

WALKING A CAREFUL LINE:
BRIDGING FEMINIST THEORY TO PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand and describe the work of five feminist teachers and to determine the extent to which feminist pedagogical theory is addressing the realities of secondary school teaching. I endeavour, in this study, to answer the following questions: Where are the gaps in the theoretical literature? How do the teachers define a feminist practice? What opportunities do they create in which to introduce a critical, feminist perspective to their classes? What elements of feminist theory can be reframed to work within the secondary school? How does the current structure of schools impose limits on the possibilities? What obstacles, constraints and contradictions are encountered in this work? In essence, to what extent have the goals of gender equity been achieved in the secondary school context?

I conducted sequential interviews with the teachers and observed their classes. I discovered through this process that two levels of feminist teachers' work have not been adequately discussed in the literature: their efforts to revise content and their activism within the school environment. I devote much of this thesis to the description and analysis of this work. I also examine the themes that have evoked ongoing discussion and critique in the feminist pedagogical literature. I explore how the teachers make sense of the most problematic elements of this theory and identify which of those elements are most germane to the secondary school site.

In this study, I focus on the perspectives and experiences of teachers, but as I strive to illustrate, their work is profoundly influenced by the attitudes and responses of many people within and outside the school culture. Students (and sometimes parents), administrators and fellow educators, those involved in the development of the official curriculum and the selection of resources, all play a role in determining what the teachers can accomplish within their particular circumstances. Throughout the study I pay close attention to context, and in doing so, hope to contribute to an understanding of the material, social and structural conditions that shape and define the work of feminist teachers in secondary schools.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which five feminist secondary teachers are interpreting and translating feminist pedagogical theory into practice through their approaches to curriculum content, their classroom teaching methods, and their activist work within the school and beyond.

While feminists working at the university level are engaged in the development of pedagogical theory that applies to most educational contexts, questions of power, authority and positionality play out in particular ways at the secondary level. In the past, theorists tended to underestimate the structural constraints of public schools and offered few practical strategies for feminist teachers working at those sites. Recent studies of women school teachers--which I will discuss in this chapter--have revealed that there is no simple transfer of theory to classroom practice. These studies suggest elements that can be reframed to work within the secondary classroom, but if the question is whether or not a university classroom can serve as a model for secondary school teachers, I believe that the answer is no, it cannot, for reasons that I will explore throughout this thesis.

The most obvious difference between the university and secondary context resides in the level of student maturity. The category of "secondary" can incorporate five grade levels and even within a same-age group, students will range considerably in their ability, desire, and readiness to respond to particular kinds of discussions. In Cheryl Sattler's study, "The Restrained Revolution" (1995), the teachers agreed that politics should not be excluded from the public school classroom but were very conscious of their responsibility to present issues in developmentally appropriate ways. Some of the teachers felt that academic feminists who push for the inclusion of certain materials have neglected to consider the emotional readiness of this age group (pp. 22-23).

Feminist teachers, in most contexts, are seeking to challenge dominant relations

of power and create spaces for suppressed voices to emerge in diverse classroom groups. But this work poses particular challenges for the secondary teacher who must respond to a considerable range of student ability and developmental levels. Maher and Thompson Tetreault, in their study, *The Feminist Classroom* (1994), explore positionality at the university site and find the implications there are manifold:

The ethnic, gender and class composition of each classroom...creates both possibilities and limitations in terms of which topics are developed and which repressed, suggesting that the etiquette of relations of difference among people is a delicate and evolving matter. Classroom discourses raised difficult questions about the degree to which individuals are embedded in the "identities" marked out for them by the dominant culture. Also at issue are the boundaries of acceptable language about the "Other", and about the ways in which students construct different "selves" and "others" in different environments. (p. 19)

If the consciousness of boundaries and etiquette of language render discussions about the "other" challenging at the university level, it is the very lack of this sensitivity that makes such discussions problematic in the secondary classroom. Some students, even at the senior secondary level, have not yet reached an understanding of personal boundaries and are unable to respond appropriately in any kind of large group discussion. While university educators can work towards a renegotiation of the student-teacher relationship in their classrooms, secondary teachers must continue to revert to the role of disciplinarian in order to control the behaviors of some students so that others can learn. Doing feminist work in the contemporary classroom poses, for all feminist teachers, opportunities and challenges. But as I progressed through this study and reflected on my own experiences, I came to a fuller awareness of the particular constraints and contradictions that secondary teachers confront and a deeper appreciation of their efforts--one teacher said that she now regards the obstacles that are thrown in her path as evidence of the importance of this work, inspiring her to "keep going." In the following section, I describe something of my own path and the twists and turns that led me here.

The Path to This Place

When I began graduate studies in Education, I had recently left my position as a youth worker/instructor at an alternative program for students who had experienced serious academic, social, motivational, and behavioral difficulties in the regular school system; some had been in trouble with the law, many were coming from difficult family situations, most were disadvantaged in a variety of ways.

Before commencing my work at the program, I had volunteered for a year as a classroom tutor at a youth correctional centre, but I soon realized that nothing could have prepared me for the demands of this work on a full-time basis. My job at the alternative program entailed teaching "life skills," assisting with some aspects of students' academic work, co-facilitating recreational activities, and acting as a guide, mediator, and counsellor for my case-load. In the three plus years I worked at the program, I saw many examples of student harassment and intimidation, and more occasionally, vandalism and theft. Such classroom behaviors as attention-seeking and task-avoidance, inappropriateness and disruptiveness were usual, the severity of which would depend upon the group dynamics at the time. My two colleagues and I continued to devise strategies to deal with these problems, and while a few were marginally successful, certainly we found no magic solutions. While there was the occasional girl who would "act out" and boy who had emotionally withdrawn, in general, it was the male students whose behavior was consistently disruptive, with the majority of the girls struggling with problems of non-attendance, low motivation, and sometimes depression.

One morning, one of the girls (I'll identify as Cathy) ingested a handful of pills in the washroom--her third suicide attempt. In addition to other problems, she was being victimized by a group of students from her former school. While she and I sat for hours in the hospital emergency room, my colleague, in the meantime, was attempting to locate Cathy's parents, and get in touch with an intake worker from Social Services. After a brief psychiatric assessment at the hospital, Cathy was administered charcoal to deal with the effect of the pills and then was left in the

corner of the emergency ward. I waited with her for someone to arrive: parent, crisis counsellor, social worker, anyone. Finally, my colleague managed to contact a worker from Victim Services--I appreciated the support of this person but found she was unable to do anything concrete. The hospital would be sending Cathy home that night--my efforts to communicate the fact that she had no home to which she could return seemed to fall on deaf ears. The parents of the friend with whom she had been staying were not her legal guardians and were unwilling, and understandably so, to take her back after this incident. Her parents could not be reached, all emergency shelters were full. Cathy spent the night in the emergency ward and returned to the program the following day. Her parents agreed to take her back that night, but due to long waiting lists and "red tape," I believe it was many weeks before she received the appropriate counselling.

My report on the incident was sent to the hospital and I believe to the Ministry of Social Services. I don't recall whether or not we heard back from the Ministry, but the response from the hospital administration was that I was at fault. "Obviously," they said, I was "too green": had I known to contact a certain director at the hospital, all necessary arrangements would have been made. Whether or not I had had knowledge of this person, I was hardly about to abandon a very sick child to go knocking on office doors. But what I found most disturbing about this response was that they seemed to be suggesting, quite unproblematically, that only people "in the know" can expect help in a crisis situation--those who do not occupy a position of privilege can expect to be virtually ignored, as we were. Several weeks later, when I was discussing the incident with my senior supervisor, she said something that resonated: she suggested that if a male worker had accompanied Cathy to the hospital instead of me, she believed the situation would have unfolded quite differently.

I was concerned for the girls in the program, but I was also struggling to make sense of, and cope with, the manipulative tactics, disrespect and sometimes blatant hostility of some male students. When I read Rebecca Priegert Coulter's study of feminist first-year teachers, I immediately recalled my first year at the alternative

program. As Coulter observes (1995, p. 43), "it was not an uncommon practice for male students to make loud comments about women teachers' bodies, their clothes...across the age groups, boys seized on an approach that rendered women teachers the 'powerless object of male sexual discourse' (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 5)." I had grown fairly accustomed to hearing inappropriate remarks as I passed the boys on the stairs or sitting down to lunch, but there was one incident that I found particularly unsettling. The program used a large van for transporting students around on field trips. Near the end of the term, we were in the process of cleaning out the candy wrappers, pop cans and cigarette packages when we discovered graffiti covering the seats in the back rows. The comments I had heard previously paled in comparison to the commentary scrawled in black ink inside that van--the remarks that referred to me and another staff member were sexually graphic and extremely degrading.

While I was aware that some of the students in the program were quite troubled, I was nonetheless shocked to be made the object of such base ideas and language. My colleagues said that I shouldn't allow the graffiti to bother me, that it was merely an indication of where some of these boys were at. But it left me wondering where these boys "would be at" as time went on if this behavior and the attitudes fueling it were not addressed. The seats of the van had to be recovered, and nothing more was said of the incident.

My colleagues had always been extremely supportive, but I hesitated to relate to them every such incident. I suppose I felt that it was somehow my fault, that I had been too lenient with the students, "too nice." And as the youngest and least-experienced staff member, I was also concerned that I would be perceived as over-sensitive, thin-skinned, unable to deal with the realities of this work. Since then I have observed that other women will downplay or even deny these kinds of experiences. Despite public attention to the issue of harassment in recent years, the power of rhetoric to create the perception that "we are now all treated equally" should not be underestimated. Because harassing behaviors are still tacitly condoned, many girls and women choose to remain silent for fear of censure and

retribution (Larkin, 1994; Stein, 1995). A considerable number of young women are entering the field of youth work. While instructors in the training programs should be actively engaged in challenging dominant structures and relations of power, they do not seem to offer the minimal acknowledgement of the very different ways in which women and men will experience this work. When I discussed the issue of training with several of the teachers in this study, they told me that their teacher education programs had been equally negligent in this respect.

Later in this thesis, I describe feminist pedagogy as a spiral: the effects and implications of feminist theoretical and practical work move outward and then spiral back in. This metaphor works well, I think, to describe my journey: in order to understand my experiences and those of the girls with whom I had been working, I needed to look outward, beyond the secondary environment to the university classroom and the theory I would find there. Through a focused study of feminist pedagogical theory, I was able to understand my experiences, situate these within a larger frame and context, and consider an alternative vision for teaching and learning. But when I reflected back, and inward, I had difficulty imagining how some of these theoretical concepts and prescriptives would translate into a viable practice in public schools. Researchers who were interested in the work of women teachers, and specifically feminist secondary teachers, were identifying more of these gaps and tensions. As I read through these studies, I considered the possibilities for my own, paying particular attention to those elements that seemed to invite further research and analysis.

Summary of Related Research

William Ayers begins his book, *The Good Preschool Teacher: Six Teachers Reflect on Their Lives*, with the assertion and query: "Teachers, working at the very heart of the educational enterprise, are among the silent. Where in the national reports are the voices of teachers?" (1989, p. 2). Michael Apple quotes Kathleen Casey in the preface to her book, *I Answer With My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers*

Working For Social Change: "Women teachers' own understanding and interpretation of their experiences have been, until very recently, not only unrecorded, but actually silenced" (in Casey, 1993, p. xiv).

In my review of the literature, I discovered that indeed only in the last decade have progressive women teachers been asked to speak about the realities of their work and to respond to the theory designed to guide their practice. In the following summary, I offer a brief overview of this research and within this context, will situate my own study of feminist teachers.

Kathleen Casey (1993), Sue Middleton (1993), and Kathleen Weiler (1988) document the journeys of feminist teachers who struggled to transcend the repressive circumstances of their lives to offer, in their work, an emancipatory vision for succeeding generations of students. These life stories reveal the differences in women's experiences based upon their race and class identities within particular historical periods in the United States and New Zealand. But a common theme emerged: through exposure to progressive political ideas, these women were able to make sense of their experiences and envision possibilities for change. Although dominant forces had, to varying degrees, rendered teaching an inevitable vocational choice, they continued to choose teaching. Moving from a position of being "acted upon" to that of "actor," they could struggle to make the classroom a site of political and social critique and ideally, of transformation. Weiler, referring to Freire, remarks, "critical teaching in dominant institutions means that teachers are constantly living a contradiction. But possibilities for critical work exist within that very contradiction" (p. 52).

Sari Knopp Biklen (1995), Rebecca Priegert Coulter (1995), Cheryl L. Sattler (1995) and Dee Ann Spencer (1986) illuminate more of that contradiction and its implications as they explore the lives of women teachers who are struggling for autonomy and change within the structural constraints of their position. As Sattler observes, the very nature of teaching is paradoxical: "...as teachers, they control students yet are controlled by administrators, legislation, public opinion, and each other" (1995, p. 7).

Although most teachers identify as professionals, Spencer argues that the lack of control in their work is more characteristic of blue-collar vocations (1986. pp. 7-8). As these studies reveal, teachers experience power in shifting and contradictory ways. Sattler states that teachers "control students," but later acknowledges that students *do* exercise considerable power in the classroom and through parents (1995, p. 19; Biklen, 1995, pp. 126-142). Rebecca Preigert Coulter's study reveals that women teachers who are engaged in efforts to challenge sexism become particularly vulnerable to the hostility of male students. Women teachers, in fact, are subject to a kind of dual discourse: either of sexual objectification, as Coulter's study illustrates, or as mother-figures. The discourse of service associated with this work creates serious implications for women: the notion that they are naturally equipped to provide care and nurture for students is one that, in general, remains unproblematic within the school culture. Teachers who strive, sometimes single-handedly, to meet students' diverse needs may do so at the expense of their own, resulting in professional and personal "burn-out" (Biklen, 1995, p. 183).

Compounding sources of tension emerge from stifling curriculum mandates, unequal resource allocation, and internal and external politics (Sattler, 1995, pp. 12-15). Teachers work in relative isolation but are rendered, simultaneously, the objects of public scrutiny. The teachers in both the Biklen and Spencer studies expressed their frustration with the public perception that teaching is easy and resent the criticism and blame they regularly endure.

In "Sex-Role Learning and the Woman Teacher," Rosonna Tite (1986) documents the action research project that she and five colleagues undertook in an endeavour to bring a feminist perspective to their elementary school practice. Tite was dismayed by the sex-role research that until then, had centered on "*fact-finding* and the scientific observation of teachers in classrooms" (p. 3). Such an approach, says Tite, blamed women teachers for the sex-role socialization of children which "deflected attention from the social and material conditions which shape our teaching, and the experiences of girls and boys in schools" (p. 4).

Michael Apple argues that schools are conveniently blamed for social

conditions over which they have little control; in recent years, educational institutions have been attacked for high drop-out rates, loss of standards and discipline, declining economic productivity, loss of international competitiveness, and unemployment. As Apple astutely observes, "this enables dominant groups to deflect a crisis often created by their own decisions onto schools and teachers" (in Casey, 1993, p. xi). The discourse of the new policy initiatives centers on notions of competitiveness, efficiency and accountability, with education increasingly conceived of as an "economic--not a social, political, or moral--activity" (Middleton, 1993, p. 13). As Weiler (1988) notes, feminist teachers are acting in opposition to a narrowing definition of education as a means to reproduce a trained work force for capitalism.

Within this climate, an anti-feminist backlash has produced distorted versions of what it means to be a feminist, making this a dangerous time for many teachers committed to a counter-hegemonic practice. Middleton's work with student teachers reveals the tensions that young women confront as they prepare to enter the profession. Some of her students are suspicious of her generation's versions of feminism and are concerned that involvement in feminist causes may damage their careers (pp. 12, 15). Echoing Lather (1991), Middleton argues that "such feminisms and socialisms can appear to our students as oppressive rather than empowering" (1993, p. 15).

The teachers in Casey's study are responding to the conservative climate by focusing on the pressing problems of their *immediate* social situations. While they may be required to use certain materials and produce particular results, they are taking advantage of every opportunity in which to incorporate progressive concepts and foster a critical awareness in the classroom. Some are encouraging student activism though such practice may prove professionally detrimental. Sattler suggests that teachers who engage in feminist and other political activities may risk loss of promotion, even retention of their jobs. What concerns these teachers most, however, is marginalization, that in naming themselves as feminists, they will lose the much-needed support of peers. As Sattler explains:

Clearly from the stories these teachers tell, they are aware of each other and this awareness affects them in various ways, one of which may be to choose not to identify personally or vocally as feminist or to conduct political business quietly without calling attention. Social critique and social organization exist in a very delicate balance in high schools... (1995, p. 18)

Finding ways to negotiate this balance has become the salient issue for most of the teachers in my study.

Significance of the Study

Like Casey (1993), Coulter (1995), Middleton (1993), Sattler (1995), and Weiler (1988), I hoped to learn the extent to which feminist pedagogical theory is adequately addressing the realities that feminist teachers confront in public schools. Casey, Sattler and Weiler conducted their studies in the United States, Middleton in New Zealand and Coulter in Ontario. I was curious about the similarities and differences that would emerge in my study of teachers who are working within one school district in British Columbia. Like these researchers, I would explore the ways in which theoretical formulations of voice, language, power, authority, positionality and the various feminist standpoints were translating into practice--in Chapter 5 of this thesis, I discuss some of these elements and the contradictions that evolve as teachers endeavour to offer progressive approaches in the classroom.

And yet, as I was reading Lorraine Code's book, *What Can She Know: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (1991), I became particularly interested in the broader issue of knowledge construction and its implications within the contemporary education system. Throughout the interview process, I discovered that the teachers also were eager to discuss subject content and the underpinning epistemologies that had produced the curriculum they are mandated to teach. They discussed their efforts to revise, and ideally, transform content to reflect a critical,

feminist¹ perspective, to challenge eurocentricism and androcentricism, and introduce the voices of women and members of oppressed groups that have been hitherto silenced. They described the constraints that this work poses: lack of supporting resources and materials, resistance from some male students who resent being nudged out of the "center," and from some colleagues who are stuck in the same approach to knowledge-seeking that had defined their own schooling lives. However, very little of the theoretical literature and related research has focused on content-related issues. As Sattler observes:

Recognition of [the] dialectic between personal autonomy and curricular limitations demands an explicit recognition of content as critical to feminist practice in the classroom. The majority of scholarship on feminist pedagogy, however, focuses on process to the virtual exclusion of content; such a body of work fails to describe these teachers' lives and struggles. (1995, pp. 22-23)

The theme that evoked the richest and most detailed responses from teachers was that of content--I chose, therefore, to devote the first two findings chapters to it in this thesis. The other was activism within the school and district. While feminist activism has been enthusiastically promoted in theory, once again, the structural constraints of public schools make this work profoundly challenging in practice. In most of the research, this level of feminist teachers' work has not been discussed. Through attention to content and activism, as well as pedagogical processes and methods, I have endeavoured to offer a wide-angle perspective on what might define feminist teaching in secondary schools, suggesting what is difficult, what is possible and what might still be envisioned.

¹ Throughout this thesis, I draw upon Jeanne Brady Giroux's formulation:

It is at this crossroad between feminism and a critical theory of schooling that a critical feminist pedagogy unfolds. A critical feminist pedagogy strives for education as a practice of freedom and a move towards a post-patriarchal discourse and social practice ...aimed at restructuring the relations of power in a way that enables women to speak and act as historical subjects within democratic social relations. (1989, p. 7)

Overview of the Chapters

In the following chapter, I describe the design and methodology of my research on the work of five feminist secondary teachers. In Chapter 3, I draw upon the theoretical literature and teacher interviews to examine the undergirding epistemologies that have shaped the disciplines of history (and social studies in general), English and science, exploring what a progressive approach to content might look like and, suggesting reasons for the failure of curriculum to reflect current scholarship and progressive education theory. In Chapter 4, I describe teachers' efforts to revise curriculum content in light of, and in response to, the constraints described in the previous chapter, and how this is translating into some exciting and innovative work. In Chapter 5, I explore some of the elements of feminist pedagogical theory in practice through analysis of "the classroom as a community," "authority and power," and "women's ways of knowing." In Chapter 6, I discuss teachers' activist work in the wider school environment and district. And in the final chapter, I summarize the findings of this study, discuss implications for policy, and point to opportunities for further research.

Chapter 2

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology and design of my qualitative study of five feminist secondary teachers who, at the time of the research, were working within one school district in British Columbia. I begin with a discussion of the principles that guided my approach. I then discuss the selection of participants and offer a profile of each, describing her subject foci, involvement in progressive work, and the ways in which her concern with gender issues intersected with her teaching career. I follow with a description of my approach to data collection, and the methods I employed in the analysis of the data. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the ethical considerations that were important to the research process and the final product.

An Approach Informed by Feminist Concerns

My inquiry was grounded in a qualitative methodology, using ethnographic techniques and informed by feminist concerns. These involve:

- 1) a rejection of value-free knowledge characteristic of positivism (Code, 1991; Weiler, 1988); rather, a feminist approach entails a recognition that the meanings constructed by both the participants and researcher emerge from the social positions they occupy.
- 2) a transparency in each stage of the process, that "makes visible why we do what we do--and how we do this. This self-disclosure reveals the extent to which the researcher learned about herself..." (Reinharz, 1992, p. 74).
- 3) a desire to understand the experiences of women from their own points of view (Reinharz, 1992, p. 51).
- 4) a redefinition of the relationship between the researcher and researched (Weiler, 1988, p. 59) where both become "the changer and the changed" within a process of

collaboration and negotiation (Lather, 1991, pp. 56-58).

5) an understanding of the difference between *drawing* upon feminist theory and *imposing* it (Reinharz, 1992, p. 72) and,

6) a commitment to praxis and change, not *about* but *for* women (Lather, 1991; Smith, 1979 in Weiler, 1988, p. 63). I will refer to these principles as I describe the particular elements of my research design.

Selection of Participants

In June 1995, my graduate advisor, Dr. Deirdre Kelly, suggested that my search for participants might begin with a call to a staff development director at the school board. I called and explained that I was pursuing research in feminist pedagogy and hoped to conduct interviews with approximately five women secondary teachers who were actively working to promote gender equity in their schools. The director suggested I contact a long-time member of the Status of Women Committee and provided a list of other members' names and the schools where they were teaching. I contacted this first committee member who agreed to participate in a pilot interview, but she explained that she would be retiring soon and felt that other teachers would be in a better position to participate in my study. That September, I was taking a directed readings course with Dr. Linda Peterat--she knew of a doctoral student at Simon Fraser University who was also interested in feminist pedagogy. At the same time, I was enrolled in an ethnography course, and one of our assignments was to conduct a pilot interview in order to practise some of the techniques we had been discussing. This offered a good opportunity to contact the doctoral student. After chatting a few minutes, we both realized that she had been my high school English teacher sixteen years before (her last name had changed since then). She was, in fact, the first teacher in my school life who had approached the material from a critical perspective. When we met for the interview, I had an opportunity to thank her for having offered a glimpse of the possibilities, for suggesting new ways of reading and thinking and seeing the world.

I found these pilot interviews both enlightening and productive. I had a good sense of the general themes that I wanted to pursue in my research and now a better sense of how to phrase particular questions. I learned that while these teachers had worked at opposite ends of the Lower Mainland with quite different student populations, they had been grappling with many of the same kinds of issues, confronting the same obstacles, and making use of similar opportunities as feminist teachers.

Several of the teachers I contacted referred me to colleagues who were in the process of developing gender equity programs and courses. I soon had a list of seven teachers who expressed interest in participating in the research. Two said that although they were very busy, they would be willing to participate if the other teachers could not. When the other five did confirm within the specified period of time, I thanked the first two for their offer and proceeded. The five teachers who agreed to participate had been recognized by their peers for their active involvement in equity initiatives within their schools and the district. Three of the teachers were working in east-side schools where the majority of students are from working-class backgrounds, many recent immigrants. The other two teachers were working in west-side schools where the student population is predominantly upper middle-class, also ethnically diverse. All five of the teachers in this study are white and of European heritage. According to a 1993 employment equity survey by the school district, 88% of secondary school teachers are white--it was not unexpected, therefore, that my use of a networking approach in the selection of five participants produced an ethnically homogeneous sample. I will discuss some of the implications of this in the sections, "bias and reflexivity" and "limitations of the study."

In the following profiles, I provide some background information about these teachers, taken from a demographic questionnaire and discussed in our first interviews. Marcia asked to be identified but otherwise pseudonyms have been used. I decided to begin each interview with the question: "Do you identify as a feminist?"

Teacher Profiles

Christine:

Yes, yes, in spite of the consequences...hard thing to define yourself as a feminist in a system, society that has put those in negative terms. In classrooms, teaching contexts, that can feel as though you're setting yourself up for onslaught.

Christine is white and in her mid-forties. She was born in England and spent some years there before emigrating to British Columbia, where she completed her B.A. in English and Geography and her teacher education. Since then she has worked for a number of school districts in British Columbia. Throughout her career, she has taught grades 8 to 12 in English, social studies, business, consumer education, and communications, as well as History 12 and Geography 12. The student populations with whom she has worked include mainstream, E.S.L., special education, First Nations and enriched. She currently teaches at an east-side regular school. Christine has been involved in many education-related committees such as the School Staff Committee, Equity Action Committee, Curriculum Committee, Teaching Excellence Committee, and Steering Committee, and has held a variety of positions, such as social equity resource selection reviewer and Gender Equity Representative for the district Teacher Association. She has facilitated workshops on equity and written articles for social studies education journals. She took time out from teaching on two occasions: to meet parental responsibilities and later, to pursue a master's degree in education. Christine approached her research and wrote her M.A. thesis about women social studies teachers from a feminist perspective.

When I asked Christine to describe the ways in which her concern with gender issues intersected with her teaching work, she recalled:

In my thirties, it became clear that there were some problems. Probably my biggest moments of feminist realization came out of the experience of teaching. Somewhere in my mid-thirties it became clear to me that I wasn't entitled to the same kind of voice, freedom of speech, same set of politics, informed opinion, that I was expected to be quiet, respectful, reticent, coy...It wasn't until I came here in 1984 that I began to experience the system that:

"you're not behaving like a lady, you're not a good..."

I think I slogged it through in a practice-based context of a department that was not a good place to be a woman perceived as not, you know...I slogged it through in a very practical-based way and became more aware that there were problems with the textbooks, but I didn't have the theoretical background to deal with that. I didn't have the women's history materials or knowledge particularly to remediate the problem. I could see what the problem was. So it actually came for me with starting a master's program and trying to decide along the way how I could frame the questions that would allow me to get at the theoretical support for a position or an understanding I had come to through classes. So I kind of went in blind, feeling my way, knowing I wanted to do something about women in social studies, knowing that the statistics were skewed and the curriculum was skewed. I needed to frame a series of questions that would allow me to engage in the theoretical background, understanding the reasons...

Mary:

Yes, yeah, no problem there [identifying as a feminist], even though the bad rap it gets all the time...

Mary is white and in her early thirties. She grew up in Ontario, where she received a certificate in the history of Italian and Latin literature and then completed her B.Ed in English and Social Studies, with a Specialized Honours in Philosophy and Literature. She has taught grades 8 through 12 in English, social studies, consumer education, and communications, working with mainstream, E.S.L., and enrichment students. She currently teaches at a west-side enrichment program. Mary has been the chairperson for the district Teacher Association Equity Committee, the district contact for the B.C.T.F. Status of Women Committee, and has been actively involved in a number of district-wide equity initiatives.

Like Christine, it was Mary's own experiences as a woman teacher and a recognition of the conditions girls confront in schools that propelled her into feminist teaching work:

I don't think I would have said I was a feminist in university or when I was going through teacher training, and I was never interested in women's issues specifically--I never took any courses in the women's studies department, never, you know, read women's

books just for the sake of reading them. I would have called myself a radical humanist. I was quite adamant about moral issues that involve people and not really making the separation. So the focus on, I guess, or the interest in, women's issues came here. And it came about because things that I saw were going on in the high school, things that I saw happening to the girls in the high school. And all of a sudden it, it just ah...also, I guess too, things that were happening to me. I thought, "it's no longer, I guess, legitimate to just go on my merry way, surround myself with people who were of like-mind because that wasn't possible anymore." I was in a working situation with people with very different ideas on things. And these things had to be addressed. I was pretty naive at the beginning. I remember my first year, there was a woman here who was on the gender equity committee with the [district Teacher's Association], and so she sort of became my mentor. She knew she was leaving the school system so she was kind of priming me to be the contact for [this school]. So, I'd go to the meetings and it was excellent. It was really exciting. We'd sort of share materials and discuss things. That first year we decided to do a conference, and that was my first dose of how difficult it can be in the high school to get things like that done. We had a lot of resistance...

Trish:

Before I would have said no, but now, I would [identify as a feminist].

Trish is white and in her late thirties. She grew up in Ontario and later B.C., where she earned her B.Sc. in Biology with a focus on genetics, and then received her teaching certificate. The first few years, she combined substitute teaching with raising her children. Trish has taught mainstream and enriched classes as well as providing one-to-one tutorial assistance in her school's Skill Centre. She currently teaches at an east-side school, grade 8 to 11 science, including senior biology and chemistry courses. She was involved in an E.S.L. pilot project and developed a junior science teaching guide. Her participation in a thirteen-week series of workshops on social equity laid the groundwork for the development of a women's studies course that she is currently teaching:

The way I got into the whole feminist ideas was actually through students who asked if I'd be interested in forming a club in the school [that would focus on] gender issues. There was one at [another school], associated with the YWCA. It was the girls who were feminist, who brought the issues to the school. And we just built on that and developed the whole thing into a course and so

now we have a course for credit that had to get through all that stuff at the School Board...

I grew up in Ontario and so I went to grade 13. There, it's more like you're streamed into either sciences or into business. I did have role models, female teachers in senior math and senior science. My plan wasn't originally to be a teacher--it was to be a physio occupational therapist. I didn't get accepted in the program at that time. And so then, I just kind of fell into teaching. It was always in the back of my mind whether I would be this kind of teacher or that kind of teacher, but I guess all through it I had the role models of these senior math and science teachers. If they could do it, I could do it....

Lynn:

When I asked Lynn if she identified as a feminist, she said simply, "yes." Lynn is white and in her late twenties. She grew up in B.C., where she completed her B.A. in Anthropology and History and her B.Ed. in Social Studies. She has taught social studies, English and business education; in addition, she currently teaches a social studies/women's studies course at a west-side regular school. Lynn has worked with students in mainstream and enrichment classes and she took a year's leave to travel and teach E.S.L. in South East Asia. She has served on a number of school committees, but her primary focus outside the classroom has centered on the sponsorship of girls' athletic programs.

