STORIES OF UNIONIZATION: FOUR TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN TWO CANADIAN PRIVATE ESL SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

The private English language training industry in Canada has grown rapidly in recent years. While subject to influences of market competition, ESL schools have had little educational or labour regulation. This study presents life history interviews with four teachers who became involved in forming unions at their workplaces because of their experiences with just labour practices.

The findings show that teachers sought union protection to deal with a pervasive sense of insecurity in their jobs. Through unions, they established clearer processes for dealing with such issues as the allocation of work and the resolution of grievances, a forum for communicating concerns to management, and a peer support structure. Additionally, these teachers have gained significant increases in salary and benefits. These narratives also show teachers, both individually and collectively, engaging in resistance as they confront the daily infringement of business priorities on their capacities to develop and practice as educators.

**Keywords:** ESL teacher; teacher unions; narrative inquiry; teachers' work

**Subject Terms:** Teachers' unions – Canada; Collective bargaining – Teachers; Education – Social aspects – Canada; Language and languages – Study and teaching
DEDICATION

For Coen and Arran
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 A Personal History</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The Context of the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Overview of Chapters</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Chapter Summary</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 OVERVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH LITERATURE</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Critical Inquiry: Researching for Change</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Foundational Thinkers in Critical Research and Education</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Developing Critical Approaches to Research and Education</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3 Studies of Resistance</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.4 Critical Inquiry and the Work of ESL Teachers</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 English as a World Language</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 ESL’s Colonial Past</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 The Globalization of English</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3 The Business of ESL in Canada</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.4 Education as a Commercial Product</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.5 The Business of ESL and the Work of ESL Teachers</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Theorizing Teachers’ Work in Public Education and in Public and Private ESL</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1 Teachers’ Work in K-12 Education</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2 The Work of ESL Teachers in K-12 and Higher Education</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.3 Researching the Work of ESL Teachers</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Teacher Unions</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1 Public and Private Sector Unions</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2 History of Teacher Unions</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3 The teacher Union Debate</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4 Teacher and Teacher Unionist Views on their Unions</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.6 Contextualizing the Unionization of Private ESL Teachers</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Research Methodology: Understanding Teachers’ Lives and Work</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.1 Qualitative Research</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.2 Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.3 Life History and Life Story</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Conclusion .............................................................................. 137
5 CONCLUSION .............................................................................. 140
  5.1 Introduction ........................................................................... 140
  5.2 Teachers’ Work ..................................................................... 141
  5.3 Teacher Unions ..................................................................... 144
  5.4 ESL and Business .................................................................. 147
  5.5 Power as Systematic, Power as (Inter)personal ..................... 150
  5.6 Implications of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research .......................................................... 152
  5.7 Conclusion ............................................................................. 155
  5.8 Epilogue ................................................................................ 156
REFERENCES ................................................................................. 157
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Personal History

I work at a private language school teaching English as a second language to international students. Mine is one of up to 200 schools in the local area (Watson, 2008) that offer such a service. Eight years ago, the teachers at the college I work at did something very unusual for this sector; we formed a bargaining unit and began working towards a collective agreement with our employer.

My reasons for participating in the unionization process were always clear to me. I was tired of fearing for my job security. I wanted to be able to enter my job site and get on with the task of teaching without worrying that I was doing something wrong. It wasn't that I didn't have much to learn. With only a year of teaching under my belt before becoming employed at this school, I was still very green. However, I felt I needed support in order to grow, and yet I was receiving threats instead. It was the sense that we were being managed in a very unfair way that brought me to our first union meeting on a rainy November evening.

When I eventually applied for graduate school, I knew that my research would hinge on what happened that night. I became curious about the lives of other teachers in the private ESL sector. What were their lives like? Did they struggle as we did, or was our situation unique? There didn't seem to be much discussion within the local professional organization about the working situations of ESL teachers, so the president of my union and I decided to deliver a workshop on collective bargaining and work issues at a conference for ESL teachers. What we discovered at the workshop was that several teachers were very
concerned about their working conditions, but they weren't sure what to do about them.

Anecdotal evidence from these teachers and subsequently from other conversations with ESL instructors suggested to me that there was a great deal to be learned about the lives of language teachers. I sensed from other cases that a considerable amount of frustration exists within private ESL schools. For example, a recent article in a local Vancouver paper (Bisetty, 2005) describes an incident in which an instructor is laid-off from his job at a language school, but upon returning to the campus to collect his personal materials discovers that he has been replaced. In a fit of anger, he hurls a book at the new instructor and then punches him in the face. A couple of days thereafter, the second instructor, while recovering from the assault, is laid-off from what he expected to be a full-time permanent position. Without condoning the violence that the first instructor resorted to, I became suspicious about what might have sparked his reaction, linking it to stories I had heard as well as to my own experiences.

My aims in this study and the research questions that I began with are an extension of my personal experience. Stories such as the aforementioned piqued my empathy and made me want to search for models of improvement. Hence, while the purpose of this research was partly to discover some of the ways that ESL teachers in commercially run schools perceive their lives and work, more importantly it was to understand how things can be better for these teachers. My intent was to gather information on the perspectives of a few private sector ESL teachers who have taken steps to improve the conditions of their work lives.

The study took the shape of life history interviews that explored the meaning of the act of unionizing for the ESL teachers. Data were gathered around the question: “What stories do ESL teachers from two private-sector language schools tell about their work and their lives in
relation to the formation of a union?" In a narrower sense, I sought to answer the questions, "How do these teachers characterize their motivations and abilities to participate in the process?" and "How do they see their role in the union now?" Obtaining information in this way has helped to reveal some details of the experiences of collective bargaining for these teachers. Of greatest benefit, it has given some insight into how these teachers saw themselves as empowered to change the circumstances within which they work.

In this chapter, I will continue with a description of the educational contexts within which the study participants work. This is followed by an overview of the literature that gives historical and academic context to the research questions. Next, I outline the basic reasons for employing a life history methodology for the aims of this study and summarize the approaches used in presenting the research data in Chapter 4. Finally, I indicate how in Chapter 5 I will look at the ways the literature review relates to the teachers' stories and provide recommendations for further research.

1.2 The Context of the Study

With about two million students traveling abroad every year (BC Progress Board, 2005) and an estimated worth of 2.2 trillion dollars per year (Bakogeorge, 2005), international education has become a significant global industry. UNESCO predicts that the number of international learners could reach five million annually by 2020 (BC Progress Board, 2005). Canada attracts approximately 150,000 English language learners from overseas per year, who spend around two billion dollars on tuition, housing, entertainment, and other activities (Bakogeorge, 2005). The two provinces in Canada that receive the most ESL student visitors are Ontario and British Columbia; however, with only forty ESL schools located in Toronto (Ibid.) compared to one hundred in the downtown core of Vancouver (BC Progress Board, 2005),
British Columbia has shown itself to be the biggest player in this industry in Canada. In total, between 150 and 200 private ESL schools currently operate in BC (Watson, 2008).

From a survey conducted by the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools (CAPLS), we know that the average ESL student is in her or his twenties, is highly educated, and requires English language skills for career advancement (Canadian Association of Private Language Schools). Approximately half of the students who come to Canada are currently postsecondary students, while the other half are currently employed. Most are here for an average of three months to a year. A large portion (65 percent) of travelers learn about the programs they enroll in through agencies who market specific ESL schools in exchange for a portion of tuition.

Asian countries, primarily Korea and Japan, represent half of the ESL learners; 24 percent are from Latin America, mainly Mexico, Brazil, Columbia, and Venezuela; 19 percent come from European countries, with Swiss and German students making up the greatest numbers; in addition, small numbers of students come from the Middle East and Africa.

There is little published information about the teachers who work in Canadian ESL schools, as no organization tracks the employment of this sector. The Vancouver Economic and Development Commission estimates there are approximately 2000 positions for individuals directly involved in language training in Vancouver, with 1200 of these in the private sector (BC Progress Board, 2005). This number includes administrators as well as teachers.

As an educational enterprise, language training falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces; however, no provincial governments currently regulate the private ESL industry. British Columbia obviously has the greatest economic stake in the sector and is starting to move towards mandatory regulation. Watson (2008) has recently published a
report on the status of private ESL schools, and comments, "there is no requirement for the estimated 150-200 ESL schools in BC to meet educational or quality standards and no protection is in place for the approximately 100,000 ESL students in BC" (p. 3). He recommends bringing ESL under the Private Career Training Institutions Act in order to offer students financial protection for their tuition investments, to make ESL schools more accountable for their marketing promises, and to promote higher overall standards within the industry. One important note is that of the fifty-two "stakeholders" (p. 29) contacted for their input into this report, no teachers were represented.

No organization maintains data on unions in the for-profit language education sector. However, I am aware of two unionized private ESL schools in Toronto and three in British Columbia. This calculates to a rate of about three percent of the total number of schools.

1.3 Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I examine a selection of theoretical and empirical academic, professional, and some journalistic publications concerning the five major themes of this study: critical theory and pedagogy; historical, cultural and economic influences on English language teaching; teachers' work; teacher unions; and narrative methods. I will initially provide a background on critical inquiry and then show how critical theory and pedagogy have been applied in the ESL context, how real life experiences have challenged and modified our understandings of what critical inquiry means, and how we can understand resistance to the dominant social order. These aspects of critical awareness provide theoretical grounding for my rationalization of the research methods, the presentation of the data, and the analysis of economy, culture, power and justice as they appear in the teacher narratives.

The next section of Chapter 2 explicates some historical and cultural influences that have shaped the ESL industry in Canada,
specifically how English language training (ELT) is rooted in British empiricism and has become commodified in the current global capitalist market. I present a selection of research that informs our understanding of the ways that the current emphasis on English proficiency as a necessary skill for securing employment disadvantages non-native speakers and threatens socio-linguistic diversity while teachers working within the profit-driven language industry become technical workers delivering a “product” to a “consumer.”

The third section of Chapter 2 examines research on work issues first for teachers in public education in general and then for those in ESL. When discussing “mainstream” teachers, I intend this to mean those teaching the standard curriculum in public schools. “ESL” teachers include those teaching in various contexts: ESL classes in K-12 public schools, public or for-profit ESL programs at colleges or universities, immigrant language education programs, or private language schools. Problems with increasing expectations of teachers by their superiors with diminishing material rewards and classroom resources, a lack of attention to teacher needs and perspectives in managerial decision-making, and extensive controls over teachers’ work are common concerns for both mainstream and ESL teachers.

With literally no data available on private ESL sector unions, I have had to rely on research conducted on the public sector in order to contextualize the research participants’ union experiences. Therefore, the fourth section provides an outline of differences and similarities between public and private sector unionization, followed by a brief historical survey of teacher collective bargaining and an examination of studies of teachers’ and teacher-unionists’ perspectives on their unions.

The final section of Chapter 2 explains the impetus for employing narrative strategies for both gathering and presenting data. As a means for drawing out personal insights on larger social processes, the use of
life history data helped me to assess the circumstances within the ESL schools as described by the research participants.

In Chapter 3 I explain the research process which engaged a life history approach to solicit individual knowledge about what life was like before and after the two unions were organized. The research plan involved two interviews with four teachers from two different unionized ESL schools in major Canadian cities. The first interviews took place with pairs of teachers, one from each school, and me in a loosely structured format. I asked them to recount the history of their teaching careers, the story of their unions, and their union roles. The second interview was based on data from the initial meeting. I elicited clarification and further details about the narratives that had already been provided. In addition, I asked teachers to reflect on the meaning that events significant to the unionization process had for them in view of their teaching and activist experiences.

Not only did I employ narrative methods in the approach to data collection, but much of the analysis in Chapter 4 follows narrative structures. The intention behind this was that, by preserving the chronology and voice of the original telling, I would be able to maintain the integrity and authenticity of the source material as much as possible. Chapter 4 begins with a personal introduction to each speaker through the use of participant profiles composed of excerpts from the original data. The second section of the chapter shows similarities in the paths that teachers took in unionizing their schools by presenting a collective union history of all four narrators, illuminating some factors that motivated the teachers to join the union effort and highlighting how the unions helped teachers to resist unfair managerial practices. A discussion of the business of education and teacher resistance in the final section of this chapter based on themes drawn from the interview texts shows how these teachers interpret the interests of marketing and
profit as impacting their lives at work and how teachers resist the imposition of unfair managerial practices.

Chapter 5 correlates the research literature presented in Chapter 2 and the interpretation of the narratives presented in Chapter 4. These connections provide a basis for discussions about how the insights of the four participants further our understanding of how teachers’ work in private ESL schools is constrained by socio-economic influences, of how unions can provide systematic relief from unfair exercises of power, and of what resistance looks like on a personal level. Further to this, I examine a few possibilities for further research and ways to help private sector ESL teachers to improve their work lives.

1.6 Chapter Summary

The motivation behind this study was my personal experience with the difficult working conditions that led up to the unionization of my own workplace, a private ESL school in Vancouver. Statistics show that the for-profit language training sector is becoming a significant player in the Canadian economy – a trend that is expected to continue over the next decade. While there is some concern about the quality of schools and the well-being of students as educational consumers, there is currently no public discussion about the quality of life of those who teach in these schools.

Chapter 2 offers scholarly perspectives on the five main strands of literature which have been identified as fundamental to this study: critical inquiry, the globalization of English, the work of teachers in the mainstream public system and in ESL, teacher unions, and life history methodology. Chapter 3 outlines the approach selected for the investigative process, showing how narrative methods were employed not only to gather data but also to analyze and to present the findings. In the fourth chapter, the analysis of the data takes three forms: participant profiles, a collective story of unionization, and a thematic interpretation
of informants’ views on business influences on their teaching and how these are resisted. In Chapter 5 I draw connections between conclusions made in the review of related literature and those made in the analysis in Chapter 4 followed by suggestions on how ESL teachers and other stakeholders might utilize these findings to improve the working conditions for language teachers employed at private schools.
2 OVERVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will survey a selection of scholarly, professional, and research literature pertinent to the five major themes of this study: critical inquiry, the historical, cultural and capitalist contexts of English language teaching, teachers' work, teacher unions, and life history research. It begins by framing the research as a critical study. Critical inquiry provides a framework for understanding the function of power in social relations, and, in the present study of workplace inequality, offers a way of looking specifically at the constraints imposed on second language teachers' work lives and the ways teachers resist those constraints. Following the survey of work on critical inquiry, I examine material that situates English language training historically as both a colonial and capitalist enterprise. The next section outlines theoretical and empirical research on how teachers see their work with particular attention paid to teachers’ perceptions of managerial practices. I will also summarize scholarly work documenting concerns that ESL teachers in various teaching contexts have about their work. The fourth section provides a review of the literature on teacher unions. Because of a lack of research on ESL teacher unions in general, this discussion is based exclusively on literature concerning public school teacher unions. Finally, the last section outlines qualitative and narrative inquiry as they are applied to this research before looking more closely at aspects of life history research practices that influenced this work.
2.2 Critical Inquiry: Researching for Change

The influence of critical theory on educational theory and practices is extensive and multifaceted, and works dedicated to elaborating its concepts and discussing its application are innumerable. While there are many "critical theories" ([Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281], I will narrow my focus to pinpoint work relevant to the present study, outlining important theoretical underpinnings of critical theory and then briefly examining how critical theory has influenced critical education and research practices. Examples of how critical theories have been engaged and developed in second language education will be reviewed. Finally, I will discuss how ideas from this school of thought pertain to the narratives of the teacher activists I interviewed.

