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## EDITORIAL

### POLICIES AND PARADOXES

Educators have to make sense of a world of counter-pressures: deeply involved in the political realities of our own society, we are also called on to be apolitical in the sense that we must consider the needs and views of all of the conflicting groups that want to be heard. There can be no outsiders, no-one whose views and needs are classified as irrelevant, when the future of a society is at stake. In the setting of public schooling, as we know, teachers who work with young or adult learners live out this paradox on a daily basis, and do so not in the relative calm and safety of a university or administrative office, but amongst noise, constant interruptions, and multiple demands. Teachers work within the tensions of a system in which they know that some will prosper and others will fail, not only because of inherent ability or effort, but because of other elements of good or ill fortune in their lives.

Most countries, especially Western-style democracies, claim to be working towards the goal of “equity, inclusion, and entitlement” (Borg & Mayo, 2000, p. 115). Yet the current reality, as the studies in this issue of the *McGill Journal of Education* illustrate, is still far from that ideal – and much more complicated. The four authors (or groups of authors) whose work is included here explore different elements of the challenges faced by teachers and administrators who are trying to make sense of their educational responsibilities in the midst of rapid change.

Katz, Earl, and Olson, in the opening article, *The Paradox of Classroom Assessment: A challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, define and explore “two very different conceptions of competence at play in the landscape of formal education.” They show how teachers are held in constant tension between collective and subjective knowledge, attending to both the “demands of a fixed school curriculum” and the “needs of the individual children with their varied understandings, backgrounds, and interests who make up a class.” This article thoughtfully articulates a major current concern: given that there is a clear link between evaluation practices and their underlying ideologies, are teachers in an impossible situation in relation to their stu-

dents, being asked to judge them using incompatible or conflicting systems of values?

In the second article, *Postmodern Feminism and Educational Policy Development*, Wallin is also concerned with questions of values, knowledge, and policy, but at the level of teachers' lives and career development. She uses postmodern feminist theory to analyze administrative practices from a new perspective, one that recognizes gender differences and the possible inequities that can result when these differences are not taken into account (or when gender patterns in the profession change faster than administrative policy). Her analysis is founded in her theoretical and practical work examining rural settings in western Canada, but contributes equally to a variety of debates across the country and internationally.

Leroy and Symes, in *Teachers' Perspectives on the Family Backgrounds of Children At Risk*, pursue issues of difference with a focus on socio-economic and cultural problems that are familiar to educators working in areas of both urban and rural poverty. This qualitative study sought out the beliefs teachers hold about the "at-risk" children in their classrooms. What are teachers able to perceive and what actions can they take, in their support of children at risk? Among the findings, which differ from those in some earlier studies, is the discovery that these teachers sympathize with, rather than blaming, the parents who cannot give children much home support. The authors reconfirm the view that the spiritual and cultural backgrounds of aboriginal students can be "a source of strength," one which other students in their schools may not be fortunate enough to share. Yet the teachers in the study seem somewhat less sensitive to the psychological needs of apparently privileged students.

Finally, in *Academic Achievement of Adolescents from Selected Ethnocultural Groups in Canada: A study consistent with John Ogbu's theory*, Samuel, Krugly-Smolka and Warren report on part of a larger study that looked at adolescents in certain ethnocultural communities and their academic achievement in Canada. The study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the school achievement of students from *voluntary* rather than *involuntary* minorities, in Ogbu's terms. The research team found that the adolescents in the voluntary minority groups, many of whose parents had come to Canada with a strong motivation to establish a better life for their families, "excel in academic performance despite language barriers and racial discrimination." This success seems to be in part a result of the positive messages given to these students in their home environments, and what they see as the relative openness and flexibility of the Canadian school system. (For *involuntary* minorities, when families did not freely choose to come to North America, the situation is not so positive.) The students from

the voluntary minority groups have confidence in taking responsibility for their own futures, and use great effort and persistence to advance as learners.

Reading these four very different articles together, we can catch a glimpse of some of the many professional demands on classroom teachers: their roles as evaluators; their need to understand and help to reshape their own working conditions; their attitudes and interventions with the most vulnerable part of the school population; and their need to be open to the potential of students from multiple backgrounds. All of us may struggle with the tendency to stereotype (and be stereotyped), to succumb to outside pressures or to remain prisoners of our own histories. These studies remind us that we benefit from being alert to the paradoxes and socio-political pressures that surround teaching and learning as well as from a constant review of our own values, attitudes and sense of agency.

A.B.

#### REFERENCE

Borg, C. & Mayo, P. (2000). Reflections from a "third age" marriage: Paulo Freire's pedagogy of reason, hope and passion. *McGill Journal of Education*, 35 (2), p. 115.

#### ÉDITORIAL: LA POLITIQUE ET LES PARADOXES

Les éducateurs doivent s'efforcer de comprendre la logique d'un univers de contre-pressions: profondément enracinés dans les réalités politiques de notre propre société, nous sommes également contraints d'être apolitiques au sens où nous devons tenir compte des besoins et des points de vue de tous les groupes antagonistes qui veulent être entendus. Il ne peut y avoir d'« étrangers », ou qui que ce soit dont les points de vue et les besoins sont jugés hors de propos, lorsque l'avenir d'une société est en jeu. Dans le milieu des écoles publiques tel que nous le connaissons, les enseignants qui travaillent avec de jeunes apprenants ou des apprenants adultes vivent ce paradoxe quotidiennement, non pas dans la relative tranquillité et sécurité d'un bureau universitaire ou administratif, mais dans le bruit et moyennant des interruptions constantes et des astreintes multiples. Les enseignants vivent les tensions d'un système où ils savent pertinemment que certains réussiront et d'autres échoueront, non seulement en fonction des compétences et efforts de chacun, mais aussi à cause des impondérables de la vie, bons ou mauvais.

La plupart des pays, surtout les démocraties de type occidental, prétendent vouloir atteindre le but de «l'équité, de l'intégration et du droit» (Borg & Mayo, 2000, p. 115). Or la réalité actuelle, telle qu'elle ressort des articles

de ce numéro de la *Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, est loin d'être idéale, et est beaucoup plus complexe. Les quatre auteurs (ou groupes d'auteurs) dont les travaux sont décrits ici étudient différents éléments des défis auxquels sont confrontés les enseignants et les administrateurs qui s'efforcent de comprendre la logique de leurs responsabilités scolaires au beau milieu d'un rythme de changement effréné.

Katz, Earl et Olson, dans l'article d'introduction, *The Paradox of Classroom Assessment: A challenge for the 21st century*, définissent et étudient «deux conceptions radicalement différentes de la compétence qui entrent en jeu dans le paysage de l'éducation formelle». Ils démontrent la façon dont les enseignants subissent la tension constante entre la connaissance collective et la connaissance subjective, devant répondre à la fois «aux exigences d'un cursus scolaire fixe» et aux «besoins d'élèves qui ont des antécédents, des connaissances et des intérêts très divers». Cet article véhicule de manière intelligente une vive préoccupation actuelle: étant donné le lien sans équivoque entre les méthodes d'évaluation et les idéologies qui les soutiennent, les enseignants sont-ils dans une situation impossible par rapport à leurs élèves, lorsqu'on leur demande de les juger en utilisant des systèmes de valeurs incompatibles ou conflictuels?

Dans le deuxième article, *Postmodern Feminism and Educational Policy Development*, Wallin s'intéresse également aux questions de valeurs, de connaissances et de politique, mais au niveau du vécu des enseignants et de l'évolution de leur carrière. Elle se sert de la théorie féministe post-moderniste pour analyser les méthodes administratives dans une nouvelle optique, une optique qui reconnaît les différences entre hommes et femmes et les inégalités possibles qui peuvent en résulter lorsque ces différences ne sont pas prises en compte (ou lorsque la distribution hommes-femmes dans la profession change plus vite que les politiques administratives). Son analyse repose sur ses travaux théoriques et pratiques consacrés aux milieux ruraux dans l'ouest du Canada, tout en contribuant à de nombreux débats à l'échelle du pays et à l'échelle mondiale.

Leroy et Symes, dans *Teachers' Perspectives on the Family Backgrounds of Children At Risk*, étudient les questions de différence en se polarisant sur les problèmes socio-économiques et culturels que connaissent bien les éducateurs qui travaillent dans les secteurs urbains et ruraux où la pauvreté sévit. Cette étude qualitative porte sur les croyances des enseignants au sujet des enfants à risque dans leurs classes. Qu'est-ce que les enseignants sont à même de percevoir et quelles mesures peuvent-ils prendre pour venir en aide aux enfants à risque? Parmi leurs constatations, qui divergent de celles de plusieurs études antérieures, il y a la découverte que ces enseignants sympathisent avec les parents qui ne peuvent guère apporter de soutien à domicile à leurs enfants, au lieu de le leur reprocher. Les auteurs confirment la théorie selon

laquelle les antécédents spirituels et culturels des élèves autochtones peuvent être «une source de vigueur», que les autres élèves de leurs écoles n'ont pas toujours le bonheur de partager. En revanche, les enseignants de cette étude semblent moins réceptifs aux besoins psychologiques de leurs élèves de milieux apparemment plus favorisés.

Enfin, dans *Academic Achievement of Adolescents from Selected Ethnocultural Groups in Canada: A study consistent with John Ogbu's theory*, Samuel, Krugly-Smolka et Warren rendent compte d'un segment d'une étude plus vaste consacrée aux adolescents de certaines collectivités ethnoculturelles et de leurs résultats scolaires au Canada. L'étude repose à la fois sur des méthodes quantitatives et qualitatives pour analyser les résultats scolaires des élèves provenant de minorités *volontaires* plutôt qu'*involontaires*, pour reprendre la terminologie d'Ogbu. L'équipe de chercheurs a constaté que les adolescents des groupes minoritaires volontaires, dont les parents sont nombreux à être venus au Canada dans le but avoué d'améliorer le sort de leur famille, «obtiennent d'excellents résultats scolaires en dépit d'obstacles linguistiques et de discrimination raciale». Cette réussite semble partiellement attribuable aux messages positifs que ces élèves reçoivent dans leur milieu familial, et à ce qu'ils perçoivent comme l'ouverture et la flexibilité relative du système scolaire canadien. (Pour les minorités *involontaires*, lorsque les familles n'ont pas choisi librement de venir s'établir en Amérique du Nord, la situation est moins rose.) Les étudiants des groupes minoritaires volontaires assument avec confiance la responsabilité de leur avenir et déploient de gros efforts et font preuve de persistance pour avancer dans leurs études.

En lisant ensemble ces quatre articles très différents, nous avons un aperçu de certaines des nombreuses astreintes professionnelles que vivent les enseignants: leur rôle d'évaluateurs; leur besoin de comprendre et d'aider à refaçonner leurs propres conditions de travail; leurs attitudes et interventions face au segment le plus vulnérable de la clientèle scolaire; et leur besoin d'être ouverts au potentiel des élèves provenant d'horizons multiples. Nous devons tous lutter contre la tendance au stéréotypage (dont nous pouvons aussi être les victimes), ne pas succomber aux pressions de l'extérieur ou rester prisonniers de notre propre histoire. Ces études nous rappellent que nous avons tout intérêt à rester attentifs aux paradoxes et pressions socio-politiques qui s'exercent sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage et que nous avons tout à gagner d'un réexamen constant de nos valeurs, de nos attitudes et de notre pouvoir individuel d'agir.

A.B.

#### RÉFÉRENCE

Borg, C. & Mayo, P. (2000). Reflections from a "third age" marriage: Paulo Freire's pedagogy of reason, hope and passion. *Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 35 (2), p.115.



# THE PARADOX OF CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT: A CHALLENGE FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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**ABSTRACT.** There are at least two very different conceptions of competence at play on the landscape of formal education, best defined in terms of what is known collectively and what is known subjectively. Teachers are forced to attend to each of these in their challenge to meet both the demands of a fixed school curriculum and the needs of the individual children with their varied understandings, backgrounds, and interests who make up a class. We outline these two contrasting notions of competence here, including their associated epistemological, pedagogical, psychological, and assessment implications. This approach shows how classroom assessment is caught in a paradox: it attempts to serve competing purposes that are intimately bound to alternative conceptions of competence.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Il existe au moins deux conceptions radicalement différentes de la compétence dans le paysage de l'éducation formelle, que l'on pourrait définir sous l'angle de ce qui est connu collectivement et de ce qui est connu subjectivement. Les enseignants doivent en tenir compte afin de satisfaire à la fois aux exigences d'un cursus scolaire prédéterminé et aux besoins des différents élèves qui composent la classe, aux connaissances, antécédents et intérêts variés. Nous insistons ici sur ces deux conceptions opposées de la compétence, notamment sur leurs répercussions connexes sur le plan de l'épistémologie, de la pédagogie, de la psychologie et de l'évaluation. Cette démarche démontre que l'évaluation en classe est un véritable paradoxe: elle cherche à atteindre des objectifs conflictuels qui sont intimement liés aux différentes conceptions de la compétence.

*Marks really do not fit with the thrust of the curriculum we are using.*

*How do you know that a kid "appreciates?" That is really, really tough to measure.*

*The interim report asks for satisfactory or not satisfactory. Well, what is satisfactory? Who defines what is satisfactory? Is it 50s, 60s, 70s? It's not really clear. And if it's not clear to us it's not clear for the parents. . .*

*I modified the program so they can be successful. Well, what is successful? Is successful 50%, 60%, 80%? When you modify for those children so that they are successful, if you have a watered down program to the extent that these children are, on paper, a success, and they go off to high school and those modifications aren't met, you've watered it down to the extent that it's not a true outcome. (from Earl & Katz, 2000)*

While assessment of students in terms of expressed goals has always been a central feature of schooling, recent concern with accountability has led to an increased focus on programs that assess students in universalized terms against “objective” standards. The outcomes of such assessment programs could then be used to judge not only children relative to each other, but also classrooms, schools, provinces, and nations. Teachers, understandably, are poised halfway between the children they serve and the mandated “objective” standards. The result is the kind of conflict cited in the epigrams given above. In this paper, we identify the roots of this conflict by focusing on the assessment arena in which teachers are most directly implicated – classroom assessment. Specifically, we will argue that the problematic nature of classroom assessment stems from its attempt to serve competing purposes which are intimately bound to alternative conceptions of competence.

It is in the preservation and accumulation of competencies that culture is made possible (Premack & Premack, 1996; Tomasello, Kruger & Ratner, 1993). Schools are the institutions charged with the transmission of these competencies from generation to generation. Conceptions of competence have changed with advances in educational and psychological theory. There are at least two very different conceptions of competence at play on the landscape of formal education, best defined in terms of what is known collectively and what is known subjectively. Teachers are forced to attend to each of these in their challenge to meet both the demands of a fixed school curriculum and the needs of the individual children with their varied understandings, backgrounds, and interests who make up a class (Olson & Katz, 2000). In the pages that follow, we outline these two contrasting notions of competence, including their associated epistemological, pedagogical, psychological, and assessment implications. In this way, the paradox of classroom assessment is exposed. We begin with “the known.”

### *The known*

*Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. . . . (Dickens, 1854, p. 11)*

So went the opening rant of Dickens' character, Mr. Thomas Gradgrind, as he presented himself to “. . .the little pitchers before him, who were to be

filled so full of facts." Although, these days, no one urges just the facts, competence defined in terms of the possession of knowledge is a well-established feature of modern day schooling. Students arrive at school with minds considered devoid of the necessary facts, rules, and principles which must then be transferred in a unidirectional fashion from the instructor, text, or other authority. Teaching becomes an exercise in telling, and learning an exercise in remembering (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Olson and Katz, 2000). The sequential and hierarchical structure of didactic teaching exemplifies the pedagogy at work here, an image well captured in Bernstein's (1972) "collection codes" view of knowledge. The "collection codes" approach emphasizes the acquisition of hierarchical sequences of information specific to given disciplines.

The substance of what is told (taught) and what is remembered comes in the form of propositional knowledge, knowledge that is taken to have an existence independent of the individual knower. The route to independence is one that has received much attention in the postmodern literature. Berger and Luckmann (1967) highlight the dialectic relation that exists between "objective facticity" and "subjective meanings" where the former, which come to be seen as natural and unquestionable, are in fact conventions that originate as the latter and come to be solidified by various means. In much the same way, sociologists of science Bruno Latour and Stephen Woolgar (1986) trace the arduous journey from private conjectures such as "I wonder if. . ." to canonical truths, "The properties were shown to be. . ." The final report, as Smith (1990) points out and as noted above, removes all traces of subjectivity to become statements of fact, constituting "the known."