Lynn's interest in feminist concerns developed while in the process of doing an independent project at university:

I guess in some ways I always felt that I should have all the rights and would always stand up for what I believed was right. But I knew nothing about feminism until fourth year of university, when I was taking an intellectual history course, and everything was dead white males and I was just so sick of it. And I got to do my project, and I suddenly discovered Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, all these amazing writers and what feminism meant and what it was, and so I guess that was when I really understood something about it. It was like a revelation. It was amazing, like suddenly...I can't believe I almost graduated with a B.A. having never heard of this stuff...

I saw problems right away with the curriculum and textbooks. In education, I guess that was my hidden agenda, what I was

drawn to, what I felt most seriously about, was gender issues. In social studies education, it's pretty much predominantly male. I had started reading in fourth year university for that course, and from then on, continued. But in recent years, I'm quite behind now on the latest theory--I'm quite busy with teaching... Mary brought it [a women's studies course developed by a group of district teachers] to our school...so of course I wanted to teach it. Naturally, I was dying to teach it. It's like a dream to be able to teach it...but at the grade 12 level, there were a lot of problems [getting it accepted]...

Marcia:

Of course I identify myself as a feminist.

Marcia is white and in her mid-forties. She grew up in Vancouver, where she pursued her B.A., earning First Class Honours in Anthropology and Sociology, and then her teaching certificate. In 1993, she completed her M.A. in Women's Studies, with a research focus on two women peace activists. She has been teaching for twenty years in this district, fourteen years of which she worked at enrichment programs teaching the Humanities from grades 8 to 12. She currently teaches at an east-side Bridge Program for grade 8s in math, social studies, science and English. Marcia took some time out from the secondary school environment to work as a Faculty Associate and Coordinator for a university professional development program. Her list of activities and accomplishments is extensive. She has been an active member and has held a variety of positions on many educational and professional committees, including the district Teacher's Association and the B.C.T.F Status of Women. She has developed and implemented numerous workshops, lectured on peace, the environment, gender equity, the media, and other issues related to social justice. She has developed educational packages and programs, conducted independent research and contributed to professional journals and academic publications. As Marcia said, her commitment to a feminist, socialist world view informs every aspect of her work and life as an activist and educator:

I've been a feminist since March 1968. I began when I was finishing my first year at Simon Fraser University. At that point, I was involved

in student politics quite deeply...and we got a hold of a paper, written by a number of women...called "Sisters, Brothers, Lovers, Listen," which was a little document analyzing some of the problems women felt they had doing political work inside the student movement in Ontario in the 1960s, particularly in one New Left organization called SUPA: Student Union for Peace Action. And some women friends and I were working at SFU, got hold of this and thought, "hey, this kind of makes sense." And I was taking a course at that time, which was taught by a professor named Martin Nicholas, who was one of Herbert Marcuse's graduate students, and his assignment for us was to rewrite *The Communist Manifesto* with a contemporary theme. My partner and I decided we would choose the theme of the oppression of, or discrimination against, women. We made up a manifesto which we called "The Manifesto of the Feminist Action League." After that we called a number of meetings and basically out of that little seed grew the organization, The Vancouver Women's Caucus...

So, from the late 1960s throughout the rest of my life, my life has been defined by feminism and social activism--*socialist* social activism. I felt, "I'm interested in teaching. I taught some undergraduate courses as a teaching assistant at SFU, and have really enjoyed that work," and I thought, "well, you know, perhaps that's a way I can be involved in changing the world, making the world a better place through my pedagogy as well as being involved in a kind of career that is organized, where there's an association--we weren't yet a union--and where I'd be able to get some professional satisfaction as well as be able to do work that I considered for the betterment of society both as a feminist and as a person with a socialist view of the world." So, in many ways it was serendipitous...So that definitely would have influenced my decision to become a teacher--the intersection of my feminism and my socialism--which I don't separate from how I live my life.

For Christine and Mary, the facade of gender equality finally crumbled when they began teaching in the secondary institution. I thought it was interesting that both Lynn and Marcia came to a feminist awareness through the process of doing an independent project for a university course--or perhaps I should say, came to a *fuller* awareness. These are moments of recognition, but I believe that there are many moments along the way that accumulate--perhaps what it takes is some defining experience or event that sparks, as Lynn described, that sudden sense of revelation. The fact that students approached Trish wanting their own club suggests that many young women are arriving at these awarenesses. Theorists such as Patti Lather (1991) drawing on the work of Foucault (1977), Freire (1973) and others, have endeavoured to illuminate more of that process. I don't know how or where or at what point the seeds of a "feminist consciousness" appeared in my own life. I

remember that when the high school teacher I have mentioned asked particular questions in class, I was aware of something that felt simultaneously new and yet not new--an affirmation of something already present, though it was small and vague and elusive. In my university and working life, there were more of these moments. Like Christine, I needed to engage in a focused study of feminist theory to begin to make sense of my experiences. The next step was meeting other women, teachers, in fact, who might share with me something of their own processes and how they have translated these into a vision and working practice.

Interviewing the Teachers

Prior to beginning the interviews, I sent to the teachers a list of themes for discussion (Appendix B). I wanted to allow them an opportunity to think about these themes and consider how they might respond. The list provided a sense of structure, while leaving ample room for flexibility and spontaneity.

I conducted the first set of interviews at the beginning of March 1996 and completed the final one in mid-June. The three (and in one case, two) sequential interviews with each teacher were spaced approximately three weeks apart, the last one usually following my observation of a class. I spent between 2 1/2 and 3 1/2 hours in total interviewing each teacher. I met them in their offices, their classrooms, their homes, and in one case, the children's corner of a public library. My plan for the initial interviews was to work at developing a rapport and discuss some elements of the teacher's background. I was surprised, however, at the amount of material we were able to cover, and the level of detail that emerged in the first sixty to ninety minutes.

I asked open-ended questions, and took notes; rather than interrupt the flow of the narrative, I noted points that I wanted to clarify when the opportunity arose. With each interview, the order of the questions varied--one thread of an idea would lead to another, not necessarily in the order I had planned. I wanted to offer the teachers as much opportunity for elaboration as possible, but still remain fairly

focused on the topic at hand. In one case, the teacher did stray off-topic, but I chose not to interrupt, and later was glad that I had not. In that strand of the discussion, the teacher offered some valuable insights into the ways in which educational institutions operate, and I was able to take up the same issue in my interviews with the other teachers.

I recorded each interview with an audio tape recorder. Immediately following, I transcribed the tape and sent the transcription to the teacher, requesting that she make whatever corrections, additions and clarifications she thought were needed. In the meantime, I studied each transcript, noted issues that I hoped to discuss further, and began some preliminary analysis that I could share with the teachers.

I saw the first several interviews as opportunities to learn more about this process and the skills that I needed to develop. Although I had considered carefully the phrasing of questions, during the initial interviews I realized that while some questions had seemed clear on paper, when spoken, sounded dense and convoluted. One or two questions evoked long silences--for example, when I asked the teachers in what ways they would define a feminist pedagogy, one teacher responded only when I changed the wording from "pedagogy" to "method and approach in the classroom." This served as a reminder of the different use of language in the university and public school settings, a difference to which I needed to become accustomed when I began as a graduate student. From that point on, I became more conscious of my use of jargon, making certain that I clarified with the teachers my understanding of the terms, and inquired of theirs.

But there were other reasons for the pauses and silences: one teacher described her understanding of feminist pedagogy immediately and without reservation, but the three other teachers paused at length before describing, with some hesitation and use of "meta-statements,"¹ their sense of the contradictions that have emerged in both theory and practice. I noticed that when I inquired about issues that teachers had experienced as particularly problematic, the narrative styles and

¹ Anderson and Jack, define meta-statements as "places in the interview where people spontaneously stop, look back, and comment about their own thoughts or something just said" (1991, p. 21).

speech patterns often reflected those tensions and contradictions.

Anderson and Jack (1991) describe interview strategies that may provide opportunities in which to hear the perspectives of women more accurately, suggesting that we "listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them" (p. 11). For example, an alertness to the moral language may suggest conflicts between self-concept and cultural expectations (p. 20). When discussing problems such as male dominance in the classroom, I heard evidence of this conflict: when teachers said: "obviously I'm not doing something right...it's something I have to work on," and "I'm no better than anyone else at that," what I heard was a feeling of frustration that the strategies they were employing had been only minimally effective, and that they felt a responsibility, as teachers committed to gender equity, to continue searching for ways to change this dynamic. One teacher, on several occasions, prefaced her accounts with, "I don't want to sound whiny..." As feminists, these teachers know it is important to speak of their experiences of sexism, but the internalized messages die hard that as women, we should not "complain," but quietly accept. In fact, most of these teachers have experienced the censure, the accusations of political bias and even "male-bashing" when they have worked on behalf of girls and women. I interpreted the teachers' moral language as both an echo of internalized cultural expectations and as a kind of guard in anticipation of future recriminations.

And yet the teachers were remarkably candid with me about their experiences. Subsequent to their review of the transcripts, none asked me to delete statements or in any way alter or qualify their accounting of events. I was grateful for their trust and very conscious of the responsibility to treat these disclosures with as much sensitivity as possible in the analysis and writing of the thesis.

Observations

In most cases, the final interview with the teachers took place following my observation of their classes. I was invited by Marcia, Lynn, Mary and Christine to observe classes-in-progress, and by Trish to the wrap-up party of her women's studies course. My purpose as an observer was to experience a sense of the environments in which the teachers were working, to get a snapshot of the individual teaching styles and approaches in the classroom, and have the opportunity to meet informally with some of their students. Throughout the thesis, I discuss the details of my observations as they apply to particular elements and issues. Here, I offer a brief description of my experiences, provide an account of my role as observer, and the ways in which that role differed in the various contexts.

Marcia invited me to observe her morning math and science classes at the Bridge program. During math class, the students worked independently, while Marcia and another teacher moved up and down the rows providing one-to-one assistance. I spent that time observing the students at work and reading through the poetry anthologies that they had recently composed. When one boy raised his hand, Marcia, who was busy with another student, asked if I would mind helping him. I gladly complied, though I don't know how much help I was able to offer considering he was rather more interested in pulling apart his pencil than attending to his fractions. This young man was, in fact, the only student whom I observed behaving disruptively; his apparent frustration with his work finally culminated in an explosion of temper that was quickly contained by another teacher. Following Marcia's animated, yet focused, science class, which I observed from the back of the room, I had an opportunity to chat informally with two of the girls who had contributed articulately to the discussion. They told me that they enjoyed doing science at the Bridge program, and that they were excited about moving into the "blue book" in math, which was a step up. Marcia and I retired to the teacher's lounge for lunch where we discussed the morning events, but focused particularly on the philosophy and approaches that guide her teaching practice at the program.

I was invited by Christine to observe her regular grade 11 English class and her Communications class for students who experienced academic and attention difficulties. During the English class, I remained very much as an observer, but my role became more participatory in the Communications class. That day, a guest instructor was taking the class, and most of the exercises involved small group work. I sat for several minutes with the only group of girls as they quietly followed the directions and worked together to arrive at the correct answers. I then joined the most rambunctious group of boys. They talked, joked, clowned around, but made little headway on finding the answers to the puzzle. The guest instructor explained the next assignment as he circulated a list of clues that would take the students around the school building and grounds on a scavenger hunt. I glanced at Christine to see her reaction and thought I detected her wince. As the students were getting organized, I asked Christine if I might accompany the group of boys with whom I had been working. She appeared relieved and said that she thought that would be an excellent idea. When I asked the boys if they minded my joining them, they looked slightly disappointed, but resigned.

Off we went. Out of the confines of the classroom, the boys bolted down the hall, but I managed to keep up. I think when they realized that I could be helpful in deciphering the clues, they regarded me less as an unwelcome appendage. My role as participant-observer on this occasion shifted to one of substitute authority figure. As we passed classrooms, teachers stopped speaking in mid-sentence, peered out to discover the source of so much noise, glanced at me, the boys, back at me again, and then shut their doors (sometimes with a slam). From that point on, I suggested to the boys that they be more quiet, walk rather than run, and so on, but my suggestions went mostly unheeded. We returned to the classroom with the various objects collected from the science lab and the school grounds (one such object was supposed to be a leaf, but the boys reasoned that they might get extra points for dragging in a large branch). As I collapsed exhausted into a chair in the classroom, I felt much as I usually had following "activity day" at the alternative program where I had worked two years before.

I observed Lynn's women's studies class on two occasions. On the first, the students were organized into small groups to prepare for a parliamentary simulation. I sat with one group of girls and listened as they generated ideas, and then watched a film in the second half. On my next visit, Lynn suggested I speak with the class as a whole, that I might discuss the purpose of my research and ask the students some questions. When introduced, I explained that I was a U.B.C. student concerned with gender equity in secondary schools and that Lynn had been telling me about this women's studies class and the kinds of issues they had been exploring. Stepping into the teaching role allowed me to experience first-hand, and appreciate more fully, the challenges of doing this work.

I thought an exercise might serve as a starting place for a discussion, so I asked the students to brainstorm a list beginning with the phrase: "If I were male (or female in the boys' case) I believe my life might be different in the following ways:..." I suggested topics they might consider, such as issues of safety and security, language, school life, mass media, body image, sexual relationships, family and domestic life, career opportunities, institutional power, and consumer issues, elaborating briefly on each. They organized themselves into groups and worked on their lists for about fifteen minutes. When we reconvened as a class, we talked for a few moments about several of the issues, but then focused on equity issues within the school environment and a discussion about gender and athletics followed.

Some interesting dynamics evolved, which I will discuss in more detail in the "classroom as a community" section in Chapter 5. Of the three male members of the class, two expressed annoyance at the suggestion that males and females experience some things differently (one of the boys in Mary's enrichment program responded in a like manner when I posed a similar question). The two boys did not give me their list, but the other boy offered me his, and the girls handed in theirs at the end of the class. I later read through these and found the observations perceptive and instructive. As the class ended, several girls approached Lynn and me to continue the discussion. One of the girls said that race was an important consideration, that she might have more privilege as a white woman than would a Black male in the

States or an Asian male in some contexts. I agreed. Another girl added, "but we have a lot more privilege than most--we're west-side rich kids--our experiences will be very different." As they departed, I thanked them for their insights and participation and turning to Lynn, said something like, "wow." She nodded, "yeah, they're really bright, wonderful kids."

When I attended the wrap-up party for Trish's women's studies class, I had the opportunity to meet more such students. When I inquired of a group of girls their thoughts on the course, they responded with enthusiasm, discussing the issues that had been of most interest to them. One girl seemed particularly concerned about finding employment for the summer and whether or not she would be able to finance university. I immediately recalled the conversation with the girls in Lynn's class who were aware of their privilege as "west-side rich kids" and were grappling with the complex intersection of gender, race and class. I considered these two groups of students, who were both focused on these questions, but were viewing them from opposite sides of town and very different social and economic circumstances. As I progressed through the research process, my understanding of positionality continued to evolve, challenging me to confront my own unconscious beliefs and assumptions, and to see my relationships with students in new ways.

Analysis of the Data

Analysis was ongoing throughout the period of data collection. In this section, I describe the process in some detail, concluding with a discussion of "theoretical candour," "accuracy," and "reflexivity."

With the use of memos, I coded topics from the outset and before the interviews were completed, I had begun to organize these topics into categories and set up a file for each on my computer--seventeen in total. I spent two to three weeks going through each transcript cutting and pasting, inserting the topic-sections into the appropriate category files. In the absence of a research software program, this was time-consuming work as there were numerous cross references--some transcript

sections contained references to five or six different categories, which I copied and inserted accordingly. But the result was worth the time and effort--I became well-acquainted with the data, and knew exactly where I would find each reference. I printed each file, stapled the pages together, and had a manageable stack that I could spread out on the floor and look at. I proceeded to organize the categories into larger themes: "students," "support," "knowledge and curriculum," "program development," and so on, which I placed in file folders.

At this point, I began some preliminary writing. I reread Natalie Goldberg's book, *Writing Down the Bones* (1986), and found it helpful in getting me started (and keeping me going later on). I wrote, without editing, about my impressions and interpretations of issues that had emerged most strongly for me in the interviews and observations. I returned to the literature review I had written for my thesis proposal and discovered that while some categories that I had applied (following the organization often employed in the theoretical literature) might still work, others would not, and the preliminary analysis of the data had produced new categories that did not appear in this review at all. I needed to find a way to organize the thesis that would reflect my new understandings of feminist pedagogy in practice. As discussed in Chapter 1, most of the feminist pedagogical theory and related research has focused on processes and teaching methods with minimal attention paid to curriculum content or to feminist teachers' work beyond the classroom. Yet, the question of "what" they could teach within their subject areas was as important to the five teachers as "how" to teach it--and "where" encompassed more than the classroom, but included the larger school environment and district. From this understanding emerged an organizational framework for the thesis: I would explore three elements of feminist teaching practice: curriculum content, teaching methods, and activism, incorporating into each, where applicable, the themes and sub-categories identified.

Theoretical Candour

I chose to embed the theoretical literature within the analysis to illustrate, in a direct way, the relationship between feminist pedagogical theory and secondary school practice. Through this process, I endeavoured to articulate those elements that may require ongoing analysis as well as identify the gaps that suggest opportunities for further research.

Roger Sanjek (1990) argues that a commitment to "theoretical candor" requires that the researcher make explicit both the significant theories that are initially brought to the field and the "terrain-specific theories" developed within it (pp. 395-396). In my review of the literature, I had explored questions of "power," "authority," "voice," "subjective experience," and "community," endeavouring to make sense of these through my own experiences as a student and instructor. My goal was to understand the ways in which the teachers interpret and translate these and other concepts into practice, but I believed that I would only hear their meanings if I had worked to scrutinize my own. Discussion of theory became, throughout the interview process, an enterprise of mutual inquiry, where particular themes suggested opportunities for the teachers and me to test the salient elements against our particular experiences.

I am indebted to feminist philosopher, Lorraine Code, whose book, *What Can She Know: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (1991) provided, in effect, a theoretical framework for this thesis.

Questions of Accuracy

In her study of post-war feminist teachers, Sue Middleton (1993) explains that her purpose was not to scrutinize the accuracy of a participant's past event construction, but rather to explore the significance the participant gave those events. As the teachers shared with me the salient events of their feminist work, I was concerned with the accuracy of my understanding and meaning construction, rather than

theirs. I was interested in how the teachers interpreted their past experiences and how these related to their current professional and political standpoints (Casey, 1993; Middleton, 1993). As I completed a draft of the four findings chapters, I contacted four of the five teachers (one had since moved out of province), and asked them if they would mind reviewing the manuscript. I enclosed a list of page numbers where the teachers' ideas were described and quotations were used. I indicated that I was particularly concerned with my accuracy of analysis and documentation, as well as the question of anonymity and confidentiality (which I will discuss in the section on ethical considerations). The teachers who responded said that they felt I had described their ideas and experiences accurately.

Bias and Reflexivity

"The problem is not whether the ethnographer is biased; the problem is what kind of biases exist--how do they enter into ethnographic work and how can their operation be documented" (Agar, 1980 in Ayers, 1989, p. 13).

As a feminist who has worked with secondary-age students in an alternative school program, I am extremely sympathetic to the efforts of feminist teachers. I have experienced many of the same contradictions and tensions and understand the frustration of working within a matrix of systems that does not particularly welcome change. I have encountered severe social problems in my work with high-risk youth and therefore understand the pressures that teachers and administrators daily confront. I do not subscribe to a position that makes schools the convenient scapegoats of society's problems; however, I do believe that schools can operate as sites of possibility for progressive social change. The work of teachers described in this study reveals what is possible where individuals are willing to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and practices. Like these teachers, I am white, from a middle-class background, and am currently working with E.S.L. students, all girls, many of whom are recent immigrants. I have worked with students from extremely privileged social and economic backgrounds and students who are disadvantaged in a

myriad of ways. I believe I share many of the same concerns as these teachers: to practice a feminist teaching method that can speak to the diversity of student experience, to introduce questions of privilege and marginalization in ways that encourage self-reflection on the part of both teacher and students--and I think, ultimately, to frame feminism as a work-in-progress, where young women feel encouraged to enter that dialogue, identifying elements that resonate, and yet able to critique those elements that do not adequately address their current lives and struggles, and aspirations for the future.

Ethical Considerations

In this section, I explore three tenets of research ethics and the ways in which I have interpreted these in relation to my study.

Informed Consent

David J. Flinders (1992) argues that informed consent becomes an ongoing issue in qualitative studies as researchers cannot predict "the twists and turns their work is likely to take" (p. 103). Researchers, then, must be honest and forthright with participants throughout, and aware of their own limitations. As I discussed with the teachers my plans at the outset, I was candid about my inexperience with this process, but in the balance, assured them that I would be conscientiously working towards negotiation and collaboration. I was clear that if at any point they felt uncomfortable with the process, they should not hesitate to tell me, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. While I did not disguise the fact that I was conducting the study to fulfill my requirements for a degree, my commitment to the principles of respect and reciprocity made the integrity of my work of primary importance.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Because qualitative researchers "strive to render vividly the lives of those studies," the question of confidentiality becomes somewhat problematic (Flinders, 1992, p. 103). Other than the use of code names to disguise the identities of individuals and institutions, I realized that there was no quick and easy formula to guarantee the teachers' anonymity. As I was writing, this issue was uppermost in my mind, and there were points at which I confronted difficult choices about what to include--such moments I endeavour to make explicit in the thesis. In the introduction, for example, I decided to exclude certain details of teachers' work lives that may have compromised their anonymity. When I sent the teachers copies of the manuscript, I pointed to particular sections that, in retrospect, might have created some concerns for them. Trish admitted that there was a chance that she might be recognized but assured me that I need not change any of the text pertaining to her experiences, adding, "I stand by what I've said." As mentioned earlier, Marcia asked to be identified and that her real name be used.

Reciprocity

In her formulation of research as praxis, Patti Lather (1991) argues that "dialectical practices require an interactive approach to research that invites reciprocal reflexivity and critique, both of which guard against the central dangers of praxis-oriented work: imposition and reification on the part of the researcher" (p. 59). To ensure a maximal approach to reciprocity, she suggests that we need to move beyond a willingness to share preliminary descriptions of the data to a process in which there is a collaborative effort to build empirically rooted theory. An interview environment should be created that is dialogic and interactive, that encourages self-reflection on the part of both researcher and researched, and provides a space in which the resonance of conceptual formulations can be tested. Sequential interviews with the teachers, I think, facilitated this process of self-reflection and

testing of concepts. When I met the teachers for the second or third interviews, they often picked up on issues that were previously discussed--adding, clarifying, offering new insights. Although I was inexperienced with this process, I endeavoured to offer the dialogic interview environments that Lather describes.

When I spoke with Trish after she had an opportunity to read the thesis, she said that it was helpful for her to learn of other teachers' experiences and know hers were not unique. "Reading it," she said, "reiterated for me what I want to do...to keep going forward." Lynn sent a very kind note in which she said, "this is important work. Thank you for doing it." I hope the final product does some justice to their generosity.

Limitations of the Study

In this study I focused on the experiences and understandings of five teachers who are working to promote gender equity in secondary schools. My research design, for reasons of manageability, did not include interviews with students; I do not offer, therefore, in-depth analyses of students' perspectives in this thesis nor do I venture beyond quite general discussions of how other social equity issues intersect with gender in the various schools. This should not imply, however, that the teachers in this study are insensitive to inequities based on race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation within the secondary school setting. Quite the contrary. Teachers such as Christine and Trish have been intensively involved in SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity), a district-wide project that has united anti-racist and anti-sexist perspectives and goals. As the profiles in Chapter 4 illustrate, these teachers are finding creative ways to reach towards these goals in their classrooms. Several teachers--particularly those working in the east side--expressed concerns related to class issues. Marcia, for example, described her feminist beliefs as being inseparable from her socialist world view, and has been involved for many years in labour union and anti-poverty organizing. Trish discussed the conditions for gay and lesbian students and was dismayed that secondary schools, for the most part, have chosen to

remain silent on this issue. I feel it is important to mention that sensitivity to the teachers' privacy prevented me from inquiring about their own sexual orientations, and while several teachers voluntarily shared with me some general information about their family lives, I chose not pursue questions of this nature in my interviews.

While feminists of the past were seriously remiss in their failure to take into account the intersecting subjectivities of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, theorists are now placing these issues front and center, looking for ways to build coalitions between feminist, materialist and anti-racist perspectives and initiatives, and to anticipate the opportunities and challenges that teachers will experience as they work to bridge these theories to practice in schools. As mentioned, all of the teachers in this study are white and middle class, and yet many of their students are recent immigrants coming from both industrial and developing nations, of predominantly Asian heritage (including South and South East Asian) and some of Latin American heritage. Each of the five teachers and all of their students are carrying with them particular understandings and perspectives as they approach feminist work. A central task in contemporary feminist work, in fact, requires examination of one's unconscious beliefs and assumptions, and reflection upon how these have been shaped by the social position one occupies. In my conversations with several of the teachers, I heard evidence of this self-work, work that is not easy and not without its contradictions. On occasion, teachers speculated about culture and class differences in ways that I did not feel competent to pursue in this thesis. For example, several of the teachers expressed their concern about some girls who seem to be struggling to reconcile an emerging feminist consciousness with some of the "traditional" values with which they have grown up, values that may, or may not, be culture and class-based. In most cases, I felt that the teachers were sensitive to, and seeking to understand, differences, while wanting to avoid generalizing or making assumptions based on the backgrounds of their students.

Lynn described feminist teaching work in the public school context as "walking a careful line." There were many moments throughout the research process that I

too felt I was walking that line, as I had to reach a decision about what I could, and could not, investigate adequately given the limits of time, access to resources, and of my own expertise. As I discuss in the final chapter, there are many opportunities for further research on social equity work in secondary schools. In doing this study, I hope to contribute one small piece to an ever-expanding puzzle.

Chapter 3

Epistemological Considerations

Before I could visualize how progressive theories of knowledge might look in practice, I needed to examine what constitutes the current curriculum and the forces that have shaped it. In this chapter, I begin at the beginning: in the jumbled vestry of old and new ideas, pulling away the surface layers to glimpse the epistemological foundations of the disciplines of social studies, English and science. The five teachers in the study formulate and practice their feminist work within these frames; I wanted to learn how they understand the development of theory within each and how they explain the failure of curriculum to reflect those developments. In asking such questions, we could begin to address the larger purpose of this study: why a feminist pedagogy and what elements are possible in secondary schools?

Marcia:

Curriculum choosers have not kept up with what is, by any measure, good scholarship. They just haven't bothered...

Social Studies: Beyond a "Few Queens and a Famous Abbess"

In "Doing History Today," feminist historian, Dorothy O. Helly, describes the shift from a literary history to a "scientific" history that had occurred by the beginning of the twentieth century. This new history focused on uncovering documents that would tell us what we needed to know about the past in order to understand the present, a belief assumed universal and gender-neutral:

Yet history was first and foremost the history of political institutions, and such institutions were implicitly understood by those who wrote, taught, and learned history as masculine in character. A second assumption made by scientific historians, in their search for evidence of the progress made on behalf of constitutional liberties and parliamentary institutions, was that fundamental change was unilinear. For English historians and

many of their American cousins, there was also a shared assumption about the central role played in this process by the "Anglo-Saxon race." Scientific historians nonetheless saw their scholarship as a search for the truth about the past as revealed by their sources and viewed the aim of their profession as objective. Because their methods were "scientific," their results must represent single, impartial truth. (1992, pp. 126-127)

We continue to know and teach an interpretation of history that is androcentric, eurocentric and yet allegedly neutral. But theory and on-going historiographic work has progressed well beyond this approach to the discipline. Two teachers in the study, Marcia and Christine, have done extensive work in these areas and spoke with candour about the most serious problems with the social studies curriculum and how it must change if it will begin to reflect current scholarship. If women and other marginalized groups are to be represented in curriculum, and not merely as superficial add-ons, but with richness and accuracy, the entire approach to social studies needs radical rethinking. Within the traditional study of history, with its focus upon great persons and fixation on major political events, publishers have responded to the inclusivity issue by placing a few prominent women in textbook sidebars. As Helly observes, "only women whose lives impinged upon this public arena, a few queens, a famous abbess, a Joan of Arc, a royal mistress who traded in court favors, entered the realm of high politics and therefore of the historically significant" (1992, p. 128).

But as Marcia argued, even this most conservative approach to history is inaccurate: many women were agents of social change and were recognized in their time. She cites, for example, women like Bertha von Suttner who, as a writer and organizer, was profoundly important to social and peace movements in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Why such women are no longer visible is a question that students do not have opportunities to explore because current historiographical scholarship is not translating into most curriculum content. Questions such as: "what is history? who decides what will be included in the record? and what criteria is used to make that decision?" open the kind of inquiry in which students should be engaged--and will need to be--if they choose to pursue study in this discipline. More

seriously, those students who do not continue will leave school with the impression that history is a linear, cause and effect enterprise about the experiences of a select group of privileged European men and their orchestrations of war. Marcia:

If I wanted to spend time on the women's suffrage movement or the women's peace movement in Europe and North America, that would have no place whatsoever in that world history course taught in grade 12. It wouldn't be considered "history." Because we still are expected to teach a particular theory of what knowledge is and how you get it and how you should be delivering it, changing that really isn't a very big issue. So if you have a little more sophisticated understanding...you just ignore what they tell you and hope to hell you've got enough time to fit in all the other stuff as well as try to teach to the exam.

If the approach to this most conservative interpretation of history is inadequate, it is not surprising that most curricula resources have ignored important developments in the area of social history. If students are to understand women's historical participation, they need an introduction to basic theories of social organization that have been formulated within other disciplines. As Christine argued, the curriculum should make room for this kind of work:

The bounding of knowledge is an anachronism. Knowledge isn't bounded into these neat little disciplines that we've put them into. Social studies is a perfect place to do the interdisciplinary because it isn't just history, geography, and a little bit of political science and current events. It *is* sociology, anthropology, archaeology. We can do all of that.

Having students trace the ideology of separate spheres might provide a point of departure. When I have asked students what they think most women were doing in the midst of some historical event, they generally answer "looking after things at home." When I inquire, "what kinds of work do you think women were doing at home?", they reply, "what women have always done." It is this assumption about women's unchanging and unilinear role in the scheme of things at least partially accounts for their invisibility in the historiographic record. As Helly argues, the

"scientific" history of the nineteenth century was developed within the ideological context of discrete social realms. Nineteenth century beliefs about women's essential nature, their bodies, and their actual or potential role as mothers relegated them to the domestic sphere as the guardians of society's morals and manners. While the public realm--which had by this point been identified with men--was subject to profound and rapid change, the female realm of middle and working class domestic life appeared to be the static and predictable center around which that change revolved (1992, p. 128).