2.2.1 Foundational Thinkers in Critical Research and Education

Luke (1992) summarizes the foundational components of critical pedagogy as being based on, "first generation Frankfurt School critical theory, on Gramsci's concept of hegemony and associated concepts of the (organic intellectual) subject and (counter-hegemonic) practice, and on Freire's educational theory and practices of 'conscientization'" (p. 27). To begin, I will expand on Gramsci's important notion of hegemony and the role of the organic intellectual as it pertains to critical pedagogy and research.

Hegemony is the operation of power as a totality (Apple, 2004). It is not, however, power exercised by force. Rather, in Gramsci's (1972) translated words, it is "The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (p. 12). In other words, the ruling class maintains power via the willingness of the masses. This can occur because the culture of the upper class becomes the general culture of society; thus, "domination is exercised on a deeper level through a profound, unconscious transformation of human consciousness"
(Salamini, 1981, p. 36). When this world view is internalized by citizens, it becomes "common sense" and remains unquestioned. The status quo of social relations is seen as valid because it appears inherent.

Hegemony, however, is always incomplete in that consent is never absolute (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Lower status groups can reject the hegemony of the ruling class and gain awareness of their historical positions (Salamini, 1981), and such resistance, in theory, leads to emancipation. In critical theory, "critical emancipation" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 282) occurs when oppressive systems are revealed.

Gramsci attributed a central role to those he termed "organic intellectuals," "organic" in the sense that "they constitute an organic link between the social class they represent and the superstructure" (Salamini, 1981, p. 62). The organic intellectual "speaks from and for the working class" (Luke, 1992, p. 27). While "all men [sic] are intellectuals" (Gramsci, 1972, p. 9) and therefore have the capacity to engage in counter-hegemonic critique, according to Kincheloe (2004), it is the critical educator in particular, whose duty it is to help students to question hegemonic ideologies, who reflects the position of the organic intellectual. In a parallel way, the critical researcher seeks to expose oppressive social relations through inquiry.

Critical research also draws extensively from writers from the Frankfurt School, particularly from the works of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. One significant contribution that these thinkers made to social theory was their critique of positivism (Bottomore, 1984; Giroux, 1982; Kincheloe, 2004). Horkheimer (1972) wrote:

As opposed to customary practice, the individual who is conscious of himself does not focus his attention merely upon the possibility of definite predictions and practical results, the universal requirements of natural science. When an active individual of sound common sense perceives the sordid state of the world, desire to change it becomes the guiding principle by which he organizes given facts and shapes them into theory. (p. 162)
Positivism in the social sciences, Horkheimer argued, views people simply as data and creates an artificial objectivity. He contrasts positivism’s neutral acceptance of “facts” with critical thinking, which argues that humans ought to study the world in order to change it. In his words, “Right thinking depends as much on right willing as right willing on right thinking” (p. 162).

The thinkers of the Frankfurt School also developed an analysis of society within a dialectical structure in which the “macro” social organization can be understood in relation to the “micro” events of human existence (Giroux, 1982). Important to this analysis is the idea that rationality is linked to emancipation; the individual progresses towards freedom through critique of systems of oppression. Bottomore (1984) explains that the Frankfurt School stressed the importance of ideology as a “major force sustaining domination, and hence [the importance of] criticism of ideology as a major factor in the process of emancipation” (p. 23)

Another important figure in the development of a critical understanding of education is Paulo Freire. In the following passage, the connection between fundamental ideas from Gramsci and the Frankfurt School and those of Freire (2000) are evident:

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men [sic] as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. (p. 73)

Freire condemned the “banking,” or transmission, model of education in which students are merely receptacles of static, lifeless information. In its place, he advocated for a “process of inquiry” in which both student and teacher are engaged as learners. In a similar way that counter-hegemonic activity and dialectical thought can lead to new understandings of the world and the subject’s historical place within
oppressive systems, the Freirean concept of conscientization entails the development of critical awareness. For Freire, "the process of learning was inseparable from individual empowerment and social change" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 71). The advancement towards freedom is a social process involving a nonhierarchical dialogical relationship between teachers and students.

Critical theories have shaped critical and emancipatory approaches to ESL in a number of ways. Some writers have objected to the fact that the English language teaching community has been, and continues to be, an apolitical technically-oriented profession (Pennycook, 2001). Tollefson (1995) sees a "widespread ideological view of English as a tool for gaining individual economic opportunity" although in actuality many experience the global dominance of English as "part of wider social, political, and economic processes that contribute to economic inequalities" (p. 2). More specifically, the profession of TESOL has been criticized for its silence on issues of racism and racialization (Kubota & Lin, 2006; Lee & Simon-Maeda, 2006).

An example of Freirean influence in language teaching can be seen in the work of Elsa Auerbach (1995). Working from a model of critical literacy in which the students' experiences and the interests of their communities are primary, Auerbach promotes a "participatory approach" to language education in which the educational process is "from the students to the curriculum rather than from the curriculum to the students" (p. 15). Another empowerment-based model in ESL is Benesch's (2001) fusion of English for academic purposes with critical pedagogy. In addition, Ramanthan (2002) and Willet and Jeannot (1993) advance teacher-training models based on empowerment education.

### 2.2.2 Developing Critical Approaches to Research and Education

As critical practices in education have developed, the empowerment approach, which centers on the transformation of the
"enlightened" individual, has been challenged. Luke (1992) summarizes what the mechanics of such a transformation might ideally look like in the classroom:

if students are given (equal) opportunity to articulate their cultural experiences, and if teachers help students discover how they self-construct cultural meanings and identities within and against ideological frameworks of mass culture, institutional settings and discourses - then students will have the critical tools with which to act in morally responsible, socially just and politically conscientious ways against individual and collective oppression. In this view, critical self-determination will lead to a democratic transformation of school and society. (p. 27)

In emancipatory research, the assumed process is similar. In her early work, Lather (1986b) sees research not only as a way to generate knowledge grounded in empirical evidence but also as a way to engage research participants in self-reflection as a first step towards transformation. Fay (1987) outlines the three aspects of critical social science as explanatory, critical, and empowering. The three aspects are linked in that such an approach will "simultaneously explain the social world, criticize it, and empower its audience to overthrow it" (p. 23, italics in the original).

This methodology has since been brought to task for its assumptions about the human subject (Ellsworth, 1992; Fay, 1987). For example, Fay (1987) argues that people "are...embodied, traditional, historical, and embedded" (p. 209), which limits our ability to both realize and change our conditions. Similarly, from a feminist perspective, several writers contend that critical pedagogical theory has distanced itself from the realities of classroom teaching and learning, and that its basic assumptions exclude women's experiences (Ellsworth, 1992; Gore, 1992; Luke, 1992). Ellsworth (1992) questions whether critical pedagogy as it is practiced actually changes power structures. She asserts that emancipatory education relies on rational argument and an implicit notion of the correct result of liberation. Ellsworth reasons that these
understandings of human subjectivity ignore the complexities of human experience stating

As long as the literature on critical pedagogy fails to come to grips with issues of trust, risk, and the operations of fear and desire around such issues of identity and politics in the classroom, their rationalistic tools will continue to fail to loosen deep-seated, self-interested investments in unjust relations of, for example, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. (p. 105)

Postmodern and poststructural approaches to critical theory, in addition to feminist critiques, have continued to challenge and transform critical pedagogy and research (Carlson, 1998; Cherryholmes, 1988; Kincheloe, 2004; Kohli, 1998; Lather, 1998; Pennycook, 2001). One major criticism is that critical theory locates its subject in a position of privilege and thus remains inaccessible to those it excludes. In Lather's (1992) view, “the discourses of emancipation are located as much within Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth’ as not” (p. 125). She sees the role of postmodernism as interrupting but also developing critical pedagogical practices.

One way critical theory has been extended has been by rejecting the dualistic, polarized view of human experience in the use of such categories as oppressor/oppressed. Pennycook (2001) puts it this way: “It is not adequate to talk in terms of people as either ideological dupes or autonomous subjects” (p. 120). Instead, he calls for more complex ways of thinking about issues such as class, gender, sexual orientation, power and resistance. In particular, he sees a need for investigations that bring the individual and specific contexts into focus.

De Castell and Bryson (1997c) present a volume of accounts documenting what critical pedagogy “actually looks like on the ground” (De Castell & Bryson, 1997b, p. 3). These experience-based works portray the difficulties that teachers and researchers struggle with in the “doing” of critical inquiry. For example, de Castell and Bryson (1997a) show how, in an attempt to empower women, a gender equity program in
education makes assumptions about how gender is practiced, thus potentially marginalizing those whose identities do not fit neatly into the traditional notion of “female.” In another piece, Hoodfar (1997) argues that although “exponents of critical pedagogy...theoretically begin with a recognition that subject position matters, this attention to race, sex, gender, and sexuality has not carried over into how critical pedagogy is practiced” (p. 211, italics in original). To illustrate, she talks about students’ racist attitudes she has experienced in relation to her identity as a female minority professor when attempting to practice critical pedagogy at the university level.

Similarly, researchers in TESOL have also begun producing works which confront simplistic views of critical practices. For example, in attempting to implement a critical pedagogical curriculum into an MA TESL class, Angel Lin (2004) finds that student teachers become frustrated with the inaccessibility of the academic language, which leads to a sense of powerlessness and alienation. Within a framework of critical race theory and critical multiculturalism, several writers have documented their struggles with issues of race, identity, and English language teaching (Curtis & Romney, 2006; Kubota, 2004; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Lee & Simon-Maeda, 2006). Curtis and Romney (2006) present narratives composed by ESL teachers of colour who portray their experiences with situations arising as a result of their being persons of colour. The authors conclude that “the treatment of TESOL professionals of color is often based on [a] disconnect” between “the realities of the English language and its perception by some students, employers, and others” (p. 190). Lee and Simon-Maeda (2006) address the matter of racialized researcher identities in studying ESL teaching. For Lee, the question emerges of what a researcher’s responsibilities are in dealing with racist ideologies when studying “her own kind” (p. 573).

Like the previously mentioned writers who problematize the doing of critical inquiry, I situate this current study within a discourse that
critically examines power in educational settings as it is experienced by those directly involved. This entails a complex understanding of power and identity and the particulars of the local context. More specifically, I locate this study within those investigations that seek to know what it looks like when actors resist existing power structures.

2.2.3 Studies of Resistance

Several writers (Giroux & Robbins, 2006; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; McLaren, 2007; Pennycook, 2001; Weis & Fine, 2004) regard schools as sites of social and cultural reproduction, maintaining the status quo rather than acting to transform it. Giroux (1982) summarizes Bourdieu: “the school and other social institutions legitimate and reinforce through specific sets of practices and discourses class based systems of behavior and dispositions that function to reproduce the existing dominant society” (p. 46). Conversely, resistance theory holds that cultural reproduction through education is imperfect and that schools are in fact places where alternative cultures compete for territory (Giroux, 2006). Several studies, such as Willis’s (1977) *Learning to Labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*, show how students may reject the dominant ideology sanctioned by the education system as irrelevant to their own lives.

Two studies of ESL classrooms are framed as student resistance to the dominance of English language and culture. Lin (1999) documents the responses of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds in English classes in Hong Kong. She learns that some students from lower income areas resist studying English because it is “boring,” angrily assuming that their chances of success in life rest on their ability to master a language to which they feel little connection.

In another study of student resistance, Canagarajah (1993) demonstrates how students in his ESL class in Sri Lanka resist the threat of cultural domination of English, and hence their own alienation,
while undermining their own chances at success in learning English. The result weakens the likelihood of their moving beyond their entrenched lower socioeconomic positions. Following Giroux, Canagarajah, distinguishes between “oppositional” behaviour, which is “unclear, ambivalent, and passive”, and “resistance” which involves “ideological clarity and commitment to collective action for social transformation” (p. 624).

As in this latter definition of “resistance,” I am interested in examples of behaviour in which injustices are challenged with a view to improving the lives of those disempowered by social inequalities. As such, I seek to portray in the present study examples of politically motivated resistance resulting in greater freedom for those coming from a disadvantaged position.

One such case is outlined by Weis and Fine (2004) in their research into two high school programs aimed at minimizing occurrences of teenage pregnancy. The authors find that the teachers have “crafted rich and fragile spaces within public schools” (p. 122). They discover “spaces of difference” (p. 149) where teachers “decenter privilege in the room” and help give social meaning to the students’ private concerns, and where students are able to safely enact different identities.

Researchers and teachers in ESL have also undertaken practices for social transformation. In the anthology, *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning* (Norton & Toohey, 2004a) writers reflect on how second language teaching and learning “might be modified, changed, developed, or abandoned in efforts to support learners, learning, and social change” (Norton & Toohey, 2004b, p. 2). The focus is on specific contexts and issues so as to understand (in)justice on a human level. Brito, Lima, and Auerbach (2004) describe a course in Cape Verdean language for students at a Boston school. The course is developed with the participatory approach to critical education described above where the learners and their communities determine the direction of the class.
In the same volume, Toohey and Waterstone (2004) discuss a collaborative research project amongst a group of researchers, graduate students, and teachers. Throughout the study, the group endeavours to engage in more equitable research practices: “When participants are positioned so that their expertise is relevant, then they are able to speak from positions of knowing” (p. 306). The authors contemplate differences between academics’ and teachers’ ways of reporting research findings and how to work with both discourses.

A study that is particularly relevant to the present research is Kathleen Casey’s (1993) *I Answer With My Life*. The subjects of this research project are female teachers who identify as “progressive political activists” (p. 13-14) and belong to one of three groups: Catholic women religious (nuns), secular Jewish women teachers, and Black women teachers. Through extensive life history interviews, Casey documents the meaning of teaching and social change for these women. An important conclusion is “we do not fully understand what it means to be political; in spite of the addition of such concepts as ‘resistance’ and ‘empowerment,’ the significance of the political continues to be inadequately documented and insufficiently theorized in progressive academic research” (p. 157). It is here that I frame the purpose of my study.

### 2.2.4 Critical Inquiry and the Work of ESL Teachers

At the very end of her previously mentioned piece on the participatory approach to critical literacy, Auerbach (1995) identifies the problems that this labour-intensive method of teaching would pose for teachers:

> [T]he participatory approach puts a heavy burden on practitioners...Teachers must identify issues, create materials, and constantly reinvent the curriculum. On the other hand, they typically work long hours, with minimal pay and no benefits, often patching together several part-time jobs, and they rarely have job security. There are few opportunities for professional development...Although the burden of change is on practitioners,
there is little support for them to make changes; like their students, they are disempowered and marginalized at the lowest ranks of their profession. (p. 29)

Auerbach recognizes that the lives of teachers and their students in the current context of English language training are inextricably tied, implying that, while it is important to work towards improving conditions for our students, ESL teachers’ work situations are also in great need of attention.

In this study, I examine how teachers experience invasive and alienating behaviours of managers in their workplace and how they resist such behaviour on their own and others’ behalf through the processes put in place by collective bargaining. Thus, this study shares with critical inquiry an interest in advancing social justice by seeking to understand how lives are shaped by power, and more specifically, how people shape power interpersonally.