Despite such illuminating work from sociologists of knowledge, both schooled and unschooled arenas continue to rely on the assumption that knowledge is found not made, that truth is "the truth," not that which is taken to be true. Latour and Woolgar (p. 240) have concluded that ". . . the result of the construction of fact is that it appears unconstructed by anyone," and this observation is borne out by the extensive epistemological belief literature which suggests that few people ever doubt this traditional view of "the known" (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Kitchener, 1983; Kitchener & King, 1981; Kitchener, King, Wood, & Davidson, 1989; Kuhn, 1991, 1992; Perry, 1970). For most, knowledge is certain and permanent (Schommer, 1994), and viewed as either right or wrong. Chandler, Boyes, and Ball (1990, p. 377) caricature this "absolutist" statement of knowledge as a ". . . free-standing attribute of the enviroing world that only secondarily comes into the passive possession of those who, because they happen to be in the right place at the right time, automatically end up with some portion of the unmitigated truth directly embossed upon the recording equipment of their minds." Disagreements between people, then, can be attributed to the lack of facts among members of one of the

parties; the reins of certainty can be pulled in by reference to a disagreeable position as “just your opinion.”

The process by which knowledge is authenticated as “the truth” in this view is thought to lie with the appropriate authorities (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Kitchener, 1983; Kitchener & King, 1981; Kitchener et al., 1989; Kuhn, 1992; Perry, 1970). Belenky et al. (1986) call this “silent knowing,” in which the individual accepts the authority’s proclamation as to what is true. There is no belief that the knower can learn from his or her own experiences and knowing does not belong to the individual. Thus, through an external definition of “the known,” clear specifications as to what is to be taught appear. Nowhere is this manifestation more evident than in the establishment of a formal curriculum embodying those truths.

What is especially interesting from our assessment-centred perspective is that in providing such clear specifications of “the known” as that which must be taught, the formal curriculum also provides an associated set of standards for assessing learning achievements. That is, classroom assessment becomes the vehicle for gauging the closeness of fit between what is told and what is remembered (Earl & Katz, 2000). In such contexts, even the evidence used to justify beliefs as “knowledge” is traceable to authorities. Since “the truth” is acquired from appropriate authorities, justification for belief normally takes the form of what Belenky et al. (1986) have termed “received knowing.” That is, evidence consists of congruity with the authority, be it person or text.

While it is true that formal testing is the typical manifestation of the “concordance check,” a similar check is built into the anecdotal assessments that stem from classroom discourse. A common classroom discourse pattern is the IRE sequence (initiate, respond, and evaluate), where the teacher asks a question, a student responds, and the teacher gives feedback (Alvermann, O’Brein, & Dillon, 1990; Cazden, 1988). Unlike normal questions which are honest requests for information, in classroom questioning teachers are aware of the answers they are looking for (Applebee, 1996). Thus, Gradgrind’s request for his star, “well-crammed” pupil, Bitzer, to define a horse has nothing do with Grandgrind’s knowledge, or lack thereof, in the equine domain and everything to do with gauging the congruity of Bitzer’s definition of a horse with that given by the dictionary as:

*Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely, twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.* (Dickens, 1854, p. 14)

The point is further illustrated by the experiences of those who have worked with younger children and received one of the following answers to a less than honest “why” question: “Because you said so” or “Because the book said

so.” Finally, assessment as judgment, particularly as supported by classroom questioning, is a culture specific phenomenon. Heath (1982, p. 105) offered the following transcript as evidence for African-American students’ expectation that questions have answers unknown to the questioner:

*Teacher: What is the story about?*

*Children: (silence)*

*Teacher: Uh... Let’s see... Who is it the story talks about?*

*Children: (silence)*

*Teacher: Who is the main character: Um... What kind of story is it?*

*Child: Ain’t nobody can talk about things being about themselves!*

Such failed questioning series were also reported by Luria (1976) in his studies on non-literate adults.

By defining that which is “known” and subsequently what must be taught, modes of education predicated on the formal curriculum are essentially selective (Glaser & Silver, 1994). That is, there is minimal variation in the conditions of learning and consequently, in instruction. We have, as just one illustration, the provincial government of Ontario, Canada introducing a highly centralized, domain-specific provincial curriculum which spells out exactly what students will know and when. For example, in mathematics, by the end of Grade 8 students will “represent whole numbers in expanded form using powers and scientific notation (e.g.,  $347 = 3 \times 10^2 + 4 \times 10 + 7$ ,  $356 = 3.56 \times 10^2$ )” (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1997, p. 26). The accompanying justification-driven media campaign explains the ease with which children will be able to move between school board jurisdictions given the new-found consistency in what is to be taught and learned.

Although pedagogically naïve, the virtue of such a specific curriculum is its direct relationship to what must be taught. By specifying this precisely, it sets the stage for a rather specific definition of accountability, accountability defined as a kind of surveillance mechanism which proceeds by way of a congruity check. What is prescribed by the formal curriculum necessarily maintains an existence apart from individual teachers and their students. It is a prescriptive blueprint for common action and by definition a yardstick for common evaluation, hence systemic accountability. In this way, it is possible to begin to talk about a target competence “norm” or “benchmark,” defined not in terms of characteristic variability, but rather in terms of central tendency – the “mean” not the “spread” of the distribution, so to speak. In addition to the classroom routines we have described, such thinking is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of the large-scale achievement testing movement (c.f. Glaser & Silver, 1994). Assessment is about judgment, judgment about who will go on and where they will go, or, to put it differently, about who is competent and who is not.

While it is true that the ideal manifestation of the achievement of fixed knowledge would appear in student performances characterized by predetermined means and zero variances (Hacking, 1996), diversity amongst learners in their achievement of these fixed goals is conspicuous. Here enters the appeal of psychological theory; in particular, the psychology based on intelligence and personality testing that serves primarily to predict and explain away the differential outcomes of schooling. We are referring here to that stance to the problem of diversity known as Individual Difference. Individual Difference proceeds by classifying people on the basis of values on particular dimensions or traits. It was trait ascription that allowed Binet and his successors to explain 25 percent of the variance in “typical” school-like tasks by reference to “intelligence,” and it is trait ascription that characterizes much of teacher talk today as they attempt to account for classroom performance variance on the basis of particular dimensions like “persistence,” “impulsivity,” “giftedness,” or “hyperactivity” (Olson, 2000). Although such characterization is almost irresistible and often harmless, it is also misleading, especially when such traits are concretized into entities. Intelligence, for example, began as an abstract relation between strategies and tasks but quickly became a possession, or perhaps more accurately, a capacity with implications for competence. In doing so, it proffered an explanation for variability, while allowing the tradition of achieving a fixed norm to continue.

The picture of formal education we have provided thus far is one familiar to anyone who has read critiques of schooling from Dewey to the present. It is one circumscribed in a notion of competence defined in terms of an individual’s acquisition of knowledge construed as facts and theories, i.e. “the known.” Attempts to define “the known” result in clear specifications as to what is to be taught, as well as an associated set of standards for assessing learning achievements. Gauging the fit between what is taught and what is learned defines the nature of classroom assessment, a process which serves as a mechanism for making competence judgments. Diversity, in this framework, is a departure from the ideal of a “norm” and requires explanation, explanation that primarily appeals to trait psychology – the psychology of happenings (Olson, 2000).

While today’s classrooms exemplify the educational vision detailed above, they are also characterized by more than simply a concern for “the known.” Indeed, such a concern results in subjective postures sharply distinguished from the objectivist stance which relegates personal belief to the substandard position of opinion, or worse, idle speculation. Thus, young Sissy Jupe’s inclusion of her experiences with the animal in her definition of a horse – in particular her father’s “belonging to the horseriding” – meets with the Gradgrind reply, “Girl number twenty unable to define a horse! Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of

animals!" (Dickens, 1854, p. 13). However, much of what we see in today's classrooms accepts, indeed encourages, what is known subjectively and experientially and seeks to develop it. We detail next this concern for "the knower," noting some very different epistemological, pedagogical, psychological, and assessment definitions from those articulated above.

### *The knower*

The image of respect for the child's point of view is one well captured in the writings of John Dewey. Influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution and the psychology of William James, Dewey spoke of thinking and learning as practical capacities through which we actively interact with our surroundings (Phillips & Soltis, 1991). In nature, he argued, thinking is stimulated by real problems that the learner has a personal vested interest in solving (Dewey, 1902/1966).

Dewey argued that traditional schools restrained both mental and physical activity. He saw knowledge emerging from a process of interpretation and clarification of meanings related to various aspects of experience in the world (Dewey, 1938). Along with this emphasis on interpretive sense-making came a psychology of **doings** that stood in contrast to the psychology of **happenings** (Olson, 2000). Dewey argued that while trait psychology proffered causal mechanisms that explained behaviour in terms of what happened, a preferable alternative would be to explain behaviour in terms of what agents, including learners, were doing or trying to do. Thus, the shift is from causes to reasons, from persons as passive respondents to persons as intentional agents. Children are seen as acting in accordance with their beliefs, desires, hopes, and intentions, that is, their mental states.

Child-centredness is, by now, a dominant theme in both cognitive-developmental and sociocultural perspectives of education (Astington & Pelletier, 1996; Shuell, 1996). In the former, Piaget's genetic epistemology comes close to providing a psychological theory that parallels Dewey's educational one. Cognitive developmentalists emphasize the child's interactions with the physical environment. Learning occurs as previously acquired cognitive structures are coordinated to form new superordinate structures. Initially, structures develop from concrete experiences and thinking remains concrete until the coordination of structures allows for the emergence of abstract thought. In the latter, the sociocultural perspective, the child's interactions with other people in a social world are emphasized. Rooted in Vygotskian theory, cognitive development is regarded as a socially mediated process. The conversation metaphor (Applebee, 1996) is a popular one, with participation in classroom discourse serving as the vehicle through which meanings are constructed. Notions of cognitive apprenticeships (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989) and communities of learners (Brown & Campione, 1994; Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996) portray learning as the

result of a coordination of perspectives between teacher and learner or amongst learners themselves.

In considering the child's point of view, the mind is acknowledged as a place of privately held beliefs and ideas (Olson & Bruner, 1996; Olson & Katz, 2000). Children are seen as individuals capable of sense-making both through their interactions with the environment (cognitive-developmental) and through discourse with others (sociocultural). Learning, then, can be conceptualized as a process of subjective interpretation, while teaching creates opportunities for intersubjective interchanges, for sharing beliefs through collaborative discourse.

Defining competence in terms of the subjective properties of the knower leads to a very different set of epistemological assumptions than those discussed in the previous section. Indeed, in recognizing that "the known" is neither God-given nor an indisputable fact of nature, knowledge is viewed as fundamentally made, not found, and consequently uncertain. Truth is seen as varying from person to person and knowledge is interpreted subjectively (Kuhn, 1991, 1992; Perry, 1970). Constructivism, in this view, is the key notion.

From this relativistic epistemic stance, the source of knowledge lies in personal, idiosyncratic processes such as individual opinion (Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Kitchener, 1983; Kitchener & King, 1981; Kitchener et al., 1989; Kuhn, 1992; Perry, 1970). Belenky et al. (1986) use the term "subjective knowing" to convey the delimiting role of intuition and gut feeling in the epistemological enterprise. Personal belief counts as evidence for knowing. To justify beliefs is to share them with others. Competence is seen as subjective sense-making.

The subjectively-driven notion of competence provides a new stance to classroom assessment. First, it shifts the focus from desired mean to desired variance, a view of diversity that is supported by an intentional psychology. Diversity is a central feature of an intentional psychology. Deviations from a predetermined norm are not aberrations but rather expectations. Normalcy becomes a property of variability rather than a central tendency because learners as interpreters necessarily construct somewhat different interpretations of any text or event. Classroom assessment is the mechanism that promotes the interpretation and revision processes of the learner. It is something best accomplished by the self since it is the knower who holds privileged access to the relevant beliefs and intentions, though they are also obliged to give a public account (c.f. Lampert, Rittenhouse, & Crumbaugh, 1996). Thus, portfolios and other self-assessment vehicles (Earl & Cousins, 1996; Garcia & Pearson, 1994; Glaser & Silver, 1994; Wilson, 1996) which promote students' articulation of subjective reasons for their beliefs and opinions rather than objective right answers (Buchmann, 1986) are sug-

gested. Additional assessment opportunities can also be found in classroom discourse episodes that support subjective interpretation.

When subjective reasons replace objective right answers, assessment, as we have seen, becomes in large part the responsibility of the knower; the knower has to justify his or her views. Assessment opportunities can be found in classroom discourse patterns which change too, from IRE to ICE (Wilson, 1996) in keeping with acronym inscription. ICE discourse encourages students to form and share their own Ideas, Connect them to one another, and Extend them beyond personal experience (see Wilson, 1996 for an example). Gardner (1990) has proposed “individually configured excellence” as a title reflective of this adaptive (Glaser, 1977) model of education. Schooling works to identify and develop sources of competence in individual students. It is in such subjective competencies that individual backgrounds, interests, and understandings are taken into account.

Conceptions of education driven by a concern for “the knower” are not without limitations. The epistemic posture associated with a subjectively-driven notion of competence derogates truth to a transient quality. Truth is variant and certainty is elusive. In this way, the stance of “skeptical” is legitimated in which “. . . all claims are challenged, every heart-felt belief is held up to ridicule, and all action is seen as permanently premature” (Chandler et al., 1990, p. 379). The problem here is that in the absence of certainty, all beliefs appear equal. Neatby (1953) points out that it is this very phenomenon that supports mediocrity or, as she puts it, a system of education that offers “so little for the mind.” Without objective standards, and the associated norms or benchmarks, systemic accountability becomes problematic for both individuals and educational institutions. It is in terms of such standards that schools are held accountable for fulfilling an institutional mandate, a mandate generally advanced in terms of those very standards.

### *The paradox of classroom assessment*

The practice of classroom assessment is one that can be conceptualized as necessarily consisting of multiple purposes, hence the potential for emergent paradoxes. Wilson (1996) explains that assessment must satisfy many goals such as providing feedback to students, offering diagnostic information for the teacher to use, providing summary data for record keeping, proffering evidence for reports, and directing efforts at curriculum revision. He underscores the inextricable link between assessment and pedagogy that we have established throughout this paper by referencing five different but necessary assessment roles which teachers must play.

First, in “teacher as mentor,” encounters with individual students help teachers make up their minds about each student’s progress and about what

will be necessary for growth to occur. Such assessments are often not noted, recorded, or even recognized. They form part of the social fabric of the class. The second assessment role, "teacher as guide," involves managing the progress of the class as a group. Markedly different from the practice of providing individual help to a single student, this role requires forming and acting on impressions of the class's progress. Third, employing numerical categories for the purpose of reporting student achievement delimits the role of "teacher as accountant." The task here is to provide a common basis of comparison so that each child appears to be treated as fairly as every other child. Indeed, this role is intimately bound to the fourth one, "teacher as reporter," in which the teacher is required to keep organized records in order to expedite the process of gathering, interpreting, and relaying information for outside communication. Finally, the "teacher as program director" is responsible for reflecting on the classroom program as a whole. This task requires drawing on periodic external assessments which specify the systemic goals that help set the overall "tone" for the classroom program.

The potential for conflict among the many assessment roles that Wilson (1996) spells out seems unavoidable. Translated into the broader language of the present argument, we see that a concern for both the "knower" and the "known" is an inherent property of the individual classroom. Teachers are pulled between the two sets of constraints in that classes are required to meet fixed and predetermined goals, yet it is individuals with varied backgrounds, interests, and understandings that learn (Clay, 1996). This, we have argued, is problematic because each element maps onto a different conception of competence which, in turn, is intimately bound to a highly specific epistemology, pedagogy, and psychology. Contradictions inherent in classroom assessment practices are unavoidable. They come to us by natural extension of incommensurable competence definitions. When the concern is with what is "known" generally, assessment is about correspondence to a norm or standard. When the concern is with the "knower," assessment is a subjective mechanism of interpretation.

For much of this century educational theory has attempted to come to grips with this gap between what is known generally and should be transmitted, and what is known subjectively and should be developed. Yet this effort typically consisted of little more than staking opposing claims on the epistemological battleground. Classical education theory considered knowledge to be an entity that exists in some tangible form capable of being transferred intact to children. Educational reformers, such as Dewey, took the other pole, insisting on the primacy of subjective and communal experience as the basis of all knowledge.

Katz (1998) illustrates these oppositional tendencies in the context of a heated debate presently reflected in the mathematics education literature.

Specially, a tension exists between providing opportunities for mathematical understanding on the one hand, and the need to teach widely used notations and algorithms on the other, with proponents of the former arguing that the latter has no place in the classroom. However, the advance of mathematics is, in part, the invention of notations and algorithms that simplify our tasks, hence the need for students to learn them. Thus, although theoreticians have been more or less content to operate almost exclusively in spheres defined by one epistemology or the other, the practical landscape of education does not enjoy the bounded consistency of abstract theory. Both elements of the epistemological enterprise seem valid in a context of actual practice, hence the need for an alternative solution to the epistemological, and thus assessment, paradox. After all, assessment practices of all varieties communicate something about the learner to the learner. They each communicate a way of thinking about the self. They are the vehicles through which children come to think of themselves as competent on the one hand or as incompetent on the other. We offer the paradox described here as a challenge to educational researchers and practitioners in twenty-first century.

