find a colleague with whom you want to work this closely over an extended period of time. Meeting with another colleague to plan, organize, and discuss practice may be considered by many educators to complicate their work. The relationship requires constant negotiation and attention because teachers try to balance their philosophical and pedagogical approaches to practice. As such, the expectations and demands of the school may not be for all teachers.

Schools where teachers question and create curriculum that is relevant to their students have many different activities occurring at all times. As such, the school is a busy place and this may overwhelm some students and staff members. Students are given much freedom (as Stacey and I discuss in interview #3), and for some students and
staff, the structure in this approach may feel loose and uncertain. Stacey and I discuss the safety concerns of students having such freedom at breaks (Interview #3). Having been a school leader, my mind immediately turns to issues such as safety as well as legal liability. Stacey shares that all the staff members take issues of student safety very seriously and, for these reasons, they have many conversations with students about the safety of certain actions. She believes that students will not stand on tables if they understand the reason is because it is unsafe and that the staff members trust them with the responsibility of safe actions (Interview #2, p. 5).

6.7 Social Interactions with Colleagues Outside School

Through her circle of colleagues, Stacey creates a social space that supports complexity that is part of living in democracy. Because the actions of individuals shape the field, Stacey’s efforts to choose people to be part of her field is a way in which she actively creates her field of interaction. Since the people in Stacey’s fields of social and professional engagements have similar ideas to hers, about the value of deliberation and democracy in teaching and learning, their ways of thinking act as positive feedback to Stacey and visa versa. In this way, their practices are shaped by the very social field which they create (Bourdieu, 2000). Although they may disagree on the particulars of approaches regarding teaching, these colleagues agree on the benefits of having a space for deliberating over tensions. Thus, they agree on the overarching perspectives of educating children in respectful, safe, democratic, and just spaces. Over time, the habits of practice of a group such as Stacey’s, act to shape the field of the school community and naturalize certain ways of thinking.
In addition to the social dynamics with colleagues influencing Stacey’s identity, she practices and continues to form her understanding of ‘self’ within the social field of the classroom (observation note, 16-06-2005). I notice that Stacey uses deliberative democratic processes to encourage student involvement in decision-making particularly for outcomes that have an impact on them and their learning. This approach to practice requires her to embrace the uncertainty, “surprises, involuntary turns, and unanticipated twists” (Britzman, 1992, p. 151) which emerge in a pedagogical dynamic of the classroom. She is teaching students about their capacity to influence their social space and to do so she must recognize that they contribute to decisions that shape what it looks like. In what follows, I examine Stacey’s practice in the classroom to illustrate the ways she understands herself as a political actor and how this contributes to her identity formation of critical intellect.

6.8 Collaboration in the Classroom Contributes to Identity Formation

Core components of Stacey’s perspectives toward pedagogy are: inclusion of all children’s voices; decisions being made within the social space of the class community; student responsibility to self, class, and community beyond the school; and student learning as feedback for teaching (Interview #2). Stacey states:

*We are a team. It’s a community. I always say that we are a community so we are responsible for each other. [...] I’m a member of your team and you’re a member of my team. And unless we all work together, it’s not going to happen.* (Interview #2, p. 5)

Stacey’s words emphasize students as contributing members shaping communities (Young, 2000). Students have a role in making decisions about outcomes that directly influence them. This, according to Young (2000), is an underpinning component of
inclusion and democracy. For instance, Stacey and the class meet each morning to
discuss the events of the day. During this time, students have opportunities to be part of
decision making about what is happening in the classroom and why. As another
example, when Stacey and Susan, her team teaching partner, are thinking about a class
trip with the students, they gather all the students together and encourage students to
share ideas, debate, and make decisions about where they want to go and why. In these
examples students participate in making decisions about outcomes which affect their
learning (Young, 2000).

Stacey's perspective about students seeing themselves as part of a community
calls for them to recognize their ethical responsibility to shaping a society that meets the
needs of all within it. As Goodman (1992) suggests, teaching for democratic
participation includes balancing individuals in society. Stacey promotes students’
opportunities for choice, leadership, and responsibility so they learn to see themselves as
participating and contributing to a broader community.

In addition to fostering student agency, Stacey's pedagogical approach as
described below, also reveals her perspective about teaching that is most relevant to all
students.

"I spend a lot of the free time with them, playing games with them during their
outputs time which is their centers time. We get two periods of that a week. I
make it a point to be really interactive with them. I play games, draw with
them, sit at tables, and just talk with them. We have discussions." (Stacey,
Interview #3, p. 1)

Stacey's personal interest in her students demonstrates to them her interest in 'who' they
are, their experiences, their beliefs, their interest, and their perspectives. She seems
genuinely interested, intrigued, and respectful of students which in turn, contributes to
meaningful relationships with them. According to Ladson-Billings (1995b), creating meaningful relationships with students, as Stacey is striving to do, is one component of creating culturally relevant pedagogy that connects and builds from students’ habits and cultural experiences. As I have previously discussed, for Ladson-Billings (1995b) other components of culturally relevant pedagogy include reconstructing curriculum to make it relevant for all students and working toward systemic change to recognize all students’ experiences. Although Stacey works to include all students, these latter two components are not as explicit in her practice as is her focus on democratic practices.

6.9 Summary

Throughout this chapter I have largely focused on Michelle and Stacey to examine the individual and social processes they employ to negotiate conditions of their social fields and form their identities as intentional actors. Within the teachers’ constrained constructions, the potential for reflection and agency occurs at points of discord between their ways of thinking and the social field of education. It is in these contradictions that potential occurs for recognizing two key points a) their ways of thinking do not align with the field, and b) there are possibilities of other ways of thinking and identification.

Individual processes of identity construction were illustrated as Michelle’s childhood understandings clashed with norms and expectations at school and she adjusted her dispositions to align with them. These experiences influenced Michelle’s choice of a work environment and her perceptions that fostering access and opportunity for students leads to equity and justice. This expression of agency draws from liberal perspectives and dissociates individual change from broader structural changes.
The second half of the chapter focused on the ways social processes of interaction contribute to constructions of agency to shape education and society. To illustrate this process, I drew from Stacey and the environment in which she works. Through collaboration, teachers were able to explore the potential of working for democracy in their practices. Using supporting observations and interviews, I explicated how deliberative democratic processes that embrace the tension of debate in dialogue (Young, 2000), can open productive, spaces for teachers. Practicing in such dynamics enables teachers to construct embodied understandings (cf. Bourdieu, 1977) of ‘selves’ as professional learners which, I argue and explore in chapter eight, is foundational for fostering teaching based on social justice perspectives.
Chapter 7: Negotiating Contexts in Educational Fields

7.1 Overview

This chapter examines the ways societal discourses and educational structures informed by neo-liberal, neo-conservative, and gendered perspectives mediate the teachers’ understandings of themselves and their capacity to influence social justice in schools. Within education, these perspectives are expressed through movements such as, standardized curriculum and assessment, regulations and the organization of elementary teachers’ work, privatization of schools, and conceptions of teaching. Throughout this analysis a theme of ambivalence emerges in the ways the four teachers construct their identities (McNay, 2003c). I explore how these uncertainties in teachers’ identity formations contribute to inconsistencies in agency for social change. Using a feminist analysis, I argue that a paradox exists in calling for women elementary teachers to engage as intentional agents for justice in their practice. Contradictions occur in the gendered history of women and teachers that rub up against them being active shapers of society.

7.2 Identities Forged Within Political Agendas

Through both discourse and structural organization, neo-liberal notions of a merit based system contingent on the fallacy of a level playing field permeate institutional systems such as education. Dominant messages regarding individuals as capable of overcoming structural imbalances through hard work endure. Although neo-liberalism
and neo-conservatism inform aspects of many discussions throughout this dissertation, at this time I focus on the ways they permeate school spaces and influence teachers’ identities and formation processes both in the past as students, and present as educators.

In what follows, Jen expresses her openness to messages filtering through the school environment. She states:

*I was a keener, a perfectionist, a hard worker. I didn’t want to miss school, a pleaser and there isn’t much more to say. That pretty much just sums it up, I just swallowed....* (Interview #2, p. 3)

In describing her association with the school environment, Jen uses bodily language of ‘swallowing’ to illustrate how she actively took in messages which then became part of her. This exemplifies the ways that history is carried into the present through our beings (Bourdieu, 2000). Individuals such as Jen, take already deeply rooted ideas into their bodies and these, in turn, become perpetuated through their daily actions. In Jen’s situation, school based liberal messages that individuals are ‘free’ to shape their destiny (Weir, 1997) support those from home that, as I previously described, included: “pull up your boot straps” as well as, “just get on with it; just make something of it; you can pick up” (Interview #3, p. 9). These ways of thinking permeated the everyday fabric of Jen’s early years.

Through school and home Jen takes ideas that she is responsible for ‘self’ and must deal with what she has been given, into her identity. The logic places ownership of success and failure on the individual and does not associate inequities to the structure and organization of institutions such as schools (Sleeter, 1995).

Annette too experiences neo-liberal messages. She explains:
...not speaking English and all the other students did. I remember having the ESL stigma attached to me, going out for support and stuff. So it wasn’t like in class support, it was out of class support. I do remember that. I do remember wanting to understand the other kids. I was quite behind obviously in printing, reading, and writing because I didn’t know any of the words. So I just remember wanting to practice and wanting to be like the other kids in the classroom and constantly asking for help at home to do things that they were doing in the classroom. With my parents working, I was around my cousins a lot. So it was my cousins and their mom that helped me out with a lot of the things. I remember at that point starting to make friends and to this day still having those friends that I made in elementary school, all growing up together. My elementary experience was fun. I had a really good time after I kind of caught up with everything. I remember my teachers. I had a good experience. I felt I was more or less at that point in charge of my own learning at a young age. I figured okay this is going on and I’m not there yet and I better get there, so kind of doing it on your own. (Annette, Interview #2, p. 1)

In relation to the messages permeating school, Annette forms an understanding that in order to be ‘successful’ and have a ‘good’ (see above) school experience one needs to adapt ways of thinking, acting, and being to align with the norms of the school. By responding to the messages in this way, Annette does not question the status quo but accommodates to it. This suggests Annette recognizes that aligning with dominant ways of thinking and behaving offers a means for attaining cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1998) in society. Thus, within the potential parameters that are recognized in her field, Annette adjusts her dispositions to align with the dominant perspectives (Bourdieu, 1977). This approach draws from a liberal agenda that through individual hard work she can achieve academically which will lead to social and cultural capital associated with school success. This is illustrated through Annette’s description (see previous quote) of spending extra time working at home to achieve what she considers an ‘equal’ level to the other students. This perspective holds that she has a deficit that can be overcome through hard work (Valencia, 1997). Annette not only embraces the
concepts but through her practices reifies them both in her ways of thinking and the norms of society.

Situations such as Jen’s and Annette’s demonstrate how students who are immersed in liberal perspectives of meritocracy and individualism come to understand that it is their responsibility to work hard if they want to achieve material, social, and emotional success. As students, both of these women took in these messages and adapted their dispositions in order to align with the demands of the education system. Thus, through their experiences the neo-liberal ideas became part of their beings that shape their thinking as adults.

7.2.1 On-Going Constructions: In the Field of Education

For teachers who grow up hearing neo-liberal ideas of individualism, competition, freedom, and autonomous agents, these perspectives inform their identities and dispositions as educators. As an example, I explore a condition that was on-going for Annette throughout the course of this project.

Annette’s classroom, which is in the basement of the school, is very cold. In my case notes, I describe how I start wearing multiple sweaters (sometimes three) to Hillcrest Elementary School. At various points throughout the winter months, Annette and I discuss that although it is generally cold in the school, it is particularly so in her classroom. She shares with me that she is convinced that it has contributed to illness of students and
herself. Talking to the custodian does her little good; he says he can't seem to make the room warmer. I overhear Annette telling him he is not going to get extra pay bonuses for saving the school board money. In addition, Annette has asked her principal about rectifying the situation. According to Annette the principal has tried to get assistance with the issue. Yet there is no change in the situation.

One day after almost six months, I notice it seems warmer in Annette's classroom. I ask about it and Annette tells me the following story. A school board trustee happened to be in the building the week before and popped into her room. Annette explained that she was wearing her coat because it was cold. The trustee agreed that it seemed very cold (it was May). The next day service people from the school board come to her classroom to fix the heating problem.

Annette and I discuss the entire process and her frustration with it.

Annette: Over and over again... You just say it and then you kind of just think "whatever" it has always been this way and so nothing has been done and you live with it. You think, okay, I'm going to put my jacket on.

Karen: Yeah, three jackets later...

Annette: Yes. Because the answer you always get is, they're fixing the boiler or you know, well we tried, or we looked at it. People do come and look and
take this apart (pointing to cover panel on radiator) and you know, yah, it is interesting. It just didn’t get to the right person. I just was not telling the right person.

Karen: I think it is so interesting.

Annette: Isn’t it? It is sad that it has to be that way and that’s the way it works. People jump when he (trustee) has something to say but I guess I just wasn’t at that meeting. I thought yah the next day, amazing. (Annette, Interview #4, p. 7)

The conversation above indicates Annette is taking ownership of adapting to the conditions of what she sees as an institution unwilling to listen to her. Initially, she looks to the institution and prods it to induce change. When none follows, she accommodates by altering her ways of engaging in the work space. Through this process of action, Annette initially sees herself as capable of influencing change in the system. When her efforts are ignored, she returns to a neo-liberal stance. This demonstrates that the locus of change remains at the level of individual rather than situating it within broader institutional dynamics (Sleeter, 1995). Drawing upon McNay (2000), I suggest that Annette’s construction of ‘self’ does not completely align with the environment perspective because she does question the politics of the institution. Despite this, she retreats to a liberal position that holds her responsible for self-change to alter the situation. Similar to her childhood, Annette’s actions demonstrate her understanding of ‘self’ as being accommodating and working within the constraints of the institution. Through her practices of adaptation, Annette perpetuates this understanding of ‘self’ as well as the status quo of dispositions in the field.
Annette’s ambivalent constructions of ‘self’ regarding her capacity to influence institutional change are also expressed through her perspective about disrupting and being creative in curriculum (Interviews #1, #3). Although I have mentioned this point in chapter five, I return to the concept to explore what it means for agency toward social justice in education. The following is a statement Annette makes about her positioning of ‘self’ in relation to curriculum.

You are more creative with it, you are challenging it; you are questioning it. I always say I like the sort of disruption of curriculum that you don’t have to always say oh this is what we are going to do. Is there a different way of doing it? (Interview #3, p. 3)

Annette’s comment indicates that she sees herself challenging the curriculum and questioning it. However, this disruption is dissociated from questioning the content of the curriculum. By this, I mean that Annette speaks of alterations in her pedagogy rather than questioning whose interests are served and why in the provincially mandated curriculum. Her attention is on how she, as a teacher, can change. Annette’s desire to challenge the curriculum while remaining uncritical, indicates a complicated construction of ‘self’ that is in disjuncture with the education field.

Demonstrating the tensions and ambivalences in identities leads to questions about the potential for human action (cf. McNay, 2000, 2003a). For instance, I share a comment Jen makes that indicates her perspective of dispositions and agency.

If they’re in tune with what’s going on inside them, in their head, in their heart wherever these things live instead of always being at the mercy of their thoughts or their first inclination. So they can be more purposeful about what they do, I don’t know if purposeful is the word. Anyway, it is like awareness, self-awareness. It is probably one of the biggest gifts I can give to a child would be self-awareness because they come into the world with a package. They’re born with tendencies, personalities and all that stuff. Some

37 I use the term ambivalent to express what McNay (2000) refers to as an individual’s habitus being only partially aligned with the dispositions of the field.
of it is really useful and some of it really gets in the way of successful learning, of successful social experiences. (Jen, Interview #2, p. 6)

Two implicit understandings in Jen’s statement are that: (1) individuals can choose dispositions and; (2) self-awareness is foundational for the action. This logic neglects to account for embedded bodily knowledge of individuals (cf. Bourdieu, 1977). By this, I mean that individuals’ dispositions are rooted in them and cannot be merely shed like a coat. Jen notices that students carry with them ways of thinking and behaving that align somewhat with the dominant culture of schooling while also rubbing up against it (see previous comment). According to Jen, student learning can be supported if students are able to control their minds and bodies. To this end, Jen encourages students to develop self-regulation. I notice that when teaching, Jen frequently tells students to set aside unrelated thoughts using language such as, “*don’t let that derail you*” (notes, March 14, 2005). She tells me this is done to encourage students to focus on the task at hand. These ways of thinking become part of the “everyday fabric of what is considered common sense” (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 111) in her classroom.