Helly goes on to argue that although nineteenth century world travellers provided evidence that family organizations might be different in different cultures, the assumption remained that women's nurturant roles did not alter over time, that men alone were responsible for social change. And yet, within their midst, the seeds of the women's movement were germinating. As Marcia explained, the flowering of political democracy--no matter how inadequate--allowed women to come together in a movement that eventually attained suffrage and opened up a whole variety of new options. While groups at the grass-roots level have profoundly affected culture, consciousness and political development, their influence has been largely ignored.

This omission is one that feminist scholars have been redressing and is of particular concern to feminist teachers. Students need to understand the historical struggle of women to organize and work collectively and link that struggle with the social and political achievements of the twentieth century (Briskin, 1990). When most students are confronted with questions about gender equity, their knee-jerk response is that "things are changing." Because no one has challenged them to consider *who* has done that work nor under what conditions that struggle has taken place, they seem to assume that progressive change occurs naturally and all in good time. It is ironic that education rhetoric eagerly promotes "student agency" when half the student population will complete secondary school without having learned anything about people like themselves who have successfully effected change. As feminist philosopher, Lorraine Code, observes:

The problem is that for a woman to believe in her competence to evaluate and challenge authority she needs faith in the credibility of her judgement. Circumspection is a luxury reserved for people who have succeeded in achieving the conviction that people like themselves *can* plausibly claim authority. (1991, p. 187)

The study of "government" in social studies fails to encourage a sense of civic responsibility or a desire to participate in the democratic process, and while most young people feel detached from this process, the problem, as Code suggests, is compounded for girls who see few women in public leadership. Christine described the current curriculum as inadequate at the theoretical level and a total failure as preparation for citizenship:

It really bores kids to tears, this very detached study of government, which is not about active citizenship and is not about the way most of them will participate in society and culture and communities. It's a very detached, formalized relation of the individual to the state, to these predominantly male figures who are at a remarkable distance. There's not a sense that as students they can participate, make change, do things within their school, within their neighbourhoods, within their community. It's painful dragging them through it.

While social studies is a subject that could connect meaningfully to students' lives, instead it has become an exercise in missed opportunities. This is particularly so for girls, and for students from cultural groups that have been largely ignored. Issues of culture, class and gender difference are not merely theoretical questions to ponder for these teachers but create in practice daily challenges and contradictions. In this district, student populations have diversified so rapidly in recent years that many teachers have had to scramble to create lessons that will meet the varied and multiple needs of their classes. If enlightened resources were selected to support these efforts, opportunities for exciting and creative work might flourish. Yet, Christine described the resources on global issues, for example, as dated, non-inclusive and in some ways, reinforcing the stereotypes that should be unpacked. "I'm teaching students about the developing world who know the developing world better than I do. They've all lived there. It's just a bizarre notion."

Helly says: "Doing history today entails focusing on the plurality of women's experiences: the ways women divide by race, ethnicity, and class, by age and sexual preference; the lives women have led as serfs and slaves...as immigrants or migrants...in urban, suburban, and rural situations..." and so on (1992, p. 132). And yet, doing the history *curriculum* today entails focusing on much of what it always has.

Both Marcia and Christine were unequivocal in their analyses of the problem: some individuals involved in the curriculum selection process are unfamiliar with the most recent scholarship and lack sufficient understanding of progressive theory developed within it. When, for example, Christine was reviewing resources for social studies, she pointed to the exclusion of First Nations women in the "New World" unit, but her concerns were dismissed by a colleague who lacked any knowledge of the current writing on this topic:

A master's degree in history that clearly hadn't heard of Sylvia Van Kirk or any of the work around Native women in the fur trade. A major, major factor in the success of the fur trade was the Native women and their role as translator and their role providing the means of survival, the food, the tanning of the furs. None of that did he know anything about, and he told me that it was inappropriate to expect a book to do what historians hadn't done. So that was the level of preparation and understanding...

If those involved in the selection of resources are not familiar with theoretical developments, Christine argued that they should, at least, be willing to defer to those who are. She suggested that this willingness must extend to all elements of content selection. If a film about Buddhism is up for review, people belonging to that community should have an opportunity to critique it for accuracy. "It's just unacceptable," said Christine, "for us still to be claiming the authority that we know about Buddhism, when we're not Buddhist. Just as a matter of courtesy to say, 'we think this is okay, could you please, someone in the Buddhist community, tell us if this is an accurate depiction'."

It is not only those involved in the process of selection and review who may

resist a progressive approach. Christine has observed that some teachers in the field are reluctant to embrace any substantive change to curriculum content because they are comfortable teaching only what they were taught:

I find it remarkably ironic that we teach for a lifelong love of learning and yet somehow stop after we graduate from university. And part of the mandate is for us to keep on top of what the direction changes are. We wouldn't expect people to be teaching science that's thirty years out of date, or computer studies that's thirty years out of date, but history and geography tend to be.

Part of the resistance may involve a lack of familiarity with the new approaches to textbook publishing. Christine suggested that these new books may appear to teachers interrupted and less dense in content, and yet they have been carefully designed to engage young people. Some publishers have attempted to incorporate the different voices of an historical account by using different text type and fonts. While these experiments may provide a stepping stone, teachers themselves need to become willing to take risks in the classroom and find support for their efforts to facilitate discovery rather than merely transmit facts to passive students (hooks, 1994).

Most teachers will acknowledge that this educational "banking system" as described by Freire (1988 in hooks, 1994) simply does not work for the majority of students. David Perkins observes: "A good deal of the typical curriculum does not *connect* --not to practical applications, nor to personal insights, nor to much of anything else" (1993, p. 90). He echoes Dewey's argument that a focus on generative concepts rather than inert information is key to a connected, meaningful curriculum. Yet as Mary observed, most teachers feel overwhelmed with content, leaving little time to make these connections. She feels fortunate that teaching in an enrichment program allows her greater freedom to offer a thematic approach:

In social studies, most of the teachers feel that they're bound to the text. They have to teach from this time period to this time period and they have to get through it. And generally, it's always packed...I actually have more power than most because it's a special program.

You get away with a few things. I use the text as sort of background: this was what was happening at the time...So I get to fool with it a bit and I get to use social studies the way I think it should be used, which is not objective tests and names and dates and chronology and what came first, second and third, because a lot of kids don't learn that way. I did sort of informal studies on retention and a week after a test: the kids had--what was it that I noticed in my class?--six percent retention of the material. So they're memorizing, memorizing, memorizing, spitting it out and then forgetting it. So my goal is to try and get them to glom all the information around a theme and get them to remember that way because it's significant in some way.

Where possible, Lynn uses the available course text as only one resource, and pulls material from a variety of other sources that offer a feminist focus. Yet her efforts are often frustrated by the lack of accessible information on the participation of women within particular historical and cultural contexts; searching for this information can be extremely time-consuming. On several occasions, however, this negative inadvertently translated into a positive, affording Lynn's students the opportunity to develop their skills as researchers:

My grade 10 girls, who are pretty vocal and who know me--I taught many of them in grade 9 so they have certain expectations--are saying to me, "well, what were the women doing? Where were the women? What was going on?" So they're starting to demand it of me which makes me go, "Yes!" But at the same time, I don't always know the answer. So, I mean, I have to search for it too--that's the whole point, that's the problem. My grade 10s demanded this when we were looking at the gold rush, and so I sent students off to [the library]. I just had no time.

And finally there is the troubling issue that Christine had long suspected and confirmed in the process of doing her own research: the disproportionate number of men heading social studies departments and teaching senior courses undermines, in both subtle and overt ways, possibilities for progressive work. How many of them, asks Christine, might be willing to do the theoretical and practical work necessary to structure a curriculum that is truly inclusive?

What are the hopes of a curriculum to reflect any feminist

understanding if we really are going by a consensus of what the mostly male teaching force is going to allow? And then there's the other question of if they aren't sensitive to the issues, do we really want them teaching it? I'll never forget the student teacher who taught women's issues in developing countries and her male sponsor teacher retaught it the next day as "myths"--the "myths" of the situations for women in developing countries.

Apparently, this level of denial is not particularly uncommon, and here lies the dilemma. It is not sufficient to revise curriculum without challenging the entrenched beliefs of those who presumably would be teaching it. But the question is how to open a dialogue with people, like this sponsor teacher, who seemed determined to stay locked into his own kind of myth-making. In most cases, the teachers recognize the futility in confronting these individuals; instead, as will be discussed in the chapter about activism, they work to create environments where alternative ways of thinking about, and being in, the world become possible. If some students and educators never set foot in an equity-related course, program, or conference, the mere existence of these projects still communicates a message: that the official curriculum might not cover all things worth knowing, and that it is not only possible, but valid, to bring social critique into the world of the school.

English Literature: Beyond *Lord of the Flies*

Marcia:

The problem isn't only that there aren't enough women represented ...but that excellent women's writing--judged to be excellent when first published before the turn of the century up until the 1950s--has been systematically excluded, out of complete ignorance...I'm not talking about literature in translation. I'm just talking about one tiny period that has never been adequately represented. For a second-rate novel like *Lord of the Flies*--which is still being taught everywhere--to go without a complimentary piece of writing by a contemporary British woman writer like A.S. Byatt or Margaret Drabble or Edna O'Brien or Anita Brookner, you can recite all the Booker prizes won by women, it's ridiculous...

As we discussed English resources, three different teachers referred to the

novel *Lord of the Flies* so that it became a kind symbol for the failings of the English curriculum. I read that novel in high school seventeen years ago, I am still having to teach it to my E.S.L. students, and like Marcia, I cannot fathom the logic of making this particular book a course staple when so much superior work by women has been excluded. While a number of novels and works of short fiction by women find their way into the curriculum, I find that students may read only a few women authors a year. This tokenization is problematic on a number of levels. With such limited exposure to women's voices, students receive the implicit message that "women writers" are the exceptions to a masculine norm, reinforcing the belief that only stories by and about males are worth hearing. And with such little variety, the plurality and diversity of women's voices go unheard.

Because Lynn teaches a women's studies/social studies class, she feels free to introduce these voices and explore literary themes of a decidedly feminist, political nature:

We're reading *The Handmaid's Tale* with my women's studies class right now and they're loving it, but I'm sure you would have a lot of [resistance] doing that with a regular English 12 class, you'd be in for a rocky road.

From the outset, Lynn's women's studies class is concerned with questions of ideology, power, and such issues as reproductive rights that are explored in this novel. However complex or controversial the topic, Lynn can expect her students to engage in a fairly sophisticated level of discussion. Yet, she and the other teachers in this study have found that this level is rarely achieved with most groups of students. I will explore the possible causes for this in the chapter on teaching methods. But among the most glaring is that few students have had the opportunities to develop the understandings and skills necessary for productive participation in a classroom dialogue (Das Gupta, 1994; hooks, 1994).

Feminist teachers are, in fact, endeavouring to provide the important learning experiences that have been neglected in the traditional curriculum. But in starting progressive work, even at a basic level, they must be prepared to encounter

resistance from some students (and some parents), and be willing to explain, carefully and patiently, motives that should be obvious. When, for example, Mary taught the *The Joy Luck Club*, a number of boys in her class responded angrily to the inclusion of the novel, insisting to know why she wasn't teaching something that reflected their interests. She then received phone calls from the boys' parents who demanded, "how could these boys possibly relate to a novel about Chinese women?"

So [the boys] were upset from the beginning of the unit to the end of the unit. And the only people who had read books that had female protagonists were the grade 10s because I had them last year. But by and large, the kids had not read a book with a female protagonist before. And certainly the grade 9 boys hadn't. So there were two things: one was that the protagonists were Chinese, and the other was that they were female, mother-daughter relationships. And those who were non-Chinese and male had a double wammy, right? They felt that they couldn't relate to any part of the book...You *never* hear the girls say, "why are we just teaching *Catcher in the Rye*? Why do we always have to have male protagonists?" You'll never, ever hear that. But the minute you do one thing [about women], then you're "anti-male."

Mary has observed that, in general, girls appear to be much better able than boys to relate to a theme or concept as opposed to the literal presentation of a text. She suggested that the dearth of books featuring women protagonists has forced girls to step outside their realm of experience, to look beyond the particulars of the story and grapple with the larger themes. They have grown accustomed to meeting characters who are unlike them and so become skilled at finding other ways to relate to a work of fiction. This poses an interesting paradox. Boys are assumed to be less capable readers and this has at least partly justified the predominance of curricular material believed to engage their interest (Tyack & Hansot, 1990). And yet perhaps they would be better served reading about unfamiliar characters and situations from an early age. With less pandering, more boys might learn to read with the kind of patience and sophistication that many girls achieve. This is, I acknowledge, speculation. The important point here is that boys would learn to step outside *their* experience and become accustomed to seeing the world through the other's eyes.

Perhaps then, reading a book like *The Joy Luck Club* in a senior English class would not be perceived as such an affront.

In recent years, concerned educators have attempted to create a more balanced English curriculum, particularly at the elementary level. But if Mary's experience is typical, the offerings become increasingly narrow at each level, with students exposed less and less often to a variety of women's work. And the problems do not end here. Just as in history, women's participation in social, political movements has been ignored so, observed Marcia, have their contributions to important movements in literature. In consequence, little attention is paid to the social stigmatization and economic hardships endured by many women who sought an education and dared to speak their truths. *Wuthering Heights* is an optional novel on the grade 12 syllabus. In the course of teaching this or any 19th or 20th century work by women, there are many opportunities to discuss the prejudices and obstacles that they encountered in their struggle to enter and transform the "public" world of ideas.

The point is that the English curriculum can and should be so much more than it is. A feminist approach to a study of literature extends beyond equalizing content; it is enriched through a willingness to examine lives, both actual and fictional, in all their variety, and situate these in the social, philosophical, and political tapestry of their time.

Science: Beyond Neutrality and False Dichotomies

When taking stock of social studies and English curricula, the question becomes *how* to effectively transfer the progressive theories formulated within these disciplines to secondary school practice. When discussing the physical sciences, however, we need to ask a more fundamental question: *what* exactly would a feminist approach to the science curriculum look like?

As Code (1991) concedes, knowledge of objects is very different from knowledge of people, but it does not follow that the salient epistemological questions that arise in a critique of the social sciences are irrelevant to a critique of the institutions and

methodology of "pure" and "exact" science. Wherever people are engaged in the pursuit and production of knowledge, some measure of subjectivity is in operation.

Feminist social scientists and historians recognize that the gender as well as the class, race and other subjectivities of the knower is epistemologically significant and must be factored in to every inquiry. A cognizance of positionality means there can be no neutral account: the author of events becomes as important as the events themselves, an awareness tantamount to a feminist, critical teaching practice (Das Gupta, 1994; hooks, 1994; Weiler, 1988).

Likewise, in feminist critiques of the physical sciences, the so-called neutrality of the experimenter/knower is made suspect. As Code contends, in Baconian, positivist, twentieth-century empiricist tradition, the faceless scientist (white and male) observes a medium-sized object to create an "S knows that p" epistemology to serve as the "building blocks from which knowledge is made" (1991, p. 128). According to the ideal of objectivity, observers are emotionally distanced from the objects of their observations--the subjectivity of the former (and latter where applicable) is deemed irrelevant. And yet this tradition has only masked its very subjective motives and purposes:

...for all its self-proclaimed objectivity, there is evidence that its hegemony is sustained by *subjective* forces: by interest and self-interest. It is difficult to evade the conclusion that the very ideal of objectivity that urges the suppression of subjectivity (emotionality) is itself as much a product of emotional circumstances (*subjective* enthusiasm and interests) as it is the produce of a 'natural' flowering of intellect detachedly knowing the world. (Code, 1991, p. 48)

Code goes on to suggest:

If the makers of hegemonic knowledge--both scientific and otherwise--were self-scrutinizing, presenting themselves as fact makers rather than fact finders...then inquirers would be obliged to evaluate the locatedness of every discovery and to acknowledge the contingency of the privilege that positions certain 'knowers' as *fact makers*...If *his* knowledge is demonstrably shaped by his subjective position and masculine socialization, then it loses its *prima facie* claim to superiority over *hers*. (1991, p. 250)

The ways in which this privilege have been constituted historically is tied to the system of dichotomies that has constructed much of our approach to knowledge-seeking. A series of decisions--sustained by political and economic interests--produced that system in which objectivity, reason and autonomy became accepted as masculine in character, public in manifestation and epistemically important, while subjective experience, emotion, and interdependence were seen as discrete processes akin to the feminine, belonging to the private sphere and therefore of cognitive inferiority (Code, 1991). Alison Jaggar describes the "nature/culture" split that underlies the rest:

The long western philosophical tradition equates women and "the feminine" with nature, men and "the masculine" with culture. That tradition has been explicitly misogynistic. Women have been seen as closer to animals, both because they lacked reason and because the functioning of their bodies has been thought to commit them to the repetitive biological reproduction of the species. Men's bodies, by contrast, have been thought to allow them to transcend this biological repetition through the creation of "culture."
(1988, p. 96)

This dichotomization became an organizing formula for society that affected all institutions (Helly, 1992, p. 135). Laurien Alexandre argues that it "legitimized women's subordination and the appropriation of women's non-wage labor" (1989, p. 5). She cites Maria Mies (1986, 1988) and others who maintain that "...women's subordination--as was the case with the colonization of the Third World--was a necessary precondition for capital accumulation" (p. 5). As Code suggests, science in western societies shows traces of the Baconian empiricist view of the Great Chain of Being: the hierarchy that placed man above woman and human beings above nature, succeeded in justifying the exploitation of the natural world (and women and the working classes) in order to serve the interests of the powerful.

A recognition of these interests, says Code, recalls us to the necessity of a case-by-case critique of the sources from which claims of objectivity and neutrality emerge. We need to understand the deep-rooted androcentricity in "malestream epistemology" that claims to account for all human experience, and yet focuses

almost exclusively on the experiences of a privileged group of men. The knowledge that women have constructed from their traditional areas of experience is afforded no epistemic status. Yet, as Code argues, such knowledge (midwifery or cookery) would meet the most rigorous tests that objectivists demand (it is testable across a wide variety of circumstances).

Just as in social studies students should be engaged in historiographical inquiry, they can apply the same critical approach to science, pursuing such questions as: "what counts as scientific knowledge? what are some examples of women's traditional areas of expertise? why were these suppressed, co-opted, pushed to the margins in the dawning of the "scientific" era? what happened to women's discoveries? and what happened to those women?"

The mystification of women's experiences under the banner of "human experience" has had serious implications, extending beyond questions of epistemology into the realm of current research. In 1995, Canada's three granting councils--which provide \$800 million to researchers annually--scrutinized their own ethical practices and acknowledged the harm done to women who are routinely prescribed drugs that have been tested almost exclusively on men (*Vancouver Sun*, Jan. 30, 1995).

Whether women are excluded from or singled out for scientific research often has hinged on the basis of their reproductive capacities. A documentary entitled *The Human Laboratory*, uncovers the abuse of women in developing nations by certain contraceptive drug companies. The seemingly calculated negligence to meet the most basic ethical research standards and the consequent suffering of profoundly disadvantaged women serves as a reminder that we can not relax our scrutiny of such institutions, particularly where the potential for material profit and political gain is greatest.

Marcia has been actively engaged in this critique. In her article "New Reproductive Technologies: a feminist caution" (1996), she argues that before we embrace such technologies, we need to consider carefully their potential implications, understanding the ideology that has made motherhood a defining

biological, social, even moral imperative for women. I learned from our interviews that while Marcia has confidence in the intellectual and ethical integrity of most scientific research, she believes, nonetheless, that responsible citizenship entails an ongoing effort to be informed, a readiness to critique both motives and consequences and a willingness to participate in public dialogue. Near the close of her piece on NRT, she cautions against a passive reliance on technology predicated on a belief that scientific advancement can correct all our imperfections, solve all our human dilemmas:

It is ironic indeed that the brilliant foremother of European women's political organizing, Mary Wollstonecraft, died of peritonitis after giving birth to a daughter, Mary Godwin, later Mary Shelley, author of Frankenstein. That novel told of lives ruined in the pursuit of scientific perfection and the ultimate creation; a "man" who could be controlled by his creator. Man playing God. Man defying Nature. It warned of the arrogance of a science unmediated by humanistic values.

So what has this all to do with a progressive science curriculum? If the overarching purpose of schooling is teach young people how to become responsible citizens within a democracy, educators need to help them think through the kinds of complex social and ethical issues that the dizzying progress of science and technology will demand. For years, theorists have been formulating approaches to teaching controversial issues and active citizenship in schools (Beck, 1971; Berman, 1990; Bridges, 1986; Chamberlin, 1991; Rudduck, 1986; Schukar, 1993; Stenhouse, 1969). Yet for the most part, those involved in the development of curriculum--perhaps constrained by conservative forces--seemed to have ignored this work. The current rhetoric insists that we "prepare" students with technological skills so that we may participate competitively in the global marketplace of the coming century. But without tools that enable students to critically analyze that marketplace, we reproduce the status quo, a hegemony based on consumerism rather than citizenship, and on achieving economic advantage, indifferent to those who are most disadvantaged by that exercise.

When I asked Trish, who teaches senior science, the extent to which the

curriculum is supporting this kind of inquiry, she said "not at all." Apparently, the new science textbooks (which incidentally, Trish's school cannot afford) show women scientists succeeding in this male-dominated discipline. But I wonder if these books explore the contributions of such scientists as Anne Fausto-Sterling, Evelyn Fox Keller, or Donna Haraway, whose feminist critiques and revolutionary practices have challenged the epistemological foundations, methods and institutions of mainstream science. As they expose the inadequacies of existing theories, they pose alternative visions and approaches, and open spaces for new theories to emerge.

Fausto-Sterling, a developmental biologist, has, along with other biologists (Ruth Bleier, Ruth Hubbard, Sue Rosser, Ruth Doell, and Linda Birke), pointed to the denigrating treatment of women and the feminine in much biological research. In her book, *Myths of Gender* (1985), she challenges biological determinism in sociobiology and other fields to reveal how the conclusions derived from it have perpetuated a male dominated society (Longino & Hammonds, 1990, p. 166). Evelyn Fox Keller, a mathematical biologist, with early training in physics, became internationally known for her biography of geneticist Barbara McClintock (1983) and her discussion of the masculinity of science in *Reflections on Gender and Science* (1985), where, reflects Longino and Hammonds, she argued that during the 17th century, the sciences were appropriated (or re-appropriated) as a masculine domain "in terms congenial not only to the new experimental science but also to new ideals of gender" (p. 168). Donna Haraway, a trained biologist, explores, in *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (1989), the science of primatology and the stories of human origins that are purported to explain what is natural in human nature.

Haraway reads and encourages us to read primatological texts... not for what they tell us about human nature, or the various primate species, but for what they tell us about their authors, not as individuals, but as spokespersons for their cultures...By showing the mutability of primatological visions in response to different human social and economic preoccupations, Haraway invites us to cast away our own preoccupation with objectivity, truth, and getting it right. (Longino, 1990, p. 170)

Academic philosopher, Sandra Harding, has made another important contribution to this dialogue. In her book, *The Science Question in Feminism* (1986), she explores epistemological questions and how these relate to social and political theory. Rejecting positivism, Harding seeks to remake knowledge, to create, observes Longino, "a new vision of the unity of science, a vision in which reflexive and self-critical social sciences occupy the foundational place occupied by physics in the positivists' vision" (Longino & Hammonds, 1990, p. 171).

As Fausto-Sterling, Keller, Haraway and Harding have interrogated and critiqued mainstream epistemologies, they have also revealed and challenged the structures of power that have shaped and sustained them. I would not be surprised, therefore, to learn that their contributions have been excluded from most mainstream textbooks. Any work done in the area of gender equity in secondary school science has focused solely on providing better access and opportunities for girls. The issue of access, however, is complex and problematic, and the tensions are reflected at each institutional level. Here, I will describe something of how this issue has played out in the secondary context, but it is one that continues to evoke debate between feminist academics and some women scientists, particularly those who have "made it" in the male bastion of the "hard" sciences.¹

Recent statistical analyses of standardized tests have suggested that the "gender gap" in education is closing. Articles in the print media, such as "Girls now beating

¹ See Longino and Hammonds, "Conflicts and Tensions in the Feminist Study of Gender and Science" (1990). In the section, "The Matter of Women in Science," Hammonds describes the conflict that has evolved between feminists who are engaged in critiques of science and some women scientists who perceive this kind of inquiry as more harmful than helpful. She observes:

Many of these women scientists focus on "fitting" women to science, while denouncing the idea that science is a necessarily male activity as merely a stereotype. They do not believe that gender has any bearing on scientific work. Gender is not itself a scientific issue, it is a purely social one. Science, they argue, as understood by those who really do it, is an activity devoid of any connections to social behaviors. It follows then that science cannot be implicated in the "legitimation of society's gendered beliefs and norms" (Bleier, 1988)...many of the professional women scientists neither hear nor understand the feminist critique. Their deep belief in the meritocratic ideology of science is unexamined and unshaken. For the most part, they are unfamiliar even with the history of women in science, except for the uncritical portraits of great women of the past...(p. 178)

out boys in traditional 'male' subjects" (*Vancouver Sun*, Oct. 4, 1996) announce that girls are out-performing boys in every academic subject, including physics.

While the girls who enroll in physics are achieving the same grades as are the boys, the writer does concede that boys still outnumber the girls in this subject. What the statistics do not reveal is how girls experience the senior science classroom. In their study of girls in senior physics, Arlene McLaren and Jim Gaskell (1995) argue that the claims of gender-neutrality in high school science whitewash the barriers girls face. What Trish has recognized and the McLaren-Gaskell study corroborates, is that male domination--manifested both quantitatively and qualitatively--creates a chilly atmosphere for girls in this discipline. In the *Vancouver Sun* article, the writer unproblematically suggests that more girls are entering senior science due to the success of certain initiatives: "Teaching methods have been adjusted to female learning styles by making material more visual and classes less competitive." Aside from the questionable conclusion that girls prefer a "visual" approach, the implied assumption that girls dislike competition is not only inaccurate, but obscures the real experiences of girls in science, and in schools generally. Many girls, in fact, enjoy competition--what they often confront instead is harassment and intimidation. Conflating the former with the latter offers an easy way to avoid these realities and reproduces a "blame the victim" belief system that essentializes and stereotypes girls' capabilities and preferences.

In the article, no mention was made of the cultural and class backgrounds of the girls who are advancing in science (and of those who are not). In light of the rapidly changing demographics of Canadian urban centers, the increase in numbers may be due to any number of factors. Christine and Trish have observed that students from some cultural and social groups tend to place a high value on science, and, in general, more readily see it as a viable career option than do students from other groups. Many of my own students are new to Canada and have acquired an aptitude for science in their home countries, and not through the girl-friendly initiatives that the writer purports are offered here.

The writer does conclude his article with the admission that some people are

concerned about the implications of these statistics, that they may produce the kind of backlash against equity initiatives for girls that seems to be occurring in Britain and Australia. Paula Bourn, Coordinator of the University of Toronto Centre for Women's Studies in Education, worries that the outcry "what are we doing for the boys?" will start here. "I think," she is quoted as saying, "the major challenge for people concerned with gender equity is that people no longer think it's an issue. They think the problems have been resolved."

Statisticians may tell us that women and members of other marginalized groups are entering scientific fields in significant numbers, but that has not altered the perception that the domain of science is one of exclusion and privilege where power is not easily accessed. Historically, those who have not been asked to the table when policies are formulated tend to be the most vulnerable to their negative, and sometimes devastating, consequences. What Marcia perceives as a growing anti-intellectual movement in North America is perhaps both a symptom of, and response to, this experience of marginality, alienation and disempowerment. A feeling of disillusionment with western scientific institutions and mistrust of their experts has led to a reclamation of grass-roots practices, and a desire to experiment with non-western alternatives, some of which have been developed within long and rich scientific traditions but are unrecognized by mainstream western institutions.

Marcia, nevertheless, is concerned that people have rejected the western scientific method out of hand and replaced it with pseudo and non-science. She applauds the contributions of popular theorists like Carl Sagan and Stephen Jay Gould who work to demystify science in response to what they see as a dangerous reversion to superstition and mass credulity. Marcia has observed the influence of these forces on students who appear quite willing to swallow whole sensational media stories disguised as science (television programs about aliens and the paranormal). She has them critically examine the sources of that information and the commercial motives that drive it, exploring notions of logic, reason and what counts as good evidence.

A critical, feminist approach to a science curriculum therefore, does not

collapse into extremes of thinking that will only take us back to the oppressive system of dichotomies that we are endeavouring to transcend. Instead, it should make that system visible, how the dichotomies of culture/nature public/private, reason/emotion, objective/subjective, knowledge/experience and masculine nature/feminine nature have produced a science that, if not explicitly sexist, is patriarchal, androcentric and eurocentric (Code, 1991). It should encourage students to consider the past: how these notions have rendered women's historical contributions to scientific knowledge invisible; it should introduce the work of scientists and philosophers who are challenging mainstream approaches to scientific inquiry and posing alternatives; and it should motivate students to question the social and ethical implications of scientific and technological developments, particularly in those instances where claims of neutrality are made. And as "gender-neutrality" continues to be the official approach to high school science, perhaps, as McLaren and Gaskell (1995) suggest, it should begin with a critique of the science classroom itself.

Throughout this chapter, I have endeavoured to describe the fundamental purpose of a feminist, critical pedagogy: to enable students to see beyond claims of neutrality and objectivity, to understand that in every account, scientific or otherwise, there is always an element of subjectivity and bias, whether in terms of the individual motives involved, larger economic and political agendas, or conclusions derived from taken-for-granted beliefs about the experiences of women and men in the world. These beliefs did not appear out of nowhere, but have shaped, and been shaped by, the approaches to knowledge-seeking that are rooted in particular historical, social and political contexts. A secondary school curriculum that fails to acknowledge the locatedness of knowledge and the privilege that has positioned "certain knowers as fact makers" (Code, 1991, p. 250), does all students a disservice, but creates, I believe, serious implications for girls and students from other marginalized groups who do not see people like themselves reflected in, and are offered no explanation for their exclusion from, the corpus of "legitimate" knowledge. Whether studying social studies, science or English, there are ample

opportunities to engage students in a critical examination of the epistemological underpinnings of the discipline, its history, sources, and implications.

Helen Longino observes: "The novelists among us might remind us that if there is a fiction in the discourses of truth, so there is a truth in the discourses of fiction" (1990, p. 174). The feminist teachers in this study are inviting students to take up this inquiry, to challenge dichotomies, grapple with paradoxes, and blur the lines between "fact" and "fiction." In the following chapter, I strive to capture something of the vitality and ingenuity they bring to this work.