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# POSTMODERN FEMINISM AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper draws on postmodern feminism to create a conceptual framework for equitable policy development within educational institutions. It first outlines major concepts of postmodern feminism as distinguished by Luke and Gore (1992), after which it focuses specifically on postmodern feminism and education. Finally, the paper details educational policy development utilizing Tong's (1986) work on the role of epistemology and expertise in policy making.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article s'inspire du féminisme post-moderniste pour créer un cadre conceptuel en vue de l'élaboration des politiques équitables dans les établissements d'enseignement. L'auteur commence par exposer les principaux concepts du féminisme post-moderniste selon Luke et Gore (1992), avant de se concentrer en particulier sur le féminisme post-moderniste et l'éducation. Enfin, elle décrit l'élaboration des politiques éducatives en précisant le rôle de l'épistémologie et du savoir-faire à partir des travaux de Tong (1986).

Social justice frameworks for understanding equality issues are helping policy makers and practitioners to rediscover the differences between the sexes in the social sciences. Gilligan (1994) states that this discovery occurs at a time when theories formerly considered to be sexually neutral are found instead to reflect masculine bias. Consequently, the presumed neutrality of science is shattered with the realization that categories of knowledge are themselves human constructions; therefore "truth" becomes a relative term. In extension, the policies created relative to these categories of knowledge become human constructions shaped by masculinist assumptions:

Our existing politics, policies, programs, research funding, and policy studies have ignored or marginalized the feminist critique. . . . Whether the issue is teen pregnancy, or sexual harassment in schools or the underutilization of women's leadership in schools – all documented problems – little funding goes to research or programs putting women at the center of these issues. (Marshall, 1998, p. 2)

The purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual framework, shaped by postmodern feminism, for equitable policy development within educational institutions. The paper first outlines major concepts of postmodern feminism as distinguished by Luke and Gore (1992), after which it focuses specifically on postmodern feminism and education. Finally, the paper details educational policy development utilizing Tong's (1986) work on the role of epistemology and expertise in policy making.

### *Postmodern feminism*

Conceptions of life represent attempts to make sense of the perceptions of everyday experience. But the understanding of the truth of such conceptions depends in part on the position of the observer, which may differ according to gender. Additionally, each woman, like each individual, conceives of truth differently. Hence the potential for the development of a postmodern feminist perspective which accommodates contextuality and individualized perceptions of "truth."

An integration of the inherent characteristics of postmodernism and feminist thought "engenders" a unique way of knowing the world. A postmodern feminist epistemology accepts that knowledge is always provisional, open-ended, and relational. The contextual character of all knowledge and knowing suggests that there can be no finite and unitary truths; inherent in this framework is the centrality of subjectivity and context. Various postmodern feminisms maintain an interest in signification, in power/knowledge relationships, in damage done by master-narratives, and in the way institutional structures are controlled. The postmodern feminist pedagogy therefore demands a critical examination of underlying assumptions. This pedagogy demands "confrontations with discontinuities, particularities, and the narratives that embody actual life stories. . . renewed attentiveness to the construction of knowledge and the life of meaning. . . relational, practice-centered, contextualized, and open-ended" (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. x).

Held (1997) suggests that gender, even more than socio-economic class, provides a perspective of reality, both social and physical, that dominant perspectives do not reveal. She believes that feminism requires "a distinctively feminist reconstruction of reality, [that is] conceptualized [from a] feminist standpoint" (p. 886). Women must be critical of the standard views promoted within society, as they may be masking masculinist notions. In order to avoid the oppression of the past, the future must be structured to be fair to women. To that end Held calls for "new conceptualizations of power and empowerment, and for new recommendations concerning the kinds of relations which ought to prevail between human beings" (p. 882). If traditional views can be reconceptualized as being "masculine" views, traditional epistemologies will be transformed. It is therefore important to ensure that knowledge includes the experiences and interests of women and

to recognize that those experiences and interests are as significant as those of men.

This position suggests that we cannot claim single-strategy pedagogies of empowerment, emancipation, and liberation (Luke & Gore, 1992). Postmodern feminism acknowledges its own contextual position in discourse and in history, as well as its potential for promoting gendered assumptions. However, by locating educational work in context and with attention to specific practices, the possibilities for reshaping relations in pedagogy may be actualized.

### *Postmodern feminism and education*

The following two sections build upon the conceptual framework of postmodern feminism presented in this paper. The sections attempt to develop a link between postmodern feminist thought and education. Discussion begins with the claim that the invisibility of women in educational philosophy devalues women in education and in policy. Since philosophy drives practice, the paper then elaborates upon some of the deficiencies that exist within the current educational system, focusing specifically upon four recurrent themes in feminist writing in education.

**THE INVISIBLE WOMEN – IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION.** According to Martin (1994), disciplines fall short of the ideal epistemological equality, that is, equality in representation and treatment of women in academic knowledge itself, for example, in scientific theories, historical narratives, and literary interpretations. Essentially, contemporary philosophy of education makes women and their activities and experiences invisible. Martin (1994, p. 115) suggests two major consequences of this phenomenon. Firstly, when the experience of women is neither reflected nor interpreted in the texts of the history of educational philosophy, women are given no opportunity to understand and evaluate the range of ideals that the great thinkers of the past have held for them; students of both sexes are denied contact with the great female minds of the past and are denied the knowledge that women have ever thought seriously and systematically about education; and the message that women are not capable of significant philosophical reflection is transmitted. The second consequence is that, by placing women outside the educational realm or else making them invisible within it, the contemporary philosophy of education also contributes to the devaluation of women by making women's traditional activities, which include the education of children during motherhood, appear trivial.

Feminine invisibility in the philosophy of education reinforces the impression that women are not important contributors to education and that the activities they have traditionally performed are not worthwhile. Furthermore, "philosophy's traditional questions of value, virtue, veracity, and

validity cannot be asked about the education of females because females are unseen in the educational realm. Thus enlightenment is denied to policies that directly affect girls and women” (Martin, 1994, p. 115). According to Marshall (1998), these policy omissions affect the educational arena:

The wave-making education reform of the 80s commanded national and state attention to improve schools’ performance. . . The policy culture did not countenance interventions to alter the patterns in schooling that reproduce inequitable gender relations. Nor did the policy culture countenance interventions that reconceptualized gender constructions, definitions of family life, and revalued women’s work. Gender and power relations in the workplace and personal relationships—the deeper assumptions undergirding gender issues—were not on the policy agenda. (pp. 2-3)

Many women have provided theoretical and pedagogical support to philosophical thought and social structure, but their own discoveries and advances have repeatedly been overlooked by male-dominated cultures. As long as there is no epistemological equality for women in philosophy of education, that discipline will serve patriarchal policy, albeit unintentionally, since male norms become the basis of policy development. Thus, traditional male activities and cultural values (independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war, and death) are built into the educational system while activities traditionally assigned to females (interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace, and life) are ignored.

**EDUCATION AND POSTMODERN FEMINISM.** The opportunities for certain women hide the discrimination that continues in many private and public realms and also masks the unevenness of women’s advances. From an analysis of the work completed by Stone (1994), Luke and Gore (1992), and Kenway and Modra (1992), four recurrent themes in feminist writing on education are found. Firstly, discussions of gender and of research on gender differences must recognize the impact of other important factors, such as social class, ethnicity, and race. Secondly, the collective struggles of women to be heard and taken seriously in matters of theory, policy and practice in education must be emphasized. Thirdly, there exists the need to address experiences of inequity faced by women in education. Finally, there exists a need to focus on alternative ways of framing questions, investigating problems, and interpreting data.

Those concerned with gender and schooling have a difficult journey ahead. The reason may be that “engaging in theoretical debate with the ‘converted’ is an occasional luxury, subsumed within the wider task of constructing a discourse with sufficient ideological power to change the practice of teachers and policy makers – most of whom are not feminists” (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p. 160).

In essence, postmodernism's influence on feminine thought advances the need to promote feminine ideology while at the same time remaining critical of its potential to define particular recipes for emancipation. Therefore, postmodern feminist ideology must be as critical of its own agendas for emancipation as it is critical of the current state of affairs in education.

What is necessary, then, are strategies for policy development which encourage critical and constant review of the meaning and evaluation attached to gender. These strategies could celebrate diversity and contextuality in gender relations and leave open the possibility for alternative perspectives. Current ways of knowing and learning can continually be questioned. Finally, the strategies can be ongoing processes without closure, advocating the importance of relationships and change, while building in an element of accountability and stressing the importance of self-correction.

### *Policy development*

Should not the goal of all educators be to provide an educational environment where gender inequity is not tolerated? This requires more than a legal precedent. All provinces/states should require their educational institutions to develop policies that will help to create an environment free from all forms of discrimination. Educators have a legal and ethical responsibility to prevent gender inequity in the educational environment. Although there are no simple solutions, by collaboratively and aggressively confronting gender inequity, educators can formulate and implement effective gender equitable policies.

The social policy and practice issues of importance to women are numerous and complex. To assist policymakers and practitioners in this area, five principles for analysis and action are proposed which have been adapted from Hagen and Davis' (1992) work on feminism and social policies. The first discusses differential impact and assumptions. All educational problems, policies, programs, and practice models must be analyzed in terms of how they differentially affect women and men, and should be examined for their underlying assumptions about women and men in society. The second principle of analysis and action is the principle of incrementation. This may enhance the likelihood that policy makers will accept changes that are supportive of women, include building change into existing programs and policies, and incorporate feminist principles into practice models. The third principle outlines the fact that policy analysts highlight the importance of policy initiatives fitting into existing societal values (Prigmore & Atherton, 1986). Being congruent with societal values, however, poses some difficulty when attempting to address, and redress, women's issues, because many problems confronting women are directly linked to prevailing societal values. The fourth principle suggests that emphasis must be given to building

coalitions around shared interests and the promotion of widespread use of groups in which women are encouraged to identify priorities and to act. The final principle suggests that action should occur at the local as well as the national level. Practical examples of policy initiatives which incorporate these principles, along with an explanation of how these examples contribute to making women's professional lives more positive, are outlined in Appendix A.

As postmodern feminism posits, there exists no one grand solution to rectify all situations. All stakeholders within education play a role in developing alternatives. Diversity is a strength. If restructuring needs to happen, or is happening, education policy makers need to keep that in mind. What follows is a description of the types of elements and/or processes that postmodern feminist policymakers are likely to incorporate into policy development, based upon Tong's work on policy analysis.

**PROCESS VERSUS PRODUCT.** Tong (1986) believes that we must have a detachment between the macro and micro levels of policy making, but that links must be maintained between them to ensure that the intent of policy matches its outcomes. Individuals involved in policymaking may have different individual politics, but it is the discourse and discussion between the policy makers that brings about best policy. Therefore, the process of policy making becomes as important as the content. This idea is analogous to that of feminist theory which advances that historically, practices and processes traditionally associated with the "masculine" have bequeathed society "products" that have been oppressive to women. Therefore, the processes by which feminist goals and policies are sought and developed should be evaluated by feminist standards.

Feminists argue that gender must be attended to as a central factor in organizing society. Policy makers must be open to differing interpretations of the lived experiences of women (Held, 1993). Feminist recommendations for the future typically include those which either de-emphasize the role of gender in the promotion of democratic ideals, or in fact grant priority to feminist concerns and traditionally "feminine" values. For instance, process proceedings such as collective and collaborative efforts, as well as mutually supportive styles for working based upon a sense of the importance of relationships, would likely increase in feminist policymaking efforts (Held, 1989).

**FACT VERSUS VALUE.** Tong (1986) encourages policy analysts to acknowledge that facts are inseparable from values; therefore, the policy world is populated by value-laden facts. Epistemological problems are likely to confront the policy expert. Generally, these problems have to do with the relation between either fact and value or knowledge and belief. Since human interests determine what counts as a relevant fact, common sense, ethical in-

sight, and dialogue/discourse between stakeholders are advised for equitable policy making.

Postmodern feminists argue this very same point, but elaborate upon it by submitting that what has constituted the “facts” of policy making situations throughout history has been laden with masculinist values which have served to decrease opportunities for women: “once we see that policy systems, schools and knowledge are the work benches for power tools, our social science pretenses of value neutrality are abandoned” (Marshall, p. 5). Consequently, these theorists argue for policy development based upon “facts” underpinned by “feminine” values as well as those typically considered to be “masculine” values. For instance, Held (1995) offers that a feminist society would view interdependence and relationships as being of high value, “embedded in a wider network of social relations characterized by social caring and trust” (p. 170). This society would be expected to put the care and development of each unique child at the center of its concerns, and it would seek to build institutions and practices beneficial for children. As a result, social programming would provide for policies developed around family, arrangements for child care, the education and health of children, maternal health care, paternal leave, early education, flexible work schedules and awareness of sexual victimization. Tong (1997) includes in this list access to birth control, abortion, adequate means to support a family, abolishing “the compulsory heterosexuality and mandatory motherhood that have characterized all male-dominated societies,” and restructuring the wage labor force. Essentially, women and men become equal participants in a workforce responsive to the needs of parents. In addition, concerns for future children may include the awareness of promoting harmonious relationships between human beings and the environment.

**INTERPRETIVE (POST-POSITIVIST) POLICY SCIENCE VERSUS POSITIVISTIC POLICY SCIENCE.**

Tong (1986) argues for the use of interpretive policy science, which looks at the kinds of facts that are selected and how they are to be interpreted utilizing humanistic disciplines, (such as historical narrative, ethical argument, literary exegesis, and jurisprudential reasoning), as opposed to the norms of the natural and social sciences. The policy analyst explains the meaning of a given activity, relationship, or artifact within a web of inter-related activities, relationships and artifacts, and always questions, “Why?” To this end, Tong (1986) advocates “human agents as self-determining subjects and a form of government that relies upon informed participation of those agents for the achievement of mutually agreed-upon social objectives and the maintenance not of mere social order but of true human community” (pp. 35-36). Therefore, policy makers are urged to utilize praxis, which includes common sense, ethical insight, and collaboration and communication between all stakeholders before policy formulation.

Tong warns policy makers not to set themselves up against the “objects” they study. The challenge for postmodern feminists, therefore, is to constantly be aware of their emancipatory ideology, so that they do not set themselves against the “objects” they propose to help, in the respect that they may create policies that promote their feminist agenda without fully considering the wishes of all constituents.

**ETHICS IN POLICYMAKING.** Policy makers need to identify and articulate the ways in which their epistemologies, ethics, and politics intersect when forging policy. For, “while it is true to say that our politics and ethics affect our epistemology, it is equally true to say that our epistemology. . . affects our politics and yes, our ethics” (Tong, 1986, p. 36). Held (1996) believes that moral theories and ethical considerations must be transformative and contextual because “we are trying to recommend and to justify how we ought to act in the world and what attitudes and characteristics we ought to cultivate” (pp. 169-170). According to Held (1995), moral inquiry into the nature of interactions within the family, as well as for the state, law, politics, and interactions among strangers should be transformed and their traditional moral significance should be reduced. She further explains this statement by suggesting that a feminist ethic will, of course, include principles of justice and equality when settling disputes, but that this ethic cannot attempt to generalize principles and approaches to all other domains and to all cases. This ethical importance given to contextuality is paramount to postmodern feminist policy making.

**ETHICS OF CARE VERSUS ETHICS OF POWER.** There exists two specifically feminist approaches to ethics. The first is considered to be an ethics of care (often labeled “feminine” ethics) and the second is termed an ethics of power (often labeled “feminist” ethics). Whereas a care focused feminine approach to ethics emphasizes values that have been culturally associated with women (e.g. nurturance, care, compassion), a power-focused feminist approach to ethics emphasizes the need to eliminate those social, economic, political, and cultural systems and structures that maintain patriarchal domination. Although there are real differences between care focused and power focused feminist approaches to ethics, Tong (1997) argues that they uniformly demand that nonfeminist approaches to ethics contain the following elements: (a) attend to women’s moral interests and issues as much as to men’s; (b) treat both women and men as full moral agents; (c) affirm the cultural values that have been associated with women (interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace, and life) as strongly as the cultural values that have been associated with men (independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war, and death); and (d) value women’s moral experiences and modes of moral reasoning as much as men’s.

Jagger (1992) distinguishes a feminist approach to ethics as seeking: (a) to articulate moral critiques of actions and practices that perpetuate women's subordination; (b) to prescribe morally justifiable ways of resisting such actions and practices; and, (c) to envision morally desirable alternatives that will promote women's emancipation. Essentially, feminist approaches to ethics attempt to articulate the importance of women's perspective and experience.

Feminist critics of feminine approaches to ethics often worry that the ethics of care/caring is an ethics for oppressed or otherwise vulnerable people, since, in their view, oppressed people often cater to the needs and desires of their oppressors in order to survive, and that "caring is subject to the same excesses and defects as justice" (Tong, 1993, p. 222).