One difference between the works cited above and the circumstances of the language teachers interviewed for this study is that most critical pedagogies and research assume that “education” means public education. Hence, there is little critical work that deals with what it means to teach and learn in an explicitly profit-driven institution. In educational facilities that are also businesses, the student is as much a customer as a learner, thus wielding consumer power in the classroom and reversing the assumption made in critical pedagogy of the teacher being structurally positioned as “superior” to student. In order to further situate teachers and learners in the context of the ESL industry, the next section of this chapter investigates the historical position of English language training as both a colonial and capitalist enterprise.

2.3 English as a World Language

International students travel overseas to learn English as a precondition for obtaining employment in a highly competitive, globally-
structured labour market. Canadian companies have stepped up to meet this demand with offerings of training in English communication skills, preparation for language proficiency tests, as well as a packaged "travel experience" which usually includes an opportunity to live in a homestay and various tourist excursions. As previously mentioned, students are positioned as consumers and teachers as service providers or even, as the teachers in this study state, as commodities themselves.

As Pennycook (1994; 2001) points out, English language learning and teaching are not neutral but take place within relations of power, some of which can become visible through historical examination. This section covers some of the literature on the past and current conditions of English language teaching on a global scale. It outlines the business of ESL teaching in Canada and then surveys some literature which critically assesses the implications of the "selling" of education on the world market.

2.3.1 ESL's Colonial Past

According to Pennycook (1994), the position of English as a world language has moved through three distinct historical periods. The first foundational period is English as the language of imperialism. In this phase, English was a language of and for control as the instrument for the political and economic advancement of British colonizers. The second phase of the status of English as a world language has been its use as a means of developmental aid. Pennycook submits that international English language dominance following the Second World War was couched in rhetoric of empowerment for the underprivileged.

Finally, the phase which governs English teaching in its current form is English as the language of the global capitalist economy. At this point, language has become a commodity to be "freely" exchanged on the world market. In actuality, the demand for English from speakers of other languages is not a "free" choice at all but rather a construction of
"Minority World" (Apple, Kenway, & Singh, 2005) economic policies. An example of what this demand looks like on an individual level can be seen in a quotation by two Brazilian English language teaching (ELT) specialists: “Most middle- and upper-class Brazilians know that their children must acquire an adequate command of English or they run the risk of missing out on opportunities for the better paid jobs offered by multinational corporations” (Rajagopalan & Rajagopalan, 2005, p. 3).

This latter description characterizes the situations of many international ESL students studying at language schools across Canada who are seeking English skills less out of genuine interest (although this may be a secondary reason) than because the employment market demands it. The English language functions much as a cultural gateway through which second language learners must be given entry in order to access desirable employment.

2.3.2 The Globalization of English

The English language and ELT are enmeshed in a web of cultural, political, and economic discourses spun from European colonialism and globalization. Within the rhetoric of English as the language of the international market, the discourse of ELT still points to its perceived value as a tool of “empowerment.” Likewise, the commodification of English can be seen as an aspect of neocolonialism.

It is Pennycook’s (1994) primary objective to show how the globalization of English is not just about political economics but about power as a cultural relationship. He differentiates between the discourses of English as an international language and the “worldliness” of English. ELT, he holds, has been understood in mainstream discourses as “natural, neutral, and beneficial” (p. 6), and he attempts to deconstruct this commonly held ideology by looking at the historical conditions that created English as a world language as well as its current local uses. He claims that it is not possible “just to teach the language” without
mobilizing relations of domination (p. 257). However, he demonstrates that English can be appropriated by students and engaged for their own benefit.

The main concern about linguistic hegemony for Singh, Kell, and Pandian (2002) is what they observe as a drive towards monolingualism, which threatens the sustainability of cultural and linguistic diversity. They write:

By taking over the cognitive domains of education, information, and entertainment the project of globalizing English colonises the space of the languages it others. In occupying an important evangelical and marketing role for English, ELT businesses could also hasten the disappearance of other languages and the people who speak them. (p. 78-79)

Like Pennycook, they suggest that one way to curb the hegemonic position of English and ELT is to teach bilingual students to appropriate English on their own terms.

One purpose of a volume of essays (Braine, 2005b) by EFL teachers who teach in their home countries is to try to overcome the scarcity of professional development resources available to and by indigenous instructors. Braine observes that the two main professional development organizations for ESL/EFL teachers, the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), are dominated by British and American members respectively. While the majority of EFL educators reside in their home countries, they lack access to professional support (Braine, 2005a). The authors in this volume represent one effort to overcome structural inequalities in EFL.

In the context of the global marketplace, English has been steadily gaining exchange value. Pennycook (1994) contends that there is a tendency "to celebrate the market-driven expansion of English as an innocent, technical operation, reducing students to 'consumers', teachers to 'suppliers of a product', and schools as 'corporations'" (, p. 165).
Singh, Kell and Pandian (2002) list some of the many English language products now available on the world market: programs offered both transnationally and in English speaking countries, courses which include English for specific purposes such as business or academic preparation, textbooks, examinations, methods, theories, and teachers (p. 65). With such a selection of products and destinations, ELT has become a service industry. Both Pennycook (1994) and Singh, Kell and Pandian (2002) contend that this trend is often presented as neutral or even favourable.

2.3.3 The Business of ESL in Canada

Canada is an active player in the ELT marketplace, but there is little evidence that documents its recent growth aside from a few newspaper articles, which generally celebrate the economic boon that ESL visitors bring. "ESL Students a Gold Mine" (O'Connor, 2004) is the title of one such piece. Another estimates that 40,000 students migrate to Vancouver annually, spending an estimated "$500 million in tuition and accommodation costs, with a further $260 million being spent on entertainment, travel, and retail purchases" (Bellet, 2003, p. G3).

Statistics Canada identified English and French language instruction as a "service industry" in a survey undertaken in the late 90's to discover the significance of the language teaching industry for the country's economy (Campbell & Couillard, 2000). The rationale for the study is presented as follows: "Service industries dominate the industrial economies and their importance is growing as a result of globalization and economic restructuring" (p. 25). Here, language teaching is viewed as an income-generating enterprise with growth potential. The writers reveal that within the institutions that responded to the survey, student numbers almost doubled between 1994 and 1998 (p. 22). They also write that in response to the pressure of working within the new knowledge economy, "the teaching profession is in transition. The enormous amount
of knowledge to transmit is forcing teachers to become instructors rather than teachers" (p. 55). I hesitate to accept this depiction of language teaching, as the transmission model of teaching is often rejected by ESL teachers and learners who see themselves as engaging in a much more complex and meaningful activity. However, the underlying assumption does point to the fact that students as workers-in-training experience great pressure to compete in the global knowledge economy, and this in turn puts pressure on teachers to meet their demands.

Another Canadian organization that has been tracking the growth of the ESL industry is the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools (CAPLS). CAPLS represents the interests of the private English language businesses, promoting Canada as a destination for international students. The association has recently signed a letter of intent to join with the Canadian Language Council (CLC) which represents public sector ESL schools in much the same way. They will form a new “Canadian language training association” (Canadian Association of Private Language Schools). The newly merged association will also be hiring a branding company to improve its image overseas in the hopes of rivaling Britain and Australia, the sector’s current leaders (L. Auzins, personal communication, March 27, 2007). This important merger indicates that the Canadian ESL business community is intending to become more competitive in the global market. The recently formed organization’s title is important to note. It uses the word “training” in place of “teaching” or “learning” revealing the business conception of language teaching as a technical skill rather than as a democratically transformative experience.

2.3.4 Education as a Commercial Product

Fleming and Walker (2004) corroborate the Statistics Canada statement that there has been an intensification of ESL teachers’ work in recent years. This is a commonly noted effect of the corporatization of
education and has been discussed more thoroughly with regard to public than to private sector schooling. Raduntz (2005) examines the movement of capitalism into public education, concluding that the marketization of education is the result of the advancement of the capitalist economy, where new markets are constantly sought in the drive to maintain growth. The current push to sell educational services she views as an attempt to stimulate the economy. However, Raduntz reasons that education suffers under market forces: “the capitalist form of market exchange in its mediating role cannot deal with quality education nor with social, ethical, or equity concerns. It can only deal with quantifiable ‘things’ as commodities” (p. 242).

Looking at a more specific aspect of education in the global marketplace, Ziguras (2005) explores the international trade in education. He maintains that transnational education, often referred to as “offshore schools,” is less regulated than domestic education. He looks at how the World Trade Organization, as outlined in the General Agreement on Trades and Services, frames education as a commercial service. As a consequence, on a local level, noncommercial interests such as personal and cultural development and knowledge building are neglected.

Market-driven education tends to put increased pressure on teachers as their work is subsumed in the corporate scheme. “[Teachers’] work is reduced to a series of performance indicators that are used to make judgments about their productivity and to refine mechanisms to induce conformity” (Apple et al., 2005); teachers are compelled to conform with what the market dictates. Teachers’ Work in a Globalizing Economy (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 1999) scrutinizes this particular issue through the lens of labour process theory, a theory that sees labour as controlled to the point of deskilling the workforce. They contend that globalization is changing teachers’ work dramatically in the ways mentioned above: regulation by market forces, an emphasis
on the student as consumer, and the deskilling and technicization of teachers’ work. Smyth et al. examine teachers’ perceptions of their work in this context, focusing on case studies of two schools, and they conclude with an appeal to cultivate a critical theory of teacher’s work. This book will be discussed further in the following section on teachers’ work.

Despite the pervasiveness of global capitalism, there is room for change. Raduntz (2005) assures us that capitalism is actually a fragile structure; hence, systemic transformation at various levels is possible. Franzway (2005), in a piece on women in labour unions, points out that “against these forces of globalization, ‘the local’ is posed as the site of everyday experience that produces diverse knowledges and practices of named, known actors who are both the victims and the opponents of globalization from above” (p. 266-267). In this view, counterhegemonic work is carried out by specific individuals in specific circumstances.

Many of the perspectives discussed in this section converge in their call for a critical resistance to the globalization and marketization of education. In the ESL context, Pennycook (1994) calls for a critical pedagogy of language learning which values student diversity. Singh, Kell, and Pandian (2002) also see ESL teachers as key actors in resisting the disempowering aspects of a globalized English. They want English language teachers to undertake a critical pedagogy that would assist learners in becoming aware of language politics in order to move towards appropriating language on their own terms and preserving multilingualism.

### 2.3.5 The Business of ESL and the Work of ESL Teachers

The preceding discussion suggests that both learners and teachers are disadvantaged by the global commodification of education in general and ESL in particular. ESL students suffer immense pressure to master English in order to survive in the knowledge-based employment
marketplace. International language schools compete with each other to provide the services that these students demand.

This competition affects teachers' work in many ways. It produces downward pressure on tuition rates, which in turn drives employers to seek reductions in labour costs. The student is treated as a consumer, hence the teacher as a service-provider who is responsible for meeting student demands. In addition, these schools depend on extensive marketing schemes in order to continue to attract students to their programs. The marketing material may not always reflect the realities of language learning. For example, some institutions advertise guarantees on test results. This puts enormous pressure on teachers to produce improbable outcomes. Finally, and most significantly to the teachers I interviewed, placing educational endeavours in a business context results in corporate managerial approaches that do not always work in congruence with the choices of teachers who see themselves as capable of making autonomous decisions based on their understandings of the learning process. In these significant ways, ESL teaching conditions are determined by the globalization of English in a capitalist economy. The following section examines theories about the work of teachers in the mainstream public system and in both private and public ESL.

2.4 Theorizing Teachers' Work in Public Education and in Public and Private ESL

The participants in this study speak not only about troubles with insufficient wages and poor working conditions, but provide, as well, extensive examples of how they and their colleagues were manipulated, bullied and controlled by unreasonable management practices. Such victimization and neglect of ESL teachers appears repeatedly in literature describing work issues for English language teachers. For example, Willet and Jeannot (1993) declare "teachers in adult ESL literacy work in the margins. They work in leftover spaces, with inappropriate materials,
under unpleasant conditions, for little money or professional status, with students who are ignored and excluded by the dominant society" (p. 477).

Discussions within the ESL teaching community that deal with teachers’ work situations often advocate promoting English language teaching as a “professional” occupation (Blaber & Tobash, 1989; Brown, 1992; Edstam, 2001). Provincial, national and international associations for teachers of English as a second or foreign language, such as BC TEAL, TESL Canada, and TESOL, also advance the notion of ESL teaching as a profession. However, the assumption that we need to become more “professional” appears to rest on shaky ground considering that there have been few empirical studies of ESL teachers’ working situations, and there are no well-developed theories of ESL teachers’ labour.

Central to research that investigates and analyzes teachers’ work in mainstream education is the view that teaching is paid employment that can and should be scrutinized with theories of labour and human capital and that teachers’ work is subject to extensive control. I will then survey discussions and studies on teachers’ work in ESL education. Material about both public K-12 and private and public ESL teachers’ work and working conditions provides a comparative context for examining the working conditions reported by the teachers in this study.

2.4.1 Teachers’ Work in K-12 Education

Lortie’s (1975) publication of Schoolteacher in the 1970s was an early attempt to comprehensively examine the work of teaching. Lortie looks at the socialization of teachers into the occupation and sees this process occurring in isolation in large part because of the physical “cellular” structure of schools. As a result, “[c]onservatism, individualism, and presentism [oriented to immediate classroom demands and student needs] are significant components in the ethos of American
classroom teachers” (p. 212, italics added). Lortie suggests that the occupation of teaching does not constitute a profession in part because teachers do not actively share knowledge beyond preservice training as other professions would (p. 79-81). His proposed solution is for teachers to begin developing their collective knowledge base. While accepting that teachers’ work is ‘undervalued, several subsequent studies (Butt, Raymond, McCue, & Yamagishi, 1992; K. Casey, 1993; Nelson, 1992) challenge Lortie’s assumptions that public school educators lack the willingness to develop their knowledge base.

While Lortie’s study is an early general sociological analysis of teachers’ work, the International Labour Organization (ILO) presents a contemporary evaluation focused more specifically on the status of teachers’ wages internationally. Based on publications from teachers’ organizations around the world, the ILO finds that teachers’ pay is not on par with occupations requiring equivalent training (Bell & International Labour Office, 1978). Two later studies from the same organization find that, on an international scale, while time spent on non-teaching duties such as administration, preparation and assessment increased, teachers’ salary levels were in decline, particularly in developing countries (International Labour Office, 1981; International Labour Office, 1992). The final report also concludes that structural reforms imposed upon teachers, such as the move towards student-centred teaching, can also increase teachers’ workloads.

The following section further considers concerns identified by the ILO. These matters of a lack of professional treatment, rising expectations of the job of teaching, and the negative effects of structural change re-emerge in several publications that more closely examine teachers’ work in English speaking countries.