Chapter 4

Transforming Course Content

In Chapter 3, I discussed the undergirding epistemologies that have shaped the curriculum and how it fails to reflect current scholarship and the development of progressive education theory. The teachers in this study, in fact, are endeavouring to offer students what the official curriculum does not. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which each teacher envisions a feminist, critical approach to content and how she translates that vision into practice. Teachers *are* transforming content in creative and exciting ways, and I hope the following profiles communicate that sense of optimism. But I do not want to give the impression that this level of work is possible in every context or indeed, in every teaching day. The ways in which the curriculum and the school itself are currently structured make that a distant ideal. What I hope to do in this chapter is illustrate what can be done where there is the awareness, the insight, and the willingness to imagine alternatives.

Where possible and appropriate, each of the five teachers seeks out inclusive materials and progressive resources: written work by women, films and articles dealing with gender issues, guest speakers and workshops related to equity. They discuss the history of feminism and the participation of women in a variety of social movements. They all encourage students to critically analyze texts for bias, whether it's found in a media literacy film, popular movie, or historical account. They critique the values and structures that have shaped women's lives past and present, and then challenge students to consider alternatives for the future. But as I listened and observed, I became aware that each teacher brings a particular focus to this work, finding innovative ways to communicate these ideas to her students. In the following profiles, I offer a glimpse--interpreted through my own lens--of Christine, Mary, Lynn, Trish and Marcia as feminists and educators who are revising content through the resurrection of stories forgotten, a better telling of those familiar, and the creation of new in the classroom.

Christine: Re-seeing the World

I showed a film the other day and it was about images of the developing world and it was a media literacy film about how those are manipulated. The western world sees starving children, famine and disaster and thinks that's what it's like. Really interesting because the film is actually made for a western audience. It's not made for kids, many of whom have lived in developing countries and who can say, "but it's not like that." This isn't meant to show them that it's not like that, but the kids knew the minute I put it on that it's not like that. There was an image of some women carrying coffee beans and I said, "well, what are you seeing here?" And really what they're supposed to be seeing is "workers." And Albert said, "women doing all the work." So brilliant. I hadn't seen it. I like it when I'm shown things that I can't see.

When Christine shows her class a film that is intended to expose bias, but is itself, eurocentric and androcentric in its perspective, she challenges every viewer, herself included, to see the world again and differently. Any film, book or taken-for-granted belief can provide opportunities for critical, feminist inquiry. Throughout our conversations, I noticed that Christine often uses metaphors related to the visual. She is concerned with that which sits beneath the surface of things, and the ways in which appearances deceive. Teaching effectively, as I understand Christine, is teaching with a willingness to risk being undeceived. The first task is to raise the hidden curriculum to consciousness, to expose the fallacy that schooling is a gender/class/race neutral enterprise. An approach to content that purports to be progressive must begin with an acknowledgement of who that content is intended to reach. Christine:

Absolutely everything needs to be constructed through the filters of gender, race and class. What are the implications in some classrooms of what you're doing and how you're doing it for girls, for children of Asian or Latin American heritage, or children who don't have any money? So the gender, ethnicity and class issues should be filters on everything. And they're hard to see, but once you get the habit of looking for what's not readily visible, I think there's a lot of ground to be gained that way.

Christine's grade 11 English class is truly multicultural, with students of Latin

American, Chinese, South and South East Asian and European heritage. Some students are academically capable, while others experience serious difficulties. How does a teacher offer content that is accessible and meaningful to a group this diverse? Christine makes connections to students' lives. She takes what the curriculum offers and stretches it, enriches it, in effect, transforms it. For students who require additional assistance, she offers hooks to engage them, and road maps to direct them.

During the period of our interviews, Christine was developing a short unit on the use of the supernatural in English literature and literature in translation. Using *MacBeth* as a departure point, she was tracing some of the ways in which this literary and dramatic device spans time and culture. There are many opportunities, suggested Christine, to explore the use of the supernatural within the oral and literary traditions of her students' own cultures--ghosts, for example, in Chinese writing, Aboriginal stories that use dreaming and animal spirits that have magical qualities. "I'm trying to pull stuff in that pulls from kids' ways of seeing the world: their heritage, their backgrounds, their cultures." Christine teaches both *The Joy Luck Club* and *Concubine's Children*, stories that chronicle the experiences of Chinese women. Lately, she has been interested in the use of magical realism within Latin American literature, incorporating excerpts from such novels as *Like Water for Chocolate* and *House of the Spirits* into her lessons.

The day I visited, Christine was preparing to show her grade 11 English class the movie *Don Juan DeMarco*, a fable about a young man who, believing that he is the mythical Latin lover, casts a spell on those around him, in particular the burned-out psychiatrist who is swept into Don Juan's colourful and romantic world. Christine was drawn to how cleverly the film blurs the line between truth and fiction, reality and illusion. Although there are not overt examples of the supernatural in the film, the main character possesses magical qualities in his capacity to transform the way people see things.

A movie about a young man who believes he has made love to countless women would not typically classify as "feminist content." But as I watched the film with the

class, I observed that female sexuality is not treated in Hollywood's usual misogynistic fashion: woman cast as either pathological femme fatale or passive object/victim of male power. During the discussion, several class members commented on this difference. Awkward as some of these comments were, nonetheless they suggested that students were intrigued by the film makers' efforts to say something new, if not exactly radical, about desire. Like other teachers in this study, Christine experiments with what a progressive pedagogy can mean, which involves sometimes stepping into unknown terrain:

I sometimes tread on the places where maybe [other] feminists wouldn't go. I don't know--using the erotic edges on a film like this to suck them in. The relationship that he [Don Juan DeMarco] has in the end is with a woman that he admires from afar. So the real condition is possible: on one hand you might say he's obsessed. My nineteen year old son has women on his walls and I can go in and give the feminist objection, but I can't condemn him with psychiatric disorders. So it's an interesting play on who has the right to create meaning out of someone else's life. I think I'm showing them something they haven't seen, and even if they have, not to have seen the other levels of meaning, other ways of looking at and comparing it to the magic quality of Latin American literature and film.

During the interview prior to the class, Christine said, "I hope this works," with a smile that might have meant: "here I go again." For the benefit of two students with poor literacy skills, she had spent her own time carefully reviewing the film, making detailed notes to serve as a model on how one might generate ideas and begin an analytical essay. She warned me that she would probably need to stop the film during the class period to contend with the disruptive behaviors of a particular group of boys (after repeated interruptions, these students were finally sent out of the room). The efforts of these teachers to adapt and enrich content while responding to the multiple needs (and sometimes developmental and behavioral problems) of students in a secondary classroom requires a tirelessness and courage that is rarely acknowledged. As I sat in Christine's class that day, I was reminded of the huge investment of self that good teaching demands.

Mary: Whose Voice, Whose Story?

We talk a lot about the idea of voice and narration. Whose voice is being included and why? Whose voices aren't being included? I look at the textbook as just another book and we have to analyze it and interpret it just like we would a book of fiction. We play with that quite a bit, with "fact" and "fiction." So under that rubric of voice and narration, that's how I usually raise it. Who is not being addressed here?

A salient theme that emerged in Mary's discussion of feminist pedagogy was the concept of voice: whose voices have we been hearing, what have they been telling us, and how have these discourses shaped our understandings. Like Christine, Mary challenges her students to consider the criteria for evaluating what is commonly classified as truth and fiction, an inquiry that requires some critical examination of language. If students are to understand the power of language to construct and perpetuate belief systems, they need to see how it operates in all kinds of contexts and disciplines. When teaching social studies, for example, Mary has her students situate and then deconstruct such abstract ideals as "liberty," "freedom," and "rights" in the context of political rhetoric to understand the ways language can be used to manipulate and distort reality. When reading *any* historical account, she asks her students to consider who is speaking and who is being spoken about:

In the Declaration of Independence, who's actually free? Who has got these rights, who gets to vote, who has property, who doesn't have property, what were the laws at the time? There was a slave trade going on and yet we're talking about everybody having the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness...who, exactly?... Whatever we're doing, we're always analyzing who the audience is, who's the power broker, who's not involved in this game at all and if that voice were heard, how would the story be different?

Attention to stories, in all their forms, plays a recurring role in Mary's vision of feminist teaching. When studying the French Revolution, her students read *A Tale of Two Cities*, to consider "the whole idea of the individual players within history." For the Women in History essay contest, Mary asked her students to interview a

woman in their lives: a mother, an aunt, a grandmother. Initially, some students resisted the project: "Can I just write on somebody who's important to me? Does it have to be a woman?"

So I justified it to them in terms of oral history, in terms of Women's History Month. Why Women's History Month? We talked a lot about that: why do we even need this? And after they did [the interviews], I had less of a need to justify it because they were really well done and we read them aloud. And I think the kids were pretty impressed. There was a girl who found out about her grandmother's experiences in the Holocaust and neither she nor her mother knew. And the grandmother just opened up to the grand-daughter for this interview. So, yes, these started justifying themselves once they were done.

Part of the reason that students know so few women's stories is that there seems to be--as Mary said--this need to "justify" listening to women. On the surface, the dearth of first-person accounts in curriculum suggests the tacit belief that women's stories are too dull, mundane, uneventful. But I believe that lurking somewhere beneath is the awareness that the reverse is true: that what we will hear will be revelatory and perhaps disturbing. I wonder about that student's grandmother: had she chosen to remain silent about her history; had no one ever inquired? Does each generation internalize the code of silence, that we best not ask what we have collectively chosen to stifle and bury? The members of Mary's class might now have a sense--though perhaps still in a vague way--that insight is rarely achieved without some discomfort and struggle.

If students, like Mary's, are encouraged to listen carefully to women's narratives, they witness essentialist and stereotypical assumptions begin to unravel. Attending to stories *about* women can provide an opportunity for students to recognize the ways that oppressive belief systems have been culturally and historically produced, and coded in literary and dramatic convention. When Mary had her class do a project on the opera *Carmen* a number of students (including nine boys) chose to explore the ways in which the madonna/whore dichotomy works through the characters of Carmen and Micaela:

They were really looking at Carmen--not just as a loose, fun-loving whore who just drops them when she's finished with them--but they were looking at her in a different way, looking at her historically. What would Carmen's existence have been like as a Gypsy, already as a peripheral member of society? And would we look at her the same if it was a man who said, "no, I don't like you anymore. I'm tired of you and I'm going on to someone else." So, they were experimenting with empathy. And then two kids actually did a video presentation. They juxtaposed scenes from the movie *Carmen* with scenes from modern-day commercials and fashion shows. So she's [Carmen] kind of got the rose in her mouth, flitting her dress up. They had run-way scenes that were exactly the same, talking about how very little has changed.

Some powerful messages emerged from this project. Students who decided to examine the madonna/whore dichotomy could begin to understand the ways in which such systems of thought have perpetuated structures of domination. Historically, the portrayal of women in literature and drama work to reflect the dominant order and sustain it. I read *Carmen* as a cautionary tale. When she behaves sexually in ways sanctioned only for men, she is labelled a whore, and when she dares to step outside the prescribed social parameters of her class and ethnicity, she is ultimately destroyed. The power that she fleetingly derives as an object of male desire boomerangs back on her; she believes that power can transform her circumstances. When students connected *Carmen* to contemporary images of female beauty and sexuality, they recognized that little has changed. The voices telling young women that for them power is achieved only through the pursuit of a hegemonic, heterosexual ideal grow more insistent as more women's stories are penetrating the static to explode that myth. Stories of domestic violence, harassment, and the related addictions and disorders experienced by women of all social classes--including those women of celebrity and privilege that many girls feel compelled to emulate--serve as reminders that such power is always ephemeral.

Chipping away at patriarchal myths is a project that is far more challenging than it initially seems. When Mary teaches the Enlightenment, she has her students question the dichotomy of reason and emotion, asking: "who is said to be more reasonable? and why has there been a denigration of emotion and passion?" to have them consider the legacy of this thought on the ways we understand the relationship

between knowledge and power. Unsurprisingly, few, if any, of the available curriculum resources discuss women's social, economic or intellectual contributions within the Enlightenment period--an "oversight" that speaks volumes about how skewed that knowledge/power relationship remains. And students have become so accustomed to the imbalance, that merely to expose it is to court controversy:

We have a really old textbook. We're doing the Enlightenment right now and there are no women mentioned. You know, there are just no women mentioned. Again, you'd never hear the girls say, "why are we using a textbook where there are no women?" Never hear that. But if I say to them, "where are the women?", you'll get a couple of them [students] rolling their eyes, "here we go again with the gender question," as if I'm the one who represents it, not that it's an issue out there that I'm just reminding them of. It's like it's *my* issue, it's *my* agenda. Some of them will be really receptive, but they will not necessarily be the vocal ones...

I found no clearer example than this of how deep the layers of patriarchy go and eventually play out in the classroom experience: from the level of epistemology where false dichotomies are accepted as truth, these beliefs filter down and have been expressed in the traditional approach to writing history, in the continued selection of these outdated texts as curriculum resources, in students' uncritical acceptance of women's invisibility, and when their teacher makes all this explicit, in their perception of her as fixated on a pet political agenda with a personal axe to grind. And, it is not surprising that the students who are receptive to this kind of inquiry are often the silent ones in the group. When Mary asks, "whose voice, whose story?" her students begin the process of learning how to listen for something more, including the silences.

Lynn: Power and Politics

I look at statistics about how few women are actually involved in Canadian and other politics in the world and why is this and what is it about politics--the way it's structured--that alienates women. What should be our role as feminists? Should we say, "well, we're alienated by this and we don't like that power structure so we're going to use private influence as we have traditionally, or we're

going to use motherhood or nurturing." Or are we going to say, "no that's not powerful and it's more powerful to play their game." So to the young women: "what is our role? What are we going to do?"

In designing a grade 11 women's studies/social studies course, Lynn had a challenging question to answer: what would a truly inclusive, feminist approach to the subject actually look like? Lynn decided that it would explore women's historical contributions in the "public" and "private" realms and celebrate their participation and leadership within important social and political movements. It would take seriously women's different experiences of oppression, exclusion and their struggles for emancipation. It would have students consider next steps, pulling them out of the passive by-stander role to work through the challenges of collective decision-making. And it would invite students to experience the excitement and risk of public demonstration.

The current social studies curriculum serves as a skeletal frame to which Lynn has created dimension and shape. In the government section of most Socials 11 courses, students are introduced to political ideology. In Lynn's course, they also explore the various strands of feminist theory. Students discover that this added dimension opens a new level of questions and problems: that certain structures and institutions within capitalist societies work to benefit certain members of the population while rendering invisible the ways in which others are disadvantaged and silenced. To make these contradictions palpable, Lynn has her students experience for themselves the bridging of theory and practice. They have to live it for a while, and that experience stays with them.

The day I visited Lynn's class, the students were preparing to begin a simulation exercise of the parliamentary process. In democratic fashion, the students voted for their classmates to fill various positions in government: the Speaker, the Governor General, the Prime Minister, leaders of the opposition and party members. The following two class periods were spent in debate, reading of the speech from the throne, question period and passing a bill. A few weeks previous, the class had worked through a consensus decision-making model where they experienced quite a

different kind of process, one that centers on listening rather than silencing, compromise rather than win or lose, and where each participant holds equal status.

They wrote journals on the process and they were like, "oh, I was amazed," and "I was glad I got a voice." Some found it really frustrating, time-consuming--which consensus decision-making *is*--it *is* time-consuming and it can be frustrating, the whole idea that you have to give...And then we did Parliament where majority rules and there was a lot of yelling, people weren't listened to, back-benchers were never heard. So the students were able to compare that and say, "well, I wasn't the main person in government or in the opposition. I didn't really get to say much. It was also time-consuming and the traditions seemed stupid and meaningless to me."

Through these exercises, students discover that there are no simple formulas for working across differences. Some students, as Lynn expected, described the consensus decision-making process as "frustrating," perhaps finding the experience of actively listening to one another uncomfortable in its unfamiliarity (Das Gupta, 1994; hooks, 1994). But they learned that a traditional model is not the only nor necessarily the best way to approach some problems. The assumption is challenged that "we do it this way because this is the way it's done" as students discover that even the decision about how to reach a decision is not neutral. At the close of these exercises, Lynn has students consider the ways in which these different models work to advance or obstruct feminist interests.

The first day of the Parliament simulation, Lynn used the last half hour to show her students *The Politics of Image*, a film that explores the media's treatment of prominent Canadian women politicians. During the debriefing, students were eager to respond to the messages of the film. One girl expressed anger at the differential treatment of men and women: while male politicians are listened to, women are first and foremost, looked at, scrutinized for their "fashion sense," hair styles and body weight as well as the status of their personal relationships. The more powerful the woman, the more pointed and blatant these attacks. Another girl picked up on Audrey McLaughlin's recounting of an interview in which she was asked whether she would continue to focus on "women's issues." McLaughlin responded that she

would, indeed, attend to women's issues, those being the economy, labour, health, the environment and education, her answer challenging the familiar dichotomy of public/male and private/female realms. As the class ended, one of the boys observed that the need to make such a film sends a strong message in itself, that equality is still a distant ideal.

Throughout the course, Lynn connects the goals of the contemporary women's movement to the struggles and triumphs of the past. Earlier in the year, she organized a role drama, of her own design, that brings to life the British suffragist movement. The drama begins with each student receiving a card with a biographical description of a particular feminist in the movement, such as Emily Wilding Davidson or Emmeline Pankhurst. Over several class periods, the students do belief-building exercises in which they introduce themselves in character, respond to questions, and write letters to Canadian friends detailing their efforts, and the consequent incarcerations and forced feedings endured. These exercises prepare them for the main focus of the drama in which they must plan a demonstration to publicize the suffragist cause at Derby Day. The challenge for students is to remain true to their characters when they propose strategies, keeping in mind the personality of each suffragist, and the degree of radical action she might have agreed to take. Lynn recounted some of their suggestions: kidnap the king, throw rocks on the race course, "but that always gets rejected because they don't want to hurt the horses. Or they discuss getting rid of all the jockeys and getting themselves on the horses, but then they know that wouldn't be realistic." Some suggested displaying posters, while others argued that more radical action was necessary. Having finally reached a decision, they leave the room pretending that Derby Day has taken place and that they have carried out their plan:

And they come back in, but Emily Wilding Davidson doesn't come back in and neither does Emmeline Pankhurst because she's gone back to France. And then I have the pictures from this book which has the suicide of Emily Wilding Davidson, which has never been anyone's plan. They haven't planned that. So they're always shocked, and then I show them the pictures of the funeral. And I actually have this film called *And They Knew How to Dance* which was women in World War 1...part of

that film has a clip from Derby Day and it has Emily Wilding Davidson throwing herself in front of the horse. And [the students] are just blown away. I'm not trying to glorify suicide, but I'm trying to show them what was going on and how far women went for that cause.

Lynn has found that students in all of her social studies classes enjoy participating in the role drama. I think it is worth noting that while the students in her regular classes chose to take extreme measures at Derby Day, the members of her women's studies class decided not to resort to violence. Lynn suggests that this difference may be due to the gender composition of the classes. It is also likely that students who would enroll in a woman's studies class are, at the very least, curious about social issues, and will be receptive to alternative ways of problem solving.

While Lynn works to incorporate inclusive and progressive content in all her courses, it is this women's studies course that allows her most freedom to experiment. There is no need to "justify" any of the content--students anticipate a feminist focus, though they may come in with some stereotypical notions about what that means. Lynn saw the school assembly for Women's History Month as an opportunity for her students to confront those stereotypes. Using skits, vignettes, and readings of poetry, they explored a range of issues, not avoiding the most sensitive, such as rape. The effect, said Lynn, was very "powerful." Two students had designed a piece of art containing the gender symbols with posters of women activists worldwide. At one point, the intertwining symbols lowered onto the stage and the students came forward, with joined hands. One girl spoke and then two of the boys in the class explained, very briefly, the meaning of equality.

...people spontaneously applauded. It was a great moment and so many stereotypes, I think, might have been shattered from that moment...and coming from two guys and they were kind of cool guys in the school, for them to stand up in front of their peers--yeah, it was amazing.

Having this experience at the beginning of the year seemed to forge a sense of cohesion and shared purpose for the class. When I asked Lynn's students what they would remember most about the course, most replied, "the assembly and role plays."

That answer suggests to me that many young people are not content to be passive, but are concerned about social issues, would like to speak out, get involved, and work together for change. In Lynn's class, they find the guidance, inspiration and opportunities to do all of that.

Trish: A Room of Their Own

I've had many ideas about my future that clashed with my friends' and my culture--too career-oriented and a female too. Being exposed to women's conferences and listening to their life stories has instilled me with hope. These women have been extremely influential and projected a strong image which I admire. This program has simply provided me with an awareness and knowledge that is definitely powerful. Knowing that I am not alone has allowed me to foster, rather than suppress, my beliefs in women's rights.

Feedback on Trish's course from grade 12 student.

Like Lynn, Trish fought to teach a woman's studies class at her school, and this is the first year it has been offered. Initially, a group of senior girls approached Trish, requesting her support in starting a girls' club--they wanted a place of their own where they were free to discuss the issues that concerned them without the often distracting and sometimes threatening presence of boys. Trish agreed to sponsor the club, but over time found that in order to explore issues in any depth, she needed the structure of a course, although the structure is unlike that of most others: it is student-centered, flexible and evolving. Because the idea of a girls-only course seems antithetical to the philosophy of the equal access mandate, Trish faced some strong opposition from administrative bodies. While eventually authorized to teach her course, she could only offer it as extra-curricular: in the early mornings and after school hours. Despite the obstacles, the course has been extremely successful, so much so that it filled up immediately for the following year, with students having to be turned away. And it will now appear on the regular timetable.

Most feminist theorists denounce the philosophy behind compensatory programs for girls--that these focus on "fixing" the wrong people. Pathologizing

young women is an old but effective method of deflecting attention from the real problem of systemic gender, class and racial oppression (Jonas, 1990; Kenway, Willis & Nevard, 1990; Tsolidis, 1990). And yet until recently, little of the theoretical discourse offered practical strategies for teachers and girls who are struggling against these multiple and complex inequities. While collective activism is always enthusiastically promoted in theory, the structural realities and public nature of school make this work extremely challenging in practice. Trish believes that first, girls need to come together in an atmosphere where they can experience a sense of connection, common ground, and support. As they discuss their current lives and aspirations for the future, they begin to recognize that their concerns are not unique but are part of a larger matrix of experience. As expressed by the student in the opening quotation, it was this sense of commonality that gave her the courage to "foster rather than suppress" a consciousness of which she was already becoming aware.

The majority of students in Trish's course are from working-class, recent immigrant South and South-East Asian backgrounds. Many are simply trying to adjust to a new home in Canada and learn a new language; others are working through the complex, and sometimes difficult, process of negotiating the bridge between two cultures. Few of their parents can afford to send all of their children to university; in some cases, only the boys in the family will receive financial assistance. As grade 12s completing high school, these students need the information and tools that will enable them to finance post-secondary education, consider a range of possible vocations, and gain access to the resources and supports that are available for young women. When Trish thinks "access," she means it in the full sense of knowing how to locate the information, knowing who to talk to, and developing a sense of confidence and comfort with the process. To these ends, the students practise goal-setting and networking:

Throughout the year, when we're [going to] workshops, they are realizing that contacts out in the community can be powerful. So they're starting to keep a list of contacts...They learn how important networking is, having friends is, how important keeping a balance is

in all aspects of your life.

One component of the course involves a mentorship program where the girls are paired with women working in a variety of traditional and non-traditional careers. It's not surprising that when Trish asked her students whether or not their mentors have children, she learned that most do not. "It's pretty hard being in a program like that *and* having kids, but [the girls] are not getting the reality of it. But how we find people like that, I don't know." While Trish encourages her students to aspire, she wants them also to be prepared for the realities that await them, that pursuing a career and raising a family demands of women a kind of balancing act that can feel precarious in the most ideal economic and personal circumstances.

In my work with disadvantaged youth, I felt the poignancy of some girls' "Cinderella" vision of their futures. Many of the older girls, however, had begun to relinquish the romantic rescue fantasy and were readjusting their expectations as they had begun to acknowledge certain social and economic realities (Kelly, 1993). And yet, for better or for worse, life's successes and failures would be predicated on individual choices. But the girls in Trish's class are learning that these "choices" are not arrived at quite so autonomously and freely as it seems: they begin to recognize the extent to which women's lives are shaped by the values and structures that operate and manifest, however subtly, on each societal level. As they progress through each course topic, the larger picture unfolds:

[They're] examining their own values and the values of their families... And then we get into the bigger picture of society and the values placed and why society puts those values on as a means of control...First of all, [we discuss] the poor, Black people and other oppressed people so they can see the patterns before I bring women in...

It is important for students to understand the multiple experiences of oppression if they are to appreciate the complex intersection of gender, class, race and other subjectivities on women's lives. This inquiry can also work to dismantle stereotypes about feminism as a movement. The political Far-Right has succeeded in

convincing many young people that feminism is an isolated and redundant exercise, barely surviving on the fringe, led by man-hating "radicals" (a term which they conflate with "militant" I suppose). But that perception changes when they discover that much of the work in the contemporary feminist movement is concerned with racial and economic oppression, because it is women who are most disadvantaged by these conditions, that it operates within and along side other social justice movements, and that women who subscribe to a variety of theoretical and political standpoints identify themselves as feminists. When stereotypes begin to dissolve, girls see that feminism is not something "out there" but that it is has direct and immediate relevance to their lives.

Trish does not avoid those life issues that are most sensitive and disturbing. Rather, she believes it is indefensible to ignore these realities, that what young women don't know *will* hurt them, and it is the school's responsibility to address what has been too long ignored or excused.

Tragically, abuse, dating violence and sexual harassment are not unfamiliar issues to many girls, but most will not have been encouraged to explore the misogynistic roots, the belief systems and social conditions that have allowed these to perpetuate. Trish spends time defining sexual harassment and locating it on the continuum of control and violence. As one student observed in an essay:

Abuse in relationships is very common. Observing from my friends' relationships and comparing them to the situations in the videos, I realize that they are very, very bad. What scares me is, will I ever be caught in a relationship that is abusive? Hopefully not.

Trish offers the girls strategies that she hopes will minimize their chances of being "caught": they attend a self-defense workshop, learn the signs of a controlling relationship, recognize the forms of sexual harassment and how to diffuse situations through assertiveness techniques. However, as this student is aware, violence against women is a societal illness that defies individual efforts at self-protection or insulation. Trish discussed the role of the popular media in shaping attitudes, citing

for example, the use of humour in television sitcoms as derived primarily from insults--the message that power is acquired at the expense, and often blatant abuse, of other people is driven home: "You hear the *Married With Children* [T.V. show] and the kind of put-downs on there...I think there are no lines anymore with harassment. The kids don't know where to draw the line."

Trish believes that media literacy programs--now fairly well established at the elementary to senior level--are a necessary first step. But it is not useful to critique the popular media as if it operated in a vacuum, ignoring the fact that its messages *reflect* as well as perpetuate social attitudes that are played out in every institution, not excluding the school environment. While Trish has students examine the impact of media images on women's health, self-esteem, and safety, she is careful to connect these understandings to the larger picture, to begin to make sense of the complex relationship between the "public" and "private," the personal and political. For Trish, this means discussing openly the conditions that students face at home, with peers, and in the hallways and classrooms at school. If staff and administration are unwilling to do the same, then media literacy programs and the like become mere panacea, allowing schools to abdicate their responsibility, deny their complicity, however unconscious it may be.

Marcia: Good Thinking

What I took away from each discussion with Marcia was a fuller sense of her commitment to the intellectual development of all students. As an educator, Marcia has lived a life of contrasts. For many years she taught enrichment program students who were extremely bright, keen, aware and possessed all the advantages of privileged home lives. The expectation that these students be interested in social change and a critical world view gave her licence to engage in progressive and often very innovative work. Marcia is currently teaching at an east-side Bridge program for grade 8 students who, in contrast to their enrichment program counterparts, experience serious academic difficulties and are disadvantaged in

various ways. Out of necessity, her approach to curriculum content may look quite different in this context, but the philosophy that shapes her teaching has not changed.

As perhaps all those who maintain their commitment to, and effectiveness in, social activist work, Marcia holds a vision of what should be while responding thoughtfully and appropriately to the challenges of the immediate circumstances--an ethos she carries with her into the classroom. If her grade 8s lack such basic school skills as how to take notes or organize a workbook, she begins working with them at this level. But she does not accept less than what she believes her students are capable of doing. She does not extricate them from their responsibility to think, to reason, to take intellectual risks. If they had lost confidence in that ability, they gradually regain it through the work of patiently gathering up, reviewing, connecting, successfully applying the skills and knowledge gained yesterday to today's new problem. Like Christine and other teachers in this study, Marcia is concerned that a focus on intellectual development is increasingly being subsumed to a utilitarian vision of schooling. While some educators, like those in this study, are bringing other ideas to the table, the rhetoric promoting work-relevance and competitive-skills is now influencing some strands of education policy, a trend, Marcia argued, that will particularly disadvantage this population of students:

I think we should be focusing on intellectual development and what I'm convinced of--and there's research on it too--is that if you concentrate on intellect, the other stuff takes care of itself. I mean, it's not that simple and I'm not trying to be cavalier or glib, but never at this school in the last twenty years has enough effort been put into developing consistent high expectations for kids, developing an enrichment program for everybody in the area of academic and intellectual work. And we're starting on some of that right now. If I can get my guys and girls to do the little poetry books with such enthusiasm and care, then hey, anybody can. And I really find it dangerous to restrict academic learning and the understanding of knowledge in an intellectual way to the [social] classes who have always enjoyed it and been advantaged by it historically.

The students Marcia currently teaches are among those who would be at risk for school disengagement. Lacking the cognitive and emotional development,

fundamental academic skills, confidence, and in many cases, family stability, that allow most students to move successfully from the elementary to mainstream junior secondary level, Marcia's grade 8s require a level of structure, support and nurturing that is typical of a much younger age group. Marcia and her program colleagues endeavour to provide the positive experiences that these students have missed, such as hearing a story read aloud:

The book that we're reading aloud--I read aloud to them every English class--is *My Name is Sepeetsa* by Shirley Sterling. It's a story--fictionalized but autobiographical in style--of a little girl called Sepeetsa whose Anglo-missionary name is Martha, growing up in the Interior in the 1950s and going to Kalamak Indian Residential School. It's really quite delightful. So this is one way that a couple of messages get across to the kids through reading aloud, which they seem to need anyway...