Alternatively, feminist approaches to ethics are subject to the criticism that they are "female biased." Traditional ethicists have insisted that ethics applies equally well to both sexes, and that it would be misguided to construct an ethics that focuses on a specific group of people. In response to this charge, Tong (1993) suggests that feminist approaches to ethics "try to fight oppression by making the powerful accountable for ignoring the oppressed" (p. 229) which has implications for the epistemology and ethics of feminist theory:

Only those who have been the victims of domination and subordination can have the moral vision to create an ethics that transcends such abuse. I realize that the Tradition is threatened by a moral claim with an experiential prerequisite. Yet should it be? Even Aristotle said that ethical decisions rest in perception – in perceiving, in seeing through one's experiences to the moral truth behind appearances. (Tong, 1993, p. 228)

The advantage of postmodern feminism is that it encourages support for multiple perspectives and ways of viewing the world, as well as accountability for actions taken by those traditionally in positions of authority who have, overtly or inadvertently, oppressed others or suppressed their voices. Is it not therefore to the benefit of policy makers to make room for multiple perspectives, and to utilize the ethical perspective that promotes the best equitable policy development within the educational context?

If the answer to this question is affirmative, the next question becomes, "Whose ethical decisions and whose experiences does one accept?" For feminists, the "experts" are women who recognize their oppressed position within society. However, Schaub (1995) succinctly details what is perhaps the most serious flaw of feminist theory: the growing gap between "first wave" or "equity" feminism which "demanded and won fundamental and political rights for women and opened up educational and economic opportunity," and "second wave feminism" which has "abandoned universalism for gynocentrism and traded enfranchisement for seemingly permanent

victim status. Solidarity with women has come to mean hostility to men" (p. 100). Postmodern feminism argues that "experts" of both genders will be found and they will all have contributions to make by virtue of their differing experiences. In addition, postmodern feminists appreciate the differences among experts within the same gender, and acknowledge the fact that individuality and contextuality, as well as gender, play a large role in the generation of the assumptions and beliefs of the "expert."

EXPERTS. Conceptions of expertise can have a negative impact upon policy development. Tong (1991) examines the epistemology and ethics of consensus, focusing on the ways in which decision-makers use/misuse ethical expertise. Tong believes that often "experts" represent specific interest groups; if decision makers are to accept the advice of these experts, the experts must have more knowledge than the decision makers themselves. This corresponds to the feminist conception that because women have been oppressed, they are better knowers and therefore have special insights into the nature of reality. Here lies a caution for postmodern feminists, since even "expert" women run into the danger of elitism by promoting an empowerment agenda. Postmodern feminists must remain constantly aware that the feminine "voice" is in actual fact feminine "voices," and that masculine voices are just as legitimate.

Tong asserts that there are two primary reasons why decision makers have come to accept the authority of expert advice. The first has to do with the fact that decision makers find it difficult to trust themselves as authorities due to the divergent interpretations and increasing knowledge bases that exist within the world. Secondly, because decision makers mistrust themselves, they are more easily swayed by those who they presume to know more and who are able to speak authoritatively.

Tong (1986) also considers whether or not experts' authority is merely epistemological or whether it is also ethical. Ultimately, Tong advocates that decision makers should accept the advice of experts only if it accommodates their own reasoned moral point of view, since "second-hand ethics is no substitute for first-hand ethics in a community of equally autonomous moral agents" (p. 415). She worries over the tendency to use a group's consensus as a substitute for an individual's own moral deliberations and perceptions.

Tong believes that the simple fact that "experts" are able to come to some sort of consensus does not necessarily transform them into a group of moral authorities: "the more pluralistic our world becomes, the more we must rely on our moral selves to mediate the differences that threaten to tear us apart" (Tong, 1986, p. 92). The danger in the use of experts occurs when experts' findings begin to be invoked as norms, since this does not encourage the postmodern belief in the validity in multiple voice, multiple perspective,

and multiple ways of viewing the world. Hence, postmodern feminists' transformation of society works vigilantly against simply replacing one value-based method of organizing society for another.

Tong believes that policy analyzing and advising must maintain open structures. Policy experts must realize that their obligation to the people is threefold:

To bring to public attention government policies or practices that they believe may threaten the public health and welfare, to speak out when they believe that public debate is being needlessly hampered by the misrepresentation or suppression of information, and to share their information with as many citizens as they practically can when public debate is not as well informed as it could be. (pp. 133-134)

In essence, knowledge should be disseminated to as many citizens as possible, for "any other policy impedes personal autonomy as well as social progress, for without knowledge, neither individuals nor communities develop" (Tong, 1986, p. 134).

Experts should be utilized in a consultative nature for educative and policy making roles. Ultimately, their role is one of informing, not standard setting. Consequently, an atmosphere of reciprocated trust and knowledge sharing must be created between the expert and the decision maker in order to facilitate communication, to alleviate and to learn from mistakes, and to regard recommendations as reference tools for individualized moral decision making. In essence, Tong advocates that experts utilize an ethics of persuasion.

**ETHICS OF PERSUASION.** Tong recommends that "experts" be particularly careful to practice an ethics of persuasion. Their role is not to force their group consensus upon decision makers' individual moral perceptions and deliberations; rather, it is to help decision makers come to their own conclusion about what they ought to do: "although we may attempt to convince some people to change their behavior, we may never force them to do so, as we will disempower them, depriving them of their sense of autonomy" (Tong, 1991, p. 422)

Tong (1991) details what she believes are three practical ways of developing an ethics of persuasion: (a) disseminate recommendations in local forums as well as in national press conferences so that practitioners have the opportunity to think through their results with experts; (b) invite those who have sought expert recommendations to listen to their deliberations; and, (c) refrain from crossing the line between persuading and compelling. With these thoughts in mind, the final decision about what to do in any given situation must rest, then, with those directly affected by the policy, and not with those considered to be experts. Tong asserts that by "thinking and speaking, by deciding and acting, we reaffirm that we are morally responsi-

ble persons, who have the capacity to direct the way the world goes" (1986, pp. 133-134). Therefore, all stakeholders must share in a democratic policy process in a morally responsible manner.

### *Implications of postmodern feminism for educational policy making*

So how does this theory translate into policy development? It seems reasonable to suggest that the content of current educational policies should be examined and critiqued to determine whether they promote and/or are underpinned by masculinist notions of gender. In that way, policy makers would be made aware of the structural and personal inequities between women and men that have been reproduced and perpetuated within policy. They could then utilize recommendations from postmodern feminist theorists concerning the kinds of relations which ought to prevail between human beings to address inequitable policies. Finally, the experiences and interests of women would be acknowledged to be of equal importance to those of men, and could be incorporated into policy development.

It also seems reasonable to recommend that the processes by which feminist goals and policies in education are sought and developed be evaluated by feminist standards. Since gender is considered a central factor in organizing society, policy recommendations for the future would include those which either de-emphasize, or in fact grant priority to, feminist concerns and traditionally "feminine" values as well as those traditionally labeled masculine values. For instance, one could suggest that the importance of process may translate into policies that encourage collaborative staff initiatives, staff and community school effectiveness efforts, and the philosophy that children come first.

Staff can benefit from policies concerned with family, arrangements for child care, the education and health of children, maternal health care, paternal leave, early education, flexible work schedules and awareness of sexual victimization as their personal circumstances warrant. However, administration also needs to be provided with support structures and resources within the school division in order to administer the policies. These may include financial or personnel resources, curricular or programming innovations and technology, and social services support. Some of the mentioned policy possibilities are more politically volatile than others, and could impact upon community relationships and ideals. Others not only provide for potential economic spin-offs within the community, but also promote the importance of living harmoniously in the environment.

Postmodern feminist theorists argue for the necessity of personal experience, ethical behavior, and collaborative decision-making. However, the emancipatory agenda of the feminist strand of thought runs the risk of developing policies that sacrifice individual desires to the promotion of a

political agenda which is as much value-based, and perhaps as much gender-biased, as current policy making theories. Instead, an ethics of persuasion could be practiced, so that decision making in policy development remains in the control of those who have to deal with the repercussions of the policy. Inclusivity of multiple voice, multiple perspective, and multiple ways of viewing the world could be encouraged in policy making efforts.

Postmodernism's premise of the importance of contextuality leads to the implication that policies need to be flexible. This is due to the fact that the feminist ethic around which policies would be based, although premised upon principles of justice and equality, is not to be generalized, but is to be applied to the circumstances of a particular context. The ability of policy to help organize and give concrete direction to the educational organization is premised on its flexibility and contextuality.

Is not the ultimate goal of policy development the desire to promote an atmosphere of reciprocal trust, knowledge sharing, open structures, consultation, and good communication for morally responsible policy making? If this is so, postmodern feminist thought can enhance policy development, because it encourages the voicing of multiple perspectives and accountability for past actions. Policies based upon multiple stakeholder input reflect decisions that are morally acceptable within the entire community, and "experts" of both genders are sought for their contributions to good practice. Questions to ask about any policy proposed to create gender equity can be found in Appendix B.

### **Conclusion**

The unequal treatment of women is structural and is embedded within the system. Unless one transforms the system, inequalities will persist. Therefore, one of the most important issues concerning change in the social structure of society is the change in attitude to that of a postmodern perspective that appreciates and systematically upholds the value of multiple voices and perspectives, and respects diversity.

Ideology affects both policy and practice. Educators must recognize that policy and practice need to build on and inform each other to ensure that equity is in fact a reality within education. Tong (1996) counsels that policy analyzing, advising, and consulting need both internal standards of excellence (i.e., the ability to criticize and advance the state of the art) and internal goods (i.e., the satisfaction of knowing that, as the result of one's expertise, the policies that govern are more likely to effect a humane social order) in order to develop into a mature practice. In addition to this, in order to create a worthwhile institutional framework for policy making, individual policy analysts must have a conception of themselves as just, courageous and honest people.

A postmodern feminist critique ultimately leads to "the need to reformulate the methodologies, criteria of validity, and merit and ultimately the political and epistemological commitments underlying the dominant notions or discourse" (Thornton, 1982, p. 53). Through the encouragement of multiple voice and the celebration of diversity and relationships, postmodern feminism allows the stakeholders of education to examine where gender inequities exist, critique current policy and practice, and offer hope for establishing gender equitable policy development and practice within education.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### ***Policy Potentials for Gender Equitable Practices Within Schools***

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (1981) and Rebeck and Roach (1996) both outline some potential policy initiatives that would promote more gender equitable practices within schools. An amalgamation of their work leads to the following alternatives to current policy:

1. Maternity leaves: allow women to accumulate seniority while on maternity leave, paying full benefits and salaries. It is unreasonable to penalize women for having children. To say they have a choice in the matter is to suggest that the choice is between fulfilling a biologically determined function and advancing their careers. Men are not confronted with such a choice. In order to eliminate the obvious discrimination that exists, policies should contain clauses that assure women that they will not be penalized for taking maternity leaves;
2. Parental leave/family leave: More emphasis must be placed on men taking responsibility at home and taking care of children. These things need to be integrated into an entirely different approach to jobs, family, and community, where there is more value placed on home and community life. These policies grant men the opportunity of being more a part of home and family life, and grant females the opportunity to continue in their career;
3. Decreasing steps to maximum: compression of the salary grid. Failure to accumulate seniority while on maternity leave or other interruption of service has resulted in the necessity of a greater number of years in the work force for women to reach the maximum;
4. Benefit plans: Plans should be sought which do not discriminate according to sex or marital status. Plans should be refused which, for example, might exclude a member from benefits because of complications arising from pregnancy. Rate levels and access to benefits should reflect no bias;
5. Recruitment and hiring: Policies should include clauses inhibiting the employer from asking questions which are not directly related to the position. Hiring practices should be adopted which specifically require that all qualified applicants be interviewed for positions. Those same policies should include a statement that positions will be advertised throughout the system, along with full job descriptions and clear criteria;

6. **Part-time teachers:** The majority of part-time teachers are women. They need to be offered as much protection in policies as those on a full-time basis. Rates of pay and benefits should be clearly spelled out and assurances written that these people will receive equal treatment. Monetary items should be dealt with on a scale pro-rated against a full-time teacher. Because a part-time teacher may also require a maternity leave, guaranteed mobility in and out of the system should be available;
7. **No-discrimination clause:** This should be found in all policies. If the clause is present, violations can be dealt with through the grievance process which, even taken all the way to arbitration, is considerably faster and cheaper than the courts. In addition, the clause can act as a "disincentive" to employers;
8. **Staff meetings:** Timing can cause difficulties with those teachers making use of day care. By dismissing classes 30 minutes early, most staff meetings could conclude within the time teachers would normally leave the school;
9. **Day-care:** To suggest that school boards should be involved in providing day care services for employees would be met with, at best, controlled enthusiasm. However, the need is there. Salary levels in teaching are high enough that subsidized day-care is not available. Private centers and baby sitters are expensive, resulting in a monetary penalty to those who are forced to use them. Further, as women assume a more significant place in the workforce, the availability of such services is becoming inadequate. Child care is no longer exclusively a women's issue. The increasing number of single fathers combined with the families where both parents must work have made it an issue that has direct and important implications for men as well as women.
10. **Affirmative Action Programs:** The enforcement of policy does little towards changing attitudes. Those in positions of authority may agree to consider all qualified applicants for positions, but could well continue with attitudes that designate certain positions as being "male" or "female". In some cases there may even be a backlash. Many women may feel somewhat inadequate considering positions that have not traditionally been available. The formation of Affirmative Action Committees may be a step towards providing a systematic approach to dealing with discrimination;
11. **A shorter work week/job sharing:** Providing more flexible hours for employment allows both men and women greater flexibility in their personal and work lives.

**APPENDIX B\***

*Questions to ask about any policy proposed to create gender equity could include:*

1. How forceful is it?
2. Which feminisms does it support?

Does it:

1. See sexism affecting males too?
2. Assume all women as one unit of analysis?
3. Incorporate ethnicity?
4. Focus on school environment?
5. Recognize schools' interconnectedness with other institutions?
6. Demand constant critical assessment, timelines?
7. Demand monitoring and reporting?
8. Deal with self-esteem?
9. Deal with women's ways of knowing and moral reasoning?
10. Deal with need for relationships, collaboration?
11. Deal with incorporating the private sphere?
12. Focus on only the high achievers?

How all-encompassing is it?

1. What mechanisms are there for reaching curriculum, program definition, training, finance, governance, buildings, and facilities?
2. Does it acknowledge resistance to change and economic and political and historical contexts?
3. Who is the target audience?
4. Who carries the burden of implementation and are they capable?

\*From "Critical feminist policy analyses: Toward demanding and disrupting policy analyses," by C. Marshall, 1998, p. 9, a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, April 13-17.

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# TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE FAMILY BACKGROUNDS OF CHILDREN AT RISK

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper focuses on a qualitative study that investigated beliefs held by four teachers in high poverty communities about the family backgrounds of children they considered to be at risk for failure in school and later in life. Results indicated that the presence of child abuse in the home, alcoholism, and single or absent parents were the most frequently mentioned family risks thought by the teachers to be affecting specific children in their classrooms. However, the teachers also expressed uncertainty about the level of their understanding of families and about the nature of cause-and-effect relationships between familial factors and outcomes. Further, while the teachers saw familial difficulties as risks for children, they also highlighted the importance of systemic problems such as the lack of support for families in poverty and the differential responsiveness of schools to the more affluent and powerful parents. They also seemed to empathize with single parents, and believed that the cultural backgrounds of Indian and Métis students were a source of strength for Aboriginal children when they were at risk.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article décrit une étude qualitative sur les croyances qu'entretiennent quatre enseignants de collectivités très pauvres relativement aux antécédents familiaux des enfants qu'ils jugent «à risque», à savoir en voie d'échec à l'école, puis dans la vie active, et plus tard dans la vie. Les résultats démontrent que, parmi les facteurs familiaux de risque affectant des élèves de leur propre classe, les enseignants mentionnent le plus fréquemment l'alcoolisme, les sévices subis par les enfants au foyer familial, l'absence d'un parent voire des deux parents. Toutefois, les enseignants reconnaissent leurs incertitudes quant au niveau de compréhension qu'ils ont des familles et quant à la nature des relations causales entre les facteurs familiaux et les résultats scolaires. Par ailleurs, même si les professeurs considèrent que les difficultés familiales sont des facteurs pour les enfants, ils soulignent également l'importance de problèmes systémiques comme le non-soutien des familles pauvres et la réceptivité différente des écoles face aux parents plus influents et puissants. Ils semblent également empathiser avec les parents célibataires et sont d'avis que les antécédents culturels des élèves indiens et métis sont une source de dynamisme pour les enfants autochtones à risque.

The term “at risk” usually refers to children who are likely to fail in school or in life because of their social circumstances (e.g., Saskatchewan Education, 1996). Most of the research on these children is modeled on an epidemiological approach to the study of disease and focuses on the presence of “risk factors” in the social environment that are correlated with poor school achievement and behavioral problems. Researchers generally agree that a single factor, in isolation, is not a basis for identifying children as at risk, but that there is a “pernicious multiplying effect” among risk factors (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1995; p. 20) or even “proof that disastrous outcomes are much more likely when several factors interact” (Barr, 1995; p. 11). Familial factors include having parents who are either very young, single, or have low educational attainment. Identifying children who are at risk because of family circumstances and understanding their needs is important in enabling us to play a proactive role in supporting their growth and development.