Jen compares teaching students this skill to throwing them a life preserver (Interview #2, p. 19). This means if students learn self-control and self-awareness they are better equipped to work hard and, in turn, experience school and social success. In this way, self-awareness translates into a form of capital that students can employ in various educational (or somewhat similar) fields (cf. Bourdieu, 1998). It is one of ‘the master’s tools’ (Lorde, cited in Pagenhart, 1994, p. 183) that aligns with the concept of rationality emphasized at the time of the Enlightenment. This logic privileges mind in relation to the body.
As I have mentioned in chapter one and examine in an upcoming section of this chapter, this perspective is gendered because of the association of rational thinking with males and bodily presence that is irrational or lacking of mind as female (Coole, 1993). Reading this situation through a Bourdieuian lens, I suggest that just as Jen is unable to step outside the contexts of her life experiences, neither are her students. By this, I mean that her life experiences and neo-liberal messages influence her thinking and practices which foster rational, autonomous agents free to shape their destiny. However, Jen’s construction and constructing are not without tension. Below Jen explicates the complicated ways her recognition of injustices in the school system merge with her entrenched neo-liberal perspectives.

Well like I said to Jason’s parents, since this is the system I’m in, I really feel a responsibility to make kids feel successful in the system. So they said ‘are you questioning the system?’ and I said, ‘we could have decided that art was our currency. It isn’t really though, not really in the norm, it isn’t the currency. I think we could have developed a kinder system and a kinder world in lots of ways with more acceptances and a broader view, more things valued than just those. (Jen, Interview #2, p. 17-18)

Jen’s use of the phrase a lack of kindness rather than inequities can be read as her suggesting that if we were all kinder to each other the system would become more socially just. I argue that although individual actions and interactions matter in fostering social justice, to consider them outside organizational structures of society and school systems is insufficient in that it does not lead to institutional transformation.

The current school system may not be of Jen’s choice, but she sees its operation to be beyond her circle of influence. In her view, teachers have a responsibility to offer students ‘currency’ so they can participate actively within the dynamics of the current system. Supporting students in developing their currency fosters their access to the
culture of power (Delpit, 1988; Lynch, 2000). In Jen’s approach, teaching students rational thinking skills, mathematics, and literacy is her way of ensuring they have skills deemed important by the dominant societal group. As I have previously mentioned, this is a necessary resource to participate in the dominant culture and an important aspect of teaching for a more socially just society. However, it is only part of the process because, as Delpit (1988) says, it is also important to teach students about the ways power acts through structures to express what information is deemed valuable and necessary for success. Similar to comments I made about the perspectives of Stacey and Michelle, Jen’s approach does not address this aspect. Therefore, the responsibility for change remains within the individual rather than the system.

Thus far I have focused on the ways neo-liberal and neo-conservative agendas as they are expressed in schools contribute to shaping teachers’ identities of themselves. My intention is to illustrate how these constructions are ambivalent and generative which can leave potential for reflexivity and intentional action. At this point, I examine standardization and gender as other on-going aspects of the social field that influence elementary teachers’ constructions of self.

7.3 Constructing Transformative Intellectuals against Standardization

As noted previously, the government regulated curriculum (Integrated Resource Packages) and teaching standards (BC College of Teachers) can, at times, constrain teachers and position them as technicians. The expectations influence the social field of teaching and teachers’ understandings of their agency. Stacey shares how the standardization impacts her efforts to teach using ‘democratic dispositions’ (Gale and Densmore, 2000, p. 143).
Stacey: I wish I could do more. It is something that I like because the more input kids have into their education, the more focused they are, the more they enjoy it, the more they can really take it on board and feel that it is theirs. It's not me telling them something they've got to memorize but things they are interested in and it really makes learning something that just happens everyday whether it is in school or out of school, so you have to be a learner everywhere. I would love to do it more but I feel the pressure of IRP's, of getting certain skill sets out to these kids. And so to be more democratic is a struggle for me. More democracy seems to take more time away from the basics they need. So it sort of wavers back and forth.

Karen: So is that a place of tension where you try to negotiate those?

Stacey: Yes and it's always in my head. Did I include them enough in this process to make what they are learning meaningful for them? But sometimes I have to skip over that because they've got to get this concept and they're... 'You don't know to agree that you need this but I'm telling you that you need it'; that's the negotiation and it's the internal monologue that is always happening. At the end of the day or the end of the lesson that you think, next time I will... (Stacey, Interview #1, p. 8)

According to Stacey, the pressures to address all of the provincial learning outcomes or prepare students for competition of future tests, constrains her practice. Frequently she does not feel she has the luxury of time to do anything other than act as a technician. This comment is especially powerful coming from Stacey who works at a school designated as alternate, where they do not have to conform to grades. It suggests there is a powerful wave of pressure filtering through government regulations and initiatives such as standardized tests and curriculum. Stacey explicates how she understands knowledge and teachers' roles within these educational movements:

I don't feel that we are trusted enough and that we are allowed the responsibility to take that on in our own class in our own way. Things are sort of foisted upon us and we are told to do things and it goes this way and you must follow this curriculum, you must teach it this way. (Stacey, Interview #2, p. 11)

Stacey describes teachers having to follow prescriptive steps when implementing curricular initiatives like social responsibility. These sorts of processes do not convey notions of educators as intellectuals or professional learners. This passive positioning of
teachers reflects a lack of trust that the government has regarding the capacity of teachers to interact in the dynamic of classrooms. Grumet (1988) speaks of women being hired to teach in the nineteenth century because they would comply with directions of the employer. They were considered to be docile (Thompson, 1997). I suspect that this deeply rooted perspective of elementary teaching remains part of today’s societal conception of ‘teacher’. These gendered notions of teachers and the conflation with mothering and caring are explored in the next section.

7.4 Gendered Perspectives Shape Elementary Teaching

If women have fled from the isolation of domesticity to the company of classrooms, how come the school still feels like home? Why do teachers maintain the isolation of their kitchens in their classrooms, seeing each other surreptitiously, during breaks, as they might have broken up the domestic day with a long phone call or occasional bridge game? (Grumet, 1988, p. 85)

Grumet’s comment illustrates the parallels between structures of the family and school and women’s roles in each. This association of teachers’ work with nurturing, caring, and mothering is deeply embedded in social norms and mores (Thompson, 1997, 2003), while at the same time maintained through institutional practices.

7.4.1 Habits of Endearment: Care in Teachers’ Work

There are three interconnected societal perspectives which associate teaching with mothering and caring (Acker, 1996) that I draw upon to analyze teacher’ perceptions of themselves. As I discussed earlier (chapter two), historically there has been an assumption that teaching is like mothering and thus, women’s work (Thompson, 1997); another perspective centers on women’s ways of relating through caring in teaching; and
a third, associates societal expectations of women’s labour with care and love (Acker, 1996).

Annette and Michelle make a point of stating during our informal chats that they do not “baby” their students. These comments suggest they distance themselves from the perspective perpetuated from the 19th century that naturalizes women’s role as teachers seeing it as a natural extension of the work done at home by mothers (Thompson, 1997). Similarly, Stacey tells her students, “I am not your mom. I am not going to be ordering the jobs here” (Interview #2, p. 5). With this statement, Stacey is clarifying to students that she does not see herself as the ‘surrogate mother’ (Blackmore, 1993) who is solely responsible for her children. Instead, they are responsible to one another (Interview #2). However, there is a tension in Stacey’s notion connecting teachers and mothers where mothers may be gentle and empathic, but also are responsible for the care of the home (the classroom). According to Connell (1985), in the public space, mother as rule enforcer is a more masculine notion that many teachers struggle to balance with more gentle ideas of mothers as nurturers. Stacey’s comment indicates she sees herself as neither drawing from a perspective of mother as empathetic or as rule enforcer but rather, a relation of reciprocal care. She refers to the team she and her students create (Interview, #2). Generally speaking, the teachers in this study do not readily draw from perspectives of teacher as mother. Still, I do hear language and actions reflecting care and relationship building such as Stacey’s preference to think of her relation with students as team membership.

Words such as ‘honey’, ‘love’, and ‘sweetheart’ are frequently used by Jen and Stacey when speaking with their students. They imply care and nurture toward students.
Caring is a central component of Stacey’s approach to teaching. According to Stacey, “A lot of what we do is about caring and taking care of each other”. (Interview #2, p. 3)

Care in education is promoted by certain education scholars such as, Nel Noddings (1992), who suggests it offers an important premise for ethical education of “competent, caring, loving, and lovable people” (Noddings, 1992, p. xiv). Noddings’ notion of care is associated with difference feminist perspectives that argue that women have certain ‘ways’ of engaging in society which include relationship building (cf. Belenky et al., 1986). Given a desire to foster a philosophy of care in education, it follows that since connectedness is a ‘way’ of women, they are aptly suited for teaching. To explore complications in the ways social notions of care, gender, and teaching influence teachers’ identity formations as political agents, I return to the discussion I began in chapter six regarding Michelle’s practice of sharing individual and group hugs with students at the end of the day.

Karen: This is about the hugs. I have colleagues who are male kindergarten teachers and as you know I’m from a different province so my experience is with other systems but we went through a phase where we were actually told not to touch the kids. I was teaching grade 7/8 at the time and I was like okay they don’t really want me touching them anyway. But my primary colleagues were saying it was hard. My primary colleagues who were male found the whole thing difficult. I don’t know if you have any male kindergarten teacher colleagues or you know any male primary teachers. Is there anything to that? Are you able to hug where someone else couldn’t?

Michelle: I remember at some schools you’d have to send home a note that we do group hugs everyday. I’m sure I don’t want to make an assumptions or generalization but if I was to teach on the West Side, which I doubt I ever will but I’m just saying that if I was to go on the West Side, I bet that if I didn’t tell the parents that we were doing this group hug, I’d have parents come up to me and say, I hear that you’re doing these group hugs, you are hugging my child and I don’t know if I’m comfortable with that. I think there is a whole different mentality with the parents I have here. It is not that I think they don’t care, I don’t think it is a big deal with them. The whole time I’ve been here, the hugging has never been an issue. ...[...] I’ve never had anyone come up to me and say there is a problem.
I know that when James (Michelle’s partner) comes and we give James a group hug, he sometimes feels uncomfortable and goes down on his knees so they are just hugging his body. I think as a male you definitely have to be more sensitive to it. I think there are issues. But when I dismiss the kids, every child has to come and give me a hug before they go to their mom and dad and not one parent has ever said to me you know I don’t know that I feel comfortable. I’ve actually had positive things said to me such as, “Oh, that is so nice that you hug so and so: and I just say, “Oh that’s just something that is important to me and I want the kids to feel hugged. I think if I was at a different school in a different part of town that it might be an issue. I know there are touching and hugging issues. I think that in Kindergarten it is a little bit more accepting with parents and families because it is a different environment compared to if you are in grade 5 or 6. I don’t know if I taught grade 5 or 6 if I’d do a group hug but I might do a high 5 or something like that.

Karen: It’s interesting and I just wondered because when you said that it hadn’t really been part of your family experience I wondered if some of the students here have similar experiences as you did growing up (Michelle has told me that she was very much like the children at this school). Maybe then, hugging an adult is or was new to them when they came to Kindergarten. (Michelle, Interview #1, p. 15)

Michelle responds to my question about the gendered association of teaching as women’s work by speculating that female kindergarten teachers working in certain parts of Norton may be able to have a different relationship with children than male teachers. This point is complicated because although Michelle describes how her partner responds to hugging students, he is not a teacher. In reading this situation using Nel Noddings’ (1992) perspective of caring education, it could be suggested that Michelle is demonstrating her connectedness to students and encouraging an ethics of care with and between them. This approach is based on a relational perspective of engaging with the world and not necessarily associated with gender. On the other hand, as an alternative reading of Michelle’s comment I draw on scholars who question the association between women teachers and caring (Blackmore, 1993; Connell, 1985; Nias, 1989; Thompson, 1997; Vogt, 2002), In doing so, I propose that Michelle’s hugging of students with no reaction
from parents is an example of women teachers being afforded more leeway compared to male teachers in terms of personal boundaries with children.

Michelle’s lack of further explication regarding an association between hugging students and gender leaves me unsure about the extent to which it reflects assumptions of gender, teaching, and hugging. Another possibility is my lack of persistence in attempting to return to the topic. Michelle’s thoughts about herself in relation to these physical acts of caring are complex and possibly informed by her childhood experiences because when queried about gender and hugging, Michelle speaks about an association between the locations of schools and hugging. Michelle does suggest it is accepted and perhaps expected that Kindergarten teachers have more physical contact with their students than teachers of grade five or six students:

_I think that in Kindergarten it is a little bit more accepting with parents and families because it is a different environment compared to if you are in grade 5 or 6. I don’t know if I taught grade 5 or 6 if I’d do a group hug but I might do a high 5 or something like that._ (Michelle, Interview #1, p. 15)

Michelle’s comment is complicated in that she draws upon multiple perspectives related to gender and care that naturalize physical acts of care for teachers while emphasizing a mothering relation between educators and young students. In terms of care, Michelle speaks about engaging in physical contact and connectedness with students at all grades. Yet, she also considers that teachers of young children will have different contact because these teachers support students’ socialization from private spaces of home into public spaces of school and society (Thompson, 1997). In this way, Michelle draws upon naturalized notions of teaching as women’s work.

Through Michelle’s actions she practices and thus, reinforces certain “ideal mother/child relation(s)” (Thompson, 2003, p. 26) as conflated with teaching. Following
Thompson (2003), I suggest these caring actions are associated with “certain culturally specific” relations between mothers and children (i.e., white middle class). This approach privileges a certain type of relation between mothers and children and marginalizes any relationships that differ from this (Thompson, 2003). It is also an essentialistic perspective because of the assumption that all members within a group engage in similar behaviours (i.e., hugging or not hugging). For example, Michelle comments that the Chinese students in her class do not know how to hug and it is necessary that she teach them (Interview #1). This indicates a perspective that there is an essence of Chinese behaviour which does not include hugging and that hugging is an important behaviour.

The focus on a certain way of behaving in caring education essentializes and conflates notions of women, mothers, and teachers (Tong, 1998). There are norms and expectations that are fostered regarding how elementary teachers behave and relate to students. As such, certain ways of thinking about women teachers as mothers become naturalized and assumed within educational spaces. This is demonstrated in Michelle’s perception that it is more appropriate to hug young children as opposed to older ones.

In revalorizing care as a characteristic of women, it relegates it, like all associations with female, to the private sphere. It is subordinated to masculine associations of rationality and public, sphere shaper (Martin, 1995). As such, women remain subordinated to and supportive of, the active possibilities of the public sphere. This association may be problematic because for women teachers it reinforces a naturalization of themselves as passive mothers who support active potential in others while overlooking their own. In this way, the gendered association of care potentially
limits women teachers’ capacity to form themselves as agents able to challenge systems from their position of subordination.

Although I express concerns regarding the essentialization of care for elementary educators, following Martin (1994), I acknowledge differences can be masked by any categorization. Moreover, as Martin (1994) suggests, in trying to avoid a priori essence perspectives, there is a possibility of embracing another a priori notion of only difference. Either extreme of these perspectives are built on assumptions which may be problematic (Martin, 1994).

I am not advocating the rejection of care in education. My questions are about the associations with the concept and the implications for elementary teachers as social agents. Given the dominant, entrenched, gendered and subordinated associations of care, I remain sceptical that it can support women’s identity formations as active society shapers. It is my contention that if the notion of care is not situated within the gendered contexts of education, it has potential to further naturalize associations of women and teachers as caretakers and mothers with little potential to act for societal change. In doing so, attention remains focused on relations and change at an individual level rather than institutional.

In addition to interconnections of care with teaching and women, there are societal expectations regarding women’s labour (Acker, 1996). Like mothers who think of others before themselves, there is a social conception that elementary teachers give their time, energy, emotion, and money to support their students as they would their children (Biklen, 1995; Thompson, 1997). All four teachers in this study readily volunteer their time and unpaid labour to leading committees (e.g., professional
development) and organizing school-wide initiatives (e.g., literacy; social responsibility). Like mothers, these extra aspects of teachers’ work are unpaid, often granted little value, and go unnoticed (Biklen, 1995). There is an assumption that teachers will do caretaker type duties without question because they are the sorts of things done by mothers (Thompson, 1997). This exemplifies Biklen’s argument that “society devalues the work” both mothers and teachers do with “young children” (p. 141). In this way, there is a notion that to be a ‘good’ teacher requires giving of ‘self’ for children whether it is giving money by buying things or giving money by spending personal time (Acker, 1996).

Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey express mixed perspectives about expectations of preparing activities for their students that involve giving their own time and money. Just as the teachers in Nias’ study give of themselves, the following conversation indicates Jen’s concerns about the time spent on work.

**Jen:** That dance routine took me so many of my own evenings, hours just to learn them off of the video. I had to go get the video. It is not like that just landed in my lap. I gave up a lot just to teach them a 10 minute dance routine.

**Karen:** Isn’t it amazing...

**Jen:** It is too much. The PE program is the shits because I don’t have the time. I think I’m doing okay in math but I had to put in...oh my goodness thousands of my own hours and I still do. I don’t know too many teachers that have the time or the willingness.

(Jen, Interview #4, p. 9)

Jen describes spending a great deal of her personal time preparing activities such as, the dance routine. She considers the preparation time for such lessons is too much. Michelle makes a similar comment about teachers spending their own money (Interview #1).