As discussed, all students should be hearing the other's voice, the different experience. Students in the Bridge program, who must feel their marginality from mainstream adolescent life, may find the different account particularly resonant, suggesting, even in a minimal way, possibilities for their own expression. These students do have opportunities to tell their stories through a focused application of journal, autobiographical and creative writing. When I visited Marcia's class, I was invited to read the illustrated poetry anthologies that her students had recently completed--I found them energetic, expressive, thoughtfully done.

I'm finding considerable success in building self-confidence and their sense of themselves through academic achievement...I try to use those things [feminist and social activist] that you indicated are a part of who I am to provide a challenge in a safe environment for these kids. We really expect a great deal, and we believe in them. And we tell them that all the time: "we have really high expectations, we really believe in you, you're going to do an excellent job on this and this is how you're going to do it, and here's why you're doing it in the first place."

Marcia explained that her first responsibility to these students is to build a foundation of knowledge, model habits of thinking, and encourage the patience and

self-discipline that they lack. She is careful to incorporate the social, feminist agenda in a way that enriches understanding but does not overwhelm. It would be inappropriate and counter-productive to ask these students to attempt independent analyses of issues, but there are opportunities to offer an inclusive perspective:

When I do *anything*, because it's so much a part of who I am, we'll always discuss what women were doing in the middle ages, or the Hindu goddesses as well as the Hindu gods, or mythology where Ariadne has a strong a role as Theseus. We're doing that kind of stuff. It's fairly minimal, but it's entirely appropriate considering the kids with whom we're working.

This work may appear minimal when compared to the content Marcia was able to explore with her enrichment students, but I have seen few grade 8 classrooms that so readily convey a concern for equity and social responsibility. On one wall a poster reads, "Multiculturalism is...dignity, mutual respect, good citizenship, community building, a society at peace, bridges not walls, a united Canada." Below this hangs the current events board with newspaper clippings arranged under the headings "Women," "Environment," "Local," "Provincial," "First Nations," "Mid-East" and "Far-East." "Everyday in social studies we do current events. Nobody else in the school does it." On another wall are the headings "Hinduism," "Islam," "Buddhism," and "Sikhism," that will be used for a world religions project.

In social studies, we're doing a world religions study..."Why are we doing this?" (Actually, they're really excited about it.) "Well, what do you know about these religions?" "Nothing." "That's why you're doing it. Would it help you if you met somebody who was a Buddhist, if you knew a bit about Buddhism? Do you think that would give you a little bit of a link, a connection?" "Yes, it would." One of the kids said, "I've got a friend who's Jewish and I might be able to ask her some questions about Judaism." "Right, fine, you can talk to your friend, that's great. And then you do some work in the library as well." So, we try to do a number of different things. There's the social agenda here and there's also the knowledge agenda. I believe that it's an inherent good to know things, not necessarily completely disconnected fact, but it's really important for kids to have things that they know about the world that they live in.

Marcia ensures that the things that her students know reflect current scholarship. For example, they are now accustomed to using "B.C.E." (Before the Common Era) and "C.E." (Common Era) as chronological time is now marked in the study of antiquity. She explains that not everyone who wants to date things is Christian, that the use of these initials allows everyone a common reference point. When studying the "New World," her students consider to whom was it new, and how this "discovery" affected the lives of people who were already here. Most students, Marcia observed, are eager to engage in this kind of discussion: "All kids, little or big, when you phrase things in particular ways will be very responsive on matters of social injustice."

And then you find that if you do a brainstorm, without even having provided any background information of your own, that the kids will know a little bit about what was going on and whose interests were being served by North America getting "discovered" in the first place. And we talk about why we use the term "First Nations" instead of "First Nation." Somebody from the Northwest coast won't necessarily know anything about the culture of somebody from the Kanasatake Reserve in Quebec or Ontario. So there are opportunities for an individual teacher to do that kind of work, start to poke holes in fairly clunky assumptions that are made about how the world is and how it got to be the way it is.

Marcia gives students permission to grapple, to make mistakes, to work through the discovery process, but she does not allow them to fall back into the false security of pat and easy answers. When they state opinions, they are expected to provide reasons, offer evidence, explain how they arrived there. In both social studies and science, Marcia has been focusing on the question of evidence, finding humorous ways to engage her students:

You can have a lot of fun with this when you're working with the kids ...You can say, "you're in the supermarket, you see a newspaper. I'm not going to tell you the name of the newspaper right now, but the headline is: Baboon Gives Birth to Set of Three-headed Kittens," or something like that.. "What do you think, do you believe it? This is in a reputable North American grocery chain, does it count as evidence? People think newspapers tell the truth, right?" "No."...It's a ridiculous example but then you should be able to move them through stuff like that. So, I'll do corny and unbelievable headlines as one of the ways that I teach them

about what counts as evidence.

When I asked Marcia her views on the "critical thinking" initiative in B.C., she expressed some irritation with the way it has been framed in curriculum, as it seems to beg the question, "what exactly have we all been doing until now if not thinking critically?" And yet the academics who designed these packages must have recognized--in the mainstream system at least--that most of the curriculum continues to work on a banking system approach to learning. While individual teachers may endeavour to do some in-depth analytical work, the lack of supporting resources, the constricting mandates and time constraints limit the possibilities. Even the alternative system has gaps:

What there doesn't seem to be is a program for grade 9 and 10, or just grade 9, that is similar to, and would be a logical continuation of, that program where we emphasize--within reason for these folks--academic work, thoughtful, intellectual examination of a whole variety of things in English, socials, science and math, and which is very structured. Most of the alternative programs, certainly at the grade 9/10 level, are less challenging, less demanding academically...And I do think that's a shame.

I concluded the interviews with Marcia and the other teachers with the sense that none sees a division, at least theoretically, between "feminist, progressive" content and what should be rich, thoughtful teaching work. If the goal is to have students see more expansively, listen more fully, think in more sophisticated ways, then one would assume that equity and social justice issues would merge seamlessly in. But it is neither seamless nor simple. As Mary observed: "Equity should be a natural thing that everybody would want to participate in. It should be an easy sell, but it isn't. It has become difficult. It's got things attached to it."

As the mainstream curriculum was developed within the ideology of liberal individualism and meritocracy, it works both to reflect and reproduce that system where issues of power and privilege are avoided, experiences of oppression and marginalization are obscured. Feminist teachers are working in opposition to that system as they make visible whose interests have been historically, and are

currently, served by it. Equity is not "an easy sell," because fundamentally, it implies a transformation of our personal and collective beliefs and attitudes, of our relations with others and of the structures within which we work and live. Among the "things attached" are the complex feelings, and often contradictory responses, that are evoked when people confront the prospect of change. In the following chapter, I explore the ways in which these teachers struggle to define and develop a feminist method in the classroom, despite, and in response to, all these things attached.

Chapter 5

Defining a Feminist Teaching Method

Mary:

...You've got thirty sixteen year-olds sitting in the room: who's got the power? I mean, they can make life hell for you. I guess you could be vindictive (laughing); I guess you could say, "Mmm, make my life a living hell boys and girls, and you're all going to fail!" But it doesn't work that way. Someone would call you on that. Someone would call you on a whole bunch of fails in your class. I mean, there *are* some checks and balances.

Ann Manicom (1992) observes that a feminist pedagogical practice is "centrally about transforming relations of power in the classroom, relations between teacher and student, and relations among students" (p. 367). As I will discuss in the first section of this chapter, most of the teachers in this study are very conscious of how they use their authority, eschewing, when possible, the traditional role in their efforts to create more student-centered learning environments. But the notion that teachers are able to single-handedly "transform" relations of power in the secondary classroom suggests a failure to recognize how the public school operates, and, in fact, how the dynamics of power manifest for women teachers working in that context. Some feminist pedagogical theory of the past seemed to derive from the assumption that teachers' power over students is static and absolute, enabling them, therefore, to "share" that power whenever they choose. Recalling my own experiences working in the alternative program, I did not think Mary was being flippant when she said, "you've got thirty sixteen year-olds sitting in the room: who's got the power?"

In the last decade, research on the work of feminist teachers has revealed that there is no simple transfer of theory to practice: many of the elements that critics identified as problematic in the university classroom have been recognized as particularly so in the secondary school. These studies have inspired an intensive

critique of, and a renewed dialogue about, the goals of a feminist pedagogy. In this chapter, I explore some of that work through attention to the concepts of "authority and power," "the classroom as a community," and "women's ways of knowing," illuminating the theoretical problems, and the opportunities and contradictions that evolve in practice as experienced by the five teachers in this study.

Authority and Power

Lynn:

In terms of how I would be different than other social studies teachers? I see them at the front talking, "blah, blah, blah," the authority, always being right, knowing content, content-driven. I just think that way of being an authority--I'm not like that at all. Sometimes I am at the front, sure, lots of times I'll be at the front giving directions, giving some information, but I think I let them have the freedom to get it wrong, to explore it for themselves, to talk to each other, to work at the process.

Christine:

You walk down the hall and you can see the teacher-dominated classrooms versus the student-centered classrooms. You know where the teacher-centering is happening. I'm not happy being the lecturer who stands at the front, and, in fact, kids absolutely hate it.

Trish:

One of the teachers that I teach with won't let the students come up and ask for [a correction] if they've found more marks on their paper. That's his way of exerting power over them: "how dare you ask for more marks?" The kids are afraid to [ask] even though they deserve it. So what are you teaching these kids? You're teaching them not to stand up for themselves. It's a power thing.

Student-centering may translate differently in various contexts, but I found that all the teachers share a set of qualities that make this pedagogy possible. First,

they do not conflate authoritarianism with its authoritative manifestation. Code (1991) makes the distinction that where the former is assumed from privilege, the latter is earned through responsible epistemic practice. Helen Jefferson Lenskyj (1994) echoes this stance in her reference to Freire's assertion that there is a difference between the use of power based on the teacher's intellectual authority and authoritarian behavior in which power is abused. For the teachers in this study the distinction manifests in a rejection of the traditional classroom approach, where the teacher is focused exclusively on delivering the required content to a class that is expected to absorb the information quietly and uncritically. The irony is that while this approach has persisted partly in the interests of maintaining control, it seems to work to opposite effect in most classrooms. I will discuss this issue in more detail in the following section, but the salient question for teachers working in regular secondary contexts is how to contain the behaviors of some students so that others have the space to learn. As Manicom argues, it is for this reason that teachers cannot, and should not, attempt to divest themselves of their authority: "...a vital teacher role is to respond to (and interrupt) power relations operating among students. In attempts to minimize teacher authority, teachers' silence all too often reinforces relations of dominance" (1992, p. 380).

Through my discussions with the teachers and observations of their classes, I learned that they do not deny their authority, but instead endeavour to use it in ways that enhance students' ability to make choices about their lives. Kathleen Casey observes that it is not a question of whether or not teachers possess greater power and privilege, but rather "*how* and for *whom* they use it" (1993, p. 161). Mary echoed this belief:

I've known teachers who've abused power and used their position to pump themselves or feel better about themselves, and other teachers who are incredible facilitators for learning...I don't have a problem with authority. I have a problem with abuse of power. I'm aware of the ability for that power to go off the deep end. I'm also aware of the wonderful stuff that can take place when you have someone to guide you.

When I asked Marcia to describe her thoughts on power within the teacher-student relationship, she expressed the concern that there has been an unproblematized linking between the qualities that some women may bring to their teaching and what a feminist pedagogy needs to do. Rather than focusing on the questionable notion of "sharing power," Marcia offers her students tools in the form of knowledge, skills, and opportunities that will allow them to develop a sense of mastery and agency:

I think what I look for when I'm looking for the basic underpinning of a feminist pedagogy is: "what are you doing in your classroom that will help your students understand themselves in a context of sex and gender? And then, where are you going to take that so they can start to change things in, number 1, their own lives, and number 2, in the world?" So I guess I look at it in a fundamentally activist way, and I try to do it in, what I would call, a very broadly political way.

To begin, Marcia assists her students in the development of personal responsibility, encouraging them to consider what they would like to learn and how they would like to learn it, to hone their ability to plan, and to "think about themselves as people who can make good decisions." Because Marcia and the other teachers invite experimentation and innovative approaches, many of their students are challenged to do the same. Marcia recalled some of the ways in which her students have embraced this challenge:

I had a group of grade 8s come to me...and said that they had a really good idea: could they be in groups--we were doing a lot of group work, that was suitable for these folks--and each group do a radio program and try to get it on Co-op Radio. And I thought, "what a good idea." One group did--this was in 1991, so that was right at the time when Apartheid was completely falling apart--anyway, they did theirs on music and anti-racism in the southern cone of Africa. And they talked about Nelson Mandela, they talked about what they thought the role of music was in the struggle against Apartheid and for people who are struggling against various vestiges of colonialism in Mozambique. It was great...So they were able to make that suggestion. It sounded fine to me. It was going to augment, rather than undermine, anything that I might have been able to use the textbook for...

Some of the things I've tried to do in the past that I've tried to do here [at the Bridge program] initially, and don't work that well, is change the chairs. So at [the enrichment programs]...the beginning of the year I'd model how to chair a current events session and then the kids would get--once everybody felt ready--the opportunity to chair their own session. And usually they got to do that two or three times in the year. And in my last year...with my grade 9s, the last two months were devoted to fourteen selected topics in Canadian history...and then for the next maybe twenty classes, they were responsible for presenting the stuff on their topic, asking questions, and setting assignments and everything. I just sat back and wrote great long analyses and observations of what they were doing. After we'd been together for the seven and a half months, it was their responsibility to take the skills that they'd learned about working together, about organizing, about presenting and put those skills into a kind of practice.

Marcia made the important point that this level of engagement is possible where students have developed sufficient "readiness, confidence and skills." While her enrichment students were ready to explore new ways of working together, her Bridge program students would be overwhelmed rather than "empowered" by such work. As Marcia observed, "you have to define power very concretely, if I were to use that word. It can't be abstract or you'll never get anywhere."

Within the feminist pedagogical discourse, theorists too often discussed power and the student-teacher relationship without careful attention to context (Manicom, 1992). When pulled from abstraction into the concrete realm of secondary school practice, "power" is a problematic issue for most women teachers, particularly if those teachers are feminists. As Briskin argues:

Not only do students respond differently to the authority of male and female teachers, it may also be more difficult to establish expertise in what some see as the "soft" subjects where women predominate. To what extent this is a result of the devaluation of subjects seen as feminine is hard to say but there is no doubt that the problem is exacerbated when the curriculum deals explicitly with gender issues: feminists face more challenges to their authority than other women teachers. The prevailing assumption is that the feminist body of knowledge is, by definition, "political" and "biased", and therefore without authority. (1990, p. 8)

Few women teachers have not experienced challenges to their authority, but those who are working from a feminist standpoint may find that they are doubly

vulnerable to the hostility of some students. In some contexts, this is expressed through disruptive and belligerent behavior; in others, students may involve their parents in efforts to avoid doing certain kinds of assignments, such as the occasion in which Mary received calls from parents who attacked her choice of the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, asserting that it was unsuitable for the boys. Any suggestion that teachers experience power in conflicting and contradictory ways usually meets with the rebuttal that teachers do have the final say in grading students. But Mary said that it is precisely the issue of grading that is the source of the most conflict for her in the enrichment program. Because she does not conceal her feminist beliefs, and works to bring a critical perspective to her teaching, she must fight the perception that a) she is "biased" in favour of the girls, and b) that the students are expected to "tow the party line" in order to receive high marks in her class:

I guess because I don't keep my politics a secret...I always get afraid that I'm going to be perceived as being unfair because a kid gets a C+ and links that up with not agreeing with me about something. I'm so vigilant about that, but it still happens no matter how careful I am. To be perceived as fair is really important to me. Sometimes I can't dance fast enough to get that through that it's not linked. But the problem, of course, is when a kid becomes convinced that you are the enemy, or that you dislike a kid's ideas, then no learning can take place. And that's a problem. You're giving some good feedback about how to write more effectively and they've just blocked you out, and they just think of you one way, and that's it. That's the sad part about being perceived as a "power" person, as a teacher.

Mary acknowledged that she feels she must over-compensate to prove that she values the boys as much as she values the girls in her classes. The boys in the enrichment program may be much quieter than their regular school counterparts, but some are just as unwelcoming to a feminist perspective and content. By accusing Mary of "not liking them," they seem conveniently to accept the stereotype that feminists are hostile toward men: if Mary is a feminist, it must follow that she is prejudiced against them. Her efforts to convince them that this is not the case fail, because ultimately, they appear determined to reduce the problem to one of

personality. If they can frame it as Mary's own political agenda and personal bias, rather than the broad social project that it is, they can minimize its importance, and avoid looking at their own complicity and privilege. Accusing Mary of favoritism deflects attention away from themselves and places her in a position where she must defend her integrity as a teacher. I do not suggest that this is entirely a conscious process or that these boys are motivated by malicious intent. However, it seems that these issues trigger for some boys (and men) such intense feelings of discomfort, that they will employ whatever possible methods to quiet these feelings.

Lynn has witnessed the lengths some boys will go to avoid facing certain hard truths about the ways in which women and men differently experience the world. On one occasion, a current events discussion degenerated rapidly into a bizarre debate about rape. The conclusion to this scenario reveals who continues to exercise the "power" to speak and be heard:

I remember my A block class, this unbelievable discussion got going where the guys in the class were saying that women often rape men, and that all these rape laws are unnecessary and, the whole tide of the discussion turned in favour of these three guys who were just saying the most outrageous things possible. And I just wanted to leave. And then finally, this one male student--who's very cool, he's First Nations and also quite tough and well-respected by the boys--he just said, "oh my God, of course women aren't raping men. I don't even know why we're having this discussion." And nobody dared say another word. And I just thought, "thank you...", you know, because at that point the girls weren't being listened to, and it was brutal...

"Brutal" is a fitting description of what this experience must have been like for Lynn and the girls in the class. There is a long history of women's accounts of male violence or the threat of it being minimized, ignored, disbelieved. Ironically, the boys who were using their collective power to silence the others in that room were, in fact, enacting the very kind of scenario the existence of which they were adamantly denying. While Lynn appreciated the intervention of the one male student, such moments are bitter medicine for women teachers: despite a woman's earned position of authority, expertise in her discipline and responsible practice,

ultimately, it is the male voice with power to influence. When I asked Lynn about her feelings on this occasion, she said:

Yeah, it's frustrating. You have to be open to listen, and some people are not open to a woman's voice, so they're not hearing. You can talk all you want, but they're not going to hear it.

In the following section, I discuss the vision of the "classroom as a community" in light of the reality Lynn succinctly described.

The Classroom as a Community

I enter the classroom with the assumption that we must build "community" in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigour. Rather than focusing on issues of safety, I think that a feeling of community creates a sense that there is a shared commitment and common good that binds us. What we all ideally share is the desire to learn--to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world. (bell hooks, 1994, p. 40)

As I reviewed this and other formulations of what might constitute a classroom community, I tried to envision the elements that could apply to the secondary school context. I considered the question of safety, and thought about my own experiences in classrooms, recalling where I had felt most and least "safe" and how others (students as well as instructors) may have experienced those environments. The contradictions surprised me. I understood more fully why the question of safety and attendant notion of "voice" have fueled ongoing debate in the literature. It seems that safety is always experienced in degrees, contingent upon what is occurring within and without, and the complex relationship between the two. It is presumptuous to guarantee, in any context, a sense of safety for everyone. bell hooks suggests that it has been the endeavour to do so that has created, for many students, the imperative for silence.

hooks argues that the knowledge-as-neutral practice of teaching and learning has survived in the name of providing a safe environment for students; conversely, however, it has worked to render the classroom as yet another site where only dominant voices are heard: "...many students, especially students of color, may not feel at all safe in what appears to be a neutral setting. It is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement" (1994, p. 39). Rather than focusing on safety, she says, the task for educators who are committed to building communities of shared discovery, and ultimately, of social transformation, is to risk with their students a return to a state of embodiment and an acknowledgement of subjectivity in the classroom that will "disrupt that objectification that is so necessary in a culture of domination" (p. 139). hooks concedes that such a radical shift in paradigms is bound to elicit feelings of fear and discomfort--rather than ignore these, educators need to acknowledge and work through such feelings. It is from this process, she argues, meaningful change becomes possible.

hooks suggests that educators can begin to assist students in the development of new skills and understandings that will further this goal. However, she and other theorists recognize that the vision of the classroom as a community cannot be realized fully and consistently without profound and systemic change to existing institutions. And yet, while many feminist educators are committed to changing those institutions, they must find ways, in the meantime, to survive professionally and personally within them.

Awareness of such tensions has inspired critique of the language of "safety," "voice," and "community" in the theoretical literature; as Magda Lewis says, "it is not always clear what practices attend these abstractions" (1990, p. 484). Iris Marion Young (1990) suggests that the ideal of community "validates and reinforces the fear and aversion some social groups exhibit toward others" (p. 235). Lorraine Code (1991) echoes this argument, recalling that traditional communities were often oppressive places for women and people of sexual and racial minorities to live. She

does not reject the notion of "community" as a viable model but qualifies it carefully.

While "giving voice and listening to women and people of color" (Das Gupta, 1994, p. 25) must become central to a transformed and transformative classroom "community," this is a project more easily articulated than accomplished. As Ellsworth (1989, p. 314) remarks, "all voices...cannot carry equal legitimacy, safety and power given present social structures" (in Lather, 1991, p. 43). In a culture of entrenched sexism and racism, most people, are not, in fact, conscious of the degree to which they tune out these voices. Bringing those responses to the level of awareness is an important first step but one that can create discord and fracture in the heterogeneous classroom. As bell hooks observes:

Suddenly, the feminist classroom is no longer a safe haven, the way many women's studies students imagine it will be, but is instead a site of conflict, tensions, and sometimes ongoing hostility. Confronting one another across differences means that we must change ideas about how we learn; rather than fearing conflict we have to find ways to use it as a catalyst for new thinking, for growth. (1994, p. 113)

While other theorists reject the notion that the feminist classroom will somehow offer the illusive sense of "safety," they see the potential for hostility (whether open, or covert) as more problematic than does hooks:

Despite claims that feminist classrooms are nurturing and caring, there is no self-evident safety. Classrooms are places where people, previously unknown to one another, are together, often for only a couple of hours each week. Confidentiality cannot be assured, and fellow students may react in ways that marginalize, patronize, objectify, or stereotype other women...Some speaking may be merely uncomfortable. In other instances it is dangerous. (Manicom, 1992, p. 378)

Earlier I suggested that safety is experienced in degrees: there are few places, it seems, where women are unequivocally "safe." In fact, those places assumed to be most safe are sometimes the least so. In a nonscientific, random sample of 2,000 girls aged nine to nineteen in *Seventeen* magazine, two-thirds of the reported

experiences of harassment occurred when other people were present; the location most frequently cited was the school classroom (Stein, 1995, p. 151).

If there can be no guarantee of safety in university classrooms, where one would hope that students, in general, have reached a certain level of maturity and developed at least the semblance of respect for other people, the secondary school environment, appears, in contrast, to be what one teacher described as a "battleground," or as another wryly offered, a "zoo." As a teacher who has worked with some of the most challenging students in the regular secondary system, Christine has observed that dominant relations of power are not merely reflected, but exaggerated and intensified in some classrooms. When discussing the implementation of a women's studies course at another school, she observed:

That course is, in fact, a safety factor where it's safe for the girls to participate and the boys are there to listen and learn...because sexist jokes are, I think, perceived as fair in the context of schooling. It's okay to do that. The group I've got this year, I've had to work really hard on the racist component as well, not that it's not all tied up together. They don't even have that kind of sensitivity, that "gee, I shouldn't be making these jokes." So [incorporating] gender issues [in that class], it's too painful, it's gone as far as it can.

While Christine, Trish and Lynn are always looking for ways to foster the sense of shared purpose in their classrooms, their efforts are undermined by the disruptive, attention-seeking, and sometimes harassing behaviors of some students. While there are girls who engage in these behaviors, it is overwhelmingly the boys who consistently try to dominate. Few researchers interested in equity within secondary schools can escape discussion about this problem. Linda Eyre (1991), in her study of a grade 8 Home Economics class, details the methods by which one group of boys managed to silence the girls, the quieter boys, and dominate the student-teacher interaction generally. In Rebecca Priegert Coulter's (1995) study of feminist first-year teachers, she learned that hostility from boys intensified with each attempt a teacher made to equalize male and female participation in the classroom.

Coulter suggests that we may need to rethink the notion that teachers unconsciously give more time and attention to boys (citing Sadker et al., 1991). The teachers in her study were not merely aware of, but angered by, the fact that the only way to maintain control was to allow different standards for male and female behavior. Some of Coulter's participants believed that acquiescing to boys' demands became imperative for their survival as classroom teachers.

The girls in these rooms are also learning about survival. Like the teachers in Sattler's study, Christine, Trish and Lynn are concerned about the ways in which the process of schooling teaches many girls to take a subordinate role. As June Larkin remarks in her study of high school girls' experiences of harassment: "The behavioural patterns that set the stage for male dominance and female subordination begin early and, when educators fail to intervene, schools become places where these patterns get reinforced" (1994, p. 31). Christine, for example, is aware that the boys who experience academic and other difficulties are placed in her care because they require a "safe" environment--but noted that little thought is given to how the girls will experience that classroom:

I have some real challenges. I have such male-dominated classrooms, I can't compete...And that male-domination is about putting the difficult kids who need the extra, sort of mothering, in a safe place, which is my classroom...At the most, there are five girls in that class and then the boys are just outrageous. It almost should have been an all-male class--at least that would have contained it. And I have done that in the past with a class similar, what I would call a skill-deficient class...There were two girls who fit the category and we [she and another teacher] just suggested they not stay. It's not a healthy [environment]. They're really accepted, but none of them would dare to offer an opinion that stands against any of [the boys]. In fact, some are quite willing to go along, because that guarantees acceptance...

While most of the teachers recognize that their power is limited to alter this dynamic, they nevertheless feel that somehow they should be doing more. Trish and Lynn expressed this concern:

Trish:

It's very hard [balancing participation]. I mean I've tried to be as conscious of it as I can, but boys are louder than girls. It's the whole thing where you take the boys out just to shut them up. I see it at the beginning of the year--it happens every year--at the beginning of the year we all start out on an equal plane, but over the year, the girls get quieter and quieter and the boys get louder and louder. Obviously I'm not doing something right. But still I'm up there [as a woman science teacher]. You get less participation from the girls than the boys...something I still have to work on. It's not easy...

Lynn:

What frustrates me sometimes very much is the boys who get so much attention from acting out. And that really makes me so angry because I end up using all of my energy with them when I could be giving it to these good girls. You know, the dynamic is still there, the dynamic of... there will be the girls with their pens and books and papers and there will be the guys, "can I borrow a pen? where's my book?" And you know, that's okay for guys to be irresponsible and girls not to. That happens in my classroom all the time too, and I'm no better than anyone else at that...

When I visited Lynn's women's studies grade 11 class, I asked the students what it was like to be in an academic class with a majority of girls. "Very different," was the response. Several girls referred to a particular class that "is so male-dominated, it's impossible to do anything. Even the male teacher can't control them."

That sense of not being in control in the classroom is one with which many teachers working in regular school environments can empathize, but as discussed in the previous section, it is of particular concern, and creates contradictory implications for teachers committed to the goal of gender equity. The point is that teachers like Christine, Trish and Lynn are *not* falling into traditional traps; they are keenly aware of the ways in which the dynamics of dominance and subordination operate at a societal level and manifest in the classroom, but as individual teachers, they are limited in their capacity to rewrite this script. Using a variety of instructional methods, making explicit the boys' unreasonable demands for attention, endeavouring to explain how their behavior affects others, and as a

final recourse, sending them out of the room serve as temporary and only minimally effective measures. The entrenchment of male power that is linked closely to the bombardment of hegemonic messages boys receive about masculinity cannot be counteracted by one teacher in one classroom. As R.W. Connell (1996) argues:

It is important...to register the fact that the school is not the only institution shaping masculinities, and may not be the most important...Media research documents what we know intuitively, that mass media are crammed with representations of masculinity ...Teachers discussing problems about boys often suggest that they are confronting intractable patterns fixed outside the school. (p. 211)

Lynn's students remarked that *even* the male teacher can't control the boys, which is itself a small but familiar example of taken-for-granted male power and privilege: these students have accepted without question that authority is accrued automatically to men--if "he" is unable to control the class, then the class must be uncontrollable. Christine reflected upon the question of privilege in her discussion of a classroom "democracy," and made the distinction between the model in theory and in practice:

I guess the thing is this model of a democracy and students as active participants in a democracy--I'm concerned with the contradiction that it empowers some more than others, that the model actually works really well for boys to have an opinion and express it and to be informed and so on, but that it doesn't necessarily empower girls. In fact, it can create conflict for them...socially we're not that accepting of forceful, strong-minded, opinionated women. So it can be a problematic model. And trying to create the space for them can be really hard. It's just a battle because those who are used to having the agenda, control of the airwaves, are oblivious, and then resentful and reluctant to give up the space that they've grown to expect. You could establish, at the beginning, a democratic concept and in fact, I do that in every single class. Together we agree on some rules. But it's token, because those rules are forgotten.

Despite their efforts to establish "ground rules," Christine and Trish find that the habitual behaviors soon resurface; as Trish described, it becomes a vicious cycle with a group of boys getting louder as the majority of girls become quieter.

Christine has observed, like the teachers in Coulter's study, that particular boys will resent the efforts teachers make to provide more spaces for girls to participate. These boys seem to feel entitled to the teacher's attention and will ensure its continuance through aggressive occupation of more psychological, social and physical space in the classroom.

But there are exceptions--both in terms of individual boys and entire classes. Several of the teachers recalled "wonderful" classes in which male dominance and disruption were not a problem. The possibility for more balanced and productive male/female student participation seems to depend on several factors: the age and maturity of the students, the ratio of males to females in the class, the degree of structure already in place (as in the Bridge program where Marcia teaches currently), and perhaps most significantly, where students are, as Christine suggested, on the "intellectual scale and the enlightenment scale":

I can't think of any easier assignment, in terms of teaching, than getting a whole lot of bright kids all day. I'm really good at sitting and prepping stuff that will challenge really bright kids. That's easy. But when you're dealing with a set of democratic rules, with guys, and some girls, whose understandings are just not well-developed yet, you're into the power struggle. They're into: "let's get off track, how long will it take to get her mad? how can we avoid learning?" All those games get played out and it's exhausting.