From interviews with teachers conducted in the 1970s, Connell (1985) reasons that understanding the process of teacher labour is fundamental to developing a theory of education. He refers to education
as a “labour-process-without-an-object” (p. 73) in that there is no tangible “product” as a result of teaching. He claims that challenges inherent to the work of schooling include the fact that teachers’ work is difficult to define. There are no clear parameters to indicate exactly where the job begins or ends, so the variety of duties can appear infinite. This is one contributor to work intensification. Other difficulties that teachers experience, according to Connell, are the harmful effects of structural reform imposed from above and the often overwhelming impact of social change. Additionally, teachers’ work is highly gendered, with men disproportionately occupying higher level positions. Solutions to these problems, he advises, ought to take teachers’ needs into consideration by first recognizing that teachers have a legitimate interest in their work. Therefore, their input needs to be included in the shaping of reform processes.

Building upon Lortie’s conclusions outlined above, Hargreaves (1994) poses the question of “whether newly provided preparation time [for public school teachers in Ontario] would bring about the development of collaboration and collegiality among teachers, or whether the use of such time would be absorbed into the existing culture of individualism” (p. 207). In interviews Hargreaves carried out with elementary school teachers and principals, he finds that the increase in noncontact hours did not motivate teachers to spend more time working together.

Instead, Hargreaves noticed a deep discrepancy between administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions of teachers’ work. One important observation is that teachers and administrators have conflicting impressions of the way teachers use their time. He states, “From their distant standpoint, [administrators] see the classroom not in its densely packed complexity, in its pressing immediacy, as the teacher does. Rather, they see it from the point of view of the single change they are supporting and promoting” (p. 107). In fact, he finds that
administrators "colonize" (p. 109) teachers' non-teaching time with their own agenda. To avoid the strain associated with restructuring imposed upon teachers, Hargreaves suggests bringing about change from within teachers' communal understandings of their work. To this end, he advances the concept of a "moving mosaic" (p. 257), a way for teachers to improve their local circumstances that is neither hierarchical nor systematic.

Connell (1995) and Smyth et al. (1999) further investigate a labour process approach to education. Connell (1995) claims that, as paid employment, teachers' work has common traits with other forms of labour. He sees the curriculum as the intersection between teachers' work and students' learning; it is the joint labour of both. He argues that teaching and learning involve "the formation and transformation of capacities for practice" in which capacities for practice "affect the possibilities that can emerge in the social process" (p. 109). In this sense, to deskill and control teachers by eliminating their autonomous decision making power is to limit democratic possibilities in the classroom.

Smyth et al. (1999) situate the work of teachers in the global economy. As public education becomes increasingly economically driven, they maintain, it is necessary to understand changes in education from the point of view of the labour process, centring on how teachers are controlled. They theorize that in capitalist enterprises, it is essential to control labour in order to maximize profit. In education, this transpires through the curriculum, through supervision and evaluation, and through the complicity of teachers themselves. One result of this, says Connell (1995), is the deskilling of teachers; their jobs become the implementation, rather than the creation, of curricula. Significantly, "teachers lose their capacity to theorize about their work" (Smyth et al., 1999, p. 46).

Smyth et al. also describe two studies carried out at schools in Australia. One school had recently experienced the move to a "flatter
management structure" (p. 71) which allowed teachers to engage in more diverse duties within the school. However, the researchers find that the potential for disapproval by colleagues makes for a "powerful disciplinary force" (p. 87) and hence operates as a system of control. The second study shows how teachers tend to associate "professionalism" with an ethic of care for their students. This sentiment can compel teachers to take on excessive amounts of work in an attempt to meet the needs of their students and their schools.

In the face of such covert mechanisms of control, these authors too call for a "revitalized critical theory of teachers' work" (Smyth et al., 1999, p. 146), linking global capitalism to the classroom. They also argue that the curriculum is a labour issue which needs to be dealt with at the bargaining table. Unions and universities are identified as two institutions that can support teachers in challenging the status quo.

In another investigation, Robertson (1996) questions whether the restructuring of teachers' work to expand their responsibilities under the banner of renewed "professionalism" has actually engendered greater autonomy. Robertson maintains that educators are obligated to satisfy specific requirements instead of possessing the freedom to exercise judgment over what constitutes appropriate knowledge-building practices and hence to direct student learning. She concludes that ideological control in education "has been unceremoniously split from teachers' work and placed in the firm hands of administrators, politicians and transnational capital" (p. 30). At the same time, teachers have acquired additional responsibilities that increase their workloads.

From the literature surveyed in this section we can discover a global trend towards lower teacher salaries relative to the cost of living with concurrent increased demands on teachers' time. At the same time, there is a trend towards greater external control of teachers' work.
2.4.2 The Work of ESL Teachers in K-12 and Higher Education

In outlining the context for his study of EFL teachers in Poland, Johnston (1997) remarks that there is little data on the work of ESL/EFL teachers to build upon. He points out that second language teaching lacks the relatively homogeneous contexts typical of mainstream education, which may in part explain this scarcity (p. 685). However, there do exist a few studies that, taken together, begin to illustrate some common concerns that English language educators have about their employment situations.

A survey undertaken in the 1980s by a professional standards committee with TESOL, the American-based professional association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, was comprised of a questionnaire mailed out to a portion of TESOL members (Blaber & Tobash, 1989). Respondents were asked to rank their employment concerns and indicate their relative importance. The results show that ESL teachers have many concerns about their working situations: salary and professional recognition rank highest, and other employment issues such as job security and access to benefits follow closely behind.

An important finding of the report is a distinct split between full-time workers and part-time workers. While only half of TESOL members were in full-time employment at the time of the survey, they represented almost three-quarters of the respondents. The researchers ask what might be different about full-timers’ and part-timers’ lives that enable or incite only one group to respond to questionnaires: “Could it be that part-timers are also marginal members of professional organizations?” (Blaber & Tobash, 1989, p. 4). They also observe that teachers working part time are more concerned with salary and job security while full-time teachers are more preoccupied with status.

After setting out to learn whether ESL teachers at one college apply academic research findings to their daily work, Crookes and Arakaki (1999) find that not only do the language educators in their study see no
practical value in scholarly texts, they are extremely overworked and thus have no time to make use of such material. Most of these informants work at two to three schools, with an average workload of fifty hours per week. These teachers have to piece together multiple part-time contracts in order to make a livelihood. The effects on teachers' lives are profound; many claim that their health and other aspects of their lives are suffering. One informant simply says, "I'm trying to stay out of the hospital" (p. 17).

As Lortie observed of public school teachers, Crookes and Arakaki (1999) find these ESL teachers work mostly in isolation and rely heavily on personal experience for teaching ideas. Like many of their public school counterparts, the informants work long hours under increasingly difficult conditions. They appeal to other academics who are in comparatively privileged positions to further investigate the learning and teaching conditions of ESL education.

The overdependence on part-time faculty has been identified by TESOL (2006) as an overwhelming problem in the world of ESL education. Graf (2003) asserts that the "proliferation of inferior part-time and temporary TESOL positions, especially in adult and higher education means that ESOL instructors must work multiple part-time jobs, go back to school for K-12 certification, or leave the profession altogether." She sees the problem resting with capitalist competition and calls for an increased ratio of mission-oriented to profit-oriented ESL enterprises and a critical analysis of profit-driven language education. She also sees a need for the expansion of union membership.

Stanley, Grosse, McLaughlin, and Longmate's (2003) report on a forum held at the 2003 TESOL Convention conclude that support from ESL teachers' colleagues, from unions, and from other TESOL members is vital for making progress on the problem of the over-reliance on part-time faculty positions. Finally, speaking at the TESOL 2007 Convention, a teacher and union activist from a Canadian college presents the model
of “regularization,” or movement towards full-time employment, that occurs at his unionized workplace as a possible solution to the part-time problem in the United States (Cosco, Hoeller, & Schmid, 2007).

ESL instructors in other contexts also exhibit dissatisfaction with their working situations. Markham (1999) studied stress and coping strategies among ESL teachers working with children in public schools. Interviewing twelve teachers, he finds that their concerns range from complaints about salary to feelings of isolation. They claim that they lack support from the administration and other teachers at their schools. Markham recommends that public schools address this issue by scheduling more time for ESL teachers to meet with administrators and their peers teaching in standard K-12 programs. He also encourages more research into second language teachers’ work.

The next study to be discussed centres on English as foreign language (EFL) teachers’ lives and work. EFL refers to the study of English for use in non-English-speaking countries. EFL teachers may be native speakers of English or second language speakers. They may work at public institutions or for private businesses.

It is in the Polish EFL context that Johnston (1997) carries out biographical interviews with English language teachers. He interviews seventeen teachers about their working lives, and determines that these teachers do not rely on notions of career or vocation to describe their working lives. Like American part-time instructors, these teachers, too, work multiple jobs because their teaching wages are not adequate for the cost of living in Poland. The informants express a sense of powerlessness: as one speaker puts it, “I don’t see any chance of leading any kind of normal life if I’m supposed to be a good teacher who devotes most of his time to teaching. It just isn’t physically possible” (p. 698-699). Here we see comparable results to those of Crookes and Arakaki (1999): because of the extensive hours of work, not only does the quality of the teachers’ lives suffer, so too does the quality of education they are able to offer.
Johnston speculates that the low status and pay of these teachers is related to gender since 11 of the 17 the instructors interviewed for the study are female. He recommends that professional organizations such as IATEFL Poland advocate for these teachers. From a research perspective, he believes that we need to learn whether similar situations exist in other ESL teaching contexts and that we need to discover options for improving the lives of EFL teachers. He states that although some notions of professionalism can be problematic, increased individual autonomy and a strong representative association are aspects of professionalism that would be very desirable for EFL teachers.

Drawing from yet another ESL context, Auerbach (1991) focuses primarily on English language training for immigrants in the USA and considers the work of ESL teachers in relation to the position of ESL students in North American society. She states:

A fact of life for ESL educators is that we are marginalized: college ESL instructors are often hired as adjunct faculty on a semester by semester basis to teach non-credit preparatory courses in academic skill centers. Elementary ESL teachers teach in pull-out programs, traveling from school to school and setting up shop in closets, corridors, and basements. Adult educators teaching survival ESL have to work two or three jobs in order to survive; jobs with benefits, living wages, and any measure of security are few and far between. (p. 1)

Her main thesis is that historically, following slavery, immigrant workers have occupied the lowest paid jobs. The purpose of ESL teaching is not to offer a holistic education that will give second language speakers an advantage in life in their new country, but rather to maintain an underclass of workers to support North American capitalism. The same may be argued for international students coming to study English in Canada who are preparing for employment in the global capitalist market albeit in their home countries. ESL teachers are victims of the same system: "We are service workers to the academy so that our students can continue to be service workers to society" (p. 2). Like many of the authors
cited above, Auerbach urges us to develop critical ways of viewing ESL teaching; for her this means taking up issues of (in)justice in the classroom. She asks us to look critically at our teaching as work. She states, “we’re workers in a system that doesn’t value our work, and we need to act like workers” (p. 7). She encourages ESL teachers to struggle in solidarity with their students and peers and to seek strength through collective bargaining.

2.4.3 Researching the Work of ESL Teachers

The work of ESL teachers shares many challenges with that of public school teachers. What has been termed “intensification” in mainstream education seems to be the norm for the ESL teachers in the studies described above. Generally, the wages of ESL instructors appear to be insufficient for doing a good job of teaching while maintaining a reasonable quality of life. As with K-12 teachers, both isolation and a gender-based inequitable division of labour are problems for those teaching ESL.

In addition to the ways that ESL teachers’ experiences parallel those of teachers in the public system, language instructors also feel marginalized in a number of ways, from being undervalued compared to colleagues in the same institutions, to enduring a lack of resources and appropriate space for working in. Attrition, or the threat of attrition, is another issue that emerges in several studies (Crookes & Arakaki, 1999; Johnston, 1997; Markham, 1999). Many teachers do not see teaching ESL as life-sustaining.

Collective bargaining is one solution to teachers’ employment issues proposed in several studies of mainstream and ESL teaching included in this section (Auerbach, 1991; Cosco et al., 2007; Graf, 2003; Smyth et al., 1999; Stanley et al., 2003), and this is the focus of the interviews I conducted with the four participants in this study. I attempt
to find out what concerns teachers were addressing through collective bargaining and how they feel the presence of a union changed their work. In order to further contextualize the struggles these teacher unionists describe, the following section provides a survey of some of the literature on teacher unions in Canada and the USA.

2.5 Teacher Unions

The foregoing discussion shows that many ESL teachers experience similar challenges in their working conditions to public school teachers. However, while the interests of most public school teachers in Canada and the United States are represented by unions, the vast majority of ESL teachers in the private sector are without collective agreements.

This section examines the literature on teachers' unions in Canada and the United States. I begin by discussing some differences between union representation in the public and private sectors and argue that evidence derived from the public model can be applied to private sector teachers' unions. Following this, I give a description of the historical basis for the development of teacher unions and then briefly outline some key points on the "problems" with teacher unions as they are debated in the literature. I end by looking at how teachers and teacher union activists see the role and relevance of their unions in their lives.

I include information on American teachers' unions here for a number of reasons. The primary reason is that little is written about Canadian teachers' unions, so the discourse is largely shaped by the American perspective. Also, Canadian labour history, including the growth of teacher unions, is intertwined with that of the US. For example, Canadian labour laws were initially based on the American National Labour Relations Act (Lawton, Bedard, MacLellan, & Xiaobin, 1999, p. 24). Canadian teachers' unions continue to be influenced by
their American counterparts as is clear with the recent trend towards "professional unionism."

2.5.1 Public and Private Sector Unions

In examining teacher unions, the focus in this section will be exclusively on public sector unions. The research I undertook, however, centred on ESL teacher unions in profit-driven schools. There are some significant differences between public and private sector unions, and some argue that the two cannot be compared. However, the similarities between public school and ESL teachers' work as well as their collective bargaining processes justify drawing from the literature on public school teacher unions to provide contextual background for understanding the unionization of private sector ESL educators.

Public school teacher unions represent one of the largest unionized work forces in both Canada and the USA. Private ESL school teaching, on the contrary, is an occupation with an extremely low union density. This trend is in keeping with national statistics on union density. While the private sector led the labour movement in its beginnings, the public sector surpassed the private sector when it was widely organized in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1950s in the United States, roughly one third of workers were in unions (Kahlenberg, 2006, p. 10). Currently, about one third of American public sector workers are represented by collective bargaining agreements compared to only about one twelfth of workers in private companies (Farber, 2006, p. 27). In Canada, approximately seventy percent of public employees are in unions as opposed to less than one fifth of those privately employed (Statistics Canada, 2000). These numbers show a general divergence in public and private sector unionization, which must be considered when examining the union experiences of the ESL teachers interviewed for this study.
One possible reason for the downturn in the proportion of unionized private sector workers is the pressure of market forces (Cresswell, Kerchner, & Murphy, 1980; Farber, 2006; Hannaway & Rotherham, 2006; Lawton et al., 1999). Many argue that employers in businesses are limited in what they can offer workers, so it is thought that union wages and other worker demands are unsustainable. Farber (2006) contends this is particularly due to foreign competition (p. 32). Other factors that account for the decline in union membership in the private sector may also include less favourable labour laws and opposition to unions by both employers and employees (p. 31-32).