*There is so much that I spend that I don’t even keep the receipt anymore. For example, I went and bought all these marshmallows, big ones and small ones because we are going to make little marshmallow snowmen. Let’s just say*
those marshmallow were $5.00, I don't think anything of it. I just go, get it and buy the toothpicks. I know I'm going to do this activity with the kids because I want them to get a chance to do it. I don't think anything of it. Most of the stuff here, almost everything I've bought. (Michelle, Interview #1, p. 12)

Michelle indicates an assumption that spending personal time and money are a necessary part of activities she wants to do with the children. During one of our conversations, Michelle shares that she has purchased most of the materials in the room. There were few items when she arrived. She states,

_They are mine so when I leave I take everything. You know our classrooms are empty when you come, the only think you have is maybe some manipulatives_. Unless you are a teacher, no one knows that. They think our school is fully stocked. (Interview #1, p. 12)

Most of the materials in the classroom are Michelle's, and therefore, will go with her when she leaves. According to Michelle, there is an expectation that teachers will provide their own materials. When Michelle and I discuss the lack of materials in classroom, she does not mention that teachers could demand the school board to restructure finances, and put more money into classrooms.

In contradiction to this, four months after the data were collected for this study, the teachers in the province held a two week job action. This event indicates that teachers believed that the conditions of their work were unjust and action was needed. One of the demands was more money to be spent on classrooms. My point is that perhaps there will be increased calls by teachers and society for school boards to support students' learning by providing more materials.

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38 A survey of Canadian teachers, conducted in 2000, revealed that on average the teachers spend $593.00 per year for learning materials (i.e. books and classroom supplies). Teachers in British Columbia were found to spend $1,095.00 per teacher, per year on classroom materials. According to the survey, approximately 95% of B.C. teachers reported spending their own money on teaching resources (Schaefer, 2001).

39 Manipulatives is a term used by educators in reference to hands-on, small items (e.g., cubes, Leggo) that students use for activity-based learning. They count, build, and make patterns with the items.
At the time of the study however, Michelle’s acceptance of the situation is an example of the entrenchment of ideas transmitted both through discourse and structures of schools. That is, teachers are responsible to make the best of what they have and give of their time and money to respond to the reality of their situation (cf. Bourdieu, 1977). According to Griffith and Smith, this is part of a ‘mothering discourse’ that perpetuates expectations of teachers and mothers to ‘love, care, and sacrifice’ ‘self’ (cited in Acker, 1996, p. 24).

Giving of self becomes endless because as Hargreaves points out, the goals and markers of achievement in teaching are ambiguous and this generates a sense of unending work. Acker (1996) aptly captures this concept stating, ‘like good mothers, good teachers find their work is never done’ (p. 24). This dedication to work is not without repercussions for teachers. For example, Jen recognizes that not every teacher can or wants to give unpaid time. She speaks about the demands of the job and the many hours she gives to it (see above). Jen reflects on this situation stating, “I absolutely have to change or I am going to burn out” (Interview #1, p. 7). These are some of the tensions arising out of the expectations of a job that is a labour of love. In negotiating the tension, Jen attempts to put boundaries on the amount of her own personal time and energy given to her work.

There are complexities in Jen’s efforts to reduce her work-time as she negotiates this desire with improving as a teacher. She explicitly states her commitment to “be a better teacher than I am now and work less” (Interview #1, p. 7). Although Jen does not refer to these expectations of teaching being related to gender, the perceptions she shares
about the dedication required to do her work, bump up against societal ideas about women teachers as selfless and giving (Thompson, 1997).

Similarly, although as previously discussed, Michelle accepts that she will spend her money on teaching, she recognizes this behaviour is dependent on her economic situation. The statements by Jen and Michelle suggest that their identities as teachers are informed by societal discourses and school structures that perpetuate sacrifice for their work. Despite this, they do not completely align with the notion because there are conditions they put on their dedication. For Michelle these are related to money availability and for Jen, health and personal life.

From my own years of experience in elementary schools, I contend that spending money, and giving personal time to students, preparation, or professional development is something many female elementary teachers do. Yet, because it is expected by society, it often goes unnoticed by members of the general public who are more likely to comment on the ‘summers off’ (Mason, 2005) than personal contributions that teachers make to public education. I argue that it remains expected as part of the construction of teachers as mothers who will sacrifice their own needs for others.

Given the association between care and gender, I question how the ubiquitous use of perspectives of care influence the ways the teachers in this study understand their capacities for social action. Interestingly, although the teachers draw from perspectives of care, I notice there are silences about the gendered nature of their work and their thinking about being a female teacher in these conditions. None of the teachers make mention of it which I suspect reflects its unspoken presence or a perceived naturalness of women as elementary teachers. I speculate that the gendered notions of elementary
teaching and teachers are deeply entrenched to the point of seeming common sense and thus, no longer noticed (Bourdieu, 2000). For instance, Annette’s response to being asked about the way being a woman influences her thinking about ‘self’ as able to influence change is, “I’m just trying to think because it is so predominantly female, the field, appeals to females. I don’t know.” (Interview #4, p. 5) However, this perspective becomes complicated when Annette later adds,

It is many males making decisions on how we are running our sport leagues in the Norton district and for me that is where I feel it the most. Not in the school environment or at workshops but at those meetings. At times, I feel the males are in charge and they’re the coaches and they’re perceived as the coaches and when you are making a motion or a suggestion, it is not as valued as say one of the males that have coached a winning team. So there is a status or kind of pecking order. But, once you have proven yourself or have expressed interest in sports or they realize that you know your sport or that you’ve taken on a role as some kind of support in one of the games or leagues or whatever, then they tend to listen to you in a different way. (Interview #4, p. 6)

Annette refers to herself as being positioned outside the dominant group of authoritative knowledge sources. She interprets her marginalization to being female. For Annette, access to the group relies on her gaining approval for entry from those in dominant positions. Even upon gaining entry to the group, Annette contends that women are listened to in a ‘different’ way. Annette’s aim to gain entry to the group through their approval leaves the hierarchy of power relations and the premise of the structure itself, in tact. At her meetings, men’s voices are granted authority due to gender. As part of the dominant group, they are gatekeepers patrolling club access.

In Jen’s situation the extent to which gender influences her thinking about herself and her hesitancy to stand out in front of her peers is uncertain.

Not that I know of but that would be something I might be completely oblivious to. I don’t think so, I think it is more to do with..(pause)...it might

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be gender based. I don’t know. That’s not how I experience it. It doesn’t feel like it is about gender to me but some of these things can be embedded and you don’t even know. (Interview #4, p. 7)

The pauses and repetitions in Jen’s statement suggest that my mention of it leads her to think about the possibility that perhaps, gender is influencing her thinking. Jen acknowledges that she may not have considered this connection because it is embedded. This comment points to the naturalization of surrounding dynamics, which Jen does not notice. Drawing from McNay (2003c), Jen’s uncertainty about the extent to which gender influences her thinking illustrates the ambivalences in identity construction. By this, I mean that when individuals form their identities, there are parts that are not completely aligned with expectations of the field. When I ask Jen a question, she considers the possibility of gender being part of her thinking and therefore, the naturalized aspect is brought into the light. Despite this momentary interrogation, Jen retreats, and says it is not influencing her. However, this conclusion remains under question because as she states (see above), she would not notice gender influencing her, even if it were. Jen’s comment suggests she recognizes there to be naturalization to the interconnectedness of mothering and caring with her work. This is a reflection of Jen’s constrained situatedness in her social environment.

These situations indicate that Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey, draw upon perspectives of care in education in their use of language and actions. There is a sense of connectedness to students that is important in their work. While the teachers align themselves with notions of care, they neglect to speak about any impact gender has on their thinking and their work. My speculation is that their habits of practicing perspectives of care align with the societal and education agendas in elementary schools.
that associate, conflate, and foster, teaching with mothering and care-giving (Acker, 1996; Vogt, 2002; Thompson, 1997). As a result, the teachers’ immersion in this environment acts to naturalize gendered perspectives and influence their understandings of ‘self’ as care-giver and/or mother. I argue that for teachers, an identification with being a care-giver while not recognizing the gendered association of this notion can focus attention on relationships and change at an individual level. This perspective is a liberal one that may limit the extent to which teachers see themselves as capable of challenging and influencing social dynamics at a system level (Sleeter, 1995). As I notice in the present study, the teachers may alter their behaviours with no questions about the organization and operationalization of the larger institution (e.g., school board, Government).

7.5 Dissonance, Taking a Stance, and Agency

Evelyn (the school principal) asked me last week if I would like to teach grade 3-4. ‘No thanks because in grade 4 I have to give grades and I feel it is unethical to give grades to little children’. I said it completely distracts from the learning. I think it is really harmful for many children and I’d much rather switch schools than teach intermediate not because of the children but because of the requirement to give them grades. I don’t think it is fair to the kids who are working the hardest sometimes. The A kids are not the hardest workers necessarily. They often aren’t. Those C+ kids are often busting their little butts and everybody is raving ‘oh you’re doing great progress look at the work you did honey. But they are comparing it to where the child started but then the kid gets a C+ and they feel deflated. Now if we didn’t attach so much importance to an A that would be fine wouldn’t it? Our society attaches huge importance to it. And teachers are just as guilty as parents. I just felt that it was unethical to do it and unfair to the kids. In a way, I don’t know if it is about equity but we need to reward the kids for what they are doing and the reward isn’t a sticker or a chart or a letter. It is ‘isn’t learning fun? Look at what you did! Don’t you feel great?’ I think that is the reward. It is all that intrinsic stuff. I don’t know why my head popped to that story.

There is something about our system that isn’t equitable. Well in a way it isn’t equitable, the rating isn’t equitable. The kids who come loaded
for this kind of learning get the A's. And the kids who are creative....like David (a student in Jen’s class who struggles to attend to specific activities), if he was in a different system he’d be thriving. He may still struggle with reading but he’d have a very different school experience and next year I don’t know, poor kid. (Jen, Interview #3, p. 10)

Jen recognizes her capacity to challenge what she believes to be unjust education practices that are associated with grades. She is willing to take a stand on the issue. She contends that the uneven playing field of schools becomes increasingly evident beyond grade three where grades are used in student evaluation. Like Jen, four of the teachers I interviewed in a pilot study said it became increasingly difficult beyond grade three to talk with students about progress because they receive contradictory messages from society and school about the importance of grading. Based on comments by teachers about schools being places where certain students excel, I speculate that many educators consider grades to be unjust because they perpetuate privileging of certain students relative to others.

I return to Stacey’s comments (see section 7.3 for the dialogue) regarding the struggles associated with grades. The pressure and tension that emerge in trying to address the IRP’s leave Stacey in a state of dissonance. To hear Stacey’s concerns of teaching the breadth of concepts outlined in the curricular documents emphasizes the pressure facing teachers. Stacey, who is committed to democracy, feels pressured to teach in a transmission manner that she does not consider best for all students. Yet, she understands there to be expectations that students are able to do certain skills and have been exposed to particular concepts by the end of the school year.

In Jen’s previous comment she recognizes her capacity to take a stand because she believes giving grades is unjust for younger children (Interview #3). Despite this
position, Jen’s actions are aimed at individual response rather than system changes. According to Ayers (1998), “teaching must be toward something; it must take a stand; it is either for or against; it must account for the specific within the universal” (pp. xvii-xviii). Jen makes comments, such as those above, which suggest she recognizes that in addition to children coming to school from different starting points, there are structures in schools that perpetuate the imbalances (cf. Nieto, 2000b). This interpretation is one Jen struggles to reconcile with her entrenched neo-liberal understandings of individuals as solely responsible for their outcome. Recognizing the disassociation between ideas about who can succeed and realities about who does is disconcerting for Jen and, likely for many teachers. This mismatch leads to dissonance and inconsistencies in teachers’ understandings and actions in relation to influencing social change (McNay, 1999a; 2003c).

As another example of teacher dissonance amidst attempts to change an unjust situation, I return to my earlier discussion regarding Michelle’s concern about the lack of material goods and the economic constraint facing her school. In what follows Michelle expresses how her frustration about the situation leads to action of spending her own money to supply material goods for students (see section 7.4.1 for more elaboration of the conversation).

You get a lot of teachers spending their own money. They do anyway but I think more so here. I’ve never minded buying stuff for the kids because I know that this is the program I want to run. I want them to have this experience so I’m going to spend money. Again Karen, this goes back to only because I can afford to right now. Maybe later on in my life, everyone tells me how broke you are when you have kids. It might change but I’ll still want to provide experiences. Maybe I’d do a little bit less because there isn’t money to provide or fund that. (Michelle, Interview #1, p. 11)
As expressed above and discussed earlier, Michelle spends her own money as a way to redress some of the economic constraints facing her school and school community. There is dissonance for Michelle because although she is able to engage in this behaviour at the present time, she shares with me that she may not be able to afford to spend money in the future. While Michelle responds to the economic limitations of her school by supplementing supplies with her own materials, her actions do not address the broader structures that contribute to the economic imbalance between her school and others in the school board.

Some of these contradictions may reflect tensions between conceptions of the agent for action and the socialization of women (Isaacs, 2002). What I mean is that the history that is carried in the body of elementary teachers and particularly, women teachers is constructed as passive, and nurturing. Thus, a tension arises in that the socially constructed bodies of women are not active but, instead, passive receptacles (Coole, 1993; Isaacs, 2002; Witz, 2000). A contradiction occurs because teachers as social agents are considered to be active, intentional agents for justice (Kelly et al., 2003-2004).

According to Witz (2000) it is the male body that is considered to have the potential for action, while the female body is perceived as inactive and excluded from having the capacity for intentional action. This difference is socially hierarchical in that, as I discussed in chapter two, everything associated with female is subordinated in relation to all associated with male. The paradox I consider is that agency requires a subject with the capacity to act with intention. Thus, for women to construct themselves as agents able to act against their own subordination, requires them to form themselves in
relation to their own gendered, socially constructed history as passive, inactive, and excluded bodies (Witz, 2000). This contributes to the constrained notion of construction and identity. There is the potential to deny women’s history in order to identify with an active or masculine, body. The additional complication is that the action would contribute to perpetuating women’s excluded bodies and subordinated societal positions. I argue that this tension resides within this and all projects aimed at conceptualizing and fostering teachers (especially elementary teachers) as social agents for justice.

Extending the works of Witz (2000) and Isaacs (2002), into the social field of education, I suggest that gendered body constructions in conjunction with dominant social notions of women as passive (Isaacs, 2002), convey to women teachers binary ideas that to be an agent requires denial of their body in the classroom. This leads to questions regarding the ways teaching from a social justice perspective can account for women’s bodies and subordinated positions.

For women teachers, being immersed in social spaces with entrenched dominant ideas of women as passive, dependent, nurturers, may naturalize agency aimed at individuals and relationships as opposed to structures. As an example, in what follows, Jen struggles to understand ‘self’ as able to act with intention against the inequities she witnesses.

_I think what kind of bothers me about school and this is something I'm trying to figure out how to take is that the low kids always stay low, and the high kids always stay high and the middle kids always stay middle...[...]...There's something wrong with that because teaching is supposed to make a difference and basically if it's not making a difference we're not teaching we're just there rowing the boat but we're not really making any changes....[...]...I need to be making a difference in these kids' lives and that means whatever they learn in my class leaves the door, leaves my room with them._ (Jen, Interview #2, p. 4)
Jen questions educational processes because she believes students come into school in stratified placements and leave in the same relative place. In Jen’s critique, she calls individuals (teachers) to change the situation by supporting students to meet the system demands. There is no challenge to the system. Jen recognizes herself as able to act at an individual level. This comment draws upon a perspective of schools as level playing fields where student performance is considered to solely reflect the efforts and capacities of pupils and teachers. As a result, the structures that may be contributing to maintaining students’ stratified positions are left unquestioned. Following Cochran-Smith (1999), I do hold that teachers can contribute to social change in schools. Moreover, like Nieto (2000a), I also consider there to be institutionalized concepts and structures that contribute to maintaining imbalances between individuals. When these remain unexamined, the liberal perspective of individual accountability prevails.

As illustrated below, when Jen and I do discuss system change her response is equivocal.

*I don’t know whether we should change the system or whether we shouldn’t change the system. It’s probably not such a bad idea. I can’t go there because I’m too embedded in what I’m doing right now, trying to help these kids thrive, not just survive.* (Jen, Interview #2, p. 19)

Jen’s statement indicates her uncertainty about whether the system should be changed and her reluctance to elaborate on how she might envision her role in any change process. She is invested in her current relational efforts of helping students to succeed within the system. Within this position, her capacity to work for institutional change is constrained.