When students, and boys in particular, do not experience success in school, and have been singled out by the institution as problematic, they are more likely to engage in rebellious behaviors and direct those feelings at teachers who are the most visible and accessible representatives of the institution. These boys are not, as R.W. Connell argues, driven "by raging hormones" as is commonly believed, but they act out:

...in order to acquire or defend prestige, to mark difference, and to gain pleasure. As indicated by the criminology research... rule breaking becomes central to the making of masculinity when boys lack other resources. (1996, p. 220)

Mary and Marcia, in their experience as teachers working at enrichment programs, described a very different kind of classroom dynamic. These students are academic achievers. To gain acceptance into these programs, they are expected to have begun to develop some critical understandings and possess the ability and the desire to engage in intellectual work. Mary explained that part of her program's mandate is to ensure diversity in its selection of students: they come from all areas of the city and from a variety of cultural backgrounds. It is important to mention, however, that most are from middle and upper-middle class circumstances. Rather than this being reflective of the academic and intellectual capabilities of working class students--as some people might uncritically assume--rather, it is suggestive of the very real, but subtle, variances in privilege. Parents who are familiar with how the system works (most have advanced academically themselves), and who can ensure their children will have access to the necessary material and educational resources, are in a much better position to take advantage of enrichment opportunities than are many working-class parents. Most of the girls in the enrichment programs have strong, quite often professional, women role-models in their lives and have been encouraged and challenged to excel:

Marcia:

Certainly lots of research shows, the Sadkers' research on the classroom, shows that males expect and get more attention, negative and positive, because any attention is good attention. They get to speak out more, they try to dominate if they can... Usually at the [enrichment programs], if there wasn't gender balance in a class, it was always balanced in numbers in favour of the girls. And because they come from class backgrounds in those two schools where girls are, in general, expected to do as well as boys, and the girls get lots of encouragement, it wasn't as much of a problem as it might be in other classrooms--that is having the girls speak out, having the girls exercise their "power," and playing a strong, equal, and sometimes dominating role in the classroom.

Mary:

I'm actually in a different situation here at the [enrichment program]. The girls are quite strong. And in fact, in the junior grades they're very strong, and sometimes really dwarf the boys, unwittingly. I mean, it's just the way it happens. They come from really strong families and they're really quite assertive. Although they'll still--it's interesting, even to see all that strength--they'll still submit in a lot of ways. You know, especially when it comes to dating or how they look and stuff like that. But in discussions, the girls will talk a lot and it's harder to get the boys. It's sort of a reverse, I guess, of a regular high school situation.

Upon initial reading of these accounts, it may seem that the answer to the problem of male dominance is to set to work on developing girls' self-esteem, confidence, and so on. But such qualities manifest where there are sufficient spaces, both psychological and physical, for them to develop. As Mary said, the enrichment program girls are not immune to hegemonic messages about femininity and heterosexuality, but at least here, as in the women's studies classes, there are opportunities for girls to begin to discuss these and other issues without the constant threat of interruption or ridicule. However, as mentioned, this does not imply that male students in the enrichment programs welcome a gender inclusive curriculum with open arms. What Mary encounters from these students might be classified as "polite sexism." Marcia and Lynn (who taught enrichment students for a year) suggested that the differences in attitude between the enrichment and regular school male students may be superficial. Marcia said that the enrichment boys are "so well-mannered, well-socialized," that they may feel too intimidated to voice their internal doubts. Lynn believed that these boys were just as "hostile" toward feminism as their regular school counterparts but "knew it was not okay to say so."

When I introduced the subject of gender inequity to Mary's English class at the enrichment program, "hostile" might be too strong a word to describe the reaction, but many of the students certainly did not appear comfortable in pursuing the discussion. In preparation for the final exam, Mary asked the students to write an essay outline on the theme: "independence means to me..." When they had completed

their outlines, I was invited to speak with the students. First, I asked if they would like to share what they had written. Both the girls and boys in the class were eager to participate. Their ideas were insightful, thoughtful and articulately expressed. I then asked, "do you think that women experience "independence" differently in our society than men do?" Silence. After several moments, a boy responded with an abrupt "no!" and showed no inclination to elaborate. Then one of the girls spoke, "yes," she said, "my brother has a lot more freedom than I do. I guess it's because my parents worry about me a lot more--they know the bad things that can happen." She continued, "I guess, in the past, women were dependent on men financially, but maybe not anymore." I asked if anyone else would like to respond. More silence. The bell rang and the students made a hasty exit. After the class, Mary and I spoke briefly about this exchange. Coming from upper middle-class homes, she said, these students have a minimal understanding of women's experiences of poverty and economic dependence, though she has, in the past, brought in statistics.

Mary's interpretation of the response may be valid, but I have observed that most students, regardless of their backgrounds, will speak of women as a homogeneous group, with the attendant implication that the advances and opportunities that some women have enjoyed are experienced by all women. And yet, my sense is that these girls are not fully convinced of this rhetoric, but that they feel it is the safe response to offer in most contexts. I expected to find in this study evidence of "resistance" to feminist content from some of the girls, but neither in my interviews with the teachers nor in my observations did I encounter it. What I discovered instead were girls (and a few boys) who were struggling to reconcile their experiences with the current perception and rhetoric that gender "equality" has been achieved. The teachers said that while some girls have quite a limited understanding of gender issues and are sometimes reticent to discuss the issues, they are not "resistant" to hearing and learning more about social equity.

When I visited Lynn's women's studies class, I asked the students to list the ways in which boys and girls of their age group might experience life differently. When

we reconvened as a class, these students also seemed initially hesitant to begin. One girl referred to the unequal opportunities for girls and boys within the school context, but then quickly added that "things were changing." I then spoke for a few minutes about the issue of backlash and that progressive change does not happen naturally, but requires a concerted effort. At that point, the girls were very eager to discuss the issues, some of which they had explored previously with Lynn. Perhaps they needed to get a better sense of my perspective and beliefs before they felt comfortable sharing their own.

One boy was very willing to participate, but he spoke quietly and had an accent that I had difficulty understanding. I was sorry that I could not hear more of his ideas--Lynn had told me that this young man often contributed positively to class discussions. The two other boys seemed to resent the implication that they experience greater privilege than their female classmates, and after disagreeing vehemently that male athletes have greater opportunities in the sports world, and that the boys' school teams have better access to the school resources, they withdrew from the discussion and talked only to each other. Several of the girls attempted to bring the two boys back into the discussion, perhaps feeling the responsibility to provide the emotional care-taking that Magda Lewis (1990) describes. One girl said, "but it isn't the boys' fault that they get the best playing fields." At that moment, I became conscious of my own efforts to re-engage the boys. Lynn acknowledged that their presence in the class does influence, to some extent, how she presents certain topics. But she said that she tries not to dilute the issues, and, in general, they respond quite positively to most discussions.

The exercise encouraged the students to consider these issues in a personal way, and therefore, may have struck a deeper nerve than would more general discussions. These two boys chose not to give me their list, which I can interpret in several ways. I think that they might have resented me for disagreeing with them on most points. But I suspect that they did not put much effort into the exercise. I wonder if the prospect of having to consider seriously what life would be like as a female was too

threatening. Even the phrase, "if I were a girl..." might well have evoked some very uncomfortable feelings: in the male adolescent culture to be identified as "acting like, looking like, thinking like a girl" is anathema, and can precipitate harassment, even a violent reaction from their male peers. I asked Lynn why she thought these boys had enrolled in her women's studies/social studies course, and she said that some of the girls in the class had posed this same question at the beginning of the year. The boys explained that they were interested in learning about other perspectives, and according to Lynn, they had been very receptive to alternative viewpoints. But what I saw the day I visited was evidence of the discomfort that emerged--and was expressed--when they were asked to acknowledge the privileges that have been automatically conferred to them as young men.

In my efforts to interpret and describe these responses, I have struggled to find language that does not minimize the complexity of students' motives, conflicting needs and impulses. Whether or not to use the term "resistance" is a case in point--Lather (1991), Lindquist (1994) and others have critiqued the often contradictory application of this concept in the literature. As Barbara Lindquist argues:

When we discuss highly emotional and controversial issues like race, gender, class, and sexual preference in class, it becomes especially important to attend to both the obvious and subtle reactions of students. To employ the concept of student resistance as a rationale for ignoring or attempting to overcome students' responses is to miss an opportunity to understand the complexity and potentially useful conflict in their responses and to modify one's teaching based on those nuances.
(1994, p. 3)

I agree that we need to be circumspect in our interpretations of students' responses, "not only listening to understand, but *for* something other than resistance" (Lindquist, p. 5). But as I stood at the front of Lynn's class straining to hear the girls as the two boys talked only to each other, or as I sat facing the boy in Mary's class who made no attempt to conceal his derision, I felt that Mary's description of this work was indeed accurate:

...It is uncomfortable--you're asking the class to sit in discomfort for a long time while things get talked about. You're asking them to put themselves on the line when a lot of them would just rather not think about it at all. You ask yourself, "well, do I want to?" Most [teachers] would say, "no, not really."

If teachers sometimes fail to appreciate the "potentially useful conflict in [students'] responses" or "to modify" their "teaching based on those nuances" particularly when some of those students insist that rape laws are unnecessary, refuse to read a novel about women, and so on, it is understandable. While theorists have acknowledged and endeavoured to explain the conflicting feelings experienced by students in the feminist classroom, I don't believe they have adequately addressed how this work is experienced by teachers. In much of the feminist pedagogical literature, the practitioner is rarely acknowledged as a person with conflicting feelings of her own--she must be sufficiently sensitive to the issues to make social equity work a professional and personal commitment but is expected to carry on unaffected by the slings and arrows hurled in her direction. Lindquist (1994) rightly reminds us that we are all "struggling with our own prejudices and intolerance" (p. 7), and citing Code (1991, p. 86), that "people are never quite what they were or will be." But such reminders, however true, may provide small comfort for the feminist teacher whose efforts to create more equitable and engaging learning environments for all students are not merely unacknowledged but are met with resentment and suspicion. Lindquist concludes her critique of "resistance" with a confirmation of the classroom as a potential community of change:

Classrooms represent a microcosm of multiple, conflicting subjectivities magnified by the number of people present. The classroom has the potential, therefore, to become a site where people can begin to imagine and experiment with forming, in a smaller context, the democratic alliances and "chain of equivalences" across diverse groups that Chantal Mouffee (1988) proposes for larger groups. (1994, p. 7)

As I progressed in the writing of this chapter, I continued to struggle with the notion of "community" and the potential for its realization in the secondary school classroom. Aside from the problems described above, there was something else that troubled me. I happened to mention my uncertainty to a friend (who is a feminist and has worked in support of many community events and programs) and she offered a key. She said that her understanding of a community involves a unifying principle that is valued sufficiently by the members to overcome issues of difference; a common purpose draws people together, out of choice.

Whatever their motives, most university students, presumably have chosen freely to be there. Secondary students, on the other hand, are required by law to attend school until a certain age; beyond that they are bound by parental and societal expectations, the threat of life-long underemployment, and the loss of connection with peers. For most students, there is little "choice" of which to speak. Some students enjoy school and thrive in the environment, others have accepted it as inevitable and do what is required, and still others will express their resentment and frustration daily. Yet, these students all come together in the classroom where the teacher must respond to their individual learning needs (and often personal difficulties), while "getting them through" the required material. I don't believe the model of community--as defined by hooks and others (Shrewsbury, 1987 in Das Gupta, 1994)--is a particularly useful one to apply to the public school classroom context, nor perhaps was it intended to be. When discussing "voice," "safety" and "community," theorists need to be careful in the transfer of these concepts, or risk setting up unattainable ideals, meanwhile missing the progressive work that is being accomplished. In the absence of whole-school policies that would make social equity everyone's concern, individual teachers endeavour to do this work in relative isolation, while simultaneously trying to meet the expectations of administrators, parents, and the public. Only with an appreciation of these constraints and tensions can the efforts of feminist teachers be fully recognized and valued.

"Women's Ways of Knowing"

Trish:

[Cooperative learning and other methods are ways] of putting boys in their place. I noticed with the gifted class, when I've mixed them into groups, that puts them more on a level playing field. The boys don't like it as much. And then more writing assignments, more journal-type things give the girls more opportunity. And it takes away from that competition--you know, the loudest one gets to answer the question--because they're writing things down. Anything more creative, the girls outshine the boys all the time.

Until institutions embrace a whole-school, pro-active approach, individual teachers continue to search for ways to make their classroom environments more equitable. Like Trish, the four other teachers in this study incorporate, where appropriate, cooperative learning, pairing, and other kinds of group and individual work that will engage students whose cognitive and learning styles are compatible with these methods. As Trish has observed, many of those students are girls.¹ But not all girls or exclusively girls prefer a "collaborative" over a "competitive" approach. The work of those who endeavoured to articulate a "female-friendly" classroom has been subjected to ongoing critique by critics who recognize the unproblematic, often essentialist beliefs on which many of these theories were built. Those concerned with revaluing "collaboration and sharing," "subjective experience" and "women's ways of knowing," often failed to address the essentialist underpinnings and contradictions. A number of the teachers in this study are grappling with these contradictions, working to define a feminist method that is both theoretically sound and feasible in practice. Mary, for example, questioned whether or not a feminist reconstructed epistemology is in fact possible:

¹ Trish seemed to feel that girls and boys do exhibit different cognitive and learning styles. But the four other teachers in the study consciously avoided language that would suggest an essentialist perspective. They would choose, for example, the word "traditional" rather than "masculine" to describe a method of teaching and learning. When Christine began her study of women social studies teachers, she expected to find that they emphasized "caring and connection" in their work but discovered that this was not necessarily the case. Through engagement in feminist theory, she created a framework for her study that would take into account a variety of "ways" of being in the classroom that did not assign stereotypical qualities to women and men.

[Regarding] how you're representing...material: I guess that would involve women's ways of knowing, and women's ways of learning, incorporating them into your lesson so that you're not doing the traditional--what many people would call patriarchal--lesson that historically has been used for years and has appealed to boys because they were the ones that were generally going to go on. So the lessons are structured for a "male way" of learning. But there are problems...and that's where I get into difficulty. The problem with women's ways of knowing is that a lot of women would say, "no, I don't learn that way. You can't make distinctions about ways of learning and ways of seeing the world based on gender. You have to make them based on personality and therefore you may have twenty-eight different ways of learning and knowing in the classroom and your job is to respond to each of those individuals." And some girls will really resist that notion [that they learn differently than boys]...One of the main areas where [feminists] disagree is that the one group will say that we have to now give credence to things that have been traditionally female: craft, to relationship, to family, to mothering, that we have to give importance to those things. The other camp, the women who are soldiers or engineers or in things that are traditionally male jobs, their stand is not that we have to give credibility to things that are traditionally female, but that we can do anything that a man can do. So you keep the status quo but you show that you've got skill in those areas. So back to the women's ways of knowing thing, if you're going to be that kind of feminist teacher and you're going to employ that kind of feminist pedagogy, then you've got this problem: do you honour women's ways of being in the world? Or do you make it so that everybody can succeed in the one way in the classroom?

These are questions that continue to inspire debate. When a book entitled *Women's Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1986) appeared on the scene, some feminists were eager to embrace its thesis: that women as a group not only construct knowledge in particular ways but that through a stage analysis we can understand the different epistemologies among women. The authors suggest that at the time of their study, each participant occupied a particular place on the continuum, and depending on her future experiences, might or might not move into another category. Some young women, in particular, were stalled in the first category of "silence" where they had little self-awareness or guiding inner voice. The other participants had progressed to the next levels: relying on received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, or had reached the constructivist stage where they understood that "all knowledge is constructed, and

the knower is an intimate part of the known" (p. 137).

While this work was welcomed by some feminists for giving authenticity to women's voices and legitimizing the role that subjective experience plays in their status as knowers, critics, such as Lorraine Code, found *Women's Ways of Knowing* "epistemologically and politically, more problematic than promising" (1991, p. 253). She concludes:

The research legitimates the unsurprising conclusion that the women interviewed had a wide range of cognitive experiences. It does not legitimate the conclusion that these are *women's* "ways". Yet the authors' assertion that they listened to "the woman's voice" points to the conclusion that that women have these experiences *because* they are women. They do not ask whether such "ways of knowing" are the products of women's oppressed social positions, nor do they consider whether a celebration of these "ways" would be empowering or politically liberating. They cite no comparative studies to show whether (some) men manifest these same cognitive styles and attitudes; nor do they address the political question as to whether privileged men's occupation of positions of strength correlates with masculine "ways of knowing". (p. 260)

For feminist teachers in this study, the salient question is how to create learning environments that allow all students opportunities to develop their potential as empowered, critically aware and contributing young women and men. As Code argues, a de-contextualized, apolitical exploration of some women's cognitive and learning styles does little to further this project. If many girls prefer small group work over a conventional classroom method, we need to ask what it is about the latter that excludes girls (and the quieter boys). In co-educational settings where groups of boys feel entitled to dominate the interaction from the primary level on, it is unsurprising that many girls find that alternative methods provide the spaces for expression that are otherwise denied them. And if few boys embrace the cooperative approach, we need to consider what that reveals about the status still assigned to the qualities of interdependence and collaboration within a society founded on the ideology of individualism.

What Code has describes as the "autonomy obsession" in philosophy has hinged

on the notion that intimate relationships pose a threat to moral and cognitive integrity: "autonomous man" is engaged in competition with other self-serving individuals who value individual rights, rational self-interest, and efficiency. Cooperation is devalued because it appears to entail a failure of self-sufficiency and the loss of autonomy (pp. 79-80). Within patriarchy, it is this ideological foundation on which most institutions have been constructed and continue to operate.

As Mary recalled, the liberal feminist camp has sought to provide access for girls and women into such institutions, while leaving the structures of those institutions intact, and the philosophy of individualism that undergirds them, unproblematicized. While the work of liberal feminists has resulted in important gains for women, these have not come without a price. The current perception and attendant rhetoric that "the work has been done" has rendered gender equity programs unnecessary in the eyes of many. Meanwhile the entrenchment of gender, race and class inequality is further mystified and obscured. Such concerns have evoked an ongoing critique of individualism within the theoretical literature. As Code describes, those engaged in the critique have tended either:

to argue for reconstructions of subjectivity oriented toward granting to such "feminine" values as caring and connectedness the place that autonomy occupies in individualistic thinking; or they have worked within the influence of postmodernism to derive conceptions of multiple or fragmented subjectivities, discursively constituted by and positioned within the political, racial, economic, sexual, ethnic, class and cultural spaces of twentieth-century societies. (1991, p. 81)

Code argues that both of these constructs pose problems in terms of the political promise they hold. In revaluing such qualities as care, cooperation and connectedness and designating them women's values, the first group creates "homogeneous, unproblematicized, and ahistorical conception of woman" (p. 81). Without serious attention to the social, economic and political contexts in which women in certain classes of western societies have developed these qualities, we return to a confirmation of traditional and oppressive stereotypes of women.

Moreover, Code suggests that it is no more useful to dichotomize methods and values than it is to designate these "masculine" or "feminine": cooperation, for example, is sometimes facilitated by differentiation and autonomy. And while trust, kindness, responsibility and care might work well as guiding principles, at times it may be more appropriate to act according to "efficiency-maximizing and autonomy-promoting values" (p. 108).

The second group (poststructuralist, posthumanist, post-essentialist), observes Code:

argue that subjectivity is a construct, hence not a locus of fixed intentions, natural attributes, or a privileged, self-actualizing consciousness..."woman" is a fiction that feminists need to deconstruct, and the same is true of gender differences. (1991, p. 81)

While Code is highly critical of "malestream ideal objectivity" (p. 255), she does not find as the antidote a "slide into *unknowing* that subjectivism and unmitigated relativism prompts" (p. 255)--a position that she sees reflected in some of the more extreme examples of poststructuralist work. Instead, Code argues for: "a mitigated relativism, constrained by objectivity and a commitment to realism, but capable of taking subjectivity, accountability, and a range of perspectives seriously into account..." (p. 251).

Theorists engaged in the discourse of progressive education have long recognized the importance of encouraging students to reflect and draw upon their own experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge. However, as Code asserts, just as so-called objective sources are scrutinized for their biases, personal narratives must be opened similarly to critique. Jeanne Brady Giroux (1989) argues for a critical theory of voice that "recognizes how meaning in all of its multilayered forms can be heard and interrogated as part of a broader task to reveal and change structures of domination" (1989, p. 9). In the absence of a theoretical departure point, the "authority of experience" can be used to "silence and exclude" (hooks,

1994, p. 90) with the classroom discourse degenerating into a "vague and sloppy relativism" (Giroux, p. 9). In Marcia's discussion of what does and does not constitute a feminist pedagogy, she echoed this criticism:

I don't think it's good enough just to say, "I'm reading a lot of books by women and I'm sitting the people in a circle and everybody gets a chance to speak and I'm valuing everything, or I'm counting every utterance as a legitimate form of knowledge or experience." I think that's very sloppy, very vague and probably doesn't have a lot to do with feminism.

Marcia and the other teachers in the study do encourage students to be self-reflexive, finding the use of journals, response papers and autobiographical exercises a good place to begin. But in most cases they make explicit the purpose of these assignments: to help students situate their experiences within a theoretical context, to understand the relationship between personal discoveries and larger social realities. The students in Lynn's women's studies class have proven that they can handle responsibly an open floor discussion of feminist issues; however, she and most of the teachers in this study have found that in regular classes, often these discussions degenerate into contests for power and attention where the most vocal students adopt a stance, usually based on some vague reference to subjective experience, with the other students intimidated into silence. To curtail these possibilities, now Lynn sets parameters from the outset, but within those parameters there is ample room for students to take the initiative and experiment:

Usually I like to be very manipulative with [these assignments]. One I did for International Women's Day was to pair them up, try to make it male/female pairs. The class voted on whether they wanted this for marks or not, and most voted "no," so there's no judgement from me...And then they take different topics, whether it's "feminism: define it" or "violence against women: go and get statistics." One pair did an amazing survey last year: they surveyed grade 8 through 12, male and female, about body image...Or the first year I did this assignment: [Mark and Sandra: pseudonyms] Mark is Korean and he made this traditional Korean dish that usually women will make. And he explained, "in my family I've learned how to cook

and I enjoy it and here's the food," and he shared it. And Sandra said, "in my family there is no dad at home because of the divorce. It's all women and so we all have to cook, but when I get stressed out, I enjoy baking, and that's okay too. Just because you're a feminist...doesn't mean you can't like to cook." So she had brownies and shared them with the class. And so those have always been great because there's none of this, you know, "my sister's cousin's husband's wife's brother said, you know, 'women rape men'." But if you bring in statistics, or this is the definition of feminism, let's discuss it, then I feel it's better. It's more manipulative on my part because you have a place to discuss it, rather than [fighting] racist generalizations and sexist generalizations...

While Lynn continues to explore these issues in the classroom, she creates assignments that will ensure every student has an opportunity to participate, productively and meaningfully. Mark and Sandra, in their choice of cooking as a theme and their discussion of what it means in their lives, succeeded in bringing the "private" into the "public" world of the classroom. They not only reminded their classmates of the importance and value of domestic work, but of its validity as a feminist/social issue. They confronted stereotypes about feminism, and recalled stereotypes about what constitutes women's work and men's work, while suggesting that the sexual division of labour has not altered greatly despite the rhetoric. And they shared their personal experiences in a way that may have inspired others to see anew the necessary yet taken-for-granted work and the people in their lives who perform it daily.

This example of feminist teaching work, provides, I think, a fitting conclusion to this chapter. Lynn did not abdicate her authority in structuring the assignment yet left a lot of room for her students to exercise their initiative, creativity and judgement. While group work is sometimes touted as the ideal alternative to traditional "competitive" instructional methods, Elizabeth G. Cohen (1986) cautions that unless tasks and groups are selected carefully, patterns of dominance may be reinforced based on students' peer, academic and societal status (pp. 23-34). I have also observed that failure to consider the potential dynamics of a group often results in one or two students (often the girls) shouldering most of the responsibility for the work. But organizing the class into male/female pairs seemed to circumvent these

problems: each of the students had to be responsible for his or her part of the research and presentation. They were free to draw upon their own experiences, and with Lynn's guidance, discovered how these personal insights connect to larger social themes.

There is no script for secondary teachers that details how to do feminist work in the variety of classroom situations they will encounter. Much of Lynn's work, like that of the other teachers in this study, involves a process of trial and error, of experimentation, risk-taking, ongoing evaluation and revision. Feminist teaching is not only about inspiring change but responding *to* change. It is uncomfortable, even painful at times. But as several of the teachers recalled, there are moments when "amazing" things happen in the classroom, when students are responsive and engaged. Such moments are what keep the teachers moving forward.

Chapter 6

Teacher Activism in the School and Beyond

As I progressed through the writing of this thesis, I began to see feminist pedagogy as a kind of spiral. In the previous two chapters, teachers described their efforts to revise subject content and the classroom experience--the inner rings of that spiral. But the classroom does not exist in a vacuum; what happens here informs, and is profoundly informed by, all those places outside. If the purpose of feminist pedagogy is social change (Manicom, 1992), then feminist teachers' work extends beyond the classroom door, into the outer, interconnecting rings of the school environment, community and culture. How teachers do this work and the problems they confront is the subject of this chapter.

For the purpose of analysis, I have organized teachers' activist work into three categories. The first I define broadly as "challenging the hidden curriculum," where teachers use informal means to encourage a critical awareness about, and address the inequities within, the day-to-day school experience. At the second level, teachers develop courses and organize conferences that deal specifically with gender issues, and then must negotiate formal channels to bring these into their schools. The third level involves teachers' support of social justice organizations where they participate, with concerned students and colleagues, in local, national and international events and initiatives.

Progressive teachers' sense of efficacy is closely tied to the collegial and administrative support they receive (Casey, 1993; Weiler, 1988). As teachers described their efforts to put equity on the education agenda, I was dismayed to learn of the undisguised, sometimes hostile opposition they encountered. In some of the stories, however, a heartening epilogue followed, where teachers described moments in which the needed support was found, sometimes in an unexpected place, that made an innovative project, a new course, a beginning possible. And where there was an absence of support in their own schools, teachers looked to existing networks in the district or developed their own.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the ways in which feminist teachers characterize their relationships with colleagues at an informal level. The dynamics of these relationships reveal something about how the hidden curriculum operates: attitudes about difference and the "other," what constitutes acceptable behavior, and how particular beliefs are pushed into subtext are all played out in these interactions.

"Walking a Careful Line"

Known as feminists, with all the attendant stereotypes that identification carries, most of the teachers feel that they have little control over, and only a vague sense of, how colleagues perceive them. They suspect that their reputation as feminists does elicit from some colleagues feelings of threat and discomfort, but the very nature of such feelings forces their expression underground. What *is not* said in a staffroom conversation may reveal more than what *is*. Several teachers have noticed that when they walk into a room, colleagues become suddenly reticent. Particular jokes may not be repeated and certain topics may be avoided. The teachers' responses to the question about these relationships may sound, at moments, ambivalent, even contradictory, but the nature of these responses, in fact, illuminates the inherent contradictions that feminist teachers live:

Christine:

It's hard to know what other people say and think. I can think of a couple of things this year... As the gender equity rep in the school, I have the obligation to inform about things like International Women's Day. I just dread having to deal with anything more serious than that informational role. And yet, I'm concerned that that's what it has become: a kind of informational role rather than a support around equity issues... I'm consulted occasionally because it's known I have an interest. I'm invited [to equity events] by other women [at other schools]. I think there's a camaraderie amongst some women. The line gets...it's the kind of line that because you're a feminist, some men know how to read it and some women know how to read it... [But there is] the collaborator syndrome where some men are

threatened by this: "those women who clearly align themselves..." But it's hard to peg as anything more than a feeling. So there are lots of women who support, to some degree, the kinds of initiatives. There are some men who are totally unthreatened by it. It doesn't mean you can't laugh and joke...

Mary:

Just sort of little things that go on, like I'm sort of known as "the feminist." There's nothing I can say to that, and people have an idea of what that is. So every time... I don't mean to sound whiny... I guess this is just the reason I started, you know, focusing on these issues...

Trish:

Starting the [girls'] club was not easy in this school because there was negative feedback from the female teachers and from the male teachers. And I noticed that people who used to talk to me more casually, now are careful what they say to me. I think that some of the teachers understand and some don't. Getting this [the girls' club] as a course I don't think some people appreciate. It's kind of hard to put your finger on some of it. One thing I noticed is the jokes that would go around the lunch table, I know that people are more guarded about that with me, which is good...um, you know...it's in fun...but I still...they're guarded and they're careful what they say to me now...

Lynn:

...there had been a pretty strong old boys network at our school but at the same time, it's the old boys who got me in...I did my practicum here. I'm always walking a careful line, and I think they have come to respect that. Like they must know: how far is it okay to joke? You work those things out on a day to day basis and then people know each other and they leave it. And people know not what to say around me and what things they might be able to get away with. And some things I'll let go because I'm not always going to be fighting...

(At a later interview:) I think one thing happens to my face and then there's another thing that happens when you're not there...I thought that I had really made myself a niche. I had defined boundaries, and I've said this is what I stand for and they had come to respect that. And in some sense, maybe, but in another sense, I think, no. What goes on

when I'm not in the room hasn't changed, they just don't say it around me. And so, can I get support from them? To my face? Yes. Behind me? I don't know.

Such remarks as: "it's hard to peg as anything more than a feeling," "it's hard to put your finger on some of it," and "just sort of little things that go on" suggest the difficulty in articulating that which the teachers know at a intuitive level but cannot positively identify by concrete example. Lynn used the metaphors "to my face" and "behind my back" to describe her sense that some colleagues will attempt to placate rather than engage openly and honestly with her--a fact that became apparent when she proposed a new women's studies course. Raising consciousness about sexism is such a challenge not only because its forms are generally systemic and taken-for-granted, but in this age of so-called "political correctness," people are careful to conceal their sexist and racist feelings particularly from those whom they assume will be most disapproving. The very feelings of conflict and discomfort that need to be discussed and worked through are further denied and repressed. Linda Briskin (1990) explores this point in her formulation of an anti-sexist over a non-sexist approach. The latter, she says, "confuses an individual stance of trying to appear 'non-sexist' with actively and collectively working to eradicate sexism. The concern with personal appearance reinforces existing sexism and becomes a barrier to change" (p. 14).