The public sector, some writers feel, is less influenced by markets than it is by politics (Hannaway & Rotherham, 2006; Lawton et al., 1999; Lieberman, 1997). They argue that the most powerful unions, in particular teacher unions, can influence the direction of collective bargaining through political involvement, by supporting political candidates and influencing public policy, and are thus more powerful than those in the private sector (Lawton et al., 1999). At the same time, public sector unions are also subject to legislation determining their rights to collective action in ways private sector unions are not. Teachers and their unions, for instance, are often regulated not only by labour laws but also by education acts (ibid.).

Another important distinction between unions in the two sectors for contextualizing this current study is that the private sector is thought to be more difficult to organize than the public sector (Lieberman, 1997). This may be in part because it is easier for a small private business to close down than it is for a public institution. For anti-unionists, this is an incentive to promote the privatization of public schooling. In the context of my study, it underscores the determination of the teachers who undertook the task of unionizing their workplaces.

Though the differences between private and public unionization are significant, information about public school teacher collective
bargaining is still applicable to the experiences of the ESL teachers who unionized their private schools. One reason is that the public sector borrowed industrial union principles when it began to organize. This was partly because there was no alternative prototype for unionizing government workers. For teachers it also made sense, Casey (2006) points out, because schools were organized according to a factory model in their physical design, in the way time was segmented, and in the standardized curriculum. "Industrial-style collective bargaining agreements codified this standardization of school life, adopting industry's framework as its terms of reference" (p. 187). On the whole, public and private sector collective bargaining follow "the same basic logic and the dynamics of the process are quite similar," according to Cresswell, Kerchner, and Murphy (1980, p. 6).

As mentioned in the first chapter, it is difficult to obtain statistics on the unionization rates of public and private sector ESL schools in Canada because no organization keeps records of such rates. From the data available to me, I have been able to estimate that in Vancouver, for example, three of approximately 170 private ESL schools have unions (a rate of less than two percent), while all but one of the public college- and university-affiliated English language schools are represented by unions.

### 2.5.2 History of Teacher Unions

Over the past one hundred years, teacher unions in Canada and the USA have grown from small organizations promoting the interests of education in general to politically powerful unions that defend teachers and significantly influence the direction of educational policy. In both Canada and the USA, what would eventually become teacher unions began as educational organizations (Kahlenberg, 2006; Lawton et al., 1999) whose goal was to improve quality of education in general. In Canada, public education is the charge of the provinces, so educational associations emerged at this level in the late 1800s. Initially, these
organizations included both teachers and school administrators, and the teachers occupied rather inferior positions (Lawton et al., 1999).

Gradually, Canadian teachers became less inclined to accept their poor salaries and difficult working conditions and began organizing around work issues. Most teachers' associations that exist currently were formed from 1914 to 1920 (Lawton et al., 1999). It was not until much more recently, however, that teacher organizations in Canada gained union rights: "The move to extend full collective bargaining rights to public sector employees started with Quebec teachers in the 1960s where, in 1964 and 1965, the private sector model was extended to the public sector" (p. 31). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, most provincial teacher unions throughout Canada achieved full collective bargaining rights, including the right to strike. Notably, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation did not achieve the right to strike until 1987 (Novakowski, 2006).

The history of American teacher unionism follows a similar pattern. The National Education Association (NEA) and American Teachers' Federation (AFT) were formed in 1857 and 1916 respectively. Like the educational associations in Canada, early on the NEA was dominated by school administrators (Kahlenberg, 2006). The two organizations eventually came to represent the rights of teachers but, like their Canadian counterparts, lacked full collective bargaining rights until the 1960s and 1970s.

Part of the opposition to collective bargaining for teachers came from within the NEA. It was considered not to be "professional" for teachers to belong to unions (Kahlenberg, 2006). To this, Albert Shankar, former president of the United Federation of Teachers and the AFT, asked if it was "professional to be poorly paid and bossed around by administrators?" (p. 11). He held that unionization was a necessary step towards professional treatment.
Through collective bargaining, teachers in Canada and the United States have gained higher salaries, access to benefits, and improved working conditions, including allowances for such matters as maximum class sizes and duty-free lunch hours. Teachers also have recourse to a grievance procedure which obliges the employer to honour the collective agreement.

In addition, teacher tenure and teacher pay are based on length of service with provisions for certification levels. Seniority is the primary means for determining access to work. Without a system of seniority to provide a predictable route to tenure, teachers may be vulnerable to arbitrary and possibly retaliatory managerial decisions. As Johnson and Donaldson (2006) write, “Unions first gained strength among teachers because school officials were perceived as arbitrary, punitive, and politically influenced” (p. 139). Such concerns are what maintain the relevance of unions for many teachers today, as will become clear later in this section. In general, unionization afforded teachers the capacity to engage in collective action, which put teachers in a far more powerful position than if they were to act individually.

2.5.3 The teacher Union Debate

“Critics assert that teacher contracts usurp managerial authority, stifle creative staffing, protect ineffective educators, prevent rewarding talent, and produce massive inefficiencies” (Hess & Kelly, 2006, p. 53). Opponents of teacher unions also condemn them for opposing school choice, unjustifiably influencing legislation, hindering reform, and acting in self-serving ways that interfere with the best interests of students’ education (Lawton et al., 1999; Lawton, 2000; Lieberman, 1997; Moe, 2006; Urban, 1982). The most severe critics contend that the power of teacher unions ought to be either weakened or eliminated. The more moderate reform unionists feel that the structure and content of collective bargaining in education needs to change; they believe that
unions can act as vehicles for positive educational reform by becoming more accountable for the quality of education and bringing teachers into the circle of educational policy making (Bascia, 1994; L. Casey, 2006; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993; Kerchner, Koppich, & Weeres, 1997; Kerchner, 2002; Koppich, 2006; Naylor, 2002). Many teachers, on the other hand, still feel that they need unions to engage in the traditional activities of protecting and representing them, and they do not see their own labour-related interests as inherently at odds with the educational interests of the children they teach (Bascia, 1994; Poole, 2000; Public Agenda, 2003).

2.5.4 Teacher and Teacher Unionist Views on their Unions

Naylor (2002) notes that public discussions dealing with “problems” with teacher unions often lack voices from members and union officers. This section will look at teachers’ and teacher unionists’ views on their unions and the role that these organizations play in teachers’ work lives as a point of comparison for understanding how the ESL teachers I interviewed see the unions at their workplaces making a difference in their own lives.

Bascia (1994) reports on the union reform movement in three California schools in the late 1980s from the viewpoints of teachers. Through the framework of what she refers to as “teachers’ professional communities,” or the social networks that teachers work within, she asks how the new union structures either help or hinder teachers’ abilities to do their work. At these schools, teachers and their unions became more involved in the decision-making processes of their schools, union leaders worked more closely with administrators, and new programs such as teacher development for new and struggling teachers were collaboratively implemented.

Bascia (1994) finds that teachers at two of the participating schools feel the reforms did not work well for them. One of these schools
initially had a strong teacher-union affiliation which was weakened by the transitions to reform unionism (p. 93-95). However, the third school experienced relative success with reform measures:

Teachers were able to shift from a position of powerlessness relative to administrators, where they had few opportunities to participate in the broader district community, to a position of greater political power, professional recognition, and professional support. The union was the key to this transformation, and teachers were well aware of its role in the change. (p. 57)

One explanation for the discrepancy in perceived levels of success between the three schools may be related more to issues of power distribution than to the ideology behind the reform movement. A case in point is that despite the apparent effectiveness of the reform measures at the third school, the administration was initially reluctant to share power with the teachers (Bascia, 1994, p. 96). Regarding the two schools which experienced more problems with reforms Bascia (1994) comments, "the new relationships do not seriously challenge authority relations between teachers and administrators, but leave in place many of the structures that reinforce teachers' subordination" (p. 99).

Bascia (1994) concludes that in order to be effective in involving teachers in reform, unions need to recognize and respect teacher's locally specific ways of working, networking, and seeking support. This reinforces Hargreaves' (1994) and Connell's (1985) conclusion in the previous section that changes in public education need to take into account teachers' perspectives in order to be effective. Bascia (1994) comments that teachers' needs are not only "professional" in the sense of improving the quality of education but include protection and representation, needs which are traditionally met by labour unions. For many teachers at these schools, the long-established role of a union continues to have practical relevance.

A broader look at teachers' perspectives on their work and on their unions has been undertaken by Public Agenda (2003), a public research
group. The organization surveyed 1345 public school teachers about their perceptions of their unions, teacher tenure, merit pay, and other work-related issues by a mail-out questionnaire. In addition, smaller focus groups of teachers were interviewed on the same issues.

The authors find that teachers enjoy their work and derive meaning from it but feel that the public is too hard on them and they receive little support. They say that there are limits to their abilities to help all children learn since factors such as familial and social influences are out of teachers’ control. On the issues of teacher tenure and reward schemes, they support the seniority system as it “addresses their sense of vulnerability” (Public Agenda, 2003, p. 22) despite the possibility that it may reward less effective teachers. Most can agree to the idea of extra pay for those who work harder or accept appointments in more difficult schools. However, most would not consent to merit pay based on student test results because student achievement is often a result of influences outside of a teacher’s control.

These teachers are concerned about being targeted unfairly by parents, students or administrators, and therefore feel that a union is needed for protection. In addition, 81 percent believe that their wages and conditions of work benefit from collective bargaining. The report responds to efforts to implement reform unionism:

While some may argue that old-style unionism needs to be replaced by a focus on professionalism, it is bread-and-butter issues – securing money and benefits – that have a lot to do with why unions enjoy teacher loyalty. Teachers simply believe that unions protect their interests. (Public Agenda, 2003, p. 17)

Newer teachers, however, are generally less supportive of unions than experienced ones. The writers speculate, “Perhaps veterans are more inclined toward unions because they can visualize the consequences in a world where unions did not exist” (p. 35).

On the problem of teacher quality, the authors of the report note, the least experienced teachers are often assigned the hardest students to
teach and the most challenging schools, which reinforces the idea that "teachers are the problem" (Public Agenda, 2003, p. 37). They propose a solution derived from teacher responses to their survey: since teachers are agreeable to differential compensation for those willing to teach in more difficult situations, a specific kind of merit pay could be applied. This should be augmented by better support for newer teachers. The report points out that teaching could learn from many other professions where novices undergo extensive apprenticeships. This may help to alleviate some of the problems experienced by beginning teachers and curb some of the criticisms regularly hurled at teachers.

Finally, because of its qualitative focus on teacher unionists, one study borders considerably on the study I have undertaken. Poole (2000) carried out a case study of one teachers' union in an eastern Canadian province in which she interviewed twenty union leaders. She sought to confront the notion that teacher unions promote self-interested goals at the expense of educational quality. Her findings reveal that for these leaders the union plays two key roles: ensuring economic welfare and promoting professional development for teachers. Secondary functions of the union were identified as improving educational quality and promoting social justice.

The first two functions address the more immediate needs of teachers, but Poole observes that, although it is often thought of as a longer-term issue, educational quality emerges as intimately linked to economic welfare and professional development. One respondent, for instance, says "[The union] can create a good environment for children by looking after and protecting teachers...because if your teachers are hurting, then your children are going to hurt" (Poole, 2000, p. 107). Another speaker states, "decreased job security could have a detrimental impact on the quality of education in the province because it would weaken the professional voice of teachers" (p. 108).
The speakers also reveal that in pursuing broader educational goals, the union is constantly hindered by pressures from within the organization, such as members’ demands, as well as from external pressures, such as financial constraints imposed by government economic policies. Additionally, when the job security and economic welfare of teachers are threatened, the focus retreats from longer-term concerns about educational quality. This happened in collective bargaining in the 1990s when the union accepted concessions and had to adapt to new legislation reducing collective bargaining rights. At this time, changes threatened teachers’ sense of security, and union leaders concentrated their efforts on dealing with high priority economic issues.

2.5.6 Contextualizing the Unionization of Private ESL Teachers

In reference to the formation of teacher unions in Canada, Lawton (1999) states, “The reasons leading to the establishment of these ‘new-style’ teachers’ unions were grounded in the teachers’ unwillingness to mutely accept the indignities that had traditionally been the lot of the public school teacher” (p. 21). While there have been extensive attempts to eliminate or refashion teacher unions, the studies surveyed above suggest that many public school teachers still depend on their unions to protect their job security, to allow them due process, and to continue struggling on their behalf for improvements in wages, benefits, and working conditions.

As outlined in a previous section of this chapter, ESL teachers share many concerns regarding their work situations with mainstream teachers: they are insufficiently compensated for their heavy workloads, they often work in inadequate conditions, and they are isolated from their occupational communities. They also share a sense of vulnerability to being targeted and a concern about whether their basic employee needs will continue to be met. It is not surprising that the teachers
interviewed for this study were looking for the same security and workplace improvements as their public school counterparts.

The present study inquires into how one group of teachers believes the presence of a union helped to change the power relationships in their workplaces. Specifically, I look at day-to-day struggles with managers, how teachers try to resolve some of these conflicts through the union, and how teachers see the union as giving them a greater say in determining the direction of their work. Their experiences will then be compared to those of teachers and union activists in the studies outlined above.

As the survey of teacher union literature shows, there is a scarcity of teacher voices in the discourse on unions. I hope to add to those studies that allow teachers to give their first-hand reports of what unions mean in their lives.

2.6 Research Methodology: Understanding Teachers' Lives and Work

As Poole's (2000) study illustrates, teacher unionists negotiate amongst various and sometimes conflicting interests. The same may be said of the teachers I interviewed. Through the use of life stories, I came to understand how these teachers struggle within complex relationships of power. Their personal narratives provide in-depth and intimate representations of what these social interactions look like.

This section of the chapter will elucidate how some of the principles of qualitative research were engaged in this study. I then outline why narrative inquiry, and in particular life history as a means of in-depth interviewing, was an appropriate way to meet the objectives of this study.

2.6.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative inquiry is described by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) as naturalistic and interpretive (p. 5). Phenomena are interpreted as they
naturally occur and by the way people communicate about them. There is an emphasis on processes and meanings rather than on stable "facts." Qualitative researchers assume that reality is socially constructed and that truth is not singular, for "[t]here is no 'correct' telling of [an] event. Each light...reflects a different perspective on [an] incident" (p. 8). The researcher is not separate from the phenomena, but is situated as a part of the research process, and the notion of the traditional hierarchical relationship between researcher and subject is problematized. It is the job of the researcher to provide representations of reality, thereby transforming the world under investigation into written or other texts.

Among a variety of approaches, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) list "feminist, ethnic, Marxist, cultural studies, and queer theory" as materialist models which, like critical inquiry, take as their starting point the notion that "the real world makes a material difference in terms of race, class, and gender" (p. 35). Further to this, the theories and methods employed within these paradigms seek emancipatory transformations. One way that research can seek liberating results is by exposing the social constraints experienced by individuals and groups in daily life.

Because this current study is interested in the ways power relations play out in the working lives of four ESL teachers, I have framed it in a similar way. The application of qualitative principles enabled me to enter the worlds that these four teachers inhabit in order to gain a deeper understanding of what they went through. In this way, the resulting findings are detailed personal accounts and criticisms of the existing dynamics between owners, managers and workers/teachers in these two ESL schools.