There are several ways elementary teachers can support children at risk. First, teachers who are good “kid watchers” (Goodman, 1985) are able to detect possible delays in children’s psychosocial growth and make referrals to appropriate specialists for assessment and intervention. Second, teachers are in the front lines of detecting signs of abuse and neglect, which can then be investigated and addressed by appropriate authorities to ensure the wellbeing of the child and of the family as a whole (Tite, 1996). Third, even in cases where a crisis has not occurred or the child is not showing delays in development, teachers can benefit the child in working closely with children’s parents in supporting children’s learning (Balster, 1991). Finally, there is a great deal teachers can do to provide immediate assistance to children in times of crisis (Newman, 1993) as well as providing term support through establishing the warm caring relationships that are so important for the development of resilience (Wang & Gordon, 1994). It would seem that teachers’ abilities to assist children in these ways would be dependent, at least in part, on the beliefs held by teachers about the ways the children are at risk.

Much of the research on teachers’ beliefs about children at risk indicates a high degree of awareness among teachers with respect to factors that impede children’s chances of future success in school and in life (e.g., Johnson, 1997). Yet a review of the literature also raises a disconcerting number of questions about the ways teachers think about children at risk in their classrooms. Some writers allege that teachers’ thinking in this area is still shaped by colonialist discourse viewing parents of visible minorities and working class or poor parents as deficient, which has led historically to the wholesale appropriation of child rearing from parents who were poor, of color, or otherwise considered to be unfit (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). Flores, Cousing, and Diaz (1991) argue that the idea of cultural deficiency

still rests behind the widespread application of the term "at risk" to any child or family who happens to be different from the mainstream model of success. Further, Fine (1990) argues that describing children at risk on the basis of their family backgrounds is basically an "ideological diversion" that "satisfies both the desire to isolate these people by the Right and display them by the Left" (p. 68) and that the label functions to deflect attention away from the systemic inequities that are the source of the problem. In support of these criticisms of teachers' thinking about children at risk, there is research showing teachers' beliefs about children in lower-income families and visible minorities to be inaccurate, stereotypical and resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure for the children (e.g., Delpit, 1995; Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; Taylor, 1991; Tauber, 1997). Furthermore, a number of studies provide cause for concern about the extent to which youth at risk have distinct memories of feeling their needs were unacknowledged and unaddressed when they were in elementary school (Ellis, Hart, & Small-McGinley, 1998).

Overall, there is a need to reconcile these two kinds of research, the one showing that many teachers are knowledgeable about factors placing children at risk, and the other showing that teachers' thinking about these children, in itself, may be a risk factor for them. One possibility is that these disparate findings are resulting from research carried out with two different types of teachers. Another possibility, discussed in the following paper, is that when we explore more fully the nature of teachers' beliefs about the "at riskness" of children in their classrooms, we find important gaps and omissions between teachers' general understandings of risk and their particular application of those understandings to children in their classrooms. In order to advance our understanding of how teachers think about children they view as at risk, what is needed is a fuller understanding of how teachers place specific children in their classrooms in this category. What indicators do teachers use to identify specific children at risk in their classrooms? What factors do the teachers think are placing these children at risk? How do teachers see the futures of these children? What connections do teachers see among the risk factors, indicators and the children's futures?

#### **PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY**

An opportunity to explore the preceding questions in relation to teachers' lived experience with children arose in a broader study designed to develop qualitative case portraits of elementary classrooms in both urban and rural communities. One of the goals of the study was to identify how the teachers interpreted the common phrase "likely to fail because of their social circumstances" (Frymier & Gasneder, 1989) in relation to specific children in their classrooms. In other words, this goal was to explore the teachers' concept of at riskness in the context of their practical experience with particular

children as opposed to the more generalized discourse of risk and risk factors. The assumption was that teachers' beliefs in relation to specific children would be more closely linked to their pedagogy than would be their beliefs and opinions about risks more generally. As Wells (2000) suggests, the basis is a constructivist position that teachers' understanding emerges from a melding of problem-solving in their personal experience, in this case dealing with children at risk, with knowledge from other sources such as knowledge gleaned from knowing the research on risks.

Six teachers participated in the inquiry. The discussion below focuses on the four who were working in urban or rural high poverty communities and who said that at least one quarter of their pupils were at risk. The participants' years of teaching experience ranged from two to over twenty. Three were Euro-Canadian and one was Aboriginal. They were teaching at grades two, combined three/four and combined four/five. In one of the classrooms there were two teachers who were job-sharing. Data collection was carried out for one week in each of the three classrooms and consisted of daily semi-structured interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) with each teacher, and classroom observations, which were recorded with videotapes and fieldnotes. In the interviews, the teachers were asked about their beliefs regarding children at risk and risk factors in general, to give examples of specific children they considered to be at risk, to tell anecdotes illustrating why they considered them to be at risk, to describe children they did not consider to be at risk, and to explain a variety of events that were observed in their classrooms.

Consistent with qualitative case study methodology, data analysis was concurrent with data collection so that preliminary themes emerging from the data could be pursued with the teachers while the study was in progress (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Stake, 1994). This open-ended, inductive approach is a major strength of the qualitative case study inquiry because it allows the researcher to pursue avenues of investigation that had not been pre-determined. The initial purpose of the study was to identify issues important to teachers who think their pupils are at risk. In response to the research invitations to speak about these issues, the teachers spoke about familial circumstances with a particular complexity, depth and urgency that is the focus of the discussion below.

## FINDINGS

### *The notion of risk: An overview*

In all the cases of children described as at risk by the teachers, the teachers provided evidence of both academic and behavioral problems similar to those reported in the prior literature on children at risk (e.g., Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1995). This evidence included de-

lays in language or reading development, aggression and violence toward other children, withdrawal from social interaction with children or adults in the school, and a variety of signs of problems in the child's family. None of the teachers said they used a single indicator, in isolation, to determine that a child was at risk. One teacher, summarizing beliefs that had been expressed by others, stated that her perception that specific children were at risk was based on "a combination of things that I know about in the home and the things I see in school, and the disengagement that I see is happening. . . . It's rarely one variable." The participants generally seemed to approach the label "at risk" cautiously, saying that it was only after they saw a cumulative body of evidence of problems that they began to see the children as at risk. For these teachers, the futures of particular children in their classrooms eventually became clear, as can be seen in a statement made by one of the teachers when asked what she thought would eventually happen to one of the boys in her classroom. "We're talking about being at risk for not finishing school, not getting a job, being involved with drugs and alcohol, maybe beating up your wife. You know, being on the streets." A similar sentiment was expressed by another teacher as follows:

'At risk' is the kids who are not going to make it. They're not going to get a good job. They aren't going to buy a nice house. They aren't going to have kids. They're probably going to have an alcohol and drug problem. And maybe be involved in crime. These are the kids we are worried about. Yeah, that is what at risk means.

Consistent with the idea that "at risk" is a predictive descriptor (Centre For Research And Innovation, 1995), the teachers associated it with a sense of disaster looming for the children. In this respect, a typical comment was "I worry about them. Like, I think what is going to happen to you?" Yet, they also expressed hesitation in admitting their sense that a child was at risk.

One teacher, for example, identified negative outcomes for particular children while recognizing the potentially unacceptable nature of her views:

These children drop out, get in trouble with the law, become social aid recipients and end up alcoholics. The list of negative outcomes goes on. And maybe I should cease my thoughts now before I say something too offensive. . . .

### ***Risks in family backgrounds***

Prior to discussing the teachers' beliefs about the characteristics of children's backgrounds, it is important to note that previous research has shown that teacher knowledge about families of children at risk is often uneven and inaccurate (Cassanova, 1990). In this study, all the teachers said that their knowledge of each pupil's home circumstances varied a great deal from child to child, usually in accordance with the relationship they had with the particular child or family in question. Sometimes they received disclosures

from the parents or children. Sometimes their information came from secondary sources such as colleagues, the principal, counsellors or social workers who had dealt with the families in question. In still other cases of particular children thought to be at risk, the teachers professed to know nothing at all about the family situation. This usually occurred when the child was living in a temporary placement, such as a foster home or with an aunt or uncle, or when the parents did not respond to repeated requests by the school for a visit or interview. Like the teachers in Johnson's (1997) study, these teachers interpreted such lack of communication as a sign, in itself, that the family background of the child was placing him or her at risk. They also frequently made reference to their frustration with this lack of communication. One of them heaved a big sigh and replied "Who knows?" when asked what she thought was happening in the home of a child she described as having extreme behavioral problems. Another commented, "Even a home visit is such a shallow encounter." In contrast to accounts of teachers appearing to jump to conclusions about children's backgrounds, these teachers seemed to be quite aware of and concerned about the partiality of their knowledge.

**CHILD ABUSE.** In spite of the uncertainty the teachers expressed about their knowledge of children's home backgrounds, there were some familial circumstances about which they expressed firm beliefs. The most frequently mentioned circumstance was the presence of child abuse in the home. One teacher said that a girl in her classroom had been raped in her home shortly before the study began but then was denied counselling on the grounds that it might interfere with the girl's testimony in the forthcoming court case. In the meantime, the girl had not only developed severe behavioral problems, such as "temper tantrums," but had initiated a sexual touching game with other children on the school ground. In another case, there was a boy who had visible scars from the cigarette burns an adult relative had made on his face. This teacher said when this occurred and she reported the abuse, she had to wait at the school until eight o'clock in the evening for the social worker to pick him up. Then (according to his teacher), the boy was apprehended and moved to another community for two months before being suddenly returned to his home. This teacher said that the boy's departure and return had been carried out without any court action, counselling, or long-term follow-up to address the abusive situation. Not surprisingly, she attributed the boy's subsequent development of behavioral problems to both the abuse and the lack of constructive intervention by authorities.

In other cases, the teachers expressed more vague suspicions about abuse. One of them referred to a girl in her class as a "frail child," who "flinches when you come near," and who had made repeated and strange references to familial "love" in her daily journal. The teacher, interpreting these as signs of possible sexual abuse, made a report to authorities and was told there

was no grounds for intervention but she was left with the suspicion that abuse was ongoing in the girl's home. This suspicion, in conjunction with the girl's behavior and lack of concentration in school, indicated to the teacher that the girl's family situation was placing her at risk. In another case, a teacher said she had previously taught one of her current pupils when he was in kindergarten and knew at that time that he had been severely sexually assaulted. According to her, he had never recovered emotionally from the experience, and based on what she had been told by the mother, the boy now seemed to be living with another abusive man in the home. Again, the preceding two teachers related the abuse directly to the problems they saw in both children's behavior, and in both instances they were critical of the lack of support in "the system" for these children. In this respect, their voices of frustration echoed those of teachers quoted in the prior literature (Leroy, 1995; Maynes, 1990; Tite, 1996).

**ALCOHOLISM AND ADDICTIONS.** The teachers also said that the presence of alcoholism or other addictions in the home made them more likely to think of a child as "at risk." However, as with their dealings with parents suspected of abusing their children, they said they had little firsthand knowledge of specific parents who experienced alcoholism and other addictions, largely because these parents tended to stay away from the school. Yet, the teachers said they often knew about these problems from what they heard from the children or saw in the community. One teacher described hearing one of her pupils being publicly taunted by other children because his father's alcoholism was well known in the local neighborhood. Another teacher, after asking a boy why he did not get his homework done, was told, "My dad was drinking." In still another instance, a teacher related an incident in which a boy remarked to her casually that his father had offered him liquor to get him drunk the night before. Then, during the week of classroom observations, on a day when this boy was absent from school, I heard his cousins telling the teacher the boy was at his aunt's house because the night before that two drunk uncles broke into his house and that "one of them hit the baby."

In the preceding case, the teacher reported the incident and then said that a social worker visited the home but, other than checking to see that the children were safe with the aunt, the social worker did not intervene or arrange for follow-up monitoring. A teacher from another community related an instance where intervention did occur during the child's parents' "drinking binge" which had lasted several days. According to his teacher, the apprehension had occurred at the school so she had seen firsthand how it had traumatized him. Then, it seems that he was simply returned to his home three days later, with no follow-up counseling for him or his family. The teacher who related this episode remarked that her own father was a recovered alcoholic who had quit drinking when she was quite young, "And

that was bad enough. I can't imagine what it would have been like to have been apprehended on top of that." Again, the implication was that the child was at risk, not just because of the family dysfunction, but also because of the way his case was subsequently handled by authorities.

**SINGLE AND ABSENT PARENTS.** All the teachers believed that having a single parent was a contributing factor to the difficulties experienced by specific children they thought of as at risk, yet none of them expressed negative judgements about the single parents, all of whom were women. Indeed, when asked why she thought single parenthood was a risk factor, one of the teachers replied, "Because I *am* one." More specifically, she related single parenthood to a lack of supervision for children in the home, stating that a single mother cannot supervise children on her own because, "You're just tired all the time." She went on to point out that the problem is even stronger for single mothers in poverty, providing an example of the mother of one of her at-risk pupils, who expressed deep concerns about her daughter's apparent drifting into street life and who seemed unable to support her daughter emotionally because of the long hours she had to work in order to support her financially. In a similar vein, in one of the rural communities, a teacher gave the example of a mother who was raising her grandchildren as well as her children and thus had ten children to look after in her home. This teacher replied "No," when asked if she thought the family situation had caused the learning problems she had observed in the grandchild, but she did say, somewhat sardonically, that it seemed unlikely the mother would be in a position to help the boy with his schoolwork. This particular boy was virtually a non-reader at the age of nine. The teacher actually thought his reading problem was caused by a disability rather than his home circumstances but she also believed that he could still learn to read if he was able to practice his skills with someone at home. This was an example of where the teacher did not blame the mother or her circumstances for causing the boy's learning problem. Instead, she believed that lack of support for the family was a barrier to implementing a solution.

In contrast to what has been reported in the previous literature (e.g., Swadener & Lubeck, 1995), the teachers in this study did not express critical attitudes toward single mothers, perhaps because of the extent to which they found themselves in conversation with them, usually young single mothers who came to them requesting help. One teacher talked about a mother who dropped in regularly to seek advice on how to keep her child, whom both the mother and teacher thought was experiencing escalating difficulties, out of trouble. It seems the mother and teacher established a close working relationship, and the teacher at one point referred to the parent as a "great mom," who needed emotional and practical support mainly because she was young and on her own. Another teacher related a similar perception of the mother of one of her pupils, " 'Mom' is great. Like,

this mom's at our school all the time. She's really good. She's at a point in her life where she says, 'I don't know what to do. What can I do?'"

This particular teacher made a distinction between single mothers who need "information" and the ones who need "help." According to her, some mothers are able to solve their children's learning and behavior problems through implementing strategies received from the teacher. When this happens, the teacher tends to think the child is not at risk because she is more optimistic there will be long-term change. However, she also said there were mothers who reported problems she considered too large to be solved without in-depth professional support. For example, one asked her to arrange counselling for her and her daughter to deal with the aftermath of marital breakdown and a sharp decline in the daughter's behavior, which seemed to be largely beyond the mother's control. Yet, according to the teacher, counselling was unavailable in the local community or surrounding area and the mother did not have a car or other resources to gain counselling elsewhere. In this respect, it is important to note that all the teachers said it was not uncommon for them to be dealing with parents who came to them "weeping" for assistance.

There were additional instances where the teachers believed the children did not have access to their parents at all, as in the case of a boy whose mother was in jail several hundred kilometers away and who was staying with his older siblings; and in the cases of many additional children who were said by their teachers to have been living "in and out of foster homes." In these contexts the teachers tended to define familial risks less in terms of a lack of support provided by caregivers, and more in terms of the "loneliness" they thought the children were experiencing when they did not have access to their parents. With the child whose mother was in jail, for example, it was evident during the observations he was heartbroken at having thought he would be able to visit his mother the previous week but then not being able to do so.

**UNSUPPORTIVE PARENTS.** The participants said that their belief that some parents were not being "supportive" of their children was a major influence on thinking of these children as being at risk. In some cases, this apparent lack of support seemed to constitute neglect, and hence, was a form of abuse. One example was given by a teacher who described a child's report that his parents had not been home in three days and that he and his siblings had run out of food, "And he was very upset about not having Mom and Dad home. He was very uptight about not having food." As well, all the teachers referred to families that were supposedly intact but who, inexplicably, seemed to ignore their children's physical needs. In this respect, each of the participants described at least one instance where a child in their classroom was currently going without medical care for conditions the school had repeatedly brought to the parents' attention: eczema, an infected sore, a

bleeding wart, and problems with vision. As well, there were children who were suspected of having had poor nutrition, often coming to school with nothing but chocolate bars and potato chips for their lunches.

The teachers also believed that when parents were not involved in the school, even if there was no evidence of problems in the family background, this had a negative effect on the children. More specifically, if a child had an academic or behavioral problem and if the parent did not come to the school, the teachers were inclined to believe that this lack of involvement contributed to the child being at risk. The teachers said one reason was that unless the parents agreed to meet with them, they would be unable to work together to implement a plan of action to resolve the child's problem. Second, from the teachers' perspectives, the children experienced this lack of partial involvement as a lack of caring. One teacher spoke of having observed deep disappointment in the eyes of children whose parents did not come to the school on open-house days or for parent-teacher interviews:

I think there's a bit of a shame factor when the children's parents say that they are going to come and then they don't. Well, the children feel bad about it, because – I have one right here [in my classroom] for sure. And a couple of others. They say, "Oh, my mom's coming," and this and that. They are so excited. "My mom's coming!" And they are really keen on the fact that their mom's coming. And when their mom doesn't show up, they think they have to provide you with an excuse.