The concern with appearances and personal moralities does not, as Briskin observes, change attitudes, it merely concentrates their expression into other forms. Within the professional culture, hostility against women and other groups is still permitted as long as it is cleverly dressed up as a "harmless good fun." It is not surprising that teachers feel some ambivalence about "the jokes that go around the lunch table." Whenever feminists have exposed the misogynistic roots of many forms of social discourse and behavior, they have been dismissed as humourless, a stereotype that many feminists must still feel compelled to disprove. When Christine said, "it doesn't mean you can't laugh and joke" and Trish said, "it's in fun, but...", I

heard traces of the same conflict with which I struggle whenever circumstances cast me with people who do not share my understandings but with whom I must work closely and amicably. Identifying oneself as a feminist, or taking a stand on a feminist principle, even if that means objecting to an offensive joke, seems to marginalize one, however obliquely, from the mainstream group (Coulter, 1995; Sattler, 1995).

For teachers like Trish, who come to a feminist consciousness while working in one school, this sudden sense of marginality can feel particularly disconcerting. Colleagues with whom Trish previously had enjoyed easy, casual relationships now seem guarded in her presence. Fear of her criticism and feelings of threat triggered by her determination to discuss sensitive issues may explain their altered behavior. Although Trish hopes to initiate a dialogue about the ways in which the school culture *collectively* supports, however unconsciously, discriminatory attitudes and practices, the fact that individuals feel personally threatened suggests that her message is hitting home, and that is bound to create resentment.

As Lynn observed, feminist teachers must walk a careful line. In theory, it sounds noble to challenge every sexist remark and expose all evidence of bias, but in practice, teachers feel they must let some things go or risk isolation, exhaustion and eventual burn-out. Lynn said, "I'm not going to always be fighting." For most teachers, it becomes a matter of choosing one's battles, sometimes daily.

For twenty years, Marcia has been in the fray. She is the only teacher in this study who does not recall having experienced an anti-feminist backlash against her personally; she attributes this to her longevity as a visible and outspoken presence in a range of progressive organizations and initiatives. Marcia's "upfront and ornery" approach has worked to advantage: colleagues have learned what they can expect from her, and she feels an understanding has developed based on mutual respect:

...people got to know me very well and they certainly had no illusions about what my politics were, but at the same time I was willing to listen

to oppositional ideas and I showed respect to people. And I think that people thought, "well, you know where she's coming from, she's got some integrity and that's important." And I'm quite willing, and do, speak out on a number of issues that are of importance to teachers whether they're women or whether they're men. I've been around for a long time, so I have just a real wide variety of friends and colleagues, former members of various executives and I think that contributes to it ...If you do the work and you're there for people they respect you. They may not always agree with you and I wouldn't expect them to, but if you do the work, that really influences how you're perceived.

Marcia's feminism comprises one facet of a life commitment to social equity and justice, work that has benefitted both male and female colleagues over the years. I wonder how the climate, when Marcia began teaching in the 1970s, compares to that which feminist teachers encounter today. Teachers now embarking on this journey can expect a lukewarm reception at best, and in some quarters, a very chilly one (Coulter, 1995). As I discuss the various levels of teachers' activist work, I will follow the thread of support and the sometimes surprising ways both its absence and presence are revealed.

Challenging the Hidden Curriculum

When I hear educators claim that their school provides an equitable environment for staff and students, a long list of questions jump to mind. Among these: how is gender handled in the language of official school literature or the school song? Does the school symbol feature, or at least include, positive female imagery? Are resources, such as funding, space, and coaching, allocated equally to girls' and boys' athletics? What about the more telling issue of support: do staff and administrators attend girls' games with the same frequency and enthusiasm as they attend the boys'? What events are featured in the school newspaper and yearbook and who is chosen to cover those events? What authors and subject matter *do not* appear on the shelves of the library?

And then there are the questions that have become almost rhetorical in the

literature but in general, remain unchallenged in the day-to-day experience of secondary schooling: how are the departments implicitly and explicitly ordered in the hierarchy of prestige and importance? Which departments and how many in the school are headed by women? How many women are teaching senior courses, particularly in history, math and science? And so on.

Feminist pedagogy is about making hidden things visible, a project that is not generally embraced by the institution. However, as I listened to teachers describe their efforts to make small but not insignificant changes, there were accounts of success. In fact, a salient question that emerged in my analysis of these interviews is how teachers might choose to define "success." Sometimes a victory is straightforward and immediate, such as when Christine approached an administrator requesting that the wording of a quotation in the daily bulletin be changed from "man" to "people" and he readily complied. In most instances, however, the immediate outcome cannot serve as an adequate measurement of success--it is the act of speaking out, moving from silence towards dialogue, that is the essence of activist work. When, for example, Christine and a concerned student attempted to change the wording of the school song from "sons" to "us," they were astonished at the response:

And some of the old guard, the alumni of the school who are actually teaching there, called their old buddies. And there were calls from all over the community--not just the teaching community or education community--the community outraged at the thought that we might change the song...

"The importance of tradition" is a slogan, used effectively and predictably, to justify the status quo. It conjures--particularly for members of privileged groups--the comforting images of order, continuity, even illusions of glory in an idealized past. For those who have not benefitted, however, it evokes quite a different set of images. The androcentric wording of the song is a familiar reminder of women's inferior status historically; but the community's unwillingness to revise the song

indicates that women's status, at least at the level of principle, may be as negligible as ever. It should be of real concern that the rights of female students (for official recognition, respect and dignity) are still unproblematically compromised--a fact that perhaps only incidents such as this make visible. While the response from some members of the community was discouraging, the women who challenged the tradition were successful in communicating the message that, at every level, sexist practices are highly problematic. If making hidden things visible is the first and most important step in feminist activist work, then these teachers and students can indeed claim a victory.

When feminist teachers challenge the hidden curriculum, they reveal just how inadequately current policies work to address real issues in the contemporary school environment. Where there has been no articulation of standards defining an equitable school environment, and no process for dealing with contentious incidents and practices, concerned teachers must confront these in relative isolation. Christine recalled two further examples, involving students' lockers and artwork:

I can make a personal commitment to asking a male child to take the [pictures of] naked women out of his locker but as a school policy, we haven't tackled the insides of lockers yet. There was a large painting in the hall that upset a number of women teachers over a long period of time. I think it has been taken down prior to accreditation...It was a barbaric scene with a semi-clad woman in a very dependent position, being helped up by the strong male figure. It's disappeared. It has been contentious over period of time, so when the administrator said to me, "I think you know where it's gone," I said, "that's interesting, I've only ever noticed it once." It's not that I hadn't heard about it. I just had never been by it. Of course, then you get into censorship issues as well...

It is ironic that because Christine has been candid about her feminist beliefs, this administrator assumed that she had been involved in the removal of the painting. If Christine had not to this point used covert methods, it is odd that she would be suspected in this instance. There does not seem to be the understanding

that feminist practice is, ideally, as much about means as it is about ends. Those engaged in efforts to confront sexism, racism and other forms of oppression through a process of open dialogue and public action are, in fact, subverting the dynamics of subterfuge and denial that perpetuate these conditions.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed teachers' awareness that what is *not* present can reveal as much about prevailing attitudes and beliefs as what *is*. Trish recounted an unsettling example of this when we were discussing attitudes about gay and lesbian youth, another circumstance that reveals the chasm between official rhetoric and actual school practice:

Statistics say that one in nine students are [gay or lesbian] and I don't think that's dealt with. In fact, our head librarian won't have any books in the library on homosexuality. What right does he have to not put them there? There is nothing, so what's that telling the kids? It's not acceptable, right? No books...Part of this CAPP course ["Career and Personal Planning," a province-wide course recently implemented], supposedly, is to teach about homosexuality. It's in there but it's something that gets...it's how lightly they deal with it: "we mentioned this, we mentioned this..." It's not like they've gone into anything. Some teachers didn't want to teach this CAPP program because they didn't feel secure about it in their own minds. So there's a lot of education needed for the teachers and the students...it's not going to get dealt with, teachers are afraid to deal with it. They're afraid that parents are going to say, "well, you said this..."

Upon its inception, the CAPP program was heavily criticised both for the philosophy that inspired it, and its feasibility in practice. Before approaching with students a highly sensitive issue like sexual orientation, teachers require more than a few pages of information; they need the guidance and opportunities to examine and begin to work through their own beliefs and biases. And a more honest level of dialogue between administrative bodies and parent groups must emerge. Too often when these issues are "taught" in schools, they are reduced to a morass of statistics, an approach that may seem safer for the school institution but does little to promote understanding or offer a more secure environment for young people who are all working through issues of sexuality and identity.

I was surprised that the librarian at Trish's school seems to have the authority to determine what students can and cannot read, but this seems to be the case. I did not discuss the matter with the librarian, and therefore, cannot comment on his particular beliefs or motives. Regardless, the message is just as Trish describes: that an institution of learning, which purports to embrace diversity, does not offer this basic acknowledgement of sexual difference.¹

Throughout the schooling experience, girls and other marginalized groups are sent all kinds of mixed messages. There is the rhetoric of equality and then there is the evidence of discriminatory practice that is pervasive, and yet unacknowledged. When talking with girls about their futures, it is tempting to resort to the liberal individualist argument that with sufficient hard work and motivation, they can become leaders in whatever occupations they choose. But without some discussion about the social and institutional barriers they will encounter, such pep talks, though well-intentioned, are misleading and counterproductive (Briskin, 1990). As these students progress to each grade level and encounter fewer and fewer women occupying senior positions, they then must accept the myth that most women teachers *did not* work hard enough or were *not* sufficiently motivated to advance (Briskin, 1990; Lewis, 1990). Like most myths, this is grossly inaccurate. Christine's statistical analysis of the gender composition of social studies departments in British Columbia showed conclusively that there is indeed a ceiling for women teachers--it runs consistently from high school to high school and hangs at the grade 10 level.

Christine:

If I show you what happens in social studies, if the figures are about twenty-three percent female teachers in B.C. in secondary schools, most of those women teach grades 8, 9, 10. There's real subject special status in schools--the higher you teach, the more the subject specialist, the more status you have. The grade

¹ Update: Since this interview in early 1996, hundreds of gay and lesbian youth from all over the Lower Mainland have rallied to protest homophobia and the related harassment that is occurring in their schools. They have called on the B.C.T.F. to pass a resolution that would provide for them better security and networks of support.

11, 12 courses are in many ways much easier to teach because the energies and requirements for behavior management are much greater at grade 8. At grade 11 and 12, it's much more the transmission model than it is at the grade 8, 9, 10. And so there's a greater male presence at the higher levels and it's harder to get those courses, and in many ways, teaching the *content* is much easier than teaching *students*.

Lynn:

I just opted, instead of teaching Humanities 8 next year, I'm going to be doing English and somebody else is going to teach socials. And why is that? Because I am feeling more and more like I don't feel like forcing the Middle Ages down the throat of a thirteen year-old student anymore. Even though I work as hard as I can at making that relevant...that content is often irrelevant to the lives of young people and making connections becomes tiresome...

The system still operates on the essentialist belief that women are natural caregivers, suited to manage the emotional and behavioral needs of younger students, while men are subject specialists, naturally equipped to focus on content and intellectual development. As Weiler observes: "...women teachers are all too often seen as a traditional nurturing presence under the 'expert guidance' of male administrators and academics. But their valuable work as intellectuals attempting to encourage critical analysis of texts and society is rarely recognized" (p. 151).

Teaching the current grade 8 social studies curriculum demands--as Lynn suggested--considerable creative powers to make it meaningful to students. And revising content comprises only part of the challenge: at the middle school level, teachers are working with students to develop the habits of thinking, organization, and behavior necessary for success in a secondary environment. This is demanding work that is still unrecognized as such.

Christine showed, through her research, that a superficial attention to numbers often renders invisible where exactly women are working and what that work entails. Mary's initial response was that quite a number of women were teaching senior courses at the main school, but when she totalled the numbers in the social

studies department, she had to pause, realizing that Lynn was the only woman teaching at the senior level. For Lynn, this imbalance is palpably felt:

In terms of always having to deal with the male department, I get sick of it. And I get sick of the dynamics and so much adolescent behavior on behalf of my colleagues and the whole show: always wanting to make themselves *look* like they're doing a great job, that they *know* things, competition for acknowledgement, they always interrupt each other. All of the dynamics get me down, I get tired of it. And it would be nice to have another woman in my department. We have all men in my department essentially. We have two women that teach in the grade 8 program...and then we have [Mary] who is in the [enrichment program]...generally on a day-to-day basis, I'm not around her. So the rest of my department is all male. That's fine, we get along...but it's not the same as being around women.

As Mary's experience reveals, however, not all women who are working within the system will be allies:

I know that I had a lot of resistance when I started teaching English 12...Most of the women in the department were quite upset that as a new teacher--and it was actually said--*being female*, that I shouldn't be getting the senior courses. But there was a big shake-down at the school when I got hired so I got an opportunity to teach English 12. In fact, some of the women in the department got together a list of teachers that they would have preferred in my position and submitted it to the administration, and everyone on the list was male...So some of the old guard in the system are female as well, the status quo type of people.

While recognizing that progressive understandings do not cut neatly down the gender line, feminist teachers do feel some sense of betrayal when women colleagues fail to support equity initiatives (Coulter, 1995), or even actively oppose them. Yet, preserving the status quo seems to create the illusion of fairness: a twist of logic that assumes all is well if all women teachers are treated equally unfairly. Mary's colleagues perhaps resented the fact that a relatively new teacher was offered a senior course, when throughout their own careers, they were forced to accept a system in which men were promoted over women, without question.

The feminist teachers in this study have been actively working, on a number of fronts, to ensure that such questions are brought to the level of consciousness. Christine devoted several years to her research on women teachers and continues to speak candidly about the inequities within social studies departments. Through their participation within a variety of equity committees and initiatives teachers like Marcia, Christine, and Mary work collectively with other feminists in the district to share information and develop strategies. Lynn and Trish developed socially progressive senior courses and overcame formidable obstacles to be able to teach them.

All the teachers in this study have taught senior courses within their subject areas. Trish, the only woman who consistently has taught grade 11 science at her school, is often asked by her students if she will be teaching the grade 12 courses. She must reply in the negative because particular members of her department have been unwilling to share the senior courses. Yet, soon after she began teaching grade 11 courses, the number of girls in senior science classes increased significantly, including students from social class and ethnic groups that, in the school's history, have not tended to continue in science. Encouraged by this trend, Trish approached the individual who has long monopolized senior courses with a request that other teachers in the department be offered these opportunities. When he refused, Trish discussed the problem with an administrator who likewise, side-stepped the issue by suggesting that she "bring it up at a meeting." Eventually, when another teacher complained about the lack of course-sharing, the administrator did decide to confront the individual directly. Trish:

And then, it was time to set the timetable and we had a department meeting. And he'd been told the day before to share some of the load. And I was willing to give up some of my Biology and stuff too, to give other people a chance. And he starts saying, "I usually sleep well at night, but last night I didn't sleep..." It was like, "there are those among you who have deceived me," type of thing..."two of you have gone [over my head]. If you don't like the way this is, then [leave]"He must have thought long and hard, the way he put that power over us.

This individual is suddenly having to face the possibility that his power is not absolute. His manipulative attempt to "put the power over" the other teachers suggests, in fact, how deeply threatened he felt. But for Trish, who was forced to continue working closely with a resentful and suspicious colleague, the atmosphere became awkward and stressful. The subsequent redistribution of senior courses was indeed a victory, but as other teachers in this study have pondered, "at what personal cost?" In the following section, teachers discuss the successful implementation of school and district-wide programs, courses and conferences on gender equity. But with each account of success is the echo of the sacrifice, often personal, sometimes professional, that this work inevitably demands.

Developing Gender Equity Programs

"What About the Boys?"

That first year we decided to do a conference that was my first dose of how difficult it can be in the high school setting to get things like that done. We had a lot of resistance. First of all, the staff--I say the *staff*--obviously there were members who were on side, but the vocal ones were the ones who were not on side. They were unhappy that it was just for the girls. We were doing it for the grade 12 girls as a graduation, sort of a gift almost: look at these issues for when you leave this setting. A lot of the male staff members were quite upset about that. One of them actually made a test that day and gave the girls zero who went to the conference. A lot of the teachers said to the girls, "well, if you're going to go male-bash, you know, you'll take your punishment, you'll take the consequences."

Mary described herself as a "wide-eyed first year teacher" who believed that organizing this conference "was the best idea in the entire world." She had little reason to anticipate this degree of opposition, nor imagine that it would be expressed with such hostility and vindictiveness. Most of the teachers in this study recounted a similar kind of experience; initially, their school environments had *seemed* reasonably equitable, but it was not until they attempted something pro-active, such as proposing a new course, program, or conference that such attitudes began to

surface.

When Mary proposed the girls-only conference, she heard the implied accusation of "reverse discrimination" that Trish encountered when developing her girls-only course. As detailed in the previous chapter, these teachers recognize the importance of bringing boys into the discussion, and they work to do so in the classroom, despite the tensions. However, both Trish and Mary wanted to offer the girls an opportunity to come together as a group to explore ideas in ways that would not be possible with boys present. As Trish suggested, if girls were free to discuss with boys the issues that concerned them without being interrupted and intimidated, there would be much less need for such a course.

It seems that behind the call for "fairness" and "equal access" in reaction to girls-only events are lurking some feelings rather less elevated. As revealed by the teachers who accused the girls of attending the conference to "male bash," the idea of women coming together to share their stories seems to trigger feelings of such profound discomfort and threat that some men will go to extreme lengths to prevent such opportunities (Daly, 1978 in Lewis, 1990). Although Trish's course had been running for months, a colleague continued to fight her: "I've had the principal call me in twice this year because of a particular teacher in the school questioning why we can't put boys in the course." Throughout the implementation process, this same attitude was expressed:

There are different processes that have to go through the School Board. And one of the people who was sort of behind me, helping me get it through, she watched the female trustees bend to the male trustees. They were saying, "we can't...a girls' course!" The people with power, the trustees, were male. She could see: first the females [trustees] were going for it and then...it just barely got passed. We had to change the title. It had "women" in the title and they wanted that changed...I forget what we were going to call it: Women and [Mentorship] or Careers for Women 12, and they wouldn't approve it. The computer code for it is "Men 12" [abbreviation of Mentorship].

This ironic little footnote can serve as a symbol for the prevailing attitude about

initiatives for women, developed by women. It seems that the word "women" in a course title is anathema to those who have rejected the philosophy of equity in favour of a position of so-called gender-neutrality. The teachers in this study find it troubling that most of their colleagues have a very limited understanding of the ways in which inequity works, how gender relations operate in society and are reproduced in schools. The gender-neutral, non-sexist approach to schooling was founded on the individualist notion that it would be possible to create a level playing field if girls and boys have "equal" access to opportunities, a notion that might make sense if everyone arrived each day equally positioned in society, carrying with them the same experiences of privilege and entitlement, of marginality and subordination.

Any event or initiative in which these differences are acknowledged and openly discussed is regarded with deep suspicion. When Mary was organizing her conference the following year, she was told that it would be approved only if boys were included; tagged on to this "condition" was the implicit directive that the conference must offer a "balanced" perspective:

So then we were stuck doing a conference for a huge number of kids. The thing was they wanted the boys to have this conference, but no man wanted to be on the committee. So they stuck this guy on the committee and he was from the religious Right, and his job on the committee: self-appointed watchdog. He told us he was there to make sure we didn't make it "too feminist." So he made sure we had a representative from Focus on the Family, which is a really right-wing group that talks about the nuclear family and mother and dad, and staying home and all that sort of stuff--really, really, right-wing conservative. So we had to have this guy there, which was difficult. And he vetoed us having a woman who was going to talk about goddesses because he said if we were going to have a member of a "religious sect" there, then he would insist that we'd have other religions represented.

It need hardly be mentioned that this "watchdog" teacher's notion of "balance" is a logical absurdity. Students hear little else but the messages of hegemony throughout their school careers. The idea that girls might once have the

opportunity to consider alternative ways of thinking and acting in the world was so unacceptable to this teacher that he seemed determined to subvert the very purpose of this conference, or at least, neutralize any possible effects of it.

Magda Lewis (1990) explores this dynamic in "Interrupting Patriarchy": in listening to women's stories of subordination, men are challenged to recognize their social location as problematic, to face the uncomfortable reality of their own privilege, which provokes some to demand "the other side of the story." At such moments, Lewis invites them to consider what, exactly, the "other side of the story" *is* of women's oppression, as experienced in the daily threat of violence through to the daily silencing that such subversive tactics as this nonsensical question, create.

While Mary's and Trish's male colleagues insisted that boys take part in gender equity events and courses, it is not surprising that none were willing to participate in the development phase or the actual teaching. With perhaps a vague sense that the inclusion of boys would somehow provide the needed "balance," the "other side of the story," these teachers seemed to have no intention of making a further contribution. Had they been genuinely concerned about the effects on boys of society's narrow definitions of masculinity, they would have rallied to the cause. But it seems safe to assume that these men have at best a very superficial understanding about these issues. When challenged to participate, they must have realized how unprepared they were to present information on gender equity to a senior class.

Opportunities for educators to explore these issues certainly exist, but as participation in these workshops and conferences is voluntary, those who could most benefit from this information, are often the least motivated to learn. When Mary's team organized a conference for district teachers, counsellors and administrators, few of the latter group attended, though a major component of the conference would deal with school-wide equity issues. Trish believes that both administrators and teachers should be strongly urged to take part in a comprehensive series of workshops where they can examine their own biases, and uncover the origins of taken-for-granted systems of belief from which they are operating personally and professionally:

[Everyone] needs the workshops that I took. Like the power and control wheel--you can try and sit there and explain it, but...I listen to the teachers talking at lunch: they don't realize how discriminatory and biased they are. They're putting somebody, some culture down and they need to really examine those [attitudes]. It's thirteen workshops, a half-year course. They would all come out with a different frame of mind. For this program, there were three teachers who went from our school. We were supposed to go back to the school and "sow the seeds" and get more people interested. But teachers don't want to listen to other teachers up on their soapbox. They have to experience it for themselves. I think it would be excellent if it were mandatory.

"All the Difference in the World": The Contradictions of Support

It is unlikely that workshops on equity will become mandatory. As it is, the teachers who struggle to implement courses and programs are at the mercy of individuals who may or may not recognize the need for equity initiatives in schools and the value of a socially relevant curriculum. Because Lynn's women's studies course would be open to male as well as female students, the administration could not reject it on the basis of equal access. Instead, they presented a litany of excuses and delay tactics to discourage her. Lynn:

Let me think: first there was the CAPP thing--they said [because of it] the course couldn't go in at grade 12. The other reason was competition with other electives and that would have an impact on staffing and blah, blah, blah... They tried to say stuff about not getting the forms in on time, when, in fact, [Mary] had done everything by all the dates it was supposed to be done...I said, "okay, let's do it at the grade 11 level." And they said, "yeah, well, that would be possible, but it's too late to get it in the course guide for next year..." At some point my department head said, "the principal said, 'no'." And then the principal said, "the department head said, 'no'." So, in other words, individually, they'd say to me, "yes, this is good," but then they'd say that the other one had said, "no"...There was all kinds of bullshit about getting that course in.

Lynn and Mary describe the administrators *with* whom they now work as very supportive, which makes, Mary said, "all the difference in the world." As revealed

by their stories, all five teachers in this study have worked *under* administrators who were clearly unsympathetic to the issues and were unwilling to engage with them honestly. The failure of Lynn's administrators to offer this most basic level of respect forced her to negotiate her way through a web of deception and denial. (I will return to Lynn's experience as I continue to discuss the question of support). My use of the terms "with" and "under" to suggest a collaborative versus an authoritarian administrator/teacher dynamic is perhaps too simplistic a rendering of what can be a complex and contradictory relationship. No one will deny the hierarchical nature of the school power structure, but the teachers were quite positive that the ways in which administrators choose to wield that power is vital. As Mary said, "There's *power* and then there's *power*. It's not about *power* or *no power*. I've had a principal who has abused power; I've had a principal who's just been the most amazing support that I could have ever asked for." While these teachers deeply appreciate the individuals who come to their schools having developed a genuine concern and some understanding about social equity issues, they welcome those who have integrity, at the very least, and are willing to listen and be open to new ideas.

The administrators in this group do not conform to a type, which suggests some implications worth noting. Marcia, for example, said that the most supportive administrator with whom she has worked was a man, near retirement, and not necessarily socially progressive, "but educationally, he was very good. And all you had to prove to [him] was that you knew what you were doing, you had a rationale for it, you could justify what you were doing, and he would back you to the hilt no matter what it was."

Another teacher worked with a woman who had been very supportive as a vice principal but when promoted to principal, suddenly adopted a traditional authoritarian style: "It's interesting to see: total change, becoming the *authority*, a whole character shift. I don't know if she has a choice actually. As a V.P. she was caring, caring about the staff...it's like black and white."

Women administrators face many of the same contradictions as do many women

educators. While the teachers appreciate supportive administrators who are male, they also recognize that these individuals can afford to be. In my concern to protect anonymity, I debated whether or not to include the above quotation, as there are so few female principals in the secondary system. As one of such a small number, her position is as problematic and contradictory as that of all women who achieve leadership in male-dominated professions: to gain the respect of her staff and peers she has little choice but to conform, at least to some degree, to the traditional role. The authority of the male administrators, on the other hand, is accrued automatically simply because they are men (and in most cases, white), privileging them to divest themselves of that authority if they so choose (Briskin, 1990). As the following examples illustrate, male administrators can also use that authority to force through a controversial initiative, where a woman in the same position would be highly vulnerable to backlash. It is also important to note that the women teachers in each case had done the hard slogging, prior to the administrators "stepping in" to save the day.

Lynn:

I know that now we have a new [male] administrator who's very supportive...There's a male counsellor who was against [bringing in a program called] *Safe Teen*, and basically, I just felt like I didn't have the energy, like I've already fought the battles. Our administrator stepped in and basically pushed it through and *Safe Teen* is going ahead.

Trish:

[The male principal at another school that was implementing a similar course for girls] was very supportive of the whole thing. He was the one who supported it and got the trustee decision. When they said, "no, you can't have a course just for girls," he's the one who fought for it.

While recounting this episode, Trish said that the colleague who was assisting

her witnessed the female trustees, who initially seemed willing to approve the course, gradually "bend to the male trustees" who were opposing it. This scenario is very plausible: in such contexts where everyone *appears* to hold equal status, I have watched myself, and other women, deferring to the authority of men; while my consciousness as a feminist enables me to recognize this dynamic, only on rare occasions have I found the power to resist and alter it. It was upon my second reading of "A Discourse Not Intended For Her," (Lewis & Simon, 1991) that I could understand my own moments of acquiescence, and those of the female trustees as being not about "moral weakness," but rather, linked to a deep awareness about the imperative for survival. Describing the first day of a graduate course, Magda Lewis recounts:

We came carrying the baggage of our governed selves. For the women this meant that we already knew that what we said and how we said it was not quite as important to our male colleagues as the fact that we spoke at all. In a set of social relations where women's ideal discursive state within patriarchy has been defined as silence, a woman speaking is itself a political act (Spender, 1980). Under these conditions the very act or intention of speaking becomes an intrusion and a potential basis for a violent reaction on the part of those who have decreed our silence. Ultimately for individuals who transgress the limits of patriarchy, the forces of regulation are without a doubt swift, sure, and relentless. (p. 260)

I accept the paradox that while this *sounds* to me like a monumental exaggeration, at a gut level, it does not *feel* so. The former is all about what I have been taught to believe; the latter is about what I know. All the teachers in this study have dared to speak in places where they knew they were expected to remain silent. Often they have done this work alone, but perhaps they carried with them a consciousness that beyond the door there were those who were on side, a circle, however incomplete, of support.

I began this chapter describing feminist pedagogy as a spiral. Support works similarly--it ripples outward and moves back in, though not always in predictable ways. As teachers described the struggle to implement new courses and programs, it

was the evidence of resistance and opposition that resounded most audibly. But in listening carefully to these narratives, I also heard evidence of support that teachers found among friends and colleagues who were working across town, or sometimes across the hall.

When Trish, Mary and Lynn were developing their programs, there were people behind the scenes assisting with the work, sometimes quietly, but persistently. As Lynn's story suggests, to manoeuvre through the system, one must find allies who understand how that system works and are in a position to fit the pieces in place.

I went to the counsellor who's a friend of mine, because I'd worked with her before when there was a lot of bullshit getting *Safe Teen* implemented and I don't think the school realized I had anything to do with it, that it was my thing, right? And I had worked with her on that and by convincing her, she then just took it...and at that moment everything was done. All the rest, she got around it all, she did everything. So I went to her [about the new course] and I said, "I remember you with *Safe Teen* and how much you got done. Here's my situation [now]. What should I do?" And she said, "well, first of all, that stuff about the course planning guide is bullshit...I'll get it in on the last page for you." And she talked to the secretary and made all the arrangements for that. Then she said, "obviously there's a problem when you're talking to them [the department head and administrator] separately. What you have to do is get them in a room together with you to discuss this." And then [Mary] wanted to come to that too, of course. So the four of us were in a room together...to every objection I had an answer because of [the counsellor's help]. And they just finally...[the administrator] said, "okay, you've got your course." And I think [he] surprised himself...Yeah, and so that's how it all happened, but it was the enormous influence of that counsellor, just pushing and pushing.

...then we had to get a sign-up of sixteen kids or the course would flop. And the counsellor that year, who was friends with the woman who helped me, she's really strong, and I'm sure we got the sign-up because of her. I don't know what would have happened otherwise: [this being] the first year [of the course with the announcement on the back page of the planning guide]. She went into the classes. I was willing to go into all the classes and say, "here's a new course if you're interested." But she was already promoting it. That's another person who was really supportive.

As it turned out, thirty students enrolled in Lynn's course, including several boys. Trish's course also filled to capacity. And as we were completing these interviews, the sign-up for the following year looked promising for both. I wonder whether the students who enroll in those classes in future years (if indeed the courses are allowed to continue) will have any notion of the struggle and work involved to ensure they would have these opportunities, these alternatives. Perhaps they should.

The Outer Rings

In September 1995, I was beginning a literature review for my proposed research on the work of feminist teachers in secondary schools. Around that time, I read an article describing the agenda of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing--among the twelve "Critical Areas of Concern" identified, "education" and "the girl-child" would be given prominence. Thousands of delegates and representatives from 181 U.N. member states were gathering to revise existing theories, struggling with the question of how to bridge those to practice in their own countries and within their discrete communities. It occurred to me that the teachers I would be interviewing were engaged in this same work. The macro and micro blurred as I caught a momentary glimpse of all the threads that connect us, and I considered the work still ahead to make those threads strong and visible.

Briskin says: "There is no doubt that claiming feminism is claiming the collective power of women...bringing feminism into the classroom means linking the struggles in the classroom to struggles in the community" (1990, p. 20). The teachers in this study forge these links in a variety of ways; as a starting point, most participate in such yearly events as International Women's Day and Women's History Month at their schools. Such events can provide for girls two important opportunities: to experience a sense of solidarity with one another (Weiner, 1985 in

Manicom, 1992) in a context that fosters leadership and agency (Briskin, 1990).