2.6.2 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, as a form of qualitative research, shares its interest in the dynamics of life, in the meanings that individuals bring to
phenomena, in a redefining of the research relationship, and ultimately in the way results are constructed and put to use.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) propose that personal experience is the starting point for all social research, for we cannot reproduce experience; we can only access it through the accounts of subjects (p. 414-415). Likewise, Cortazzi (1993) credits narrative inquiry as being suitable for understanding the human world in that it enables the researcher "to look at the telling to get back to the knowing" (p. 139).

Casey (1995-1996) contemplates the multidisciplinary character of the narrative approach to empirical investigations pointing out that since narrative methods gained increased appeal in the 1980s, several practices that can be categorized as "narrative research" have emerged (p. 211). She indicates that narrative inquiry is a relatively new field comprised of "diverse elements from a number of philosophical and political sources, the latest (re)organization consisting of largely overlapping clusters of research" (217). From this broad range of approaches to narrative inquiry, I will focus on the particular ideas that helped to frame my own methodology.

Cortazzi (1993) explores analytical methods borrowed from the fields of sociology, psychology, literary theory, and anthropology, contending that not enough is known about narrative analysis in the field of education and that educational research would benefit from the application of theories from these other disciplines. He gives examples from his own studies of British primary school teachers' narratives to illustrate the interpretative work that can be accomplished with these various analytical schemes.

One interpretive method explained by Cortazzi (1993) is the use of the "evaluation model" (p. 120). Cortazzi holds that the evaluation at the end of a story is the speaker's theory of how the particular relates to the whole. Following this, I was attentive to how teachers made sense of the stories they reported, allowing their reasoning to guide my understanding.
of the narrative meanings. Additionally, "if a large number of Evaluations are collected on the same topic this allows an exploration of teachers' cultural perspectives" (p. 120). Thus, I also linked the stories and "evaluations" of the four different teachers together in order to arrive at broader conclusions.

I have not only employed narrative as a way to understand the teachers' thoughts about their working situations, but also as a method for presenting the findings of this research. In a similar way, Polkinghorne (1997) rationalizes the use of narrative in presenting findings through the use of a narrativized research report, which details the progression of the investigation in story form. He argues that the narrative style is compelling to its audience and helps to convince readers of the acceptability of its knowledge claims. He states, "[t]he formats in which research is reported are not neutral and transparent, but reflect particular epistemological commitments" (p. 6). Within a constructivist conception of knowledge, he holds, narrative reports may offer a unique and persuasive method for reaching the audience.

2.6.3 Life History and Life Story

In this study, I found the life history approach to be of particular value because it brought forth richer details about the teachers' personal experiences with their unions. It also enabled the speakers to determine the direction of the interviews to a large extent, facilitating greater equity between my role as researcher and theirs as subject.

Life history is not a strict method but a general approach to research. Common to all life history investigations are in-depth interviews. These may focus on an individual's entire life or more narrowly focus on the life experiences related to a specific event (Kouritzin, 2000, p. 7), as in the current study. A life history study might exclusively concentrate on an individual telling, or it may draw from several people's stories, as this study does, as well as on artifacts related
to the topic under consideration such as journals, letters or news articles. Goodson and Sikes (2001) distinguish between a life story, that which the narrator shares, and a life history, a composite text locating the life story within broader social, political or historical settings. It is the life history, composed by the researcher, that moves the oral story from the personal, private realm to the social, political realm: "The life history pushes the question whether private issues are also public matters; the life story individualizes and personalizes; the life history contextualizes and politicizes" (p. 88).

Documenting a life history requires an appreciation of the balance between individual experience and social influences. In discussing the application of life history research to educational contexts, Goodson and Sikes (2001) relate the benefits of the approach for exploring subjective experience. A life history approach is useful, they state, because it accepts and accommodates the multiple identities that exist in individuals (p. 2). Specifically, the authors maintain that multiple social roles are naturally integrated in real life. The teachers I interviewed, for example, explained how their workplace experiences significantly affected and were affected by their personal lives. Furthermore, the self is not expected to be linear. There are interrelationships among the different stages of a single life, determined in part by different historical contexts, and in perpetual conversations with the past, present, and future. Kouritzin (2000) concurs that the life history subject may be fragmented: "Doing life history research means that the research participant may present profoundly conflicting views, and the research need not choose between them" (p. 12). It is within this complex notion of subjectivity, which makes room for emotional responses, that informants make sense of their lives.

Three studies show how, by bringing the individual into focus, life history investigations can add to our understanding of teachers' lives in order to improve teacher-training models, the design and implementation
of reform, and management styles. Through the use of reflective journals, interviews and observations with five pre-service teachers, Knowles (1992) examines teachers’ coping strategies in the classroom, discovering a disconnect between the way these teachers were trained and their actual teaching behaviours. The greater influence on their teaching styles, he finds, are the often negative images of teachers they have witnessed in the past and argues that we need to guide teachers-in-training towards more positive self-conceptions.

Butt, Raymond, McCue, and Yamagishi (1992) engage collaborative autobiographical studies of two teachers to provide new insights into how teachers learn so as to better incorporate teacher perspectives and culture into educational reform. They suggest that teachers’ practical knowledge draws from both personal and professional experience and from both thought and action, and that managers need to understand these dynamics in order to work more effectively with teachers. Huberman (1995) arrives at a similar conclusion after interviewing 160 teachers to learn about their professional life cycles. He finds that the evidence provided by the personal narratives of these teachers often conflicts with administrators’ notions of how teachers’ work experiences change over time. Huberman notices that school officials often act upon their own assumptions without actually attempting to learn about how teachers view their jobs. In my own research with teacher unionists, the intimate character of their narratives greatly enriched my appreciation of the impact of their working situations on their lives as a whole. The stories brought the teachers’ lives into focus, reflecting the impact of management behaviour on their own and their coworkers’ lives.

One aim of the study I conducted is to not only identify areas of inequity in education, but to find ways to change current conditions. In Huberman’s (1995) previously mentioned study, he asserts that by telling their stories, teachers are encouraged to reflect upon their narratives. As a result, “[t]he invisible strings of power or influence within the system
become more visible, and the desire to understand them, then to act on them, begins to gain momentum” (p. 131). While for Huberman the emancipatory potential of life history inquiry lies in the possibility of personal transformation within research participants, this is not the focus of this current study. Rather, as Clandinin and Connelly (1994) put it, “It is in the research relationships among participants and researchers, and among researchers and audiences, through research texts that we see the possibility for individual and social change” (p. 425).

In the present study, I wanted to build mutually beneficial relationships with the participants as much as possible, which to me began with fostering a sense of trust, respect, and responsibility at the interviews. Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) express that a foundational condition for narrative inquiry is that it “occurs within relationships among researchers and practitioners, constructed as a caring community” (p. 4). To this end, Cole and Knowles (2001) ask that researchers develop “empathy through reflexivity” (p. 29) and that interview responses be authentic. One possible result of mutually beneficial research relationships, according to Kouritzin (2000) is that informants feel heard (p. 18). This was especially important in the research I conducted as it became clear that the teachers I interviewed had been struggling to be heard by their superiors at work previous to the formation of their unions.

I attempted to set the stage for a less hierarchical relationship with the informants in part by arranging group interviews. To some extent this interrupted the traditional researcher/researched dichotomy as the interview conversations took place mostly between the two informants with minimal guidance on my part. One result of my efforts to make room for this more fluid interview style was that I found my role as authoritative researcher to be minimized as the speakers took ownership of the interview process. For example, each pair decided at the group
interview exactly how they would share their teaching history and union stories. One pair decided to take turns telling long stories while the other pair engaged in a back-and-forth exchange, constantly comparing their experiences. In the latter case, the informants’ dialogues produced some interesting theoretical results that formed the basis of some of my conclusions.

Tierney (1994) documents an research relationship with Robert, a gay First Nations university professor in the final stages of AIDS. The complexity of issues around power, voice, and authorship come to the foreground in this study, as Tierney was both a friend and researcher to Robert, and because Robert was himself a professor and writer. The multiple roles of the two individuals are made clear in an excerpt from the interviews where Robert expresses his wishes for the way the research is reported:

I also think it should be your book. My story, your book. But I'll write a preface and introduce myself. I don't care about editorial control. I think you should be the author because your opinion counts too. You've been involved in all of this. I've told you things I haven't told anyone else. And somebody needs to be objective and make sense of all of this. How it all fits together. (p. 103)

Similarly, as Robert was Tierney's peer as both colleague and friend, I was not only a researcher in the interview process but a fellow unionist, fellow teacher, and, subsequent to the interviews, a friend to the informants.

Other researchers talk about becoming an ally of participants. Aston (2001), for instance, comments that being of the same gender as her informant fostered a closer connection. This inspired the researcher to reveal information about herself, which contributed to the conversational atmosphere of the interview and enhanced the level of trust (p. 147). Similarly, Tierney (1994) recognizes that Robert saw him as a confidant due, in part, to their shared sexual orientation (p. 102). He
contemplates whether other individuals who share identities outside the mainstream might also have unique research relationships.

In conducting life history interviews with female teacher activists, Casey (1993) also finds that a shared identity with her informants becomes important: "Only by becoming an 'insider,' someone who identified with and sympathized with the person speaking, could I become part of the conversation" (p. 18). With the responsibility of the role of confidant came the expectation on the part of the research participants that she would be an "intermediary who could carry their intimate meanings into the public sphere" (p. 17). While for Casey the researcher bears the responsibility of telling the participants' stories, for Kouritzin (2000) and Orr (2001), participating in life history conversations also means taking on the role of advocate when necessary. Orr explains, "...I developed trust through advocacy and ongoing commitment to these individuals' lives" (p. 201).

I also found myself playing the role of ally to the participants in the research I undertook. When I approached the individuals to invite them to join the study, there was an immediate feeling of comradeship. This was clearly because I was a union activist myself and had supported the establishment of a union in my own workplace. I took this familiarity as a starting point for the interviews and accepted that, though I could not claim to be "neutral", a sense of trust and understanding emerged from my own life story that set the foundation for our interview relationship. One narrator was emphatic about "our" story needing to be told. This writing, and others that will bring these voices to the public sphere, is one attempt to live up to my responsibility to the informants.

Another way that life history research incorporates transformative possibilities is by challenging and informing our notions of social reality, specifically of how people experience their worlds. For Tierney (2000) working with life history studies means an "investigation of the mediating aspects of culture, the interrogation of its grammar, and the decentering
of its norms” (p. 306). In the current research, I wanted to know what forces teachers were resisting through the union. I was able to link the teachers’ personal experiences with their work, their coworkers, their supervisors, and the owners of their schools to their theories on how business influences affect their daily lives. I will show how profit-driven English language training may in these two cases set up a context for punitive management styles.

The literature on life history inquiry shows that for many researchers, our theoretical notions are disrupted by the inclusion of marginalized voices (K. Casey, 1993; K. Casey, 1995-1996; Kouritzin, 2000; Orr, 2001; Tierney, 1994). Life history research allows “nonlegitimated voices [to] compete with the ideologies of the status quo” (Quantz & O’Conner, quoted in K. Casey, 1993, p. 19). The aforementioned studies of teachers’ work and knowledge described by Knowles (1992), Butt, et al. (1992) and Huberman (1995) illustrate how evidence from life history studies can conflict with official versions of reality. For example, Butt, et al. hold that scholars and administrators rely heavily on notions of technical approaches to teaching and learning whereas teachers depend more on their personal experience.

Another example of how teachers’ versions of life in schools may contradict more “official” versions, is Nelson’s (1992) study of personal oral histories of teachers’ lives in New England. These accounts were compared with written versions, such as school board reports, from the same era. The researcher discovers that significant issues in the teachers’ lives, such as experiences of sexual harassment and feelings of fear and vulnerability, are nonexistent in the written documents (p. 170-172). The oral versions of the teachers’ lives also point toward new interpretations of the written materials. Though teachers were highly constrained by strict codes of conduct, for instance, they regularly broke the rules, suggesting that these teachers were not always victims of imposed ideologies as is often assumed.
In another case, life history data enables Casey (1992) to question commonly held managerial views of teacher attrition which are largely informed by statistical analysis rather than individual disclosure. She finds that in her study administrators advance instrumental systems of reward or punishment to promote retention when what teachers really want is the ability to engage in a meaningful teaching experience. In addition, the teachers are often subjected to hostile behaviour by their superiors and are thus compelled to leave their workplaces. “In these stories,” Casey finds, “the administrative repression of teachers operates as a chronic, covert, psychological force, causing many teachers to withdraw themselves from school employment without any appearance of crisis” (p. 199). Thus, the real reasons for attrition are overlooked, and administrators are never informed about how their behaviours influence the choices these teachers make to leave the workplace.

2.6.4 Gathering Stories of Teacher-Activists’ Lives

The data presented in Casey’s (1992) study resonate with the information I gathered from teachers working for their unions. As in Casey’s analysis, these teachers’ narratives reveal how teachers were left out of the circle of communication at their schools and how managers and owners act on poorly informed assumptions, particularly about how to improve teachers’ classroom practices. The stories also suggest ways of understanding the power inequities at these workplaces by pointing to the growing competitive market for ESL products at the time the work sites were organized and, further, how the presence of a union secured for teachers a place in the educational power structure.

Life histories provide an opportunity to explore how individuals’ lives are shaped by, and at the same time help to shape, social and cultural forces. With a better picture of what life is like for teachers, we can begin to improve the theories and policies that affect their lives.
2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has attempted to contextualize the worldviews of the teachers in the present study by surveying data and discussions in areas relevant to the purposes of my research. My hope is that this study will extend the discourses presented here on several fronts. By depicting teachers' efforts to enact social change in their daily lives, this work has the potential to challenge the market-driven, colonial, and long-held academic priorities of English language teaching. It can spark dialogue on issues of ESL teachers' work and provide insight into possible strategies for improving the material conditions of their lives. These teachers' perspectives on being active in unions can help other teachers to envision how a union might change their work lives. Finally, I aim through this work to increase awareness of the lives of real people engaging in everyday political activities – in this way broadening commonly held impressions of what it means to be political.

This chapter has provided an overview of literature on themes pertinent to this study in order to provide a basis for analyzing the data presented in Chapter 4. The next chapter will delineate research strategies used in the collection of the stories and give specific details of the research site and participants.
3 METHODS

3.1 Introduction: Study Goals and Overview

My intent in developing this study was to gain an understanding of what life was like for four ESL teachers working in private for-profit schools in Vancouver. I wanted to see what it looked like when these teachers challenged the power structures they were working within by participating in the unionization of their work places. I expected that this insight might put stakeholders in the English language teaching community in a better position to engage in dialogue about progressive action within the industry.

As the survey of the literature in the previous chapter suggests, many teachers in the ESL industry experience problems with their working situations. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence that documents difficulties they have in their everyday working lives. A key purpose of this study is to attempt to add to our knowledge of life for teachers in ESL schools. By better understanding what reality looks like for these teachers, we will be better able to begin to address some of the concerns expressed by them.

Further to this, Apple (2004) holds that “struggles to better the day to day conditions of our economic and cultural institutions are critical...only by action on day to day issues can a critical framework be made sensible” (p. 152). Thus, this study sought to explore collective bargaining as a “political possibility” (Franzway, 2005, p. 268) for dealing with day-to-day issues that ESL teachers face. The picture we gain of their struggles will be used to inform discussions about unionization as a solution to what these teachers saw as unfair managerial practices.