The other three teachers in this study see themselves as able to contribute to change both at an individual and system level. For example, Annette holds that for teachers to influence change at a system level they need:
...resources, money and...I think we talked about this earlier when I was telling you an example of the change with early literacy and just how teachers getting together do make a difference. And voices heard, stating that something is important and valued and they do want to create change. I think if something is persistent and if you target the right person. And those people are listening, it depends on what is going on at different levels too and if you can filter in to the right people who are listening, then I think you can influence change. (Annette, Interview #2, p. 3)

Annette’s perspective is that she can influence systemic change; however, it is dependent on those in positions of dominance and power to listen. As such, the individuals or groups calling for change are responsible for convincing the dominant group there is a need to change. Furthermore, if individuals seeking change are unable to convince those in power to alter the system, then they are expected to adjust their behaviours or expectations. This is problematic as it puts the responsibility for change on individuals who are victims of unjust situations. As an example of this I return to Annette’s situation regarding the lack of heat in her room (see section 7.2.1). When she could not convince people in power to listen to her, she believed changing the situation meant she had to adjust her behaviours. Interestingly, when someone who did have power spoke on her behalf, the heat was fixed. I make this point not to blame Annette for her actions but, instead, to demonstrate how a neo-liberal approach to the situation requires individuals to alter themselves to fit the given system rather than calling the system into question.

Like the other teachers, Stacey argues that teachers can influence change. However, she contends that time, and money needs to be spent on professional development so they can have opportunities to engage critically with colleagues. In this way, Stacey is calling for structural alterations in order to foster systemic change in thinking and practice. As I have previously discussed and continue to explore in the next chapter, for Stacey, the momentum for action toward change can emerge through
collaborative efforts. According to Stacey, "It's about sitting in the staffroom and talking and also about teaming, not just with one partner but with more than one partner." (Stacey, Interview #2, p. 6) Thus, working in partnership, small groups, and larger groups is not only Stacey's desire but a staff commitment. It is part of their common vision of working toward education for all students.

Similarly, Michelle believes that system change can occur through collective efforts. She states,

I've always been a staff union rep so I'm a strong believer in solidarity. It sounds like a cliché but it really is you sticking together. If you have strong beliefs, you have a voice and even it if is just your voice, it can definitely make an impact on something going on in the system. I look at our curriculum and the IRP's for example are grouped as K-1 and 2-3 (these refer to grades) and we've been complaining for years that it is unfortunate that the IRP's were made up that way. We don't know where the dividing line is for K-1. I think it was something that was voiced for a long time and also through our union. Well I know that right now the ministry, the last year or two, are working on putting out just a kindergarten IRP and a grade 1 IRP. They are splitting up the grades. I don't know if that would have happened if teachers didn't complain about it and make a voice stating that this is a real concern for us in the schools. (Michelle, Interview #2, p. 7)

Michelle contends that the change in the curricular documents came about through collective effort. She considers that through a common vision, mobilization of action for change is possible. It is also important to note that Michelle considers individual voice within the collective to be important. She recognizes there can be individual ideas and experiences as well as collective vision. Furthermore, according to Michelle her individual voice is important to the group effort and thus, she considers herself capable of contributing to collective efforts of system change.
Throughout the project, although Jen seems reticent to discuss how she can contribute to making a more just school system, she openly acknowledges teaching to be a political endeavour. She states:

It's everywhere. It's so political. Well just teaching, it can be. Either way it would have to be because if you teach kids to think, to critically evaluate things, that’s political. If you teach people to be submissive, that’s political...[...]

"When I was a younger university student I would read those books by Paulo Freire and I’d think I’m going to teach these people in the villages to read. That’s political. And it maybe doesn’t seem as obvious here but the same thing is true. Reading and writing are powerful. Where did I read, oh there is something like, literacy is power and I thought you are probably right, maybe I better read more about this. Because I have said to so many people that yes it is fine to make kids be wonderful artists but in our system, the way our culture works, if you can’t read and you can’t write, your self-esteem plummets. It really does in our system; if you can’t do math. Somehow kids’ self-esteem is linked to those core things. I really believe that so I feel like I am sending them out a life preserver in a way by really focusing on the literacy piece; so much of their identity at school, and most of their life, is around literacy and numeracy. (Jen, Interview #2, p. 17)

Jen speaks of valuing critical perspectives and teaching as political. Nevertheless, she also is strongly influenced by current dominant ideas about the competitive nature of the school system. This is an illustration of an individual carrying within her ideas of her past and experiencing her current environment through these (Bourdieu, 2000; Lovell, 2003). Jen, like the other teachers in this study, is working at a complicated intersection of neo-liberal perspectives engendered in childhood, the political agendas that are part of today’s school and social environments, and her students’ daily realities of interests and self-esteem.

In Jen’s situation, there is an absence of support to: (1) question the sources that influence her thinking; and (2) ‘try on’ different ways of engaging with the social field to foster new ways of thinking. Therefore, Jen struggles on her own to try and make sense of ‘self’. The discord between her dispositions and those of the field frequently leave her
in dissonance, which she acknowledges in many statements throughout the project (see Interview #3). It is my contention that lacking any other sources of support, dominant and enduring ways of thinking prevail and the other ideas become extras or niceties that will be attended to if there is time in the future (Interview #3, p. 12). These are the ways enduring habits of practice are maintained and lead to unevenness of social change (McNay, 2000). Attempting to alter deeply rooted assumptions and practices does not occur easily, especially in isolation (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Moreover, it “is less daunting when done in collaboration with like-minded teachers” (Wolk, cited in Minnes Brandes & Kelly, 2004).

7.6 Summary

Throughout this chapter, I focused on the conditions of teachers’ work and the influence on teachers’ understandings of ‘self’ and their capacity for intentional action toward justice. Drawing on interviews and observations of Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey, I argued that although their understandings draw upon neo-liberal agendas and conflations of mothering with caring, their constructions of identities are not always completely aligned with dominant dispositions of the education field. As such, at times identities are in discord with the field and this leads to dissonance. Extending the works of McNay and Bourdieu into the field of elementary education, I examined how ambivalences of teachers’ identities offer potential for reflexivity and agency (McNay, 2003c).

Inconsistencies in women teachers’ understandings of ‘self’ as able to influence change emerge and these, I argue, may be associated with historical constructions of women as passive receivers of actions. Furthermore, in drawing from Isaacs (2002) and
Witz (2000), I speculate that calling women teachers to recognize their capacity as intentional actors puts them in contradiction with dominant gendered social ideas and history. It creates a paradoxical situation out of which emerges dissonance and inconsistency. This grappling process sometimes results in unevenness between ideas and behaviours in working toward socially just practices and schooling.

For the teachers, experiences in social fields of classrooms, school hallways, the yard, with parents, and in staffrooms, lead them to sometimes notice the uneven playing field in society and schools. However, from this point, I draw together statements made by two scholars. Nieto (2000a) proposes that teaching is a life long journey of transformation and Cochran-Smith (1999) says that teachers cannot be expected to engage in the work of social agency alone. I argue that constructing ‘self’ as a social agent is an on-going process of transformation that is not easily sustained in isolation, especially given the power dynamics influencing education. In the following chapter, I continue to analyze observations and interviews and sketch out what I propose to be conceptual methods to support teachers’ constructions as social agents.
Chapter 8: Critical Collaborative Educators for Justice

8.1 Overview

This chapter is an exploration of the ways emergent themes of inquiry, trust and collaboration influence teachers’ understandings of themselves. I analyze observations and interviews with all four teacher participants to demonstrate how struggling to engage in critical inquiry in community holds potential for supporting their political identity formations as social agents. I draw from these findings along with Giddens’ (1994) concepts of ‘active trust’ and ‘generative politics’ to propose critical collaboration processes as a way to support teachers in understanding themselves as educators working toward constructing socially just schools and society.

8.2 Inquiry into Practice

I really feel that teachers need to be exposed to those ways (teaching for diversity) and have support systems in place where you can access to help them be aware because I think a lot of the time they don’t know what is out there. They don’t know how to relate to what is going on in the classroom and how to talk to kids about it. I feel exposed to it but I feel that I still have a lot to learn from it too and if it wasn’t for my contact with the diversity cohort I wouldn’t have been exposed to half of the stuff that we’ve done - just being able to go into different communities, cultures, and religions and to talk about various things and expose yourself to different things and almost feel uncomfortable with them too. (Annette, Interview #2, p. 7)

40 The diversity cohort is a teacher education program created by the local school board and university. The focus is diversity, anti-racism, and social justice in both course work and the practicum.
Annette proposes that exposure and opportunities to negotiate new social spaces challenge reflection regarding perceptions and practice. In this way, they are important for learning. Annette’s experience of learning is ‘transformational’ (Fenstermacher, 1999) in that it is “learning that changes, transforms the learner in profound ways.” (p. 191). The comments indicate her thinking and practice are influenced and altered through experiences with student teachers, committed to teaching for diversity. This transformation of ‘self’ occurs as Annette opens herself to listening and learning from the student teacher. She is prepared to consider alternative ways of understanding herself and the social field (cf. Bourdieu, 1998). However, there is tension in this process in that “exposing yourself to different things” (Annette, see above) can lead to emotional discomfort (Boler and Zembylas, 2003).

According to Boler and Zembylas (2003), the discomfort occurs from moving out of one’s comfort zone into social spaces where common sense ways of thinking are challenged and exposed as social constructions which are managed and perpetuated through institutions such as schools. Based on the discomfort associated with uncertainty in the learning space, I suggest that engaging in this environment as a critical inquirer is a decision about ‘self’ as a pedagogue. There is dissonance, stress, and fatigue that come with spaces of on-going critical questioning about assumptions, positions, practices, and structures. These behaviours are part of taking a ‘stance’ (Cochran-Smith, 1991) of inquiry toward practice.

According to a number of education scholars (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Minnes Brandes & Kelly, 2004), an inquiry stance is necessary for teachers who question themselves, practice, and schools in working for social justice. Jen contends that
continually questioning everything she does is central to her practice (Interview #1), stating “I'm not interested in hanging out with people who don’t question their practice. It’s really boring.” (Jen, Interview #2, p. 9) I notice that Jen starts conversations in the staffroom about her practice, asking colleagues for feedback on actions taken in class. The discussions I observe do not go beyond a few exchanges of opinions in the staffroom. However, Jen states:

> I like to know what I do has an impact on the kids. So I’m always doing this thing where I evaluate everything I do and say. ‘Did that work, did the children respond? Did they seem engaged? Are they taking this home with them through their talk?’ (Jen, Interview #1, p. 5)

Although Jen engages in questions of practice, this inquiry does not include assumptions regarding the ways power dynamics influence her own practices as well as those of schools and society. For Minnes Brandes and Kelly (2004), teachers’ critical questions about their “beliefs, assumptions, and biases” (p. 2) are part of working as a critical educator for justice.

Stacey shares her perspective of inquiry into practice for a critical educator stating, “I think it is never taking the status quo…. [...]...What kid didn’t I hit today that needs my help? How can I better adjust my philosophy or practice to be more inclusive, to help those kids that are forgotten or on the fringe. How to help the top kids or those in the middle”? (Stacey, Interview#3, p. 2) Although Stacey’s comments refer to questioning status quo and practice, they still seem to draw from more liberal perspectives which permeate education. What I mean is the questions of inquiry and reflection I hear Stacey (and generally speaking, all the teachers in this study) asking pertain to helping students on the margins acquire skills to gain
access to the dominant domain. Yet, the premise underpinning societal dynamics that contribute to maintaining student stratification remains largely un questioned.

During my time at Sherwood Elementary School, I notice that as a collective, the teachers frequently question themselves about the assumptions they hold in relation to practices taken. Cochran-Smith (1991) suggests that inquiry can be explored by teachers working together. It is a “position that teachers and others who work together in inquiry communities take toward knowledge, its relationships to practice and the purposes of schooling” (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 14). Next year, the teachers at Stacey’s school, plan to engage in professional learning groups, in addition to all other staff meetings. The aim of this endeavour is for small groups with similar professional interests, to study these interests in more depth within a supportive learning environment. This offers potential for collaborative inquiry processes that ask questions about power and politics of education and how they can work to foster the interests of all students. By this, I mean that teachers can support one another in critically questioning their perspectives and assumptions as well as educational practices and organization.

As I describe in the analysis of identity formation (chapter six), as a group the teachers are able to generate momentum as a ‘counterpublic’ (Fraser, cited in Kelly, 2003) to question their assumptions. With the support of the group and dispositions that recognize questioning, they can create alternative perspectives of themselves that push against political dynamics that act to position them as passive technicians. This community not only embraces questions but fosters their sense of themselves as able to speak out against discourses and structures that perpetuate unjust school
spaces. Throughout the research project, I frequently witness the educators at Stacey’s school (during staff meetings) engaging in inquiry about the what, and how of education practices as well as who it is for and whose needs are not being met. In the comment that follows, Stacey shares the role inquiry plays in her own and her colleagues’ practices.

*The philosophy (school’s) is that strong and everyone is on board with it. I think it has been happening for many year, the alternate status has reinvigorated the philosophy, it re-motivates people and it makes as ‘Derek’ (a staff member) was saying the other day in our lunch Pro D meeting, it makes us constantly have to re-look now more so than has ever happened before because the way education is leaning right now it is not leaning toward us. It is leaning in the exact opposite way. [...][...] It also motivates us to keep current and to keep fighting for what we believe in so we don’t lose it and we don’t swing the other way with new staff members coming in.*

(Stacey, Interview #2, p. 7)

Stacey acknowledges that despite receiving alternate status as a school, which has allowed their school community to organize themselves, foster collaboration, avoid competition, and marginalization through not using marks on report cards and having multi-grade classrooms, they must remain ever vigilant as a staff to question their practices. She recognizes the presence of many educational and social pressures that “*lean*” in the opposite way to their school perspective. For teachers who work against the dominant grain of ideas in education and society, questioning their thinking and actions is a constant (Cochran-Smith, 1991). As I illustrate in what follows, collaboration is a method for sustaining this on-going endeavour of inquiry.

According to Minnes Brandes and Kelly (2004), there is generative potential that emerges from collaboration of teachers who share a vision or commitment. This is contra the paralyzing dissonance that Jen experiences in negotiating these agendas in isolation. From Annette’s perspective, collaboration between teachers regarding a curricular
initiative provides impetus for board-wide institutional change in the ways teaching literacy is approached in the district.

It really does take a group of people to really push for change. You really need the right people. I think alone you need to be part of it but it is also the people that are around you and the more people you bring into your circle that can help you make the change. (Annette, Interview #1, p. 8)

Annette’s statement reveals that the momentum that emerges through learning and questioning with others is inspiring. Drawing from the teachers in this study, I propose that to construct ‘self’ as having the capacity to engage daily with a critical eye to justice, speak back to institutions about inequities, and work to foster a system that meets the needs of all children, is more easily done in community. Yet, finding others of like mind does not always happen easily. Jen makes this point in her comment about trying to work with colleagues.

We are collaborating in the sense that we are sharing our professional knowledge, ideas, and things. Another layer is to actually teach together, plan units together. And it’s really great because we end up valuing each other more and we can feel it. We feel like a team. And it was so frustrating; it took us so long. (Jen, Interview #4, p. 13)

On one hand, Jen’s statement indicates that creating a relationship where there is collaboration can be energizing and generative. However, on the other hand, she acknowledges there exists a time and emotional investment. This comment suggests collaboration requires time and patience. I suggest that ‘trust’ acts as both an outcome and requirement for collaborative relationships. Thus, trust is an underpinning component for collaborative critical inquiry.

8.3 Trust Formation

You have to have a lot of trust. As somebody said this morning in our meeting, this is a group that we trust so we have our bang up, blow up, knock
Stacey’s statement indicates that teachers at her school need to be able to trust one another in order to open their practice as a collaborative space of inquiry. Following Giddens (1994), I suggest that the interactions of Stacey and colleagues require and foster ‘active trust’. This is negotiated through social interactions; it is not obligatory. Active trust “is a powerful source of social solidarity since compliance is freely given rather than enforced by traditional constraints” (Giddens, 1994, p. 14). In this vein, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey all speak about the relation between teachers trusting others (teachers, parents, community members) and their willingness to engage in collaborative inquiry. Annette explicates on the dynamic formation of trust:

*I think it has to do with relationship building and just the trust factor between people. I think that is basically the bottom line, what it really is and then the other parts get attached to it, you know, personalities and characters...or, experiences when once they did say something and someone just completely cut them off.* (Annette, Interview #2, p. 6)

According to Annette, relationships of trust are pivotal to teachers’ willingness to open their thinking and practice to examination. If trust is lacking, staff members will avoid sharing their thinking for fear of judgement and therefore, not engage in critical collaborative inquiry or generative political actions for justice. Yet, trust formation is tenuous and dynamic because it is negotiated based on experiences with one another.
As Annette (see above) suggests, relationship building and active trust emerge in a space where all members believe one another has a contribution to make (Sachs, 2003b). Building on Giddens’ (1994) notion, Sachs (2003b) argues that for teachers committed to just schools, active trust is necessary because it fosters a “shared set of values, principles, and strategies” (p. 140) which are continually questioned and debated.

In a space where trust is actively being constructed and reinforced, teachers can ask questions with others about their own, one another’s, and the institution’s practices. In addition, by generating a sense of shared principles for justice, the individuals can work together for social change (Giddens, 1994; Sachs, 2003b). According to Giddens, this collaborative work toward social transformation is ‘generative politics’. Gale and Densmore (2000), as well as Sachs (2003b), extend Giddens’ ‘active trust’ and ‘generative politics’ into education positing that through collaboration teachers can work toward social justice in schools. In the following conversation excerpt, Stacey comments about the interrelatedness of trust and collaboration in teaching.