The teacher who made the preceding comment also noted that home-school activities, such as the provision of prizes for children whose parents verify they read at home, seemed to backfire for many children since it strengthened the children's beliefs that their parents were letting them down.

**PARENTAL ADVOCACY.** While the themes of dysfunctional families and parents who were not supportive emerged when the teachers spoke about families of children they considered to be at risk, another theme, involving a negative view of parental advocacy, emerged when the teachers spoke about families of children they did *not* consider to be at risk. Indeed, when asked to talk about the latter, all the teachers spontaneously raised this point to illustrate what they saw as the differential advantage afforded to children of middle-class, well-educated parents.

In other words, a shared and very strong concern among the teachers was the extent to which parents who were white, middle-class, well-educated and assertive seemed to be able to appropriate a disproportionate set of resources in the school and in society to ensure the success of their own children. For example, in two of the classrooms the teachers were dealing with children whose "special needs" gave them access to teaching aides and curriculum adaptations far beyond what was available to the other children, and far beyond what the teachers thought was necessary. Another teacher

referred to a mother who had lobbied at the school and school division level to ensure that her daughter, who was physically disabled, received what the teacher considered to be more than her share of resources. In all three instances the teachers were conscious of these advantages being provided to privileged children at the expense of resources for children with stronger needs simply because their parents were more vocal and strategic in their lobbying. In this respect, the teachers' beliefs were consistent with Maynes' (1990) finding that school systems tend to be more responsive to issues of learning disabilities than to those of poverty. A note of sarcasm was sometimes apparent in the tone used by these teachers to describe the privileges that some parents obtained for their children. With reference to one middle-class mother's assertiveness, one of the teachers commented, "My stomach twirls every time I see her." Then she paused and said, "Actually, I think the mom's the at-risk person, in this case."

The teacher's critical attitude toward the assertive middle-class parents also extended to their consideration of privileges afforded some children outside of the school. As one teacher put it, it seemed that children of "rich daddies" could do well no matter how low their achievement or how poor their behavior because the "daddy will buy them a business and set them up in it somewhere." Paradoxically, while the teachers did not think of these children as at risk, they did perceive them to have their own set of problems. Describing one of the children, a teacher reported the following:

He tests my patience quite often because of his sense of arrogance and his pompousness. He has become a little more modest, but a lot of the times in the circle it was – he wouldn't raise his hand, he would blurt out. He always wanted to be heard because he had the best toys and he had the best stories. Sometimes it's the kids – maybe it's just a different kind of problem that an upper-middle-class kind of kid can have, in terms of self-control.

**CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS.** Based on the prior literature on teachers' thinking about children at risk, one would expect their thinking to be affected by stereotypes about children with cultural minority backgrounds (e.g., Tauber, 1997). In these teachers' classrooms the largest single minority group was comprised of Indian and Métis students and the proportion of these children identified as at risk by the teachers was the same as their representation in the class as a whole. This finding, in combination with the comments made by the teachers, suggests that particular aboriginal children were not identified by teachers at risk simply because of their culture or race. Indeed, comments made by the teachers generally indicated a belief that having a strong cultural background was, or could be, an asset for aboriginal children. In this respect, their beliefs were consistent with those advanced by contemporary researchers and theorists on culture and risks among aboriginal youth (e.g., Brendtro, Brokenleg, Van Bockern, 1990; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). For example, they said they noticed the children of parents who were

conscience of their traditions, particularly "spiritual" ones, seemed to be more secure than were children who were not in touch with their roots. As well, all of them spoke of the importance of including Indian and Métis content in the curriculum as much as they could, while at the same time pointing out that provision of Native curriculum content did not compensate for what the aboriginal teacher termed "cultural loss" in the home and community. However, the Euro-Canadian participants believed this loss was a risk factor affecting Indian and Métis children more than others, the Aboriginal teacher said she also saw adverse effects of cultural loss on the identities of children at risk in the mainstream culture as well.

Additionally, the teachers believed that mainstream social agencies were often unwilling to intervene when problems were evident in the home but, at the same time, local Indian and Métis organizations were not yet well established enough and jurisdictions were not yet clear enough to enable them to step in. Hence, they believed that Indian and Métis children were more likely to fall through the cracks of social services systems. The Euro-Canadian teachers expressed confidence that Aboriginal control over social services would eventually "solve the problem," and while the Aboriginal teacher expressed the belief that Indian and Métis communities need to hold responsibility for the children, she expressed less confidence that a solution for the children's problems was close at hand with a transfer to local control over social services.

#### **SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS**

The preceding discussion was based on a qualitative case study inquiry that attempted, in part, to explore teachers' beliefs about social circumstances they thought were placing their pupils at risk for failure in school and in life. The most important factors, as perceived by the teachers, were familial ones: child abuse, alcoholism or other addictions in the home, and single or neglectful or absent parents. Consistent with the literature on children at risk, the teachers referred to the complexity and multiplicity of these risk factors and raised questions about the nature of cause-and-effect between factors and outcomes. Furthermore, consistent with contemporary research from an aboriginal perspective, these teachers viewed the cultural backgrounds of Indian and Métis students as sources of strength rather than as an impediment to school achievement (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). Finally, while they viewed family circumstances as the main locus of problems for the children, like some of the more critical researchers in this area (Fine, 1990) the teachers also expressed concern about systemic problems in the broader community that prevented children's families from obtaining the assistance they need. Overall, the teachers' level of knowledge and their overall tone of respect toward children and families were at odds with portraits painted in the literature of

teacher attitudes as being less than tolerant of children whose circumstances are different from those the teachers would prefer to see (e.g., Delpit, 1995).

However, the study also revealed some important aspects of teachers' perspectives on children at risk that warrant further study and perhaps indicate a need for further professional development. First, it was found that the teachers thought of children as being at risk only after the children developed problems and even then only when the problems were multiple and more extreme. Such caution on the part of teachers would, on the one hand, decrease the chances of unnecessarily targeting children and families for intervention but, on the other hand, could result in too many children at risk being overlooked until their problems escalate and become more difficult to address. Since the term "at risk" is meant to be a predictive descriptor enabling the implementation of proactive measures, such caution on the part of teachers needs further investigation. One possibility is that the teachers are concerned about the ethics of labeling and stereotyping of children that may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy for the children. Another possibility is that teachers may be concerned about sharing their concerns with others in case their own professional judgement is called in question. For example, it would be difficult to refer a child for investigation on the grounds that she flinches or one might easily be considered to be reading too much into references to family love as incest. In either case, teachers need more support of a collaborative nature that would enable them to talk through their observations and concerns with well-qualified professionals without fear that such talk has negative ramifications for themselves or their students.

Another important finding of the study was the extent to which the teachers believed that lack of parental involvement in and communication with the school contribute to the risks faced by children. This finding is consistent with results of Johnson's survey of teachers (1997) as with several other studies in which teachers have been known to judge parents as less active and supportive in their children's schooling than they actually are (e.g., Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). In the current study, however, it did not seem that parental involvement in itself was perceived by teachers to be the source of the child's problem. Rather, parental involvement was perceived to co-occur or be symptomatic of other problems such as alcoholism or abuse in the home. It was only when teachers also saw evidence of such domestic problems or saw evidence that the child was experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties that they viewed parental lack of involvement in children's education as a risk. Questions arise from this study as to the basis for which teachers try to connect with parents and how they respond if they feel their efforts are rebuffed. It seems likely that some contexts of teacher-family relationships are more conducive to open communication about family circumstances than others. For example, it may be that when the

teacher and school are seen as part of a network of social support services, parents are more likely to be open about the challenges they face when raising their children. Conversely, when the school is seen as part of an adversarial system, as in contexts where more children are apprehended than are helped, it is more likely that teacher-parent communication would break down. As well, this study indicates there may be personal characteristics around which particular teachers and parents develop an affinity with each other. Much more research is needed to discern what facilitates the growth of mutual understanding between parent and teacher so they may better collaborate in meeting the needs of the child who is thought to be at risk.

Results of the study also indicate ways in which even well-informed teachers may overlook children at risk in their classrooms because of ways they view the children's backgrounds. Generally speaking, quantitative studies do support the teachers' contention that children from middle-class backgrounds are less likely than children in poverty to drop out of school and be less successful in life, but this does not mean that children from middle-class backgrounds do not face risks of their own (e.g., Human Resources Canada/Statistics Canada, 1996). Indeed, it may be that when a middle-class child has academic or behavioral difficulties it can be more difficult for the teacher to have patience with the child or to identify social characteristics for which referrals may need to be made. This may result in a situation where a child's authentic need for attention is dismissed as pompousness. In a similar vein there is evidence emerging in the literature that in some classrooms children who are visibly members of minorities actually evoke a stronger sense of patience from the teacher than do other children from the same minority group. This occurs because there is less visible evidence to remind the teacher the child is struggling to establish himself or herself as a member of the community if the child does not show particular racial characteristics (Leroy, in press).

Overall, the findings of the study indicate a great deal remains to be explored in the complexity of teacher's beliefs about children at risk and how these beliefs are interrelated with the teachers' pedagogical practices. The beliefs indicated by the teachers in this study were more complex than has previously been revealed in survey research on risk factors for children. They also seemed to be more informed by a more critical understanding of social issues than would have been anticipated on the basis of some of the literature on the problems inherent in the discourse of risk. It would be most beneficial if follow-up studies could be carried out to determine the accuracy of teacher assessments of the risk status of particular children in their classrooms but also on the extent to which teachers are able to qualify their judgements or express the degree of uncertainty they experience in their judgements. Furthermore, much more research is needed to discern teachers' perceptions of and comfort levels with varying degrees of parental

participation in their children's schooling. In this study too little participation was viewed as a risk factor but too much was also viewed as unhealthy. Additional investigations would be necessary to learn whether this relates to a fairly narrow conception of what the parents' involvement should be like or whether it represents an accurate picture of the extent to which both the lack of involvement and extensive involvement may be related to the development of risks for the child later in life.

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# ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF ADOLESCENTS FROM SELECTED ETHNOCULTURAL GROUPS IN CANADA: A STUDY CONSISTENT WITH JOHN OGBU'S THEORY

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper analyses the academic achievement of adolescents in selected ethnocultural groups in Canada. Specifically, the article, a part of a larger study,<sup>1</sup> is an analysis of the academic performance of adolescents from the Caribbean, Chinese, East European, Latin American, South Asian and Canadian groups. In the larger study 1,954 students were surveyed and 131 were interviewed in schools in Toronto and Vancouver. The findings in the article, consistent with John Ogbu's theory, indicate that the majority of the students who belong to *voluntary*, as opposed to *involuntary*, minority/ethnocultural groups excel in academic performance despite language barriers and racial discrimination.

Few studies have been conducted on the academic achievement of selected ethnocultural<sup>2</sup> adolescents. Therefore the purpose of this study was to (1) determine the academic achievement of selected ethnocultural adolescents and (2) demonstrate consistency with John Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of voluntary minority groups in the Canadian context.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article analyse les résultats scolaires d'adolescents appartenant à des groupes ethnoculturels choisis au Canada. En particulier, l'article, qui s'inscrit dans une étude plus vaste,<sup>1</sup> analyse les résultats scolaires des adolescents appartenant à des groupes d'origine antillaise, chinoise, d'Europe de l'Est, d'Amérique latine, d'Asie du Sud et du Canada. Dans l'étude plus vaste, 1 954 élèves ont été étudiés et 131 ont été interrogés dans des écoles situées à Toronto et Vancouver. Les résultats de l'article, qui concordent avec la théorie de John Ogbu, révèlent que la majorité des élèves qui appartiennent à des groupes parmi les minorités ethnoculturels, *volontaires* plutôt qu'*involontaires* obtiennent d'excellents résultats scolaires malgré les d'obstacles linguistiques et la discrimination raciale.

Peu d'études ont été menées sur les résultats scolaires d'adolescents appartenant à des groupes ethnoculturels choisis.<sup>2</sup> C'est pourquoi le but de cette étude était (1) de déterminer les résultats scolaires d'adolescents appartenant à des groupes ethnoculturels donnés et (2) de corroborer la théorie culturelle-écologique de John Ogbu sur les groupes minoritaires volontaires dans le contexte canadien.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the academic achievement of adolescents in selected ethnocultural groups in Canada. Specifically, the article, a part of a larger study,<sup>1</sup> is an analysis of the academic performance of adolescents from the Caribbean, Chinese, East European, Latin American, South Asian and Canadian groups.

Few studies have been conducted on the academic achievement of selected ethnocultural<sup>2</sup> adolescents. Therefore the purpose of this study was to (1) determine the academic achievement of selected ethnocultural adolescents and (2) demonstrate consistency with John Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of voluntary minority groups in the Canadian context.

## BACKGROUND

In order to situate the study in its historical context, we first provide some background on the theories – some of them overtly racist – of earlier eras.

In the earlier 1950s, the *genetic deficit theories* in the United States claimed to be able to delineate moral and intellectual depravity in the adolescent (Erickson, 1993, p. 27). A widespread rationalization was that minority children of colour were “inherently inferior, intellectually and morally to the children of the middle class” (Erickson, 1993, p. 27). However, in the 1960s, *cultural deficit theories* replaced the racist genetic deficit theories where nurture replaced nature as the main explanation for school failure. In contrast, the cultural deficit theories hypothesized that minority children were “culturally deprived” or “socially disadvantaged,” and emphasized a cognitively stimulating environment as being necessary for academic achievement. Minority children were deemed as being not only “deprived” but “depraved” as well. School professionals found the cultural deficit theories appealing as the fault was situated on issues outside the school.

However, the ethnocentric cultural deficit theories were followed by the *cultural difference theories*. In the late 1960s, the cultural difference model accounted for a relativist position in communication and learning patterns between teachers and students of minority groups (Erickson, 1993, p. 30). Erickson characterized the sociolinguistic model as a “*communication process explanation*” (1993, p. 30). He argues that with empirical support, there is a “causal connection between the cultural communication patterns of classroom discourse and academic achievement” (1993, p. 30). Empirical research conducted with native Hawaiian school children indicated that a simple change in conversational style in classroom discourse improved academic performance. Erickson explains that altering the structure in classroom discourse could reduce “culture shock” and enable minority students to feel conversationally comfortable in an otherwise uncomfortable

setting (1993, p. 31). Further, when the “cognitive task structure” was simplified, students were able to grasp and amplify ideas. However, Erickson’s cultural responsive pedagogy is inadequate as there are some successful teaching strategies which exclude a cultural responsive pedagogy. In evaluating the cultural determinist position Erickson himself exposes an example among Black Muslim children where teachers have been successful in not following the interaction patterns found in the students’ homes (Erickson, 1993, p. 34).

In the 1970s, Ogbu vehemently critiqued the cultural difference model for conceptual ambiguity and propounded a premise explaining *why* immigrant students succeeded academically despite experiences of language impediments, inappropriate curriculum, and institutional racism. In a recent pathbreaking analysis, Ogbu promulgates the *cultural-ecological theory of minority groups* to explain academic success among voluntary minority groups. Ogbu’s definition of minority status is based on “power relations between groups” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 162), rather than in terms of numbers. Therefore, a group of subordinate status in relation to another group constitutes a minority population. Ogbu categorizes minority groups into *autonomous, involuntary, and voluntary minority groups*. *Autonomous groups*, he explains, are those, which differ (non-visibly) from the dominant groups in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, or language. Some examples are the Amish, Jews, and Mormons. *Involuntary or nonimmigrant groups*, refer to those who have been “conquered, colonized and enslaved” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 165). Involuntary minorities, contrary to their will, have been permanently made a part of North American society or any other society by historical forces. *Voluntary minorities* constitute mostly recent immigrants who have willingly moved to North America in search of a better life or for political and/or religious freedom. Ogbu considers *refugees* as those who did not willingly move to North America, but whose attitudes and behaviours are similar to immigrant minorities. This study focuses primarily on *Ogbu’s classification of voluntary minorities*.

In explaining *why* voluntary minorities succeed academically in schools, Ogbu claims that voluntary minority groups, in general, maintain a positive attitude towards North American society. He asserts that migrant parents consider a western education as providing opportunities for accomplished careers they would not have access to in countries of origin (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p.170-171). Hence he argues that voluntary minority parents try to maintain high expectations for their children and place the responsibilities of academic success on the children themselves rather than the schools. Migrant parents offer fervent support to their children in learning the English language so that the children can acquire high grades in school and, later on, be successful in the job market. Parental influence is strong in regulating migrant students’ time and homework. Further, most voluntary

minority students, Ogbu acknowledges, share their parents' positive attitudes with regard to the school experience – an edict for academic success.

Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of voluntary minority groups – a “heuristic device for analysis and interpretation of differences among minority groups in school experience” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 155) – has not been empirically tested in the Canadian milieu. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the consistency between Ogbu's theory and a sample of Caribbean, Chinese, East European, South Asian, and Latin American adolescents in Canadian schools.