Specific questions that will be addressed are:
• How do these teachers describe their working lives both before and after the establishment of the union?
• What issues were these teachers trying to address in becoming active in the union?
• How do they see the functioning of the union and their role within it?
• How do they describe their use of the power that the union gives them?

In addition, this study asks the questions:
• Who are the people who became active in the union?
• How did they feel empowered to undertake such action?
• How have these teachers handled unjust situations in the past?

This chapter outlines the concepts that informed the development of the methodology used in the research. Specifically, I provide some details about the benefits of using a life history methodology in learning about the meaning of an event for the actors involved and why it was suitable for the aims of this study. I then explain the stages of the research process from the interviews to the analysis to the choices made in how to portray the research findings. I also discuss how the legitimacy of the knowledge claims made in this research may be validated by the ability of the study outcomes to stimulate discussion in the research and ESL communities. The final section of this chapter aims to familiarize readers with details about the research site and the interview participants.

3.2 Approach to the Study: Life Stories and Critical Research

Several aspects of a narrative approach, specifically a focused life history, are important to achieving the goals set out for this study. For one, the narrative approach lends itself well to the gathering of abundant data on the meaning of an occurrence. It assumes that “human experience is episodically ordered and best understood through a
reconstruction of the natural narrative order in which it is lived" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 19).

In keeping with the aim of understanding what empowerment looks like on a personal level, another important advantage of a life history perspective is it allows participants to "explain their own behaviour in terms of their own subjectivities" (Kouritzin, 2000, p. 1), which allows for affective responses (McEwan & Egan, 1995).

Unionizing a workplace is a political action that goes well beyond the individual, and union stories provide insight into the larger social and political context that the teachers were responding to. Learning about context has been noted as one of the aims of life history research (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 11). Kouritzin (2000) reminds us, "it is important to include a life history perspective in order to appreciate political decisions in human terms, particularly with respect to those people most affected by those decisions, instead of legal, economic, or otherwise-empowered terms" (p. 16). The speakers in this study were able to scrutinize the power structure within which they work from the worker/teacher point of view.

By bringing attention to the experiences of individuals on a local level, life history opens the way for a critical understanding of cultural ideologies and the function of power. I was particularly interested in learning about the life experiences of ESL teachers who found their working situations to be desperate enough for them to establish a collective bargaining unit. However, I wanted to go further. I wanted to challenge the commonly held perception that ESL teachers are merely victims of unfair circumstances by presenting alternative versions of their workplace dynamics. Hearing ESL teacher unionists' personal stories provides an opportunity to appreciate how their biographies inform their resistance.

Finally, from experience I know that forming a union is an incredibly empowering experience. After our union came in, I finally felt
that I had gained some control over a very significant part of my life. The most meaningful thing was knowing that I could speak and that speaking would not be penalized. To be true to this understanding, I chose the life history format because I wanted to provide a place where ESL teachers could speak with a sense that they were valued. This approach emphasizes the storyteller as the expert, giving significance to the speaker’s words and life. This is consistent with my desire not to dominate the investigative process or exploit the oppressive potential of the research relationship.

3.3 Research Methods: In-depth interviewing and Life History Analysis

The process of this study had three distinct stages: the data-gathering stage, the analysis of the data, and the presentation of the results. However distinct these stages may seem, there was continual overlap. Huberman and Miles (1994) reason that

the design of qualitative studies can in a real sense be seen as analytic. Choices of conceptual framework, of research questions, of samples, of the ‘case’ definition itself, and of instrumentation all involve anticipatory data reduction – which...is an essential aspect of data analysis. (p. 430)

The analysis, therefore, is implicit in every step of the research process, and this research makes extensive use of narrative approaches to analysis.

3.3.1 Data Gathering

Two in-depth, phenomenologically-based interviews (Seidman, 2006) helped me to gain a thorough understanding of how the participants felt about their union experiences. The purpose of the overall design of the interview phase of the study was for each participant to reconstruct and also reflect upon their experiences within the context of their lives. As shown in Chapter Two, I utilized “evaluative”
(Cortazzi, 1993) moments in their storytelling to explore the meaning that events had for them.

Each teacher participated in two interviews. The first was a paired interview with another teacher from a different school. The reason for the paired interview was twofold. First, it created a more natural audience for the telling of stories. Cortazzi (1993) states, “What is narrated in performance is not said to the audience, but for it” (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 46). Having a second teacher who had gone through a similar experience and who was an active and interested listener helped to provide such an audience.

A further reason was that I wanted the meeting to offer some benefit to the participants. Kouritzin (2000) notices that in some group interviews speakers have expressed that they felt a validation from sharing their experiences with others coming from a similar background (p. 20). In the groups I was working with, I hoped that the participants might gain insight, comfort, or perhaps inspiration from hearing each other’s stories. All the teachers commented that they enjoyed meeting the others and sharing their experiences. In fact, one of the themes that surfaced in the analysis was a feeling of isolation for the teachers; perhaps the study helped to break that isolation to some degree. Also, as outlined in the second chapter, I aimed to minimize researcher dominance in this study as much as possible. In the paired interviews, the conversational focus tended to take place between the two participants, while I acted more as a guide occasionally redirecting the discussion.

At the first meeting, participants were asked to share stories of how they became a teacher, of how they came to be at their present place of work, of how the union came into being in their workplace, of their experiences since the formation, and of their role in the union. These interviews lasted from three to four hours. I tape recorded each entire
interview. During the interviews, the teachers were free to ask each other questions about the stories they were sharing.

The atmosphere at these interviews was quite lively because the teachers were interested in hearing about the other's union and work stories. Several times the teachers drew comparisons or noted differences between their own experiences and those they were hearing about. This created a different context from what would have existed had it been a one-on-one interview with the researcher only asking questions or responding to the content from one speaker. On the contrary, in the group interviews, the storytellers were clearly influenced by the reactions of the others. I saw this as a strength that made for a more authentic discussion and added to the energy of the narration.

After the first interviews, I transcribed the recordings. During this process, an initial analysis highlighted potential themes. Some prominent issues concerned conflict, isolation, and frustration. I also noted feelings of power or powerlessness. Relationships, both successful and not, appeared important as were the speakers' experiences of positive conduct for teachers and managers. These observations formed the basis for follow-up questions at the second interview.

The transcripts were then sent to the participants to read, reflect upon, and comment on. A letter accompanying the transcripts asked that the interviewees read the transcripts fully and make notes for the next interview. I asked them to consider any sections that would require further explanation or correction. As well, this was an opportunity for them to request the omission of any parts of the text. Two participants asked me to omit some strong language used when they were feeling angry. I honoured these requests.

The objectives of the second interview, which were also tape recorded, were to acquire more details of experiences and to elicit the speaker's own analyses. Providing an opportunity for reflection is an important aspect of life history interviewing, as delineated by Huberman.
(1995), Casey (1992), and Seidman (2006). In fact, Casey (1992) claims "...the act of interpretation is largely relinquished to the subjects themselves, while the researcher concentrates on discovering the patterns of priorities in the narrative texts" (p. 189). The second interview was intended to encourage personal reflection on issues that had emerged in the previous interview.

The second, one-on-one, interview began by covering the participant's own highlighted points. I then asked questions that had resulted from the initial observations, which I shared with the teacher. Some questions were aimed at gleaning more details about the unionization process. Others were based upon the initial analysis that identified episodes in which the speaker experienced an injustice either personally or indirectly. An example of such a question was, "You said, 'And then I went into a depression here.' What was that about?" Another such question was, "You seemed really angry about the fact that the owner did this. What exactly happened?" Speakers were also asked to comment on how they saw their role in the union and to characterize important relationships. Reflection on their work, the union, and the union's role in their lives came quite naturally to these participants; this was clearly not the first opportunity they had had to think about it deeply. These interviews generally elicited more personal responses as each narrator shared emotions associated with difficult moments of their lives.

I transcribed each of these second interviews following a similar process to the first interviews. Certain issues become more prominent than others such as the importance of personal relationships at the workplace. I was able to fill out details from the first interview and to make connections between different speakers' accounts on the same themes. I also explored the informants' views on how and why certain events occurred. For example, I tried to understand one teacher's reaction to being excluded from the initial union membership drive and
how these feelings were resolved so that the individual subsequently became the president.

3.3.2 Analysis and Presentation of Findings

The analytic stage of the research process requires that the researcher make certain epistemological decisions, and one choice I encountered in undertaking narrative analysis was whether to deal with the data thematically or to maintain the narrative order. Polkinghorne (1997) typifies the thematic approach used in qualitative research as presenting data in “stop-time” (p. 8) form. That is, the results appear suspended in time, in a single dimension. The resulting text lacks a sense of process, and this in turn, he argues, deprives it of context.

Huberman (1995), on the other hand, asserts, “It is legitimate to search across lives for common meanings” (p. 158) and to try to link those meanings with accounts that explain “how and why, under these circumstances, people might think or feel or behave as they are telling us they have” (ibid.). By making connections across narrative reports, researchers can draw out and develop general theories. Casey (1993), for example, locates common metaphors among oral accounts of the lives of teachers who have similar identities and backgrounds. When these are presented collectively, a new discourse results, one authored by speakers whose voices rarely enter the academic sphere.

There are equally compelling reasons for employing a narrative format for presenting findings. One is that it is more consistent with the original form of the data. “Stories,” Polkinghorne (1997) succinctly states, “are linguistic expressions of this uniquely human experience of the connectedness of life” (p. 13). Thus, to story the presentation of the results of this study is to honour the integrity of the research situation – the group meeting, the one-on-one meeting, the contexts in which the narratives emerged. The stories are extensions of those environments.
Neither of these approaches is necessarily a more accurate depiction of the truth. They are simply different ways of assembling text to reveal interpretations. As Mishler reminds us, "We too are storytellers" (p. 117), and this is particularly evident in the construction of the results. In reality, Huberman (1995) holds, investigators utilize both approaches, as do informants in the way they present their stories and ideas. In this research, I have chosen to rely primarily on the use of narrative formats because I find that maintaining a "storied" aspect to the results helps to maintain the authenticity of the original telling. Following the narrative presentations, a discussion draws on isolated constructs identified from the participant narratives in order to explore in greater detail the conditions in which the teachers struggle.

3.3.2.1 Participant Profiles

In the first section of the next chapter I will make use of participant profiles (Seidman, 2006) to introduce the teacher unionists in their own words. This is achieved by eliminating the interviewer and co-participant's comments and editing the text so that the account reads as an extended first person story. Seidman justifies the use of personal profiles in this way:

We interview in order to come to know the experience of the participants through their stories. We learn from hearing and studying what the participants say. Although the interviewer can never be absent from the process, by crafting a profile in the participant's own words, the interviewer allows those words to reflect the person's consciousness. (p. 102)

Presenting material in this manner centres on what Mishler (1995) refers to as "textualization" or "narrative strategies through which plots are constructed that create meanings, including our sense of temporality" (p. 103). The fact that a storyteller chooses certain words or places events in a particular order carries meaning unto itself (Wolcott,
1994), so to disrupt this process is to lose meaning. Profiles maintain the integrity of the telling to a great extent.

Huberman (1995) describes a life history study of a British teacher presented entirely in the words of the teacher. He states, “the narrative stands alone, like a novella, but with an undeniable ring of truth. More important still, Riseborough [the researcher] has no commentary; he simply leaves the reader with the transcribed story. There is only one voice here”(p. 159-160). The value in this text, Huberman finds, is that it is useful for psychological and sociological analyses, as well as a means for discussing the profession of teaching. He claims that it is “theory-empowering” and that “one forgets to ask whether this account is true because of its expressive force” (p. 160).

Support for this approach is also offered by Wolcott (1990) who himself chooses to use sustained stretches of original text for similar reasons. However, he warns against using “heaped data” (p. 13), or pure data, in the analysis lest the audience perceive that the writer has arrived at no interpretation whatsoever and is relying on the reader to complete this task. This dependence on “reader response” is criticized by Kvale (1996) who cautions the writer not to rely too heavily on readers for validation, as it suggests a lack of researcher confidence and effort.

Another criticism of this approach is that the voices of the interviewer and co-participant are removed. This may be seen as rendering the resulting text artificial. However, as I will attempt to establish later in this chapter, textual representations of real life experiences are already part fiction, part reality. Kincheloe (1997) contends any narrative “brings together the given and the imagined” (p. 66).

With these concerns in mind, I decided not to present the findings entirely in the form of profiles but to limit their use to the initial introduction of the informants. In keeping with my goal of exploring the individual element of collective action, I found them valuable for
conveying a sense of what the teachers are like as people. The profile is affectively expressive in a way that an isolated fragment of text is not. I believe that these vignettes have the potential to move the audience to sympathize with the speakers.

The profiles are divided into two categories: the self as teacher and the self as activist: They focus specifically on personal history, on personal struggles with power, and on how individual biographies inform choices made later in life. The data that were selected for the "self as teacher" profiles were drawn from the interview section in which the speaker was asked how she or he became involved in teaching. The data for the "self as activist" profiles primarily came from the second (one-on-one) interviews during which each speaker tended to reach more deeply into their memories and expand on specific events in which the teacher had dealt with power struggles. Comments from the me and the second interviewee were then removed although the original order of the telling was maintained. This produced a continuous text intended to read as a longer autobiographical vignette.

The resulting passages were edited for readability. Specifically, repetitive comments and interjections such as "um" and "you know" were removed, and some grammar was changed to suit the conventions of written text. In spite of these changes, I tried to maintain the oral nature of the text and the voice of the speaker as much as possible.

### 3.3.2.2 The Union Story

The next section attempts to answer the question of what the issues were that prompted these teachers to organize into a collective bargaining unit and what life was like following the event, in both positive and negative ways. Themes were "inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 23). As in Cortazzi's (1993) study of primary teacher narratives in which similar stories are grouped together, I searched for comparable constructs
among the union stories of the four teachers. Cortazzi finds that “if the same perspectives are evident in the narratives of a number of teachers, then this would be evidence that the perspectives may be cultural” (p. 120). In the present study, if a similar theme emerged among two or more teachers’ accounts, I saw this as evidence of a shared perspective.

Much like putting together pieces of a story puzzle, I assembled narrative patterns from the text in this section of the analysis. This way of composing research results corresponds to Mishler’s (1995) idea of “making a telling from the told” (p. 100), a method typically used in the construction of historical accounts where several personal stories are correlated to create a single text. “[T]hey ‘narrativize’ large-scale social processes, events reflecting or resulting from the action of collectivities” (p. 100).

3.3.2.3 The Business of ESL and Teacher Resistance

The final section of the analysis in Chapter 4 presents selected vignettes or reflections that focus on how the teachers perceive the educational contexts they work within as influenced by business priorities. The narrative excerpts also show how labour problems were confronted in dealings with owners and managers. These images are also instructive in pointing to solutions for such problems. From these illustrations I hope to learn about what counterhegemonic practices look like in everyday life by investigating patterns of intersubjective power dynamics.