Karen: I’m wondering, what do you think, is that a personal thing within the individual or is that somehow or another that sense that someone is going to judge me fostered in teaching? Or is it just the way some people are? — are they uncomfortable?

Stacey: I think it is a combination. I think there is a lot about teaching that does foster that ‘oh my goodness, I’m closing my door and going for it because I don’t trust anybody out there’. It is a judgement system and I don’t know where it comes from; whether it comes from what they see in their practicum. For instance, part of it is what they see on their practicum with the closed door and how their sponsor teachers deal with things. Because I don’t know where else you learn it. I was at Sherwood annex (her practicum placement) where I learned that there is no closed door. [...] If your personality is one that is not overly confident then that is another reason to have a closed door and I also think if you are a bit judgemental too because if you are a judger of others then you imagine that you are also being judged.
According to Stacey, teachers’ work contains a system of judgements where they feel they must be secretive to avoid being criticized. The insecurity of worrying about others’ perceptions fuels isolation and what I call a ‘closed door syndrome’. I use this phrase to refer to teachers working independently with the door as a barrier to the school community.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) propose that teachers engage in epistemological boundary crossing because they live differently in different spaces. Inside the classroom is a safety zone for teachers where they trust their practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). For Stacey, this safety zone has been a space for survival (Stacey, Interview #3). Stacey tells me a story of working at a school where she did not agree with the staff’s philosophy regarding the teaching of reading. The teachers were not interested in hearing her ideas and she was told to use the same approach as the rest of the staff so as not to disrupt the status quo. She shares her response:

*I was prepared to close my door and keep doing that because I firmly believe that doing the same thing every day, day in and day out with kids hits a number of them but it doesn’t hit everybody.* (Stacey, Interview #3, p. 14)

Stacey’s action of continuing with her own practices behind closed doors demonstrates an intention to push against the status quo in a way that she considers best for students. Despite voicing a concern with the staff, she is ignored. For Stacey, closing the door is a political stance rather than an act of hiding for fear of criticism. The interactions and negotiation with other staff members do not foster trust instead, there is distrust. The
lack of shared principles counteracts collaboration, leaving Stacey to work in isolation behind closed doors.

Stacey speculates that the negotiating process of active trust begins during teaching practicum placements. In a Bourdieuian sense, student teachers are spending time in a social space where trust and collaboration may be lacking. These are the practices that shape their dispositions. By this, I mean the student teachers are learning from experience that teachers close doors when trust is low and this act forecloses potential collaborative critical inquiry. Yet, when the teachers are in halls and with the public, they express the dominant ideas of teaching and learning. In this way, ‘sacred stories’ as well as ‘secret ones’, are maintained (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Both Stacey and Michelle suggest that some of the fears of judgement are fuelled by personalities. According to Michelle, fears about others’ evaluations might limit teachers’ willingness to be collaborative.

*There are teachers in this very school and it’s very sad they don’t want to have a special needs student in their class because they don’t want to have another adult in there. It’s very unfortunate because I don’t think as a teacher or a special education assistant you are making judgements on this person’s teaching because everyone has their style and they know what it is they are doing. Maybe there are some that would be different from yours but I think the big worry is that people are worried about being judged. Where for me it bothers me when I hear some things but I’m pretty open too because people will say why are you doing that. I don’t know, I think it is unfortunate that it happens sometimes. (Michelle, Interview #4, p. 12)*

According to Michelle, for some teachers fear of criticism influences their interest in having children in their class who require individual adult assistance because it will mean another adult will be in the classroom. Whether closed doors are the result of different values, fear of judgement, or another reason, both Michelle and Stacey argue that the action leads to isolation and alienation. Furthermore, it is antithetical to collaboration.
From these statements, I contend that trust, a sense of inquiry, and openness to collaboration, contribute to forming ‘self’ as a critical educator working for just schools.

I am arguing that developing trust among staff members does not occur through mere association, and it requires time. Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey each mention that they need time in order to engage in teaching as intellectual work both individually and when working with colleagues. They view time as a constraint limiting their capacity to participate in processes of critical inquiry. According to Hargreaves (1994), “time structures the work of teaching and is in turn structured through it” (p. 95). This means that decisions regarding the tasks completed by a teacher (e.g., teaching, preparing, communicating with parents, gathering materials, and marking) flow out of time structures such as, start time, recess, length of a teaching period etc. In turn, the topics that are taught and the relative time spent on each are organized based on societal value placed on knowledge about that topic. This determination influences the amount of minutes spent on a particular subject discipline each week. For instance, if science if valued more than music, it might be reflected in an expectation that students receive 160 minutes of science instruction per week and 80 minutes of music per week. In this way, I am arguing that time and teachers’ work are interconnected. The increase in tasks under the umbrella of the job of a teacher, along with reduction of time for relaxation or preparation, lead to what Apple (1986) and Hargreaves (1994) refer to as the intensification of teachers’ work. Apple suggests that this increase in teachers’ workload, results in “a total absence of time to keep up with one’s field” (Apple, 1986, p. 41).

For Stacey, current curricular initiatives such as social responsibility can be problematic when they are “not backed up with time and money so we have a space to
speak, we have a place to share and talk about how we find diversity works and how we integrate it in the room” (Interview2, p. 11). Instead, the teachers at Stacey’s school “have to make their own time at 7:45am on a weekday in the morning” (Interview #2, p. 11). Like Stacey, Michelle speaks about the constraints of time on professional collaboration:

Most of the collaboration we do is during the large group social responsibility time. Like when the primaries get together over lunch hours and after school. It would be nice if we actually had a time in the school day....[...]...Because right now we are meeting maybe once a month or twice a month but it’d be nice to meet every week where we can share ideas. (Michelle, Interview #4, p. 11)

The teachers are interested in working collaboratively yet to meet, they must give their lunch hour. This situation can be stressful for teachers because the pressure to address required learning outcomes leaves them scrambling for time and unable to engage as critical intellectuals. As Hargreaves (1994) states, constraints on teachers’ time limits the potential to engage with one another in creative, intellectual, and transformative interactions. I contend that this situation constrains the development of trust, collaboration, and ultimately, actions to change social conditions. As a result, the path of least resistance which perpetuates the status quo, in terms of dominant ways of thinking, is sometimes taken due to fatigue and lack of time.

8.4 Teachers: Identities as Critical Intellectuals

Teachers’ perceptions of ‘self’ influence the ways they position themselves in relation to knowledge construction and teaching as an embodied, intellectual, creative activity. Michelle describes her experience of collaborative, generative processes:

There is this literacy initiative where the school board decided with some of this money where one day a week you have someone on your school who is a
literacy mentor or literacy coach. They would provide professional
development for you or relieve you if you wanted to go visit someone else's
class. So that's how this whole thing came up, oh we'd love to visit someone
else's classroom instead of going out to another school maybe go to visit for
a period or even just the morning. It is very interesting because there are
people who are really excited about being able to do that and there are quite
a few that just did not feel comfortable and they wanted to know if they had a
choice. (Michelle, Interview #4, p. 12)

Together, Michelle and other teachers consider themselves and others able to create
knowledge. They also understand each person to have contributions to the construction
processes. At the same time, Michelle knows there are other teachers on her staff who do
not feel comfortable with this concept. For Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey, they too
desire engagements with professional, collaborative opportunities to create new ideas
from exploring theory and practice. They see themselves as able to do so through
professional inquiry with their colleagues. Michelle states,

*I would definitely want to spend a day visiting someone's classroom to get a
sense of where their kids are at, the level they're at and even just some of the
activities.* (Michelle, Interview #4, p. 13)

Michelle indicates she believes that she and her colleagues can learn from one another
and the ideas will be contextually based. In this way, the constructed knowledge will be
situated in the contexts of the local environment and thus, relevant to their practice. As I
stated in chapter four, I notice that many practicing teachers from various surrounding
school boards come to spend time in Michelle's class. Their observation is a form of
professional development. This suggests to me that there are other teachers like those in
this study, who believe they can learn from colleagues. Like Michelle, Stacey
understands teachers as intellectuals. She states,

*So giving teachers a chance to talk to each other and that professional
development time, Pro D days where we don't have to go learn about a new
teaching technique but we share what is going on that motivates us to change*
because we see such a positive outcome in another classroom and that influences more than just ourselves; everyone. (Stacey, Interview #2, p. 6)

For Stacey, there is a great deal of creative, critical potential that can emerge from teachers working in collaboration. She seems weary of some of the top-down workshops that direct abstract, decontextualized concepts into the education landscape. Stacey believes that through collaboration, she and colleagues can generate pedagogical perspectives that are tethered to the local context and relevant to the community. In this way, they understand themselves as intellectuals with the capacity to contribute to influencing curriculum.

I am proposing that critical collaborative processes have the potential to support teachers’ identities as “transformative intellectuals” (Giroux, 1992, p. 21), speaking of possibilities and change. Understanding teachers as intellectuals recognizes their capacity to create contextually informed curricular experiences for students. According to Cochran-Smith (1991), it is through questioning processes that teachers construct curriculum. My intention in speaking of teachers as intellectuals is not to reinscribe a dualism between mind and body. Like Rahman and Witz (2003), I argue that to ignore the body in the room, particularly societal notions of women’s passive bodies, is to alienate women from their history. Instead my attempt is to bring forth a fuller, yet more complicated, picture of the teacher as social agent.

My understanding of teacher as an intellectual draws on hooks’ (1994) holistic perspective of body, mind, and spirit in the classroom. As an example, I offer a statement made by Stacey that expresses the interrelatedness of these three concepts.

...when there is a problem we can talk about it and deal with it instead of pushing it aside and saying, “Oh yeah that was something that happened out on the playground or that was something that happened at home”. Because
I read Stacey’s comment as an illustration of her perspective that she and students are holistic beings in the classroom and the disconnection of mind from either body or spirit is impossible. She believes that the interconnectedness between body, mind, and spirit influence not only students’ experiences and learning, but her capacity to teach every student. Thus hooks’ (1994) concept pertains to teachers and students.

Furthermore, I understand ‘intellectual work’ (Giroux, 1988, cited in Cochran-Smith, 1991) as a foundational component for teachers who think about themselves as practicing from social justice perspectives (Cochran-Smith, 1991, 2004). The idea is that teachers understand themselves as learners, who construct theory through individual and collaborative inquiry into their practice. This conceptualization offers a foundation for teachers to form political identities as social agents because it fosters thinking and action regarding questioning of power, assumptions, and dominant ways of thinking about education and society.

Based on this study, I contend that Michelle, Annette, Jen, and Stacey recognize teachers as intellectuals. This is evident in their interest to learn from and alongside students while also teaching them. Thus, they situate themselves as teachers and learners and in doing so, they open possibilities to generate theory from practice while using it to inform practice. These teachers willingly explore their practice in collaborative examination as a way to learn about themselves and their teaching while creating knowledge that is relevant to students at their schools.
8.5 Summary

In this chapter, observations, interviews and informal conversations with Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey are used to illustrate the ways the teachers engage in professional inquiry and collaborative practices. Based on their comments, I suggested that ‘active trust’ (Giddens, 1994) can be forged through teachers’ interactions and can support collaborative practices. This holds possibilities for collective critical inquiry and political identity formation. In turn, this process supports teachers in working to address unjust social contexts of schooling. Specifically I argued for the importance of teachers recognizing ‘self’ as a learner; teachers questioning their practices in an on-going way; trust between colleagues; and an understanding of ‘self’ as an intellectual. My speculation is that together these aspects contribute to the formation and sustainability of teacher agency, aimed at socially just education. I also suspect that a lack of one or some of these components, may lead to ambivalence in recognizing ‘self’ as agent and thus, uneven action for social change (McNay, 2000).
Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Overview

Drawing from the analysis, theories, and literature presented thus far, this chapter is a discussion across the collection of cases regarding the emergent tensions facing these four teachers in forming identities as social agents. Included is an analysis of what the contradictions mean and how they speak with and against the current field of research. In keeping with Stake's (1995) perspective of collective case study, I thread the findings regarding tensions in identity formation through the cases. Specifically, I focus on five conceptual points. Although these relate to the themes discussed in chapters five through eight, they offer a different perspective for thinking about them. These five points are: teachers' struggles with liberal perspectives of action for justice that detach individuals from structures; negotiating justice against agendas for student centered curriculum; gendered constructions of elementary teaching; issues of trust and time mediated by education agendas of standardization and regulation; and generative collaborative processes that support political identity formation.

After weaving through the cases, I discuss the significance of the findings and the contribution this research makes to theory and practice in the field of teacher education. I also speak to the constraints and limitations of this project and how these might be addressed in future work. Last, I outline recommendations and directions for further
research as well as practice in teacher education (both preparation and professional development programs).

9.1.1 Re-centering the Conversation

My original research aim was to examine tensions women elementary teachers grapple with in forming their political identities and the ways these influence their perspectives of themselves as able to contribute to social transformation in education. The research study was intended to be open and emergent, thus, I set forth with a few guiding questions. These were queries about the ways political, cultural, economic, social and gendered contexts of teachers’ work mediate their formations of ‘self’ as social agents. Furthermore, I wondered how the identities teachers formed influence their capacity to work for justice in relation to curricular initiatives in school. Following other scholars whose works are grounded in socio-cultural perspectives (e.g., Pierre Bourdieu, Lois McNay), I understand experience as an important component of identity formation. This led me to question the extent to which teachers’ past experiences with agency mediate their current thinking and action.

9.2 Changing Individuals versus Changing Systems

At the start of this study I explored teachers’ thinking regarding their capacity to shape change. Although they each spoke of change and their ability to influence it, their actions were aimed at an individual level rather than toward systemic change. In other words, in keeping with neo-liberal perspectives, the teachers expressed an assumption that individuals are “free and un-fettered author(s) of ...(their) destiny” (Weir, 1997, p. 184). This understanding assumes that individuals can overcome any economic or social
constraints. Thus, there is an illusion that the playing field is equal. However, this liberal perspective of agency encourages a separation of individuals from structures and holds the former solely responsible for their life conditions (e.g., job, economic situation). As such, institutions such as education are absolved of their contributions to systemic marginalization and oppression. Sleeter (1995) cautions that to focus on change at an individual rather than systemic level leaves structures that maintain inequality intact. For Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey, making efforts to change their own actions or those of students without questioning broader issues of institutional organization and discourse is reactionary and leaves unfulfilled potential of an active stance aimed at altering unjust social conditions.

The teachers attempt to address what they recognize as injustice for their students or themselves by changing their own, or helping students change their behaviours. For instance, previously I discussed Michelle’s spending of her own money so that her students could have the same curricular experiences as students in wealthier communities. There was also Annette’s action of wearing warmer clothes when the conditions in which she had to teach were cold. As yet another example, Jen spoke of her recognition that students enter into school at unequal starting points; however, her perspective was to teach them how to succeed within the existing system while leaving it unchallenged. These efforts by teachers are their attempts to redress what they see as inequities in schools. However, it is my contention that the teachers’ actions work toward individual change which has limited impact on systemic changes for justice.
9.3 Identifying as Agent

An emergent and, as I indicate in chapter five, somewhat perplexing theme of this study is the lack of resonance the language of social justice has for the teachers. They do not identify with the language of being an agent for social change but instead, feel it is outside of who they are as educators. To Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey, they are ‘regular’ teachers and only those who engage in political demonstrations outside of school time are considered worthy of the social agent term.

As I have previously discussed, this is a contradictory finding in light of the recent provincial teachers’ strike (10-2005). I offer a few speculations on ways to make sense of this situation. Returning to my discussion in chapter five, I propose that perhaps the teachers’ language is situated in that it is drawn from dispositions in their fields of engagement. Reading this situation using Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) field, I propose that the power dynamics shaping the dispositions of a field contribute to norms for communicating and engaging in the social space. Thus, the teachers in this study form understandings about recognized ways to interact in their school communities and the broader educational field through their experiences in the neo-liberal permeated space of education and society. The ways of being that are encouraged in education emphasize students as able to be anything they want if they apply themselves. Within this approach, justice requires teachers to create opportunities for all students in order to ensure a fair playing field. Their use of the language and practice of ideas is constructed in and constructing of their environments. Yet, the mutability of the field and individuals’ habitus enables social change to occur gradually over time. I have discussed in chapters seven and eight how ambivalence in habitus contributes to shifts in
individuals' practices and in turn, changing dispositions in social fields. This can occur on both an individual and collective level.

As an example of teachers constructing dispositions in their environment, I draw upon Lovell's (2003) argument that social change requires a readiness of the field to recognize new ways of thinking and being. Reading data from this study through this perspective, I propose that the local educational field was ripe for political action. In order to situate this claim within broader contexts it is important to note that during the time period of this research there was a provincial election. While I was in staffrooms I sometimes overheard teachers expressing their frustrations at the lack of resources for students and what they considered to be unfulfilled government promises. Through experience with these tensions the field was being prepared for action. Furthermore, teachers were beginning to speak out about the lack of resources and work for change through an election campaign. Thus, the teachers were positioning themselves as agents who together could act to challenge institutions that they considered unjust.