## METHOD

The Canadian schools chosen for the study were situated in the large urban immigrant populations of Toronto and Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 1997). Interviewees were born either in Canada or were born in countries of origin, but had lived in Canada for a period of two years. For purposes of interpreting data, the students were identified by where they or their parents came from. Hence, five broad geographical areas were selected, namely, “Caribbean,” “Chinese,” “East European,” “Latin American,” and “South Asian.” Further, these geographical regions represented a sizable proportion of immigrants relocating in Canada, as with the East Europeans who were not a visible minority group and mostly represented the refugee category. The Caribbean students whose families came mostly from Trinidad, Jamaica, and Guyana were interviewed in Toronto. The Chinese students who came directly from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China were interviewed in Toronto and Vancouver. Eastern European students who were from Poland (mostly), Russia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and other parts (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Hungary, and Romania) were interviewed in both cities. Latin American students who came mostly from El Salvador and other parts of Central America and South America (mostly Argentina) were interviewed in Vancouver. South Asian students, most of whose origins were in India, and fewer in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, were interviewed in both cities. For a comparative data analysis, the sixth group, the Canadian<sup>3</sup> students, were defined as those who were born in Canada and whose parents (and perhaps other generations) were also born in Canada.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection were used in the larger study. A survey questionnaire was administered to the students, by teachers in classes, in six secondary schools – three in Toronto and three in Vancouver in total, covering grades 9-13. The survey consisted of 116 items with closed-ended questions. The students took nearly 35 minutes to answer the questionnaire. Trained researchers conducted interviews, the qualitative part of the study, with students in eight schools – the same six

in which the survey was conducted, one other school in Toronto and one in Vancouver. Knowledge of English<sup>4</sup> and parental consent were taken as criteria for selection. Guidance counselors made a presentation of the study to select the sample and identify countries of origin. Most of the interviews were conducted in the spring/fall of 1996; some of them were conducted in the winter/spring of 1997. The interviews, partially structured, contained exploratory, open-ended questions. The interviews were tape-recorded and a deductive/inductive content analysis of summaries made. Further, verbatim quotes were identified on the main topic areas. Other sources of information entailed four teacher focus groups (23), school board officials (8), and parents (10).

### THE STUDENTS

The number of Caribbean adolescents surveyed was 223 (11%), Chinese, 598 (31%), East European, 169 (9%), Latin American, 85 (4%), South Asian, 328 (17%), and Canadian, whose parents were born in Canada, 551 (28%). The total number surveyed was 1,954, with a gender distribution of males (45%) and female (55%). Of this total, 131 were interviewed.

### FINDINGS

It may be stated that most students in the study were influenced academically by the earlier schooling experienced in countries of origin. Since Canadian school systems are less strict, with a less rigid curriculum, most migrant students were inclined to adapt reasonably well and excel academically. As Ogbu has pointed out in his cultural-ecological theory, one of the community forces essential to the study of minority perceptions is "a comparative frame of reference" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 170) when adolescents compare their present school to the school "back home." Recent newcomers to Canada fall into Ogbu's "voluntary group" category and are influenced in socio-cultural adaptation by experiences in the young migrants' countries of origin. Thus, most voluntary immigrant students, by comparing earlier experiences in schools "back home," appreciate the positive aspects of educational practices in their present schools. In the words of Ogbu and Simons: "Voluntary minority students share their parents' and community's positive attitudes and verbal commitment to school" (1998, p.177).

School is much less rigid here; it seems to the newcomer that you can do what you want. . . . Sanctions are removed (17 year old male, born Jamaica, one year in Canada).<sup>6</sup>

In old school many rules and regulations (19 year old male, born in Hong Kong, 11 years in Canada).

In Russia, completely different from here. . . . Much stricter than here. Level of schooling much harder and faster there. More choice of subjects

here, but they are easier. When I first came here I thought I would fail everything, but in Math I got 98% (17 year old female, Born Russia, 3 years in Canada).

Really strict. Very different. Have to be really disciplined. . . . Enjoy going to school here. It's really nice (18 year old male, born Nicaragua, 5 years in Canada).

Things were stricter there, we had to wear a uniform and running shoes, we had to braid our hair (16 year old female, born Sri Lanka, 6 years in Canada).

Regarding marks, the mean average of the selected groups was 74%. According to table 1, the Chinese adolescents fared extremely well followed by the East European, South Asian, Canadian, Latin American, and the Caribbean students.

TABLE 1. Mean average mark in school last semester/term, by gender and ethnocultural group (%)

|              | Caribbean | Chinese | East European | Latin American | South Asian | Canadian | All |
|--------------|-----------|---------|---------------|----------------|-------------|----------|-----|
| Male         | 69        | 75      | 75            | 71             | 74          | 70       | 72  |
| Female       | 74        | 78      | 77            | 74             | 75          | 75       | 76  |
| <b>Total</b> | 72        | 77      | 76            | 72             | 74          | 73       | 74  |

TABLE 2. Breakdown of average mark in school last semester/term by ethnocultural group (%)

|                | <50 | 50 - 69 | 70 - 79 | 80 - 89 | 80 - 100 |
|----------------|-----|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| Caribbean      | 3   | 35      | 39      | 20      | 5        |
| Chinese        | 1   | 20      | 34      | 35      | 11       |
| East European  | 2   | 24      | 30      | 31      | 13       |
| Latin American | 3   | 32      | 38      | 25      | 2        |
| South Asian    | 1   | 28      | 35      | 28      | 8        |
| Canadian       | 2   | 32      | 33      | 25      | 7        |
| <b>All</b>     | 2   | 27      | 34      | 29      | 8        |

A similar pattern follows (with the exception of the East Europeans doing well in the 90-100% bracket) in the breakdown of average marks (table 2). The mean average mark of all students (74%) (table 1) indicated the academic merit of most of the surveyed students. The females (average mark – 76%) slightly surpassed the males (average mark – 72%). Greater proportions of the Chinese and East Europeans had higher grades (46 and 44% of them, respectively, and scored between 80 to 100%: see table 2). Most interviewed students were interested in academics and expressed motivation to succeed in teaching, law, sports, medicine, and graduate studies in psychology and sociology. Most reported that their parents took a real interest in their school work. Therefore, the findings on school performance deduced from the above data are consistent with Ogbu's theory of the academic excellence of voluntary minorities.

Though voluntary migrant groups initially face inequitable educational policies (Low, 1982; Wollenberg, 1995) and language problems (Wang 1995), these barriers are not long lasting. Parents usually adopt a positive attitude and are strongly committed to their children succeeding in school and tend to hold the student, rather than the teachers, responsible for academic success. In the words of Ogbu and Simons:

[Voluntary minority students] work hard, strive for high grades, pay attention in class, do their homework, and generally follow school rules. Immigrant minority students are rarely disruptive in class, and show respect for the teacher. They are anxious to learn English. Their peers support school success, so that they experience minimal peer pressures detrimental to academic achievement. (1998, p. 177)

However, they caution that academic success presents only the “dominant patterns” within the voluntary group category and insist that there are both subgroup and individual variations in school attitudes and achievement. Doing well in school was deemed important by the selected ethnocultural groups. Parental pressure for academic achievement was high and most students felt the concomitant emotional stress.

There is parental pressure to do well in school. Most of the time they don't allow me to go out and if I failed a course, I would try and hide it from my parents. (17 year old male, born Taiwan, 4 years in Canada).

Sometimes I will be quite tired of doing homework and just will walk around the home and they will say, 'how come you're not doing your homework?' and I need to go back and do it. (18 year old female, born Hong Kong, 4 years in Canada).

As regards future expectations most of the students aimed for post-secondary education. University degrees in science, medicine, and engineering were the invariable aspirations of most adolescents. More of the Chinese

had this aspiration (an average of 73%), with fewer males in the university-bound group; females were consistently more likely to expect to attend university across groups. The Canadians, particularly the males, had the lowest aspirations for university studies with community college or technical school being the goal. It is possible that university education occupies a low priority for Canadians, in comparison to other groups, due to easy job access. Again, males are more likely than females to expect to attend community college or technical school. These findings are consistent with the findings of Maxwell, Maxwell, and Krugly-Smolka where minority females are "continuing the trend of increased levels of education" (1996: 258). Maxwell et al., further note that voluntary group females have increasingly entered traditionally male-dominated occupations and that ethnocultural groups of "more recent arrival" depicted higher levels of ambition than Canadians.

Despite their ability to communicate with the interviewers, many interviewed respondents felt that language barriers inhibited rapid progress in their studies. Some explained that the English they learned back home was different from the English taught and spoken in Canada.

Like I'm a little lost right now – because it's new to me... because the ESL didn't teach us regular English, poetry etc. (18 year old male, born El Salvador, 5 years in Canada).

English teaching in Hong Kong is not English... not helpful, because I tried that [English] here, but nobody spoke like that. (19 year old male, born in Hong Kong, 11 years in Canada).

The negative perception of some students suggests the prevalence of racial discrimination in schools (Taylor & Hegarty, 1985; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Christensen, 1995; Dei et al., 1997). Even though an average of 13 % spoke of inter-group discrimination, a higher proportion of South Asians (21%) and Caribbeans (17%) felt more discriminated against.

When Black kids go the guidance office, they don't encourage them to take the enriched courses. (18 year old female; born Toronto, parents – Caribbean).

Some students have no good manners. When we do group work everyone says their idea right but... they don't ask me my opinion right... they don't give me a chance to learn. (16 year old male, born India, 2.5 years in Canada).

But here it is more hidden. It can be little things...like making fun of the way your hair is or how light you are if you are black, how you speak, how you walk, how you dress...sometimes things are said and the person doesn't even know it's racist (15 year old female, born India, 8 years in Canada).

I found some of the teachers only give white people high marks. For people from other countries, they give low marks if they don't like them. (19 year old female, born Hong Kong, 5 years in Canada).

There is differences here. . . It's like you don't belong. There was always this group of people (mainly white) that were always very mean to other people (Latin Americans, Orientals etc). (18 year old male, born Nicaragua, grew up in El Salvador, 5 years in Canada).

Therefore the finding that most minority adolescents experience the negative effects of language impediment and racial discrimination and yet fare well academically is in agreement with Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of voluntary minorities. There is evidence to suggest that other factors which contribute to the academic success of ethnocultural students are parental pressure and the individual motivation of students themselves to "make it" in the host society.

#### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study support Ogbu's (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) cultural-ecological theory that most voluntary minority groups excel academically despite language barriers and the prevalence of racial discrimination. The mean average mark of the sample of adolescents was 74%. The Chinese, East Europeans, and South Asians scored higher marks on an average (77%, 76%, and 74%, respectively) with the Caribbean and Latin American adolescents not far behind (72%). Similarly in the breakdown of marks, the Chinese and the East Europeans scored highly with an average in the 80%-100% bracket followed closely by the South Asians, Latin American, and the Caribbean adolescents. Therefore, most adolescents of the selected ethnocultural groups fared extremely well academically. Our central question – why and how do voluntary minority students succeed academically – makes it logical to link the findings of the study to Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory. Theoretically, Ogbu's approach enables us to understand academic excellence in voluntary minority school performance.

However, to reduce variations and maximize minority student performance, it follows that language barriers and feelings of racism need to be minimized. Due to budget restrictions, the survey and interviews in the study did not deal with ways in which language barriers can be speedily overcome. It follows, however, that ESL classes need to appropriately address the requirements of voluntary minority adolescents. ESL classes should deal with ways to reduce miscommunication in the classroom and include culturally distinct ways of speaking (Erickson, 1993). As well, teachers should design a culturally responsive pedagogy (Au & Mason, 1981; Erickson, 1993; Berry, 1998; Ogbu & Simons; 1998). Culturally appropriate pedagogy involves

instruction which credits students' learning styles, culture and language in the classroom. Indeed, a culturally responsive pedagogy will indicate that the teacher respects and honours cultural diversity and thus make school a less alien place to be. In Erickson's words:

Perhaps the immigrant minority student would do even better than they do already if they were educated in a more culturally responsive learning environment. (1993, p. 35)

In addition, to construct a more positive environment in the school setting, the teacher's priority should be to build feelings of trust. Some students mentioned that mainstream teachers did not trust them.

Some teachers don't trust us – kick us out if we are in the halls and going to the cafeteria, consider a big group is a gang. Principals are always watching us, under cover cops in the school. (17 year old male, born Canada, parents Guyanese).

If I had a problem, no I wouldn't [feel comfortable going to the white teachers for help] because I would feel as though nothing would really be solved really with it. (18 year old female, born Toronto, parents from Trinidad).

I dislike most of the teachers because of how they treat me; I am nice and friendly and if I am respected I will respect back. . . They look down and talk down rather than help you (18 year old male, born Canada, parents from Trinidad).

Therefore, there is a need to build trusting relations between the teacher and the students. Trusting relations will build positive feelings of self-esteem and self-identity in the students (Maharaj-Sandhu, 1995). As Erickson has clearly pointed out:

[L]egitimacy, trust and interest are also existential and emergent phenomena that are continually negotiated within the intimate circumstances and short time scale of everyday encounters between individual teachers, students and parents. The institutional legitimacy of the school is affirmed existentially as trust in face-to-face encounters between school staff and students and their parents. (1993, p. 37)

Dei et al., note that “[t]he caring and responsive actions of a single individual – a teacher, guidance counsellor, or parent – can often make the difference to a student” (1997, p. 253).

To reduce racial discrimination some students felt:

We need to try to make people aware of groups, have multicultural club and multicultural week makes people aware of other cultures (17 year old female, from India, born in Canada).

Multicultural week, surveys, food stalls, music, workshops, a week isn't enough, it should be a continual process. (18 year old female, from Pakistan, born in Canada).

The continuous process of creating an atmosphere of cross-cultural awareness is necessary to reduce racial feelings. Therefore, it is necessary to reduce language barriers, build trust, include a culturally responsive pedagogy and enhance cross cultural awareness<sup>7</sup> to maximize minority student potential. Thus educational research must be contextualized to make an impact in practice. Further, theoretical and empirical work is needed to address the above issues with respect to *all* ethnocultural adolescents. Detailed case studies of minority students according to the length of stay in Canada for up to a few years and at intervals of over a two-three year period would contribute to literature gaps in the field of institutional ethnography. A longitudinal study of young newcomers to Canada which examines in depth the process of adjustment into the Canadian school system would enhance the integration of knowledge into educational practice.

#### NOTES

1. This paper is based on a study conducted by The Social Program Evaluation Group, Queen's University at Kingston. The study, funded by the Multiculturalism Program of Canadian Heritage, commenced in the spring of 1996 and the report was published in the fall of 1997. The authors are Wendy K. Warren, Edith Samuel, Mathew A. King and Jane A. Yealland.
2. In this study, "race" and "ethnicity" are not defined per se, as the terms are "socially constructed" and "ambiguous" (Maxwell, Maxwell, & Krugly-Smolka, 1996). Although race is based on physical characteristics, there are diverse cultural differences between and within races. So also, ethnicity is based on common language, cultural values, and shared norms. Further, social scientists label some groups as ethnic and others as not. Hence, we use the term, "ethnocultural groups" to refer to the selected voluntary minority and refugee groups studied.
3. "Canadian" in the study refers primarily to the dominant English-speaking group of Anglo-Saxon heritage. While tensions between the two major language groups, the Anglophones and Francophones, may be deemed as intercultural and intra-racial (Karumancherry, 1992, p. 3), we focus on the stresses between the select ethnocultural groups and the dominant group. We exclude other minority ethnic groups who are not part of the five selected groups. The categories "white" and "non-white" are not applicable to the study as the East Europeans come under the "white" category. So also the "visible minority" grouping is applicable to the Caribbean, Chinese, Latin American and South Asian groups but not to the East Europeans. Thus, we refer to the selected groups as "ethnocultural" minority groups. This categorization between the dominant group and the ethnocultural minority groups does lead to the study making some generalizations about the two groups (dominant and ethnocultural) in focus, but this is a limitation of the study that we recognize. For example, in the survey, some third generation adolescents of ethnic origins identified themselves as "Canadian."
4. Recent immigrants may not qualify due to linguistic/cultural considerations, a limitation we recognize in the study.
5. It is necessary to point out the paradox presented here regarding the views of minority students of schools "back home," as compared to schools in Canada. While it is true that migrant students feel that the academic standard and discipline of schools in countries of origin are higher and better, they are also quite aware of the differences in teaching methods and discipline enforced in Canadian schools. Many minority students prefer the system followed in Canadian schools for the simple reason that there is a greater flexibility and freedom in learning and in the expression of one's views.

6. All verbatim quotes were taken from the interviews, the qualitative part of the research.
7. Christensen has advocated five stages in the development of cross-cultural awareness (1995, p. 7). In the first stage, there is an awareness of cultural, ethnic, or racial differences. The second stage is "accompanied by uneasiness and/or beginning sense of cognitive dissonance" (1995, p. 7). The third stage is one of "conscious awareness" with conflictual pre-occupation of cultural, ethnic, or racial differences. The fourth stage of "consolidated awareness" is characterized by positively accepting other cultures and the last stage of "transcendent awareness" is when cross-cultural awareness becomes a "way of life" (1995, p. 8)

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## *The Academic Achievement of Adolescents*

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## BOOK REVIEWS

A.R. NEILSEN (Editor). *Daily Meaning – Counternarratives of teachers' work*. Mill Bay, BC: Bendall Books Educational Publishers (1999). 200 pp. C\$ 22.00 (ISBN 0-9696985-5-0).