3.3.3 The Individual, the Interpersonal, and the Collective

In reference to her life history study of female teacher activists, Casey (1993) states:

The lives of the women featured in this study are grounded in particular social relationships, and their transformative activities (including their narrative renderings) are organized around these specific connections. It is within concrete social contexts that each
of these women simultaneously develops her sense of self, her understanding of others, and her response to existing social arrangements. (p. 158-159)

In this quotation, Casey conveys that the informants’ narratives frame three distinct but enmeshed aspects of their lives: their identities, their interpersonal relations, and their social worlds.

The three sections of the findings presented in the current study touch on the same areas that Casey specifies. The first emphasizes the identity constructs of each participant in the two roles most relevant to this research: teacher and activist. The second section examines the collective history of the two ESL unions within the specific circumstances of their schools. The third section provides a closer look at the human connections and disconnections involved in “the practical transformation of the real world” (Gramsci, quoted in K. Casey, 1993, p. 161).

The most important point that I draw from Casey’s (1993) life history report is that the political is always specific and situated. Thus, I aim constantly to connect my analysis with the accounts of the informants’ daily lives.

3.4 Knowledge Claims and the Interpretation of Life Stories

Cole and Knowles (2001) contend, “Any knowledge claims must reflect the multidimensional, complex, dynamic, intersubjective, and contextual nature of human experience” (p. 127). In the foregoing discussion, I have demonstrated how the findings of this research are grounded in the particulars of the narrators’ accounts so as to humanize the results as much as possible. Another benefit of providing extensive primary data is that the reader can also arrive at grounded understandings: either in agreement with or divergent from mine.
3.4.1 The Social Basis of Knowledge

My notion of what constitutes a legitimate interpretation of the research data is guided by a constructivist view of knowledge and by arguments around construct validity. I recognize that facts are socially agreed upon (Kvale, 1995; Mishler, 1990) and that a direct correlation between the phenomenon under investigation and its representation in language is impossible (Cherryholmes, 1988). Construct validity, understood as the process of determining whether research constructs can reasonably be derived from the evidence provided, allows for a social interpretation of knowledge claims.

The idea of construct validity is extended by Cherryholmes (1988):
Construct validity does not entail identity between constructs and measurements, and it extends beyond technical methodological considerations. Subjects as well as researchers have something to say. What subjects and researchers say (write) is located in an inherited context of time and place enforced by power relationships. What is said and written can be criticized. There are alternative interpretations and stories to tell. (p. 120)

Research knowledge becomes useful when engaged through the work of other academics and through the discourse of the community targeted by the inquiry. In one writer’s words, “the process of validation is arguably ‘democratized’ by the proliferation of readings emerging from researchers, participants, and readers” (Aguinaldo, 2004, p. 134). Several writers have argued that validity is essentially discursive (Aguinaldo, 2004; Cherryholmes, 1988; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Kvale, 1995; Lather, 1993; Mishler, 1990). Specifically, it is the ability of academic work to stimulate discussion and to motivate others to extend the research that stands as the judgment of its worth.

Ultimately, critical inquiry hopes to transform social injustice. One way to achieve this is by inciting recognition of and discussion about unfair situations. Hence, the validity of critical research findings is ultimately tied to its aims. If the results resonate with the audience,
perhaps people will be motivated to take action. In this sense, construct validity as it pertains to emancipatory research is fundamentally pragmatic. At minimum, research that is critical of social norms seeks to produce “a ‘generative’ theory...[which is] designed to unseat conventional thought and thereby to open new alternatives for thought and action” (Kvale, 1995, p. 13).

In order to be seen as worthy of inspiring thought and action, research findings must be compelling. Mishler (1990) reasons that the best way to persuade readers of the acceptability of a study is to provide abundant primary data and a transparent method. Wainwright (1997) concurs, arguing that enough data should be provided “for an alternative reading to be constructed” (p. 11). By providing substantial sections of original data in his own work, Wolcott (1990) states, “informants are given a forum for presenting their own case to whatever extent possible and reasonable” (p. 130). Sparkes (1994) also uses this strategy in his life history study of Jessica, a lesbian whose life took her from being an elite athlete to a physical education teacher. His interpretation of Jessica’s experiences relied heavily on Jessica’s words in the form of selected quotations to illuminate how homophobia acts to shape her life by forcing her to construct a range of coping strategies to defend her substantial sense of self...[The] thick description...ensure[s] that researcher interpretations are grounded in actual lived experience. (p. 173)

In a similar vein, Seidman (2006) proposes the use of profiles to exhibit research findings. As I have explained above, a profile is an extended text narrated solely by the original speaker. It is meant to capture “the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time” (p. 119). By providing the first section of the results exclusively in the words of the informant, this study seeks to privilege both the speaker’s voice and the reader’s interpretative abilities. Subsequent sections of the findings continue to provide ample stretches of the original narratives. With the available text,
the audience can assess the competence of my method and interpretations. I encourage readers to find their own interpretations and thus to extend the scope of the study.

3.4.2 Potential Obstacles to Generating Legitimate Interpretations

This section addresses possible criticisms of how this study arrives at its conclusions. One question that readers may raise about the content of the study is whether I can be sure the informants’ stories are true. How do we know if they are providing accurate accounts of what actually happened when their schools unionized? Many factors may affect the “truth” of an historical report, including the length of time since the event and the research context. However, this begs the question of what kind of truth we want to get at. Butt et al. (1992) clarify this point: “the effect of an aberration, in the way that teachers see their own knowledge, is less important if one recalls that teachers think and behave as if it were true” (p. 94, italics in the original). Since the purpose of this research is to understand the perceived truth upon which informants form opinions and make decisions about what actions to take, it is not necessary to attempt to get at a factual truth, a notion which is problematized in a constructivist paradigm.

Another potential threat to the authenticity of the results is the influence and identities of those present at the interview, in particular the other participants at the group interview and myself as both researcher and fellow union supporter. Some may contend that having additional union activists telling their stories may skew the data. Interviewees may conceal unfavorable opinions or the accounts of their co-participants may trigger responses they would not have shared in an individual interview.

In order to minimize the possibility that speakers may hide their true opinions, I provided an opportunity for them to speak to me one-on-one at the second interview. Regardless, I found that at both interviews,
the teachers were quite forthcoming with both positive and negative assessments of their experiences. To the second concern, that the speakers may spontaneously produce stories in congruence with their co-participants’ accounts, I hold that every interview establishes its own culture. As previously stated, interviews are performances held for the sake of the audience (Cortazzi, 1993), and in this study having like-minded audience members helped early in the process to create a sense of trust, understanding, and familiarity that allowed speakers to become comfortable with their audience very quickly. It is my sense that this atmosphere enabled participants to be more candid in their discussions.

A related apprehension might focus on my influence as both a researcher and union supporter. It may appear that I was unable to remain neutral in the research process. I am, in fact, unable to claim neutrality. However, it is now widely contended that all research is ideologically biased, be it implicitly or explicitly (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Goodman, 1998; Lather, 1986a; Wolcott, 1990), and this research is no different. I have already mentioned that speakers considered me to be an ally, and that this afforded a sense of ease at the interviews. My political identity may have eliminated personal barriers that would have remained intact had I presented myself as an unbiased researcher peering into the lives of these teachers entirely from the “outside.”

I have also made it explicit that this research is inspired by my desire to provoke dialogue on the labour conditions of ESL teachers. Given the overtly ideological influence on this study, some may argue that producing valid results would be particularly difficult. With the awareness that, as a critical researcher, I might be blinded by the need to persuade, that my “hunt to find...limits [my] sight” and that this hunt may give rise to “a form of fundamentalism that obliterates from [my] sight what does not fit [my] intentions” (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p. 99), I have had to consider whether the results are legitimately connected to the aims of the research.
One way to help curtail this tendency to blindly impose my own prior constructs on the data is to ground the conclusions in the findings of the study so that there is a dialectical relationship between theory and data (Lather, 1986a; Wainwright, 1997). That is, the process of the investigation needs to be both deductive, beginning with the assumption that a specific power inequality exists, and inductive, being open to challenges to that assumption based on what I learn from the informants' reports.

To me, this initially meant creating a research situation in which the participants could be heard in a respectful manner. It also meant withholding judgment in order to gain as full an understanding of the speakers' thoughts and feelings as possible. It was also important to acknowledge my own responses to speakers' stories. For example, I had to accept that the union not only brought about improvements in working conditions but also presented new problems. In one specific case, I had to suspend my own verdict when a participant told a story in which he was the victim of homophobia in a small town. His way of viewing the situation was to take responsibility for his part in the social dynamic that influenced the expression of intolerance. Accepting this point of view was difficult for me, coming from a belief that a targeted person is not to blame for bigotry. I had to accept that this speaker's way of seeing the situation was his way of experiencing and dealing with unfairness in his life.

Readers may also find another potential threat to the legitimacy of my research results: the fictionalization of parts of the narratives. One noticeable theme in my findings was that the teachers who chose to become active in their unions felt that they faced the real risk of losing their jobs and thus potentially suffering damage to their careers. I was concerned that by publicizing the narratives in their original form I would be compromising the confidentiality I had committed myself to at the outset and at the same time endangering the employment of the
teachers. Yet, at the same time, the informants and I all believed that these were stories that needed to reach the public sphere.

Cole (2001) faces a similar paradox. Having recorded conversations with university professors who reveal unflattering truths about their workplaces, Cole tells of her struggle to find a “form of telling that was both safe and authentic” (p. 168). Like me, she feels that the stories must be told in order to start to change the current conditions. At the same time, she knows she must search for a way of telling that protects her informants from the dangers of backlash. Her solution is to “push beyond the bounds of academic convention to find more appropriate representational forms” (p. 169), which she discovers in the use of fiction, in particular in the form of the novel.

I have also chosen to fictionalize portions of the narratives in order to protect the identities of the subjects. I have invented names for the participants, obscured the location of the actions, and either changed or omitted easily identifiable details in stories. In regards to his life history work with one professor, Knowles (2001) states, “Elements of his story are fictionalized but remain faithful to his experiences as a whole” (p. 5). Similarly, in the presentation of the findings, I have tried to maintain the spirit of the original tellings and at the same time to protect the safety of participants.

3.4.3 Presenting Teacher Narratives: One Approach to the “Truth”

The way the data are interpreted and presented is inextricably connected with the purpose of the research. An important question here is, “What kind of truth do I want to show?” The purpose of this study is to learn about the lives of people working in conditions of unequal power. Ultimately, I hope that life can become better for ESL teachers in similar situations. At the same time, I wish to be considerate of those involved in the study. I value their contributions and want their words to stand as a primary testament to their experiences while their safety is preserved.
3.5 The Study: Participants and Context

This section of the chapter outlines some background information that will aid in understanding the teacher unionists' narratives. First, I describe the schools that the teachers are currently employed at, the same sites that they helped to unionize. After this, I give a general introduction to the four participants, keeping in mind that more personal, in-depth introductions will take place in the narrators' own words in the following chapter.

3.5.1 The Workplace Context

The research interviews took place in the spring of 2005 with four teachers from two different language schools located in Canada. These for-profit private colleges specialize in the delivery of English language instruction to international students. Both schools have been in existence for more than ten years and stand out among private language colleges as being particularly successful. Each school has grown steadily to a student population, in the high season, of several hundred at one school and over a thousand at the other.

The clientele at the two schools generally matches the student profiles outlined in Chapter 1: individuals in their twenties primarily from East Asia and Latin America who are studying in Canada for a period of a few months to a year in order to further their careers.

3.5.2 The Participants

I had originally intended to interview only those who participated in the unionization process but needed to alter the criteria according to those who were available to participate. Instead, I was fortunate to be able to speak with three teachers who were actively involved in the initial act of unionizing and one who was originally not in favour of the union.
The latter had a gradual change of heart, which offered a unique perspective on the matter.

The participants' ages ranged from mid-thirties to early sixties at the time of the interviews. Three of the teachers are male, and one is female. This gender ratio is not representative of the schools or of teachers working in ESL in Canada. From data I was able to obtain from one of the schools, the male to female ratio of the teaching body is approximately one to five. I was unable to gain access to the figures from the other school.

All the teachers had been teaching for more than ten years at the time of the interviews, and one individual had been teaching for over thirty years. All of the informants have overseas teaching experience, and they all hold undergraduate degrees and, at minimum, a certificate in teaching English as a second language. One teacher had gone beyond this training to earn a diploma in teaching ESL. Another teacher was originally trained to work in the public education system and had several years experience doing this. It is also noteworthy that three of the teachers had been working at their current schools for over ten years. The other teacher had been there for nine years.

In the interests of protecting the identities and ultimately the job security of those involved, not much more information can be released about the participants or their schools. As I have noted, some minor aspects of the data will be modified in order to further protect participant confidentiality. The modifications are not intended to affect the quality or meaning of the stories. The integration of invented with factual data is understood in this study as a constructivist practice, for "there are fictive elements in all representations and narratives" (Kincheloe, 1997, p. 65). I am aware of the fact that with research on human subjects, there is the possibility that you may harm those who you aim to help. I intend to minimize this danger as much as possible.
Pseudonyms have been used throughout the research report when referring to names and places. The participants and their schools are identified as follows: Tobias and Andrew are coworkers at ESL College, and Samantha and Ben are at Canadian English College (CEC). The names of interviewees and schools are intended to be fictional. At the initial paired interviews, Ben and Andrew were together, as were Samantha and Tobias.

3.6 Chapter Summary

I have reviewed in this chapter how this research project draws from life history methodology to meet its objectives. The in-depth interviews supply personal narratives that promote a deeper understanding of the struggles of these teacher unionists so that, as a community of people interested in bettering the lives of those involved in the language learning process, we can start to make sense of the larger power structures at play.

The approach I have chosen allows for the presentation of extensive excerpts from the source material. This is partly to aid readers in establishing their own assessments of the data and of my interpretations as well as to honour the thoughts and voices of the teacher unionists who volunteered their time and risked exposing their identities in order to share these important experiences. Finally, in view of my desire for ESL teachers to feel empowered to change the circumstances of their working lives, these stories provide models of what it looks like when entrenched power inequities are undermined. It is my hope that such images will stimulate ESL teachers, managers, school owners, union representatives, academics, and others to consider alternatives to the current ways of going about the business of language teaching.

This chapter has provided the rationale for the methods used in this study. The next chapter explores the identities of the teachers in
relation to teaching and advocacy and how they understand their struggles to achieve and maintain fairness at work.
4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of a life history study conducted with four ESL teachers who helped to unionize their private schools or, for one teacher, who became active in the union after it was established. This chapter has three main sections. The first two sections use narrative formats to present the oral histories. First, personal profiles are intended to acquaint the reader with the narrators, with the specific purpose of showing how these individuals express their identities within and against the constraints imposed upon them by their commercial educational institutions. The second section of the chapter presents a shared unionization story built from the narratives of all four speakers. The intention in this section is to show the chronology of how the two unions came into existence while highlighting similarities and differences between them. In the final section, I have identified two general categories that are important for understanding the socio-political context that sustains the unions: the capitalist ideology that teachers see as supporting the inequitable conditions they teach within, and their notions of individual and collective resistance that work against it.

4.2 Participant Profiles

In order for the reader to gain an appreciation of the human aspect of what might otherwise appear as a systematic process, I have developed teacher profiles, extended texts drawn from