9.4 Bringing Gender into Conversations of Teaching for Justice

A theme that emerged in this study was the gendered construction of teaching which permeates education and is accepted unproblematically by the women elementary teachers. The silence around the role of gender in teachers' work and thinking indicates the extent to which it is taken-for-granted. It is merely part of the field of elementary education and teaching (Connell, 1985).

41 I am referring to conversations that were had by teachers who were not participants of this study. I am unable ethically to offer more specific details. Thus, my comment is an overall impression based on numerous staffroom discussions at all of the schools.
To make sense of the teachers’ entrenched and unspoken constructions of gender in education, I return to the interdependent relation between habitus and field (Bourdieu, 1977). I am suggesting that the teachers formed their identities in relation to the continuum of recognized options within their social fields of interactions. Thus, within a gendered educational structure, the teachers constructed understandings of themselves in relation to these dominant ideas. These identity formations may have been disjointed in that there was/is not full alignment between the dispositions of the individual and the field. As teachers these individuals work in a field where dominant notions of gender prevail. They practice the dispositions they embody from their past and present experiences in a gendered society. In doing so, they further entrench these gendered notions in the social field and in the dispositions of students and future teachers. It is in this way that society takes for granted the historical constructions of teaching as women’s work and women as ‘natural’ for the job.

I am proposing that identities and constructions are mutable and not always aligned with fields. This may occur through practice in different fields and be expressed by disjuncture with and resistance to dominant ways of being. As an example, I return to Michelle’s situation of experiencing dispositions at home that did not include hugging. Still, she reshaped herself through interactions in fields where hugging occurred. In this way, disjunctures are places where individuals can recognize potential for shifts in habitus.

The late 20th and early 21st century education movements of increasing standardization of curriculum and pedagogy along with increasing governance over teachers, acts to further deskill and feminize the field of teaching (Apple, 1986; Sachs,
From an alternative perspective, the notion of care has been promoted by certain education scholars (e.g., Nel Noddings) as a concept around which to construct education. During this research, words and actions of care were readily used. Care emerged in the sorts of words used in speaking with and about students, and in teachers’ reflections about their work. My concern with the perspective of care is that it becomes conflated with altruism, or as Acker (1995) proposes, martyrdom. What I mean is that teachers start to think that to show they really care about children they will give more of themselves to them. This may lead to teachers taking it upon themselves to redress systemic inequalities at the individual level rather than working to change institutional and programmatic structures in education.

Agendas of care are fostered through discourse and organization of education systems. I suspect an underlying reason is this approach does not challenge the status quo of current school structures. As such, teachers are encouraged to adapt themselves to these ideas and not to question the system. The notion care may also be supported by neo-conservative agendas that promote a return to ‘traditional’ values. In this way, the teacher is the central figure of care representing mothers at school.

The teachers are so busy being care-givers that they have little time to think about issues of justice in curriculum and schools and what might be done to alter them. This is part of the intensification of teachers’ work that Apple (1986) and Hargreaves (1994) argue is occurring. This means that teachers’ work is becoming so filled with duties and tasks that they have little time to engage in professional dialogues with colleagues. The result of this stress on time is isolation and alienation of teachers in their work.

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42 In using the term ‘inequalities’ my intention is to emphasize the more liberal approach of equal access being taken.
9.5 Time and Trust

Time was identified by all the teachers as a source of constraint and tension they had to negotiate in their work. Changes in curriculum and teaching expectations are frequently additions to workload with no corresponding decreases for balance. This was expressed by teachers as a stress because they are continually being expected to embrace and enact more initiatives. However, there is little time to critically engage with the concepts. Both Hargreaves (1994) and Apple (1986) argue that movements in education that reduce teachers' thinking and professional inquiry time contribute to the deprofessionalization and deskilling of their work.

The teachers attempted to implement new curricular ideas of social responsibility, literacy, science while also preparing report cards and many school initiatives. They mentioned that the lack of time was constraining their potential to reflect on the politics of school initiatives and to foster trusting relations with colleagues in order to discuss and examine practices. Under time constraints, teachers are unable to examine, question, and grapple with new ideas flowing into their landscape. In addition, the limitation on teachers' time means that they have little opportunity to engage collaboratively as a way to rethink and reconstruct concepts (Hargreaves, 1994). Thus, I am suggesting this reduces the likelihood teachers will question and/or challenge curricular or broader educational movements.

According to the teachers, time opens potential for the formation of trust. In turn, trust is important for supporting professional conversations, inquiry, and development of practice. In addition, the teachers contend that a lack of trust is related to professional insecurity. As I discussed in Chapter seven, the concept of trust and its relation to
dynamics for social transformation is taken up by Giddens (1994) and extended into the context of education by Gale and Densmore (2000) as well as Sachs (2003b). It acts as shorthand for communication in that it builds on a sense of common understanding between people or groups (Sachs, 2003b).

Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey speak of trusting colleagues which Sachs (2003b) refers to as ‘social trust’ (Sachs, 2003b). Yet, there is a tone in some conversations with Stacey and Annette about their lack of trust in the system, which Sachs (2003b) considers ‘general trust’. This is illustrated in the teachers’ interest and willingness to share and work with colleagues to study and improve their practice, while at the same time, being less keen to engage, challenge and question at the institutional level. At the social level, the interactions flow from trust while concurrently reifying it and this contributes to teachers’ social capital with one another (Sachs, 2003b).

In a Bourdieuan perspective, the teachers’ actions of social trust contribute to form the social field in which they interact. At the same time, the teachers believe there is unpredictability in the actions of the system. Thus, their concerns about the risk of a hierarchical structure which imposes curriculum and regulation directives upon them, overrides any sense of general trust they might have toward it (Sachs, 2003b). They remain unsure of the top-down directives and initiatives that flow in and out of the contemporary education field. Because they consider new movements to be fleeting, the teachers do not invest much energy or belief in them.

The willingness of these teachers to question their own thinking and practice through conversations with colleagues reveals trust. I notice that they make a commitment to seek out colleagues at breaks and to spend time discussing their practice
as well as their experiences. These conversations are not negative gossip sessions but instead are filled with inquiry, supportive words, and laughter (personal reflection notes). Both Michelle and Stacey informally tell me that these connections with their colleagues are essential to their practice. These relations are processes in which they form identities of themselves as able to question and act with intention. According to Giddens (1994), this formation of relationships is 'active trust' (p. 92). It relies on “integrity of the other” (p. 127) and is necessary for social transformation. For Giddens (1994), in a detraditionalizing society, active trust fosters individuals’ commitment to one another and community.

The term detraditionalized society is used by both Giddens (1994) and McNay (2000) to refer to communities where changes in past ways of engaging or thinking are questioned and open to alteration. Members of the community engage in reflexivity and are active shapers of the present and future. They do not unquestioningly accept assumptions based on traditions. The uncertainty of this space requires active trust to be generated through negotiation, which takes time.

Conversely, the teachers speculate that for some educators who choose not to interact with others, teaching could be alienating and lonely. This behaviour may emerge from a lack of security about competence and lead to a lack of trust in colleagues at school as well as beyond (i.e., the Norton School Board, the Ministry, etc.). In other words, some teachers are uncertain about their capability and thus, prefer to keep to themselves. However, this action feeds their insecurity and distrust of others. Just as I state that active trust enhances relations, the converse can occur in that a lack of trust can act to alienate teachers and increase insecurity. In this way, trust and personal relations
are interrelated in what Giddens (1994) refers to as a 'positive spiral of difference' (p. 127).

Active trust between teachers can facilitate their sense of responsibility to one another and their commitment to questioning their assumptions about their work. Following Sachs’ (2003b) who calls for an activist teaching profession, I contend that active trust takes time and underpins the potential for educators’ collaborations. In turn, this supports the solidarity for teachers to form political identities as social agents engaging in generative efforts to make schools, education, and society more just.

9.6 Generative Collaborative Processes

The centrality of collaborative processes to teachers forming their political identities as social agents is illustrated in Stacey’s experiences. Throughout the study, she speaks about the importance of collaborating with her colleagues. Through her interactions with them, I notice that Stacey grapples with questions of ‘who’ and ‘how’ in relation to curricular decisions, school organization, policy, and pedagogical practices. These discussions and debates are examples of deliberative and participatory democracy processes through which Stacey recognizes herself as an educator who questions everything about her work. According to Stacey, “without that trust, you cannot have collaboration. You have to build that first”. (Stacey, Interview #4, p. 4) At a staff meeting, I observe as teachers at Stacey’s school discuss the importance of their trust in one another to their deliberative democratic processes. They also discuss the importance of their commitment to sustaining trusting relations (personal notes). This signals a realization that their interest in democracy and collaboration hinges on the dynamic concept of active trust. Based on these data, I conclude that collaborative processes hold
potential for supporting teachers’ ‘generative politics’. I borrow the term generative politics from Giddens (1994) who suggests it “is a politics which seeks to allow individuals and groups to make things happen, rather than have things happen to them, in the context of overall social concerns and goals” (p. 15). Thus, it is a concept that emerges from collaboration and active trust to draw individuals and collectives to think and work for justice in society (Giddens, 1994).

In this section, I am proposing that collaborative processes can support teachers to recognize their capacity to challenge inequities and injustice in schools while educating students about participating in the formation of a more just society. Yet, as Hargreaves (1994), Sachs (2003b), and the teachers in this study contend, in order for teachers to collaborate, they require organizational support. This is part of educational structure that the schools and school boards need to create for teachers to collaborate. In applying Bourdieu’s habitus and field to this situation, I argue that when teachers practice in a field where collaboration is a recognized disposition, they take these ways of engaging into themselves and perpetuate them through their practice. In doing so, they shape their own dispositions as well as those of the field.

The point I make speaks to my original research questions, about the ways teachers form their political identities in relation to social fields of interaction (e.g., the school). Based on my findings in this study, I am suggesting that to support teachers’ formations of identities as social agents, schools ought to be organized so teachers have time to develop trusting relations with colleagues and critically engage with ideas regarding education and their practice. This may contribute to creating an environment that recognizes teachers as critical actors working for social justice. In turn, this field
would imbue dispositions that foster teachers' perspectives of themselves as social agents committed to justice. Ultimately, the teachers' actions toward justice in the school would act to construct the dispositions of the education field and schools as sites for generative politics aimed at a socially just society.

9.7 Implications for the Field of Teaching for Social Change

Drawing from the findings of this research, I propose three implications for theories used in studying teachers as agents for social change. The first is that Bourdieu's socio-cultural concepts of habitus and field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998, 2000) in conjunction with feminists' (e.g., Lovell, 2000; McNay, 2000, 2003c) extensions of these notions, offer a way to conceptualize the teachers as embodied and situated within historical, as well as contemporary discursive, and structural contexts. The interrelated concepts (habitus and field) account for ambivalences in teachers' identity formations as well as unevenness in their actions for social change. This perspective holds that the on-going construction of identities in relation to broader social fields of engagement may lead to reflection, shifts in dispositions, and the possible reshaping of dispositions in social spaces. In this way, social change is a gradual process that involves interactions between embodied, constrained agents in social fields.

A second implication follows from my claim that the women elementary teachers, in this research, are constrained by enduring, entrenched notions that associate both women and elementary teachers with passive caregivers who are incapable of acting to shape society. The teachers' investments in a society where these ideas dominate and permeate social spaces inform their thinking regarding themselves and agency. It is my contention that using socio-cultural and feminist perspectives to frame this research
exposed deeply rooted gendered constructions of women and teachers influencing these women elementary teachers' identity formations. This is an important implication for pedagogical perspectives that call teachers to be social agents and presume teachers' capacity to recognize themselves as social agents. Yet for elementary teachers, particularly female teachers, this is paradoxical if the perspective does not account for gendered, historical and contemporary, discursive and structural dynamics that constrain teachers and position them as passive. Thus I propose that theories of pedagogy for social change need to account for the extent to which constructed notions of women and teachers permeate and endure in discourse and structures. More specifically, I am arguing that consideration needs to be given to the gendered constructions of educators embodied in teachers and the extent to which these constrain their perceptions of identities, agency, and justice.

This research also has a methodological implication for the study of teachers as social agents. I propose that using collective case study facilitates exploration of tensions in identity formations from multiple perspectives. In this way, exploration of concepts can occur across as well as within sites. Moreover, participant observation in conjunction with interviews and artefacts offers a way to understand the teacher as situated in contexts. It is my contention that shadowing individuals over a period of time contributes contextual information to the interview dialogues and in turn, to the findings of the study. As I have previously discussed, the combination of these methods in various settings offers plural perspectives for making sense of contexts in educational spaces that influence teachers' identity formations and agency.
9.8 Implications for Teacher Education and School Organization

I put forth two implications from this research for teacher education and elementary school organization. First, I argue that teacher education ought to include more in-depth examination regarding the contextual dynamics influencing teachers' identity formations. I am referring to exploration of neo-liberal agendas, entrenched gendered constructions of teachers, and the ways the feminization of their work permeates and endures in schools and society. I consider these explorations crucial if teacher education is to be committed to supporting teachers as social justice agents in schools and society. I make this point because there remains little said about how teachers work and form identities amidst agendas that feminize their work and position them as passive technicians. This is important because teachers' understanding of themselves as agents underpins their capacity to engage dynamically in questioning and shaping just learning spaces. By creating such dispositions in teacher education, I suggest that teachers may continue to engage in these behaviours with other educators throughout their career. In turn, the actions may contribute to shaping dispositions in social fields that recognize teachers as critical agents.

The contradictions and complications that emerged within and across the cases in this project contribute different perspectives to conversations about teachers, and in particular, elementary teachers as agents for social justice in schools. It is crucial that those in teacher education and teacher development, who are committed to advocating for teachers as agents for justice, consider the potential contradictions when speaking about and with women elementary teachers. This may be done by exploring the historical and contemporary societal and educational contexts influencing teachers and their identities.
Engaging in such complicated conversations may support teachers in recognizing the dynamics which shape the social field in which they work and construct their identities. I am proposing that examining ambivalences in identity formation can offer ways for teachers to recognize possibilities for reshaping identities as well as social spaces.

A second implication flows from findings that time and trust are required and valued by teachers in order to work in critical collaboration toward justice. It extends to teacher education and the organization of elementary schools. I suggest that teacher education and elementary schools be organized to enable increased opportunities for teachers to generate spaces of active trust and critical collaboration. In teacher education, this perspective of critique and collaboration would need to permeate the program in order to contribute to teachers’ (student and practicing) understandings of teaching as occurring in a shared space where critique is part of reflection, practice, and on-going learning as an educator.

In addition to teacher education continuing to encourage opportunities for trust and critical collaboration, I am suggesting that elementary school organization be altered to support teachers in forming their identities as social agents. These changes are part of recreating the social and physical space in which teachers work. As one example I propose that teachers’ work be understood to include all of the tasks associated with the job (i.e., preparing lessons, engaging with curricular documents, meeting with colleagues to plan, organizing events, communicating with parents, writing report cards, etc.). By reframing the work it would be necessary to account for these various components in terms of time. By this, I mean that time would be dedicated for teachers to attend to all
of these tasks. Thus, time would be built into the teachers' day to include meeting with colleagues to engage in professional dialogue.

What I am suggesting extends beyond individual preparation time and requires changes in the structure of the day so that teachers could meet in groups. One way to support this process is to hire additional educators to work with students while classroom teachers meet. This proposal requires a commitment of money to hire staff as well as the reorganization of the school day. Within these collaborative groups, teachers discuss not only their classroom practices but broader school structures in relation to the learning of all students. These small group dialogues can be further explored in larger staff meetings. In this way, the teachers contribute to shaping the local school space to meet the specific nuances of the community. They also participate in decision-making that affects their work.

My intention is for teacher education and elementary schools to encourage teachers' trust and collaboration with colleagues while critically questioning norms and practices for justice. Drawing from the interrelation of habitus and field, I argue that these processes will encourage construction of educational fields where notions of teachers as critical collaborators committed to justice are recognized.

9.9 Methodological Considerations

There are four methodological aspects that I suggest emerged as dilemmas in conducting this research project. The first pertains to the breadth and openness of my research questions. My desire was for the specific tensions to emerge from the teachers' work spaces because I believed this would emphasize the teachers and the issues they negotiate. I was trying to avoid fitting the teachers into a pre-set structure.
At the time of my research proposal, my committee members and I discussed the openness of my approach and how it might leave me feeling overwhelmed while in the field. Although I stand by my original project intention, in terms of practicality and manageability, I would not again enter into the field with such a broad research inquiry. I am of mixed ideas about whether the road I chose ought to be considered a limitation or learning experience. On the one hand, a tighter research focus might have made me able to attend more quickly to the specifics within each research site. Yet, on the other hand, being open in the field allowed me to be attentive to the issues teachers negotiate in their work.

A second issue I mention is my method of participating as a volunteer while observing in classrooms. Some might critique my approach suggesting that it is difficult to multi-task and that while helping students I may have missed important actions or comments by teachers. I chose to position myself as a participant observer in teachers' rooms for multiple reasons. As an experienced teacher, it was my reciprocity to the teachers. In addition, my intention for observing was to get a sense of the contexts influencing teachers' work and to develop a rapport with teachers as a way to understand them. My aim was not to focus on specific statements or practices in their teaching. Thus, I argue that by participating alongside the teachers I came to understand them in their work spaces in a deeper way than dropping in to interview them.