As described in the previous chapter, the students in Lynn's women's studies class, through their participation in the school assembly for Women's History Month, wanted to make a statement about feminism that would "shatter" stereotypes. Their performance received a chorus of approval from their peers and they seemed to take from the experience a sense of pride and accomplishment.

That sense was echoed by Mary and Christine whose students participated in Women's History Month through writing. Christine:

The [newspaper] ran a Women in History essay contest and so I brought the contest back here and [the school] had four of the top ten in the city. One of the runner-ups was a grade 8 student that I teach and three of them came from the grade 10 teacher's classes. One of the three city winners overall was from this school. We were pretty proud of that.

Christine's school is designated "inner city," with a majority of students from working-class, low-income circumstances. Of those who proceed to university, few will continue study in the Humanities. The results of the contest, however, sent the message that girls in this community can excel in these areas; they are challenged by ideas and are able to develop and express these with insight. Perhaps they need more opportunities to be heard. The students in Mary's class discovered, through a similar project, the rewards in listening to women speak about their own lives. Discussions about why women's histories have been excluded from the historiographic record resonate when students have the opportunity to see for themselves what has been lost, and what might still be regained with care and effort.

Critics argue that such events as International Women's Day and Women's History month are token. Most of the teachers would not dispute that call, and in fact, use these events as teaching moments to have students critically examine why they are still perceived as necessary. Mary, for example, asks her students to consider what our society fails to do on a daily basis that compels us to set aside a day or a month each year to honour women's historical achievements and consider their

present circumstances globally.

As the many examples in this chapter illustrate, teachers who attempt to implement gender equity initiatives within their schools can expect to encounter opposition: sometimes expressed covertly and other times with overt hostility. International Women's Day and Women's History Month offer for teachers a window of opportunity to do something pro-active without having to engage in battle. As these are officially recognized events, teachers find *less* of a need to justify reasons, or defend themselves against the implied accusation that they are forcing a personal agenda. Mary:

When you do anything that has to do with gender around here, what I can see, or what the kids can see, is that you just wait, wait for the reaction because there's going to be one. And if you talked about First Nations or if you talked Black History Month, there would not be these issues. But there is so much--I hate to use the word "backlash"--but there really is. And all you're doing is fielding, and so much of your energy gets drained. It's really, really a difficult job.

This job becomes doubly difficult for teachers who are willing to openly address such issues as violence against women. Most have discovered that their colleagues would rather avoid the issue completely. When Trish, for example, proposed her workshop on harassment, her administrator became very uncomfortable: "You want to do this workshop? You're going to open this big kettle of fish..." And when Mary announced the anniversary of the massacre in Montreal, the reaction was bizarre:

I just said this is the time to remember and to dream of a time when there's an end to violence, and I mentioned Marc Lepine and I got all these letters in my box: "how dare you mention his name and not the names of the fourteen women?"...There was a legitimate point behind it, but the *way* it was done...

I could make little sense of this response. If these individuals were so deeply concerned about this issue that they would engage in this level of criticism, it is

curious that they themselves had not made any effort to observe the anniversary. I can only surmise that, in fact, they resented Mary for introducing the subject, and aware that they could not express their feelings of discomfort that her announcement triggered, were determined to use this pretense to retaliate. On still another occasion, Mary felt that some of her colleagues were determined to misunderstand the intent and purpose of a fund-raising project:

We were doing fund-raising for women in Madras, India who decided to keep their baby daughters and therefore were kicked out of their homes and were...just wandering, couldn't get a job, no food, no money just because they wanted to keep their girls and not have them killed at birth. So we sent them some money, but I got a lot of flack, again, from the staff. Some of them were calling me anti-abortion because they thought that the stand for these women meant that we didn't want them to have abortions. Just a total misrepresentation of the entire issue. So I sent out this flyer to everybody explaining it all and then I still got real, real reaction, unbelievable.

Some people insist that these kinds of activities do not belong in the public school context, period. They seem to read neutrality as "balance," a commitment to social justice as "political bias," and preparing students for citizenship as "indoctrination." Feminist teachers engaged in activist work are vulnerable to such allegations; they must be prepared to justify their activities to colleagues, and consider carefully the degree of student involvement and potential effects and outcomes. While these teachers do not avoid sensitive or controversial issues, they are careful to ensure that students express an independent desire to participate in activist work, and do so with as full a knowledge and understanding of the issues as possible. Many of these students belong to equity and/or multi-cultural clubs within the school and are actively involved in the selection, organization, and implementation of initiatives. Because Lynn teaches a women's studies class, she feels she is able to include these students in the planning of activities, if they choose. But she is still careful to stress that participation is voluntary:

Hopefully, a lot of them are going to join me on the walk for the rape relief crisis centre. I'd like to encourage that, but it's not a part of the course. I would never try to push that...

Like Lynn, Mary would not consider involving her regular classes in activist work. In fact, as discussed in the chapter on teaching methods, she is continually reassuring her students that her purpose is to encourage them to develop more sophisticated ways of thinking through issues, not to passively regurgitate what they believe she wants to hear. As she said with a sigh and a smile, "it's a balancing act, for sure..."

Feminist teaching is a "balancing act" and so, it seems, is the larger feminist project. On one hand, it necessitates a keen sensitivity to differences, an awareness that broad theories translate unevenly into particular contexts, and a concomitant acknowledgement of the innovative work of practitioners who are revising theory in response to their site-specific issues. But it requires also a wide lens, a way of situating the specific within a larger context and purpose. To move towards these goals, teachers are assisting students to understand their experiences more fully and discover the ways in which these both mirror, and differ from, those of other women. They are finding ways to connect across culture, distance, even time. Feminist teachers may need to "walk a careful line," but each line creates another ring in the spiral.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

In this chapter, I reflect back and look forward, describing the conclusions that I reached in the process of conducting this study, suggesting implications for education policy, and pointing to opportunities for further research in the area of gender equity in secondary schools.

Summary of Findings

I embarked on this study to learn the extent to which feminist pedagogical theory--that is generated at, and is concerned primarily with, the university site--is translating to practice in secondary schools. I interviewed five public secondary school teachers and observed their classes; all identified as feminists and were actively working to promote gender equity in their schools. Three of the teachers, Lynn, Trish and Christine, were working within mainstream classrooms. Marcia was teaching at a Bridge program for grade 8 students who experience academic and other difficulties, and Mary at an enrichment program for students who are academically strong.

At the initial stages of my data analysis, I saw that there were gaps in the theoretical literature. First, it seemed that some theorists had not adequately considered the question of context in their formulations of feminist pedagogical theory. Not only do secondary teachers as a group experience their work differently than do their university counterparts, but the student populations with whom secondary teachers are working will largely dictate the elements of feminist practice that are appropriate and possible to introduce. Second, much of the feminist pedagogical theory has focused on classroom processes and methods, with minimal attention paid to other aspects of feminist teaching work, such as subject content. Yet the teachers in this study were particularly concerned about content issues, and

they described with cogency what they consider to be the most serious problems with the secondary school curriculum.

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I drew upon teacher interviews, progressive education theory and current scholarship to offer a glimpse of the epistemological underpinnings of the disciplines of history (and social studies), English and science, and suggest how these have shaped the approach to knowledge-seeking that we continue to see reflected in curriculum. Changing that curriculum means changing some deeply-held beliefs about the purpose of education and the role of both the teacher and student within it. Rather than a "banking system" of learning and teaching, we need to move towards an approach that focuses on citizenship, student agency and critical engagement. It is not sufficient to settle for an add-on approach that merely tokenizes women and other groups--a progressive curriculum that will reflect the richness and diversity of experience must begin with a deconstruction of the notion that knowledge is "neutral." Students should be encouraged to ask such questions as: "Whose beliefs and values are reflected in this historical, literary, or scientific account? Whose perspectives are obscured or ignored? How would the account be different if these other voices were heard? Who decides what counts as 'legitimate knowledge'? What is the relationship between knowledge and power?" and so on. Marcia and Christine argued that those involved in the curriculum and resource selection process must become acquainted with, and apply, the progressive educational theory and progressive scholarship that is generated within the various disciplines. But they believe that their colleagues also need to recognize the value and importance of this work and understand that equity issues do not "belong" to any one discipline, but are, and should be recognized as, integral to all.

In Chapter 4, I described each teacher's work to revise course content to reflect these principles. All five of the teachers encourage students to consider the world through the eyes of the other, to hear the different voice, to attend to stories of women and people of other marginalized groups. Several described their efforts to challenge such dichotomies as "fact and fiction," "reason and emotion," "objective

and subjective," and "masculine ways and feminine ways." They discuss in their classes how the dynamics of power have manifested historically and are reproduced through our current social and political system. And where appropriate, they invite students to take an active and creative role in the development of assignments and projects.

The salient conclusion I have drawn from this research is that while feminist teachers are committed to the development of a socially relevant curriculum, this is still very much an individual enterprise rather than a collective one. As individual teachers, they experience tensions and constraints that impose severe limits on what they can offer in each teaching day and with each group of students.

In Chapter 5 of this thesis, I examined some elements of feminist pedagogical theory and the degree to which these elements are bridging to practice in secondary school classrooms. I found that while some can be reframed to work within the public school, others translate with uneven results. What may be possible in terms of renegotiating the teacher-student relationship, creating classroom communities, and opening spaces for suppressed voices to emerge at the university site, becomes particularly challenging at the secondary where students with divergent maturity, readiness, and skill levels come together in one classroom. For most of the teachers in this study, the problem of boys who consistently disrupt and dominate is of primary concern. While the teachers employ a variety of strategies, their power is limited to counter this dynamic. Many of the boys seem to resent teachers' efforts to equalize classroom participation or to introduce women's work and perspectives.

In the past, compensatory programs for girls were devised in order to bolster girls' self-esteem so that they might "compete" in male-dominated environments. However, most progressive educators now realize that the solutions do not lie in "fixing" girls (Larkin, 1994), but attending seriously to the ways in which many schools accept and tacitly condone the dominating behaviors of some boys (Jackson & Salisbury, 1996). When I asked Trish what she thought were the biggest hurdles to overcome at her school, she immediately referred to the problem of harassment. Mary is also concerned with this issue, that at the minimum, schools should: "have

really clear harassment policies...and have the administration really shown that those policies are important, have a system for the kids to report complaints, where they can talk to people about things that might be happening in school, giving them some power to deal with that." I will return to these issues in the section on "implications for policy."

For a number of the teachers, it is not simply a question of how to translate feminist theory to practice, but how to make sense of the various strands of that theory and determine which are most sound and germane to the secondary school context. In the final section of Chapter 5, I considered the work of feminist philosopher, Lorraine Code (1991) and the teachers' perspectives to explore the extent to which a restructured feminist epistemology is possible. It seems that the efforts in this direction result in an essentialist, potentially oppressive return to stereotypical conceptions of women and men. Most of the teachers employ a variety of instructional methods and approaches in the classroom that will engage a class of students who exhibit a range of cognitive and learning styles. But as Mary suggested, we cannot assume that, for example, girls "naturally" perform best in cooperative learning situations while boys possess an innate inclination to compete. Instead we need to examine the material and social conditions in and out of schools that have shaped these responses. We need to consider the philosophy of individualism and its relation to patriarchal structures to understand why particular values and qualities are afforded currency and status in our culture and why others are not. While the teachers believe that the qualities of care and connectedness are integral to good teaching, to designate these "women's ways" continues to place the responsibility of this work on the shoulders of women. In the chapter on teacher activism, I described the efforts of teachers to make visible and challenge the assumptions that perpetuate these taken-for-granted practices.

Although activism is promoted widely in feminist theory, there has been no in-depth research, of which I am aware, that has explored how feminist secondary teachers experience this element of their work. In Chapter 6, I discussed teachers'

work to challenge norms, beliefs and everyday school practices, to design and implement equity related course and programs, and to raise awareness and support of local and international social justice organizations and initiatives. In many cases, the teachers confronted suspicion, derision, even hostility from some colleagues and administrators when they endeavoured to expose sexist practices, revise non-inclusive school "traditions," and particularly, when they sought to introduce courses and conferences that would focus on gender issues. Mary and Trish faced formidable obstacles in order to provide for girls the opportunities to come together to discuss the pertinent issues in their lives. But even Lynn, whose women's studies course would be open to male and female students, had to "fight" to get the course approved. I asked these teachers if for any reason they chose to leave their current positions, whether or not they believed these courses would continue. As Lynn and Trish had only been teaching their women studies courses for one year, they hesitated to predict the future. But their sense was if they were to depart, the courses would not be resurrected. What concerns these teachers most is that many of their colleagues seem to have narrow and stereotypical perceptions of feminism, that they assume the "work has been done," yet fail to understand how social inequities are reflected and reproduced in public schools. Marcia believes that there is a serious lack of consciousness and will on the part of her colleagues. In the following section on policy, I suggest some possible reasons for this and why, in consequence, we do not see more progress at the secondary school level.

Implications for Policy

Rethinking the University/Secondary Relationship

In the methodology chapter of this thesis, teachers described the ways that a feminist, social consciousness intersected with their teaching work. In several of the stories what became evident is that the development of this awareness and its

translation into commitment and action, depended largely on chance: meeting other women who were also struggling to make sense of their experiences, coming across a book, an article, or obliquely through a university course. None of the teachers, however, were introduced to social equity issues in their teacher training. As Mary said, "there was nothing that dealt with social responsibility in education... no one had ever talked to me about incorporating socially responsible attitudes or issues in the curriculum." If only a minority of teachers working in the secondary system consider social equity work as their responsibility, this may be due to the fact that most teacher training programs seem not to afford these issues much credence or recognize their importance to public school teaching. When Marcia was working for the Education department of a university, she hoped to remedy that: she and a colleague developed an outline for a course that would combine theoretical engagement with practical classroom strategies. However, the course was rejected on the grounds that there were insufficient time slots. "I think for many people," Marcia said, "it's not relevant--the whole area of social justice and equity--is not regarded as a legitimate area of study."

The problems at the secondary level--a general lack of awareness and understanding, resistance to change, passing the buck--also play out at the university level. Mary, like Marcia and the other teachers, believes that just as social justice and equity should be integral to every secondary school subject, these should comprise the focus of every discipline in the university:

Your teachable subjects: it's those professors who should be talking about how equity issues or life issues can be incorporated into that particular curriculum and how important that is. That's where it should be, right in the subject. It shouldn't be a core course so that it's left to the student, how to incorporate all those things...Why not in teacher training, [have] the [student] who's going out on his or her practicum deal with one equity issue or one socially responsible issue in his or her practicum, no matter what the subject is. You know, making it a component, going beyond the curriculum, being issue-oriented in your subject and not pretending that one's objective and one's neutral and one's loaded. It's not that way. And when kids see things compartmentalized like that, then they think, "well, I'm not going into *that*. I'm going into *this*. I don't have to think about equity

because it doesn't figure in my subject."

As in the secondary context, students at the university rely largely on chance that they will enroll in a course taught by an instructor who does not separate social equity concerns from intellectual inquiry. When Christine returned to university, she saw evidence of change, that students who are interested in the experiences and contributions of women can find attention to this work in places other than Women's Studies departments:

I certainly saw when I was on campus, the change that seems to be taking place in some of the disciplines, but then I know that when I went to observe and audit, I was not choosing traditional classes, choosing a course with a gender dimension in Shakespeare or a gender dimension in the history of modern Europe...it was exciting for me that these courses existed. [But] you [will meet] traditional instructors in [most regular classes].

The teachers had other concerns: in particular, the problems associated with the transition of students from the high school to the university. Many students perceive the competition for placement in post-secondary institutions as very fierce, and in response, have adopted a myopic view of the secondary school experience. Achieving high marks on their exams is primary. I was concerned about several of my own students this year who were studying to the point of exhaustion to achieve "A" marks, and considered any discussion of issues beyond what they would "have to know" irrelevant and superfluous. When teachers choose to deviate from or enrich the core curriculum, they can expect their students to inquire: "Is this going to be on the exam?" As Mary and Trish argued, university admissions departments need to consider students' work more qualitatively, rather than focusing exclusively on grade percentages. Mary:

You're fighting a system on your own...Even though you know in your heart that once you get into university, the ability to think and to apply and to be interdisciplinary and to be issue-oriented

is an asset, is a benefit, at high school you can get through and be very successful and never have those skills, or never have to look at those [issues]...So, if the universities are wanting kids who can think a little bit better, then maybe you're going to have to start looking at them beyond the exam.

The teachers in this study believe that it should be the responsibility of all educators to ensure that students graduate from secondary school having at least begun to develop some critical skills and understandings. But most teachers expressed the frustration that they are "fighting a system on [their] own." This was a theme that ran consistently through the study. When the teachers openly discuss social inequities that manifest inside and outside the school, they become vulnerable to accusations of political axe-grinding, of forcing a personal bias and agenda. And yet, such problems as student harassment, and in particular, male students who systematically dominate and disrupt cannot be dismissed as the mere figments of the teachers' imaginations. There must be a recognition of the legitimacy and importance of gender equity work in public schools, and a willingness to listen to those teachers who have devoted their time, their intellectual powers and creative energies to this work. In the following section, I discuss the ideas of education theorists who argue that solutions to the salient problems in secondary schools can be reached when men begin to collaborate in the enterprise for change.

Addressing Male Dominance: A Whole School Approach

David Jackson and Jonathan Salisbury (1996), in "Why Should Secondary Schools Take Working with Boys Seriously?", ask why schools do not begin channelling the time, energies and resources that are required to pick up after boys into "preventative, pro-active, whole-school programmes that deliberately challenge conventional, 'Boys will be boys' behaviors?" (p. 104).

To begin, they argue that we need to move away from the perception that males represent "an undifferentiated, monolithic system of power that is static and

unchanging" (p. 108). Most of the teachers in this study, in fact, paused to mention particular boys who are respectful, attentive, and contribute productively to classroom discussions. Jackson and Salisbury point to a recent body of work that is concerned with "the transformative implications of *variety, difference* and *plurality*, both between men and within individual boys and men":

Because there isn't a mechanical one-to-one correspondence between the system of male power and *all* boys and men, it allows us to see that *some* men and boys in schools can actively work against conventional, patriarchal power. Although most boys benefit from the institutional privileges of being a boy in a school system that is organised in the interests of male power, there are many fissures and cracks in boys' relation to that system that come out of this new emphasis on variety and contradictoriness. The tensions between the ruling models and images of manliness and the real conditions of boys' lives always give rise to doubts, mismatches, and confusions even within the lives of the group cocks at school. These mismatches create the possibility of an oppositional space within which new work with boys can begin. (p. 108).

R.W. Connell echoes the argument that while the gender privilege of men gives boys an interest in maintaining the current gender order, there are incentives that might lead them to "participate in educational work that must call that interest into question, and may require them to decline the offer of gender privilege" (1996, p. 227). For example, boys should be made aware of the educational and physical costs of patriarchy for males, have opportunities to reflect on the kinds of relationships that they may want to develop with girls and women, and consider the interests that men and women share--such as promoting a healthy environment--that require their collaborative work (pp. 227-228).

Theorists such as Connell, Jackson and Salisbury--in their efforts to understand how multiple masculinities are constructed and expressed--argue that the tensions and contradictions that boys and men experience should be looked on as valuable opportunities--bringing these to the level of awareness is an important first step in doing progressive work with boys in schools. That work, assert Jackson and Salisbury, must involve a pro-active response from male staff who should begin to

reflect on the messages they send to boys about masculinity and be willing to envision alternatives in their own lives. Similarly, in "Retreat for the Future: An Anti-Sexist Workshop for High Schoolers," Novodgrotsky and her colleagues argue that the success of their program depended on the willingness of the male teachers to model "the openness and risk-taking they expected from the young men" (1993, p. 77).

Trish, like a number of teachers, observed that students need more positive role models, both male and female. Mary agreed that it is not sufficient to talk about respect, dignity, understanding, social justice and responsibility in the classroom, if students do not see teachers putting those values put into practice in their own lives. Teachers must be aware of:

...the enormous impact we have on them [students]. And I don't mean that in a power sense because we're very replaceable, but we also spend eight hours a day with them, so there's a lot of room in there to deal with issues issues of tolerance--not even tolerance--compassion, and model it, and know that some stupid joke about blondes is not the kind of modelling we want to do.

Progressive educational change depends upon the willingness of school staffs, both teachers and administrators, to acknowledge the importance of equity work, particularly in this time of budget-cuts when district programs are being eliminated. It requires a better level of communication between secondary schools and universities where parallel methods and common goals can be agreed upon. It demands the collective efforts of men and women where the individual teacher does not become the sole voice for social justice and responsibility, and a whole-school strategic approach to the problems of male dominance, and student harassment in general. It means, as Christine said, "valuing the work that's done, recognition of the extra time and work, sharing of responsibility, [towards the] ultimate goal of nurturing students and challenging them intellectually."

Thoughts for Further Research

In this study, I focused on the work of five feminist teachers: their viewpoints and philosophies, the constraints and contradictions they face, the sources of their frustration and their moments of success. Most described their feminist work in the secondary context as a balancing act, that they must "walk a careful line" in their efforts to revise curriculum content, challenge assumptions, and introduce alternative perspectives and practices. These teachers are engaged in important, yet difficult work. They maintain that true gender equity, and social equity in general, will require the consciousness and will of all players in the schooling enterprise: administrators and colleagues, those involved in the selection of curriculum and resources, students, parent groups and the wider community.

There are numerous opportunities for further research. Studies that would illuminate students' perspectives on, and responses to, gender equity work would be extremely valuable. A case study might be conducted that would follow students through a year-long women's studies course, and explore positionality in the heterogeneous classroom. Another might focus on youth activism. Research on the social equity review process for curriculum and resources would be extremely enlightening. Studies of administrators and male teachers who are concerned with equity issues would make excellent contributions to this body of knowledge. And indeed, there are countless possibilities for further research about the work and lives of feminist teachers. This study has only scratched the surface.

Ann Manicom (1992) concludes her critique of the feminist pedagogical literature observing that the claims made in much of the theory, while important, become problematic and complex in practice. "It reminds us," she says, "that continuous reflection on and attention to issues of classroom practice are required. And it shows we need more accounts from feminist teachers and students as they tackle issues around experience, sharing, and authority in their classrooms" (p. 382). And I would add, as they tackle issues of power, seeking to understand, reveal and

challenge how that power manifests in curriculum, operates within the school structure, and is reflected in the often contradictory responses to feminist classroom teaching and social activism. There is still much work to be done.

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Appendix A

Statement of Participant Consent

I have agreed to participate in Pamela Short's study of approximately five secondary teachers who are working to promote gender equity in education. This study will fulfill, in part, the requirements for Pamela Short's Master of Arts Degree in the department of Educational Studies at U.B.C.

I am aware that the purpose of this study is to understand more about the experiences of women teachers who are committed, in their lives and work, to greater gender equity. The study will focus on the ways in which this concern informs teachers' current teaching practices.

I agree to participate in approximately three, two hour interviews. I will discuss with Pam the usefulness of her undertaking observations of one or more of my classes. If I feel this would be enriching to the study and not disruptive to my teaching, Pam will provide for the students and their parents a letter explaining the purpose of the observation and requesting their consent. If, however, there is any question of whether students or parents may be uncomfortable with this procedure, no observations will be undertaken.

I am aware that the research will begin in February, 1996 and continue for a three to four month period. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any point and that my identity will be kept confidential. My anonymity will be ensured through the use of a code name and careful presentation of data which I will have the opportunity to review.

I will be discussing with Pamela Short and/or her U.B.C. Advisor, Dr. Deirdre Kelly, any concerns and questions that might arise.

I, _____, CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY DESCRIBED ABOVE. I HAVE FOR MY OWN RECORDS A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM, OF THE CONSENT FORM FOR POSSIBLE OBSERVATION OF CLASSES, AND A LETTER DESCRIBING THE RESEARCH.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Knowledge and the Feminist Classroom:

1) discussion about traditional conceptions of knowledge as neutral and objective: how this has played out in curriculum, i.e. myth of gender-neutral education though one position is assumed as referent (privileged male perspective), "banking system" where students regurgitate facts, etc.

In what ways has this changed? are materials reflecting diversity of experience, topics explored from the perspectives of women and other groups?

2) Critical Teaching: opportunities to engage students in critical analysis of cultural texts and taken-for-granted institutional beliefs and practices (including hidden curriculum): questions of privilege, marginality, social and historical constructions of femininity and masculinity, history of women's movement, future lives of students: paid and unpaid work, relationships.

3) Experience: participants' thoughts about role of student experience in learning, how to incorporate: use of autobiographies, journals, other strategies for reflection, bridging student experience to the academic.

4) Language: a) language used to discuss gender issues; how are stereotypes confronted or circumvented, i.e. students' perceptions about feminism, b) how to make language object of analysis in classroom: reveal the ways it constructs gender identity, how it is used to exclude, etc. c) challenges and opportunities for students learning English

5) Power and Voice: who speaks, who listens, how teachers manage classroom dynamic: how does need to control classroom behavior impact feminist pedagogical goals.

6) Relationships: role of cooperation in learning, caring for students--thoughts on how this responsibility can be more equally shared.

Students

- task of responding to diverse groups of students (gender, race, class, levels of maturity, ability, readiness).
- thoughts on female students: challenges they face, attitudes, expectations for the future, perceptions about feminism
- thoughts on male students: how they respond to discussions about gender equity, attitudes, expectations for the future
- problems of harassment in schools: policies in place, thoughts on this issue
- student activism: are there students who have expressed desire to move outside of classroom with their ideas, activities--outcomes of these endeavours

Curriculum and Policy

- process of developing new courses and programs, plans for implementation
- changes proposed for participant's subject area within new curriculum mandates
- beliefs about purpose of education: responsibility and role of schools in society
- how have conservative forces impacted feminist teaching practice?

Support: School Culture and Wider Community

- how participants define and experience support within school--has voicing feminist concerns affected collegial relationships?
- formal and informal networks of support
- sources of stress in feminist teaching work

A Critical, Feminist Approach to Curriculum

1

What is the relationship between knowledge and power?

What counts as Legitimate Knowledge?

Deconstruct notion that knowledge is neutral. Whether teaching Social Studies, English or Science students ask similar kinds of questions

How might the account be different if other voices / stories were heard?

Whose perspectives have been obscured or ignored?

Whose values are reflected in this historical, scientific or literary account?

2

MAKE VISIBLE THE SYSTEM OF DICHOTOMIES OUT OF WHICH MUCH OF OUR APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE HAS EVOLVED

FICTION

FACT

Literature History → Science

Subjective	.....	Objective
experience	.....	Knowledge
Emotion	.....	Reason
Interdependence	.....	Autonomy &
& Cooperation	.....	Competition
Private realm	.....	Public realm
Feminine	.....	Masculine

Challenge this system of dichotomies and pose alternatives

3

C Discuss ideology of individualism, how it has shaped social structures: Is any living thing on this planet truly independent? What have been some implications of the autonomy obsession in our culture?

D Explore historical separation of the "private" and "public" realms and the profound implications this has had for women.

E Consider how these dichotomies have produced beliefs about "feminine nature" and "masculine nature" and the social/economic/political practices that have resulted.

A Deconstruct fact and fiction as discrete entities. "Shift to focus on 'stories' - in Literature, History, Science etc.

Can something be a "fiction" and still be true?

B Value subjective experience and emotion as sources of knowledge - make links to theory to reveal how personal discoveries and insights connect to larger social realities.

FEMINIST TEACHING METHODS

Theory to Practice

CONCEPT

CLAIMS IN SOME THEORY

TRANSLATION TO PRACTICE

Authority- Power
(Changing power
relations between
teacher and
student)

Share power
with students

Not realistic - false
assumption that teachers'
power over students is
absolute - students play
large part in creating
classroom dynamic.
Feminist teachers experience
"power" in contradictory &
problematic ways.

Provide opportunities
for students to
take greater
control over their
own learning.

Possible where students
developed "readiness,
confidence and skills."

Make distinction
between responsible
use of authority
and authoritarianism

All five teachers
committed to responsible
practice: put students
at the center; move
away from "banking
system" of teaching
and learning.

FEMINIST TEACHING METHODS

Theory to Practice

CONCEPT

CLAIMS IN SOME TRANSLATION TO PRACTICE THEORY

Classroom as a Community

(Changing power relations among students)

Create "community" sense of shared purpose and common goal

Difficult to achieve in many secondary classrooms - Students come in with very different agendas, understandings and developmental levels.

Create sense of "Safety"

While teachers work to foster an atmosphere of respect and inclusivity, efforts undermined by some students - harassment ongoing problem.

"Give voice" to members of oppressed groups i.e. create spaces for girls and quieter boys, equalize participation, interrupt dominate relations of power

Difficult to ensure those voices will be heard. Some students have not learned how to participate appropriately in groups, some male students consistently dominate - feel entitled to teacher's attention. Strategies to counteract this only minimally effective.

FEMINIST TEACHING METHODS

Theory to Practice

CONCEPT

"Women's Ways
of Knowing"

CLAIMS IN SOME TRANSLATION TO THEORY PRACTICE

Create female -
friendly learning
environments.
organize class-
room instruction
to reflect "female
way" of learning.

Efforts result in essentialist,
potentially oppressive
stereotypes about
females and males.

The teachers use a
variety of instructional
methods and techniques
but most feel that we
can't make assumptions
about learning styles
based on gender. need
to explore larger social
conditions to understand
dominant responses

Revalue subjective
experience as
legitimate source
of knowledge

Teachers do this but
recognize need to have
students make connections
between their experiences
and larger realities;
teachers need to create
some parameters on
assignments.

TEACHER ACTIVISM IN THE SCHOOL AND BEYOND

Challenging the Hidden Curriculum

Make visible and challenge School norms, practices & "traditions"

Developing Gender Equity Programs

Conferences for students and for teachers and administrators; Gender equity courses.

The Outer Rings

Support of local, national and International social justice organizations and initiatives.

Problems:

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- 1 Rejection of gender equity in schools - stuck in philosophy of gender-neutrality and equal access.
 - 2 Teachers in this study are concerned that many of their colleagues fail to understand how inequities operate in society and are reflected / reproduced in schools.
 - 3 The teachers find little official support for their gender equity work.
 - 4 Feminist teachers working in opposition to those who believe that social activism does not belong in schools - people who read neutrality as "balance", a commitment to social justice as "political bias" and preparing students for citizenship as "indoctrination".

* Gender equity work is still very much an individual rather than a collective enterprise.