As I read the ten counternarratives in *Daily Meaning*, I in turn laughed, cried, despaired, questioned myself, felt affirmed, and wondered if I should be hopeful. When I first started reading, I had no idea that I would have such a range of responses. Each piece is emotionally charged and attempts to make visible the “real” work of teachers in today’s schools.

In the introduction, Neilsen, the editor, explains that “counternarratives offer perspectives on taken-for-granted understandings of how some aspects of the world work” while attempting to challenge “the construction and maintenance of the dominant cultural narratives that shape – normalize – our everyday beliefs and practices.”

In each story, the authors try to make sense of their work in classrooms and schools that are in a world that has changed dramatically since they were children going to school themselves. The fact that the authors are teachers is very important as little of what has been written on classrooms and schools has been by teachers.

*Daily Meaning* engaged me as a reader because each contributor told his/her story so differently:

Jeff Doran in *Rough Cuts* tells an almost too real account of some of his high school classes and helps us understand that schools can be lonely places because of a lack of time for meaningful interaction.

Patricia Clifford and Sharon Friesen in *Awakening in a Dark Wood* weave their teaching/learning stories around the myth of Beowulf and describe the many aspects of “swamp life.”

Marlene Milne in *Bending the Willows* describes what it was like for her to embark on a teaching career in the 1960s and contrasts this with what it is like to teach today by providing brief profiles of teachers from the 1990s.

Arlene Connell and Carol Johnston-Kline in *Front Lines* write a number of letters to each other over the period of eight months and explore the choices they and their schools have made as a result of numerous budget cuts.

Susan Church in *The Emotional Labour of School Leadership* tells us of her conversations with four women principals who explain and give examples of the importance of nurturing relationships in the work they do.

In *Looking Back on "Getting Out"* Gary Knowles shares excerpts from his personal journal going back as far as 1974 to explain why he decided to leave public school teaching. He intermeshes this with a description of the many demands placed on teachers.

In *Hide-and-Seek: Stories from the Lives of Six Lesbian Teachers* Sonya Singer uses the voices of these teachers to help the reader understand the secret existence lesbians often have in still very homophobic schools and communities.

In *Outtakes*, Geraldine Hennigar tells four stories that highlight the many decisions and actions teachers must take that remain invisible to most outside schools.

In *From Here to Uncertainty: A Preoccupation with Code*, Mike Corbett tells us of his past and leads us to understand why his "passion comes out of confronting the norm and perhaps undoing the work that many schools define as their principal business."

In the last piece, entitled *Reclaiming our Children: Teachers as Elders*, Jacqueline Barkley critically describes pop culture as "resulting largely from top-down political and economic forces which construct our needs and desires for us, so that we can only be consumers, not creators; observers, not actors." After telling us of the shallow world in which we live, she writes to give us hope by suggesting at least partial solutions. Barkley explains the importance of having parents, teachers and principals reclaim their role as elders and gives very concrete examples of how this can be done.

After reading this book, I reread the comments from other reviewers and was struck by the fact that I agreed with almost every word of praise. As I read, one question lingered in my mind: Who should read this book? Although I agree with Ardra Coles' review in which she suggests that politicians, journalists, parents, educational administrators and educators would benefit from reading this book, I remain unsure about when it would be most beneficial for a teacher to read these stories. As a teacher educator who works with teachers at different career stages, I worried about the

impact of these pieces on pre-service and novice teachers. In sharing this concern with a colleague, she suggested that these stories might be an excellent starting point for a dialogue on the culture of teaching and an exploration of proactive strategies for teachers interested in effecting “real” changes in the way they do their work as well as working toward classroom, school and system level change.

I agree that we must bring these powerful stories to those who make and influence decisions about education so they have a sense of what teaching today is really all about. The authors of *Daily Meaning* together provide a rich description of their fears and frustrations, their exhaustion and disheartenment and their insights and dreams.

ANTOINETTE GAGNÉ, *OISE at University of Toronto*

L. WEIS & M. FINE. *Speed Bumps: A student-friendly guide to qualitative research*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University (2000). 144 pp. US\$16.95 (ISBN 0-8077-3966-9).

Those of us who drive are familiar with speed bumps, awkward convexities placed thoughtfully on the road in order to make us slow down, either because we need to move cautiously through the area, or to alert us when we tend to veer off the road. Within the context of qualitative research, Weis and Fine refer to speed bumps as moments of reflection on the methodological and ethical concerns that make researchers slow down in order to realize more fully both objective and subject in their research. Specifically dedicated to students, this book could be seen as a collage of different voices uncovering researchers' personal concerns, dilemmas and situations that tend to be excluded from formal, published reports. What makes this book even more student-friendly is that it compiles graduate students' own stories, in which they confront their individual speed bumps in the process of doing qualitative work.

Drawing upon their most recent ethnographic study, *Unknown City: The lives of poor working class young adults*, that addresses the lives of young adults in the poor communities of Jersey City and Buffalo, Weis and Fine advocate the role of qualitative research in promoting social justice in culturally diverse America. By focusing on the issues of crime, poverty and violence within different demographic groups, Weis and Fine argue that development of social policies must include the voices of marginalized people.

The book's main section consists of four chapters. In the first chapter, Weis and Fine introduce and contextualize their research. *Unknown City* involves

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The book's main section consists of four chapters. In the first chapter, Weis and Fine introduce and contextualize their research. *Unknown City* involves

154 interviews of White, African American, and Latino young adults of both sexes, age 25 to 35, from the poor communities of Jersey City and Buffalo. It was meant to address their experiences since leaving high school and to explore a spectrum of social problems including crime, racism, violence, and police brutality. The questions are clearly stated to target the issues “. . . relating to neighbourhood, schooling, experiences with jobs, family, gender relations, violence, social activism, religion, racial, and ethnic identification, children, and desires for the future, both one’s own future and that of children” (p. 26). Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

The findings demonstrate that narrative responses on these issues varied dramatically among the six demographic groups such as white men, white women, African American men, African American women, Latinos and Latinas. For example, most white men perceived the street violence as the main problem in their community, while projecting their personal fears onto significant others such as parents, children, sisters. They also seem to sympathize with police, dismissing the police brutality and corruption as racially trumped up. Fewer white women trust police, identifying corruption in the ranks; however, they see police as responsive in the case of domestic violence. On the contrary, for both African American men and Latinos, the problems in their communities derived from the lack of jobs, racism, and police corruption and harassment including brutal use of force, false arrests and exaggerated charges. Although African American women encounter less violence in their homes than Latinas and white women, they find police also unresponsive in their communities. All quotations supporting the statements appear concise and well edited. However the sections reporting the views of the White men and women appear shorter than other sections. Weis and Fine suggest that the above stated findings should be taken as the signs of a deeply fractured American community at the turn of the new century. In the development of social policies that are sensitive to differences associated with gender, ethnicity, race as well as the social status of people, “the question, today, is not what to do, but who is going to listen” (p. 25). Using qualitative research to encourage listeners from the centre to hear the needs of the people from the margins makes *Unknown City* a book dedicated to social justice.

The second chapter deals particularly with the method and design of the study. The study included both individual in-depth interviews and focus group interviews across all six demographic groups. In addition, Weis and Fine perceived group interviews as more hopeful and articulate than individual ones. The interview questions were developed in consultation with graduate students who were also trained and involved as field interviewers. Even though Weis and Fine state that actual interview questions were

formulated in an open-ended fashion, they did not explain if standardized questionnaires were adopted by each interviewer making the comparability of data easier.

Also, this chapter covers the issues of participant selection as well as the structure of qualitative analysis followed in the study. In both Jersey City and Buffalo, the participant selection focused on four sets of urban institutions: 1) schools and post-secondary institutions; 2) churches and spiritual sites, 3) social agencies and self-help groups, and 4) community centres and activist organizations. "White men, for example, are underrepresented in social agencies because they tend to attend in fewer numbers than the other groups, and Latinos are overrepresented in community centres, due to the prominence of particular community centres in the communities in which we worked" (p. 27).

An extensive analysis drew upon 184 coding categories generated in an inductive fashion ranging from "Physical abuse," "Where from," "Childhood fears," "Family when growing up," "What community means," etc. Data gathered in the focus group interviews were also coded with similar categories; however different coding schemes were set up.

The computer-based analytic programs such as *Hyperqual* and *Ethnograph* were used for initial filling in and breaking down of categories. Weis and Fine say that actual analysis began after hours of sorting interview segments, printing out categories and creating specific manila folders for each category. After more than a year of analysis, they started writing in collaboration with a number of graduate students, focusing on the issues of reflexivity and representation.

The third chapter focuses on ethical issues, raising a whole spectrum of critical questions on the issues of reflexivity, textual subject, representation and social responsibilities in qualitative research. By criticizing the difficult relationship between the researcher and subject in social science texts, Weis and Fine focus on the implications of the researcher's own political reflexivities in formulating the representations of others. In fact, they are concerned with what Michelle Fine calls "working the hyphen" between Self and Other, and produce writing that bears responsibility and communicates in ways that may "transform public consciousness and common sense" (p. 33).

This chapter encompasses also the view of Susan Weseen and Mun Wong, associated researchers, on the issues of race, community and cultural differences. There are some wonderful insights on the ethics of informed consent, "who is informed and who's consenting" (p. 41). Additional emphasis is placed on the narrative; how one distinguishes between good and bad stories and what could be done with data that refer only to daily life routine. Weis

and Fine recognize that qualitative life narratives should not involve only hot statements loaded with “the exotic, the bizarre and the violent” but also passages that refer to mundane daily life (p. 50). The chapter concludes with a set of marvellous critical questions such as: “Have I connected the voices and stories of individuals back to the set of historic, structural, and economic relations in which they started? Have I described the mundane? How far do I want to go with respect to theorizing the words of informants? Have I considered how these data could be used for progressive, conservative, repressive social policies? Who am I afraid will see these analysis?” (p. 65).

The last chapter compiles the insights of fifteen graduate students from State University of New York at Buffalo and City University of New York whose research addresses youth and young adults in urban communities. Their research involves thesis and dissertation studies that include various interview studies and participant observations within the contexts of so called “free spaces.” These imply churches, schools, lesbian and gay movements, civil rights movements, and other levels of subculture in which young people may realize their identities and project political change. I found this chapter to be the most exciting to read as each essay documents honestly the struggle of young researchers in facing their own speed bumps. These include the issues of gender, race, cultural background, and textual representation. The only problem that I had with this section is that most of the researchers could have introduced the research questions in their writing more successfully.

Some of my favourite entries include the stories of Susan Lombardo, Kathleen C. Tocke, and Anne Galletta. Susan Lombardo confronts the implications of her Irish background in the research that addressed Irish people. Although she felt connected to the symbolic meaning of red hair, freckles and accent, Susan learned that she failed to address whiteness portrayed in her dissertation. Kathleen C. Tocke discusses sexually harassing bumps that she encountered in coping with the sexist comments of boys at the high schools where she did her research. Thinking what to wear and how to fit in as a five-foot nine-inch female researcher made her realize that being sexually harassed could also be a part of the research. Anne Galetta’s story is equally intriguing. One day during her ethnographic work at the Centre Academy High School, Anne encountered a student who offered to do her nails. The problem is that Anne had never had her nails done before, and most importantly not by an African American woman. “As Patricia rubbed [my nails] with alcohol, my whiteness became as perceptibly strong to me as the sent of the alcohol smarting my nose, and I felt an overwhelming desire to run as far away from this place as I could” (p. 85). Anne’s concern is: how is one supposed to deal with the uncomfortable situations that could also be part of the participant observation?

To readers engaged in social research, this book offers an excellent background for understanding ethical concerns and reflexivity in their methodologies. The stories of struggle, differences and dilemmas that Weis and Fine perceive as moments of slowing down, I find to be the moments of honesty. At its best, this book will encourage both young and veteran researchers to confront their own speed bumps and promote social responsibility in qualitative research in the future.

VLADIMIR SPICANOVIC, *McGill University*

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Notre journal traite de tout un éventail de sujets dans le domaine des sciences de l'éducation en général. Même si les articles traitent avant tout de la situation canadienne, certains portent également sur des recherches et des problèmes théoriques revêtant une importance mondiale, ainsi que sur des sujets propres au Québec.

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Le but et le rôle de *Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill* sont bien précis en ce qui concerne la recherche, la théorie et la pratique dans le domaine de l'éducation au Canada. Son tout premier objectif est de faire connaître les progrès dans le domaine de l'éducation au Québec, où l'enseignement en anglais est donné dans un milieu francophone et où l'enseignement en français est donné en collaboration avec une importante minorité anglophone. En raison de ce lien, les enseignants anglophones et francophones rédigent des articles qui font état des progrès dans le domaine de l'éducation de ce point de vue particulier. De plus, les théoriciens et les chercheurs provenant de milieux divers et uniques se servent de cette revue comme une tribune, à l'échelle nationale et internationale, pour présenter leurs idées et les découvertes de leurs recherches. Cette revue tout en mettant en valeur le caractère unique de l'éducation au Québec, laisse une place de choix aux écrits savants d'un public international qu'elle apprécie, ce qui permet aux spécialistes connus à l'échelle internationale d'apprendre l'histoire de même que les progrès récents en ce qui concerne l'éducation au Québec, en particulier, et au Canada, en général, ce qui, en retour, peut faciliter l'avancement dans le même domaine dans leur propre pays.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

WINTER 2001 VOL. 36 NO. 1

- 5 ANNOUNCING THE MARGARET GILLETT AWARD  
FOR THE BEST ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN  
THE MCGILL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION
- 7 EDITORIAL: Policies and paradoxes  
ÉDITORIAL: La politique et les paradoxes  
*Ann Beer*
- 13 THE PARADOX OF CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT:  
A CHALLENGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY  
*Steven Katz, Lorna Earl, & David Olson*
- 27 POSTMODERN FEMINISM  
AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT  
*Dawn C. Wallin*
- 45 TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE FAMILY  
BACKGROUNDS OF CHILDREN AT RISK  
*Carol Leroy & Brent Symes*
- 61 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF ADOLESCENTS FROM  
SELECTED ETHNOCULTURAL GROUPS IN CANADA:  
A STUDY CONSISTENT WITH JOHN OGBU'S THEORY  
*Edith Samuel, Eva Krugly-Smolkska, & Wendy Warren*
- 75 REMEMBERING REGINALD EDWARDS
- 77 BOOK REVIEWS

## PUBLICATION GUIDELINES

### DIRECTIVES DE PUBLICATION

**PUBLICATION GUIDELINES.** MCGILL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION accepts English and French articles in the form of theoretical essays, descriptive reports of research, reviews of books, and commentaries on current educational issues and policies. All papers submitted should be: double-spaced, in quadruplicate, in the format of the American Psychological Association style manual (4th edition), 15-20 pages in length, and accompanied by an abstract of not more than 75 words. The title page with author's name and address should be on a separate page. Authors must state in their covering letter that this manuscript has not been simultaneously submitted to any other publication. Authors must ensure that any research funding has been properly acknowledged. They should also acknowledge all who have played an important part in conducting the research or in preparing the manuscript, including research participants, unless bound by rules of confidentiality. Authors of accepted papers will be requested to assign all rights to copyright to the *Journal* by means of a standard form. The review period ranges from six weeks to three months.

References, notes, tables, graphs, and figures should be limited so that they do not detract from or clutter the text of the article.

All submissions should be addressed to the Editor, MCGILL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, McGill University, 3700 McTavish Street, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 1Y2. (Telephone: 514 398-4246; Fax: 514 398-4529; e-mail: keenana@education.mcgill.ca)

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Les références, les notes, les tableaux, les graphiques et les figures doivent être limités pour ne pas encombrer le texte de l'article ou distraire le lecteur.

Tous les articles doivent être adressés à la rédactrice en chef, REVUE DE SCIENCES DE L'ÉDUCATION DE MCGILL, Université McGill, 3700, rue McTavish, Montréal (Québec) Canada H3A 1Y2 (téléphone: (514) 398-4246; télécopieur (514) 398-4529; keenana@education.mcgill.ca).



## In this issue

- 13 The Paradox of Classroom Assessment:  
A challenge for the 21st century  
*Steven Katz, Lorna Earl, & David Olson*
- 27 Postmodern Feminism and  
Educational Policy Development  
*Dawn C. Wallin*
- 45 Teachers' Perspectives on the Family  
Backgrounds of Children At Risk  
*Carol Leroy & Brent Symes*
- 61 Academic Achievement of Adolescents from  
Selected Ethnocultural Groups in Canada:  
A study consistent with John Ogbu's Theory  
*Edith Samuel, Eva Krugly-Smolksa, &  
Wendy Warren*