In addition, the contextual information I acquired was helpful in interviews. I know this because during our conversations the teachers often referred to specific incidents that occurred while I was in the room or situations I knew about from being at the school once a week. The contexts which shape the teachers' perspectives of
themselves are an important aspect of the socio-cultural lens through which I view the world (i.e., Bourdieu's habitus-field). Thus, it was important that I study the teachers within their contexts.

Furthermore, to encourage teachers who are busy to participate, I felt I needed to give while getting. Based on my past experience with teachers, I did not believe that teachers would be happy with me sitting taking notes at the back of their room while they try to work with twenty-some students. I think this perspective held true because when the teachers introduced me, they all said that I was helping them out in the room and not just sitting in a corner watching. Despite helping I did try as Bogdewic (1999) suggests to be 'unobtrusive', 'unassuming', 'a reflective listener', and 'honest'. As I described in chapter three (methodology), I worked to engage in a helpful way by joining in class activities and pitching in to support students with their work.

Third, while my experience as a teacher and administrator provided me with cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1998) and some common understandings in working with the teachers, it also led to dissonance. I related so closely with the conditions of the teachers' work that I found myself protective of them. I wanted to ensure their anonymity and avoid any details that would embarrass them. As such, I struggled with issues of representation and decisions about which aspects of conversations or observations to share and which to leave outside the boundaries of my field notes and this dissertation. According to Warren (2000), many researchers, who write field notes, struggle with issues of protection of participants in trying to avoid identifying or embarrassing them. Therefore, in order to share and analyze data through a critical lens, I continually worked to read the teachers' perspectives as part of broader societal dynamics.
For many reasons I felt a responsibility to the teachers. When I was speaking with potential teacher participants, I said that my intention was not to sit and critique their teaching techniques, but instead to understand the ways they think about their practice and their work. I made this statement because I was sensing that teachers were nervous that I would sit with a pen and judge them and thus, would not want to participate.

Despite my saying I was not judging them, for the first few months of the study one teacher often suggested that I could tell her about the practices I was witnessing in other classrooms and that I could teach the class. I interpreted this latter statement as the teacher’s discomfort about me in the room and fear I was judging her. Another teacher told me that she trusted me completely because I said I was not there to judge her. In some ways, my initial comment created tension for me as I wrote because I was trying to read situations with a critical eye while not betraying the teachers’ trust.

I was conscious of the ways my relationship with the teachers was influencing decisions about representation in the dissertation. As Fine (1994a) suggests, the question is not whether the researcher influenced the representation of participants but the ways in which this occurs. In the present study, I did not want to portray the teachers in a negative light because they participated in a project that required me to spend a great deal of time with them and I realize that this may have made them feel vulnerable.

Fourth, in writing the dissertation I realize the centrality of gendered constructions of teachers’ work in understanding teachers’ formations of identity. Yet, from analyzing the data I was surprised at the few points in conversations where I explicitly asked questions of teachers about gender influencing their thinking and practices. This lack of explicit mention of the word gender in the interviews may limit the amount and type of
interview data I am able to share about teachers’ thinking regarding the ways being a woman influences their agency. When I did inquire about gender and teachers’ thinking, I found the conversation fell flat. I read teachers’ silences as assumptions that were deeply entrenched and thus, taken as ‘natural’. In addition, I read the interviews from my own feminist perspective and I considered the associations of the teachers’ comments to gender. In reflection, I think I was unsure about how to word questions in different ways in order to move beyond silences and find out more about the teachers’ ideas. When the questions about the ways gender influences their perspectives were met with uncertainty, I clarified the question but eventually moved on. In the future I would try to find ways to circle back to ideas using different approaches and wording.

9.10 Directions for Future Research

In drawing from the findings of this study, I offer suggestions regarding directions for future research. First, I propose the need for research that explores the ways teachers’, particularly, women teachers’ socializations influence their capacity to construct themselves as intentional actors working for just schools and society. Current perspectives regarding teaching for justice that conceptualize elementary teachers (women or men) as agents are paradoxical. As I have previously discussed, these require teachers who have been constructed as passive and associated with feminine to take up a perspective of agency associated with masculinity. In doing so, the teachers, who are often women, may ignore historical construction of women’s passive bodies, incapable of intentional action. Moreover, I reiterate that to call women teachers to be agents without speaking of gendered histories of the agent is to request them to act against their own positions of subordination (Isaacs, 2002). The tensions and dilemmas of conceptualizing
elementary teachers and particularly, women elementary teachers, as agents leads me to suggest that more research is needed to explore the possibility of a feminist agency that accounts for teachers as embodied beings in classrooms.

Second, I contend that continued research is needed that maps the ways critical collaborative communities mediate teachers’ perspectives regarding their capacity to influence social change. What I am proposing extends current research regarding teaching for social justice (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gore et al., 2004; Kelly & Minnes Brandes, 2001; Minnes Brandes and Kelly, 2004) to study of the relationship between processes of critical collaboration and active trust and how these together contribute to the formation of teachers’ political identities as social agents. I am not suggesting collaboration occurs spontaneously and as such, I propose investigation regarding the potential of a structural organization within the school to support time, space, and opportunities for teachers to critically engage with their own and school-wide practices.

Both of the research directions I propose could be explored using action research studies made up of a collaborative team of university based researchers as well as practicing and student teachers. This type of approach has been used in exploration with student teachers by Cochran-Smith (1991). My suggestion is to explore this process outside the constraints of a university course evaluation to reduce the ever-present power dynamics of participants as students and researchers as their evaluators.

A third recommendation for future research draws upon claims I made about the need to implement programs in teacher education and re-organize schools to support teachers in building trust, collaboration, and identities as social agents. I am proposing longitudinal study of changes to program and policy in both schools and teacher
education that are implemented to support teachers in forming their identities as social agents. This type of long-term study can be helpful to assess the impact any changes in programs or structures have on teachers’ experiences. In addition, findings from the present research contribute toward sustained change in the field of teacher education as well as in teachers’ perspectives of themselves as agents for social change.

9.11 Closing Thoughts

In closing, I return to my research inquiry regarding the tensions in formations of teachers’ identities as social agents to suggest that for teachers to work against the dominant tides of individualism, competition, and neo-liberal perspectives of justice, they need to recognize themselves as capable of intentional action for justice. Yet, from this study, I argue that there are many conversations that need to be had with and about what it means for a teacher and woman who is constructed as passive to be asked to engage as an agent. These are not easy topics to discuss because they are multi-faceted, yet, they are crucial if we are to change the status quo of education that privileges certain students based on their experiences and work toward a society that is just for all.

I am reminded of Stacey’s phrase, ‘the on-going conversation’. This has become not only a way for me to understand teachers in their contexts but, also an indicator about possibilities for teaching and teacher education. If we, as educators, consider ourselves to be learners engaged in on-going conversation with the world around us, we might approach teachers’ education as a career long process. This perspective would lead us to ask questions about the purposes and processes of education as well as our role in it. In turn, if our school and teacher education spaces are permeated with dispositions which include critical inquiry, we might think of ourselves and our practice as always under
question, tension, and in process. This is a space which I envision enables the formation and sustaining of critical educators.
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Appendix 1: Letter of Information

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Elementary Teachers as Agents of Social Change

Letter of Information

Are you a female elementary teacher who is committed to addressing social inequalities in teaching and learning spaces? If so, I would like you to participate in this research study. My name is Karen Sirna and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of British Columbia. My thesis research explores how elementary teachers, committed to social change, think and act in response to social inequalities in teaching and learning, which occur in relation to educational initiatives from the school board, school or provincial government. Furthermore, I am interested in understanding how teachers’ past experiences of acting for social change shape current perceptions of inequalities as well as agency for social change.

This is an opportunity to be part of research, supervised by Assistant Professor Lisa W. Loutzenheiser, that contributes to addressing inequalities in schools and promoting social change. I would like to spend time with you at school in order to better understand the ways you make sense of professional experiences and issues of inequality. Therefore, my plan is to shadow you for one day per week for six months. I will observe you, not to critique your practice, but to better understand your thinking as someone who is committed to equality and social change in education.

I have 13 years experience working in elementary schools. I spent 12 years as a classroom teacher two years of which I was a vice principal. In addition I was a principal for one year. As such, I am sensitive to the busy schedules of elementary teachers and will respect this at all times throughout the project. I am also happy to help out in the classroom in whatever way might be useful to you. In addition to the observations, I would like to interview you four times throughout the project (beginning, every two months, and end). Each interview will be approximately 45 minutes in duration. During the interviews there will be opportunities for you to share your stories of professional experiences. The purpose is to better understand you and your thinking about these experiences. Throughout the study you will be invited to keep a journal to note any ideas you wish to talk about or reflect on.
Thank you.

I __________________________ (please print name) agree to participate in this study ‘Elementary Teachers as Agents of Social Change’. I have received a copy of this letter.

_____________________________                __________________________
Signature                                   Date
Appendix 3: Interview #1

General Script for Interview #1: General questions regarding agency

1. _(name)_ please tell me what grade you teach and how long you’ve been teaching this grade?
2. Tell me a bit about the length of time you’ve worked at this school or other schools and the grades (if others) that you have taught.
3. Please tell me a little bit about this school, its size, the community, and the staff.
4. What are your thoughts regarding the current provincial educational initiatives from the Province?
5. What in your opinion are some of the strengths of the current provincial initiatives?
6. Describe for me what you think might be some weaknesses of the current provincial initiatives.
7. Tell me about the way these provincial educational initiatives are being or have been taken up by your board and school.
8. Tell me about some of the changes in educational initiatives that have occurred since you started teaching.
9. In what ways do you think educational initiatives from the government, school board, or school to influence your practice?
10. Tell me about a situation of inequality that you have witness that relates to teaching and learning.
11. Tell me your response to the situation you just described and your thinking about what made you react the way you did.
12. Do you have any additional thoughts regarding this topic that you haven’t yet mentioned that you would like to add?

Guide Questions for Interview #1 – Jen

1. _(name)_ please tell me what grade you teach and how long you’ve been teaching this grade?
2. Tell me a bit about the length of time you’ve worked at this school or other schools and the grades (if others) that you have taught.
3. Please tell me a little bit about this school, its size, the community, and the staff.
4. What are your thoughts regarding the current provincial educational initiatives from the Province?
5. What in your opinion are some of the strengths of the current provincial initiatives?
6. Describe for me what you think might be some weaknesses of the current provincial initiatives.
7. Tell me about the way these provincial educational initiatives are being or have been taken up by your board and school.
8. Tell me about some of the changes in educational initiatives that have occurred since you started teaching.
9. In what ways do you think educational initiatives from the government, school board, or school to influence your practice?
10. Tell me about a situation of inequality that you have witnessed that relates to teaching and learning.
11. Tell me your response to the situation you just described and your thinking about what made you react the way you did.

Guide Questions for Interview #1 – Annette

1. Annette, tell me a little about your own elementary school experience (e.g., where did you go to school, what was your impression of school and learning?).
2. Did you always want to teach?
3. Are there any teachers in your family? If so, tell me a little about them in terms of the grades they taught and the sorts of teachers you might consider them to be.
4. If haven’t asked – ask about her family.
5. Tell me a little about your area of interest in your Masters work in educational leadership.
6. As you know your name was given to me by someone who considers you to be a progressive teacher who advocates for democratic, just, quality learning spaces, in what ways do you think this describes or doesn’t describe you?
7. I’ve noticed that you make a special effort to cultivate an appreciation of diversity of languages and to not premise English as the only authentic language (such as in the songs that are sung, days of the week that are said etc.), can you tell me about your thinking in doing this?
8. I’ve noticed that school bulletin boards have English and Chinese writing on them, is this part of a school wide initiative?
9. Tell me about any different first languages spoken by students in the class and how you negotiate this with the child and family especially at the start of the school year.
10. I’ve mentioned to you that I’m interested in understanding how you think about yourself as influencing educational spaces (both in and out of your classroom). To what extent do you see yourself as being able to influence your work space?
11. I’ve noticed from the internet that Begbie school has major goals this year of literacy, numeracy, and social responsibility, can you tell me about any particular projects or activities at the school level aimed at addressing these goals?
12. To what extent do you intentionally take up the school goals of literacy, numeracy, and social responsibility in your class and practice?
13. How does your interest and willingness to participate in research regarding numeracy, literacy and diversity reflect the way you see yourself as a learner and how does it shape your practice?
14. To what extent do you think you have the capacity to influence students?

Guide Questions for Interview #1 - Michelle

1. Please tell me about the school and your length of time teaching here as well as other places. (worked questions about the school, community, and teaching in later)
2. I want to ask you some questions about the approach that I’ve seen and some of the things we’ve talked about. I notice that you use a lot of visuals, and you mentioned that you spend a lot of time on the language, and that a lot of students didn’t speak English when they came in. Could you tell me a little about your perspective on this?
3. If a child doesn’t speak the dominant language of the district, let’s say English, does that become an equity issue for that child through school?
4. We were talking about the inner city designation. Please talk a bit about the economic needs and how this influences your thinking.
5. Tell me about your own school experiences and how these influence your thinking, and what you see happening at the school.
6. You’ve talked about diversity of languages and some of the economic constraints, do these influence the ways you engage with students or plan activities?
7. Do you have a professional network of support and if so, where do you find these people?
8. Tell me about the way these provincial educational initiatives are being or have been taken up by your board and school.
9. In what ways do you think educational initiatives from the government, the School Board, or school to influence your practice?
10. I told you that your name was given to me when I was looking for teachers who are progressive thinkers, who are dynamic, and who demonstrate a commitment to fostering democratic spaces or socially just practices. What do you think of this and to what extent would you self identify this way?
11. I notice you do class hugs. I’ve worked in school boards where teachers were not to touch students. I’m wondering your thoughts on how you’d feel about engaging in this practice if you were a male primary teacher.

Guide Questions for Interview #1 – Stacey

1. Tell me about the length of time you’ve worked at this school or other schools. How many years have you been teaching?
2. Can you tell me a little about this school, its philosophy?
3. Please tell me about the school and community, in terms of diversity, race, ethnicity, and economics?
4. As I understand it, this school has partial designation as an inner city school what does this mean in terms of materials, resources, etc?
5. What drew you to working at this school?
6. In what ways or to what extent do you think the philosophy of this school influences your practice?
7. To what extent do you think you are able to influence educational spaces?
8. You've been recommended as a progressive teacher that advocates for socially just, democratic, quality learning spaces; to what extent do you see yourself this way?
9. Please tell me about your research regarding cooperative learning as an aspect of socially just educational practices.
10. In what ways do you think your own educational experiences influenced your practices?
11. You told me briefly about your experiences teaching in England; in what ways has this experience influenced your practice?
12. We spoke briefly about your support network at this school and at your previous one. Please tell me about the ways you think this support network influences your thinking, perspective and practice.
Appendix 4: Interview #2

General Script for Interview #2: Making Sense of Contexts

1. Tell me about one educational initiative implemented over the last two years by the Ministry of Education, your school board, or your school.
2. What are your thoughts about this initiative? What are the strengths and weaknesses of it?
3. What is your response or reaction to this initiative?
4. Tell me about your reasons for your reaction.
5. What resources are required for this initiative to be implemented?
6. How do your colleagues feel about this initiative?
7. Describe your school community to me.
8. How would you describe your relationship to the community?
9. How do you think the school community is responding/ or responded to the notions promoted in the educational movement?
10. What sorts of resources do you think you need in order to promote equality in learning opportunities for students?
11. How does having or not having these resources influence your decisions regarding acting for equality?
12. What sorts of things do you think your students need from you so they might have a learning space that meets their needs?

Guide Questions for Interview #2 – Jen

1. What were your impressions of the diversity and social responsibility conference in terms of initiatives being emphasized at your school (in schools)?
2. Tell me about your own elementary school experiences.
3. What is your vision of teaching and learning?
4. Tell me about a teacher that you felt had an impact on you and your perspective of teaching and learning.
5. To what extent do you think inequalities based on race, class, gender, ability and sexuality are expressed in schools and ought to be taken up by teachers?
6. To what extent do you think teachers can influence individual or system level change of social inequalities that act to marginalize certain students?
7. How does a philosophy that advocates freedom to make choices account for restrictions of options and opportunities based on poverty, race, gender and ability? In other words how does choice theory account for an uneven playing field facing individuals?
8. To what extent do you think teachers who are often part of what last week’s conference key note speaker said was the dominant group (being white, middle class) can challenge these dominant ways of being and knowing and embrace diversity that goes beyond heroes and holidays?

9. The speaker states that ‘to value diversity, we have to have change’ – what do you think of this statement?

10. Superintendent and the guest speaker both stated that as a board ‘we need to move beyond tolerance to appreciation’ – to what extent do you think teachers (communities etc.) are willing to act on this call? Do you think it will take more than a call for this, If so what do you think is needed in order for this call to be taken up?

11. said that the curricular document focus is primarily from a perspective of White European history and cultural values – and we are still utilizing an add on approach (calls us to decenter this perspective) – challenge to decenter – to what extent do you think decentering can/will be taken up?

12. Tell me about your hopes for your students.

13. You referred once when we spoke to your sphere of influence. To what extent do you see yourself being able to influence other teachers or the system?

14. What are your thoughts about how ‘SMART LEARNING’ might influence your students over the long term – beyond the classroom and elementary school?

15. “You must be the change you want to see in the world” Mahatma Gandhi – can you tell me your thoughts about this quote?

16. In your Learning Portfolio you state that you “want to be a teacher who develops students’ hearts and minds; as well as empowers them to be aware of themselves as learners and to act on this knowledge”. Please expand on how you think students’ thinking of themselves as learners will impact their lives.

17. In what ways do you think your current experiences as a learner impacts your thoughts about society and your role in it?

18. If there was a school initiative that you didn’t agree with would you do? What do you think teachers (in general) can do if they don’t agree with school, board or ministry initiatives?

19. What influences your perspective on your ability to influence social change?

20. How valuable do you find it to discuss professional thinking with colleagues (either discussing situations in the classroom with colleagues at school or professional questions with colleagues at your class)? (example – I’ve noticed on more than one occasion that Jen talks with colleagues in the staffroom about her practice – and seems to be interested in hearing their perspective on her thinking or actions).

21. I notice during class activities such as your physical education games, student inclusion and cooperation is often pivotal to a game. Can you elaborate on the extent to which you consciously think about emphasizing inclusion and cooperation in your teaching?

22. In class I notice that you often ask students to collaborate. How is this important to your philosophy of learning and hope for students?

23. Tell me about the effect you think the daily announcements about social Responsibility have on the students at school.

24. If we think about democracy and social justice as being dependent on parity of
participation than we might consider it important for students to recognize themselves as connected to community, Can you speculate on how your school initiative of cultivating safe, respectful socially responsible movements throughout the school might relate to this notion?

Guide Questions for Interview #2 - Annette

1. I’d like to hear more about your own elementary school experiences. What was school like for you?
2. What is your perspective of teaching and learning?
3. What are your hopes for your students?
4. Tell me about a teacher that you felt had an impact on you and your perspective of teaching and learning.
5. To what extent do you think inequalities related to race, class, gender, ability and sexuality are expressed in schools and ought to be taken up by teachers?
6. What sort of impact if any do you think teachers can have on individuals (such as, students, other colleagues)?
7. To what extent do you think teachers can influence structural change (at more of a system level – such as changes to curricular documents)?
8. In what ways do you think your involvement in the curricular initiative regarding literacy contributed to changes in individuals? to structures within the school system (board)?
9. In what ways do you think your current experiences as a learner impacts your thoughts about society and your role in it?
10. If there was a school initiative that you didn’t agree with would you do? What do you think teachers (in general) can do if they don’t agree with school, board or ministry initiatives?
11. What influences your perspective on your ability to influence social change?
12. How valuable do you find it to discuss professional thinking with colleagues (either discussing situations in the classroom with colleagues at school or professional questions with colleagues at your class)?
13. Tell me about the effect you think the daily announcements about social responsibility have on the students at school.
14. Superintendent __________ stated that as a board ‘we need to move beyond tolerance to appreciation’ – to what extent do you think teachers (communities etc.) are willing to act on this call? Do you think it will take more than a call for this, If so what do you think is needed in order for this call to be taken up?
15. As I mentioned the Norton School Board is promoting diversity as part of social responsibility and a keynote speaker at a local education conference I attended indicated that promoting diversity included challenging dominant ways of thinking regarding values and knowledge (in Canada that is white, middle class, male, able bodied, and heterosexual).
Guide Questions for Interview #2 - Michelle

1. I’d like to hear more about your own elementary school experiences. What was school like for you?
2. What is your perspective of teaching and learning?
3. What are your hopes for your students?
4. Tell me about a teacher that you felt had an impact on you and your perspective of teaching and learning.
5. To what extent do you think inequalities related to race, class, gender, ability and sexuality are expressed in schools and ought to be taken up by teachers?
6. To what extent do you think teachers can influence individual or system level change of social inequalities that act to marginalize certain students?
7. In what ways do you think your current experiences as a learner impacts your thoughts about society and your role in it?
8. If there was a school initiative that you didn’t agree with would you do? What do you think teachers (in general) can do if they don’t agree with school, board or ministry initiatives?
9. What influences your perspective on your ability to influence social change?
10. How valuable do you find it to discuss professional thinking with colleagues (either discussing situations in the classroom with colleagues at school or professional questions with colleagues at your class)?
11. Tell me about the effect you think the daily announcements about social responsibility have on the students at school.
12. School board superintendent ____________ stated that as a board ‘we need to move beyond tolerance to appreciation’ – to what extent do you think teachers (communities etc.) are willing to act on this call? Do you think it will take more than a call for this? If so, what do you think is needed in order for this call to be taken up?
13. As I mentioned the Norton School Board is promoting diversity as part of social responsibility and a keynote speaker at a __________ conference I attended indicated that promoting diversity included challenging dominant ways of thinking regarding values and knowledge (in Canada that is white, middle class, male, able bodied, and heterosexual).
14. Please tell me your thinking about emphasizing cooperation with your students

Guide Questions for Interview #2 - Stacey

1. I’d like to hear more about your own elementary school experiences. What was school like for you?
2. What is your perspective of teaching and learning?
3. What are your hopes for your students?
4. Tell me about a teacher that you felt had an impact on you and your perspective of teaching and learning.
5. To what extent do you think inequalities related to race, class, gender, ability and sexuality are expressed in schools and ought to be taken up by teachers?
6. To what extent do you think teachers can influence individual or system level change of social inequalities that act to marginalize certain students?

7. Last week at ________ a staff member suggested that at your school ideas of caring, safe, cooperative community did not need to be presented in poster form in hallways because it is expressed and lived in the daily life of all members of its community. Do you think that your school philosophy has an impact on kids? - If so, in what ways?

8. How are the kids that leave your school in grade 7 different from those at other schools?

9. In what way do you think team teaching (partner teaching) influences or contributes to you being able to create the type of school environment you desire?

10. In what ways do you think your current experiences as a learner impacts your thoughts about society and your role in it?

11. If there was a school initiative that you didn’t agree with would you do? What do you think teachers (in general) can do if they don’t agree with school, board or ministry initiatives?

12. What influences your perspective on your ability to influence social change?

13. How valuable do you find it to discuss professional thinking with colleagues (either discussing situations in the classroom with colleagues at school or professional questions with colleagues at your class)?

14. Tell me about the effect you think the daily announcements about social responsibility have on the students at school.

15. I’ve read on the web the philosophy of your school and I know that schools have to specifically spell out their goals – Does your school have to do this and if so what are they? Are the goals of the school the philosophy?

16. Superintendent _____ stated that as a board ‘we need to move beyond tolerance to appreciation’ – to what extent do you think teachers (communities etc.) are willing to act on this call? Do you think it will take more than a call for this. If so what do you think is needed in order for this call to be taken up?

17. As I mentioned the ________ is promoting diversity as part of social responsibility and a keynote speaker at a ________ conference I attended indicated that promoting diversity included challenging dominant ways of thinking regarding values and knowledge (in Canada that is white, middle class, male, able-bodied, and heterosexual).

18. Please tell me your thinking about emphasizing cooperation with your students.
Appendix 5: Interview #3

**General Script for Interview #3: Notions of agency in relation to practice**

1. As you know, in this project, I refer to the term agency often. I have defined it as intentional action aimed at addressing issues of inequality to foster social change. Tell me about what it might mean for you to address inequality in your role as a teacher.
2. Tell me a story about a professional situation (interacting with colleagues, students, your principal, school board members) when you acted to promote social equality (in relation to race, class, gender, sexuality, or ability).
3. In the specific situation you are describing, what influenced your decision of action?
4. What do you think makes a situation socially unequal?
5. When you think a situation at school is socially unequal, what sort of thinking process do you use in deciding what you will do in response?
6. Do you think all teachers act with agency in their role as teacher? Explain.
7. What sort of influence do you think your agency has on other staff members and students?
8. In what ways do you think your sense of your agency influences your colleagues (who do not necessarily work on this staff)?
9. How do you think your sense of agency (willingness to engage in action) is perceived by those in positions of greater authority than you?
10. Looking back at yourself at the start of your career, would you say you always worked to address inequalities and promote social change?
11. Tell me about a situation when you were first a teacher (or a teacher candidate) when you responded to a situation of inequality to promote change (or didn’t – depending on answer #4).
12. Reflect back on your experiences in elementary school, how did you think about yourself in terms of your ability to act with agency?

**Guide Questions for Interview #3 - Jen, Annette, Michelle, and Stacey**

1. What is good teaching?
2. Who in this school would you describe to be a good teacher and why?
3. Describe for me your ideal school.
4. What is it that makes a teacher a critical educator? To what extent might you question what gets included in the IPR’s (written curriculum), what is not included and why?
5. What does equity mean to you and how do you see yourself working for it in schools?
6. What are barriers and supports for a teacher to question and challenge issues of equity and justice?

7. What are strengths and what is missing from the school board goal of social responsibility?

8. Your school has taken up an educational initiative of social responsibility (in some cases literacy or writing); what do you think is missing from this goal?

9. Since schools do not operate in a vacuum it might be said that they represent larger society and its diversity as well as inequalities related to race, class, sexism, ableism.

10. What role do you think schools ought to play in preparing citizens to participate in making the world a better place for everyone?

11. To what extent do you think it is important for educators to teach students skills to learn content or discipline knowledge, content knowledge, and skills to critically question biases and assumptions in the content knowledge?

12. How do you think your willingness or sense of capacity to foster equity and work for more socially just schools has changed over your teaching career?

13. What and/or who has supported your development as an educator who speaks out and acts to change social inequities in your school?
Appendix 6: Interview #4

General Script for Interview #4: Follow Up On Previous Conversations

1. First few questions will follow up from previous interviews, observations, and discussions. These cannot be predicted in advance.
2. ____(insert participant’s name)____ in what ways do you think the way you perceive your professional experiences in the past and present influence the way you think about acting to address inequalities related to current educational initiatives?
3. Tell me about how you see yourself in your professional life 10 years in the future.
4. Share a story from your professional life when you have felt constrained by your circumstances and unable to act to change them.
5. What advice might you have for new teachers regarding reacting to educational movements?
6. In what ways do you think your actions in response to inequalities in your school, influences other teachers’ actions?
7. If you could change something about how your have responded to a educational initiatives of teaching and learning implemented by the Ministry of Education or school board what would that be?
8. How has the way you think about yourself (in terms of agency) influenced how you think about your experiences?
9. As we draw our series of more formal interviews and the project to a close is there anything you would like to share or discuss that you have not had the chance to do?

Guide Questions for Interview #4 - Jen

1. Last time we talked about equity you said that you thought you were the wrong person for me to be interviewing. I want to discuss this further. Tell me more about your thoughts regarding yourself as working for equity in schools.
2. How would you describe your cultural, racial, and class background?
3. How would you recognize a teacher who works for more equitable, just society in his/her practice? __b) Would you describe yourself this way? Why/ why not?
4. Can you think of any examples where you’ve tried to address what you perceived to be an inequity related to a school or board curricular initiative?
5. In what ways do you think the way you perceive your past experiences influence the way you think about acting to address inequities related to teaching and schools?
6. How does being a female influence your thinking and actions to redress inequities you recognize in school/curriculum?
7. How does your thinking about your own race, culture, class, gender, sexuality or ability to influence your practice with students and staff?
8. You've mentioned to me that your school has taken up a school initiative of social responsibility, which I understand will remain as one of your school goals. You have said that you see the school taking it up in a simple way. If you could change something about how your school has taken up this initiative what would that be?

9. To what extent do you see yourself influencing students' thinking about diversity and the ways certain groups in society are marginalized based on race, class, gender, ability?

10. In what ways can elementary educators prepare students with skills to participate as citizens to make the world more equitable and socially just for all? In what ways can this perspective of teaching be integrated with teaching skills and content of the written formal curriculum?

11. How important do you think your relationship with parents is to your students' feeling successful?

12. What role does collaboration play in your practice?

13. Do you ever talk with students about the relationship between race, privilege, and power?

14. You have mentioned a few times wanting students to be self aware or have self control. How does this relate, if at all, to teaching students to act to make society a more equitable, humane place?

Guide Questions for Interview #4 – Annette

1. How would you describe your cultural, racial, and class background?

2. How would you recognize a teacher who works for more equitable, just society in his/her practice? b) Would you describe yourself this way? Why/ why not?

3. Can you think of any examples where you've tried to address what you perceived to be an inequity related to a school or board curricular initiative?

4. In what ways do you think the way you perceive your past experiences influence the way you think about acting to address inequities related to teaching and schools?

5. How does being a female influence your thinking and actions to redress inequities you recognize in school/curriculum?

6. How does your thinking about your own race, culture, class, gender, sexuality, or ability influence your practice with students and staff?

7. I understand your school has taken on a goal of literacy for next year (as this year). Can you talk a little about any particular efforts you plan to make regarding diversity of cultures, races, and languages in working towards this goal? Also how might you try to talk to other staff members about some of these issues – especially in your role as literacy leader?

8. To what extent do you see yourself influencing students’ thinking about diversity and the ways certain groups in society are marginalized based on race, class, gender, ability?

9. In what ways can elementary educators prepare students with skills to participate as citizens to make the world more equitable and socially just for all? In what ways can this perspective of teaching be integrated with teaching skills and content of the written formal curriculum?
10. How important do you think your relationship with parents is to your students feeling successful?
11. What role does collaboration play in your practice?
12. Do you ever talk with students about the relationship between race, privilege, and power?

Guide Questions for Interview #4 - Michelle

1. How would you describe your cultural, racial, and class background?
2. In what ways does your social location (as you’ve described it) influence the way you think about teaching and learning?
3. How would you recognize a teacher who works for more equitable society in his/her practice? Would you describe yourself this way? Why/why not?
4. In what ways do you think the way you perceive your past experiences influence the way you think about acting to address inequities related to teaching and schools?
5. In what ways do you think being a female elementary teacher influences your thinking and actions if you think something is unjust in school/curriculum?
6. How does your thinking about your own race, culture, class, gender, sexuality, or ability influence your practice with students and staff?
7. I understand your school has taken on a goal of social responsibility for next year (as this year). I also noticed on the feedback sheet that you were asked to provide input regarding this you might like to see happen or not happen in the future. Can you tell me a little about how you’d like to see this goal taken up by your school?
8. To what extent do you see yourself influencing students’ thinking about diversity in society and the ways certain groups of people are marginalized based on race, class, gender, ability?
9. In what ways can elementary educators prepare students with skills to participate as citizens to make the world more equitable and socially just for all? In what ways can this perspective of teaching be integrated with teaching skills and content of the written formal curriculum?
10. How important do you think your relationship with parents is to your students feeling successful?
11. What role does collaboration play in your practice?
12. To what extent do you think you might or other teachers ought to teach students about the relationship between power, privilege, and knowledge?
13. I have noticed over the six months I’ve been visiting you that many, many, of your colleagues have come to observe you. They have told me how highly they regard you. What is it that you would like to share with them? What do you think they want to learn from you?

Guide Questions for Interview #4 – Stacey

1. How would you describe your cultural, racial, and class background?
2. In what ways do you think the way you perceive your past experiences influences
the way you think about acting to address inequities related to teaching and schools?

3. How does being a female influence your thinking and actions to redress inequities you recognize in school/curriculum?

4. In what ways do you think the way you perceive your past experiences influence the way you think about acting to address inequities related to teaching and schools?

5. How does your thinking about your own race, culture, class, gender, sexuality, or ability influence your practice with students and staff?

6. I understand your school has taken on various goals for next year and you’ve chosen to focus on writing. Can you talk a little about any particular efforts you plan to make regarding students’ diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, language) in working toward these goals? Also, how might you try to talk to other staff members about some of these issues, especially in your role as professional development leader?

7. To what extent do you see yourself influencing students’ thinking about diversity in society and the ways certain groups of people are marginalized based on race, class, gender, ability?

8. In what ways can elementary educators prepare students with skills to participate as citizens to make the world more equitable and socially just for all? In what ways can this perspective of teaching be integrated with teaching skills and content of the written formal curriculum?

9. How important do you think your relationship with parents is to your students feeling successful?

10. What role does collaboration play in your thinking about your practice?

11. Do you ever talk with students about the relationship between race, privilege, and power?

12. How do you feel the mentoring process with the student teachers has gone this Year? Would you do anything differently next year? - If so, what?

13. You once talked about a teacher agent as someone who is an activist carrying picket signs and that was serious and was not you. Can teachers such as yourself who do not picket in demonstration educate children to see themselves as actively contributing to society and working to make the world a more humane place for all?

14. I have heard staff members talk at meetings that democratic practices are of central importance in the running of this school. To what extent do you think elementary students can learn from this to be citizens who work to make society better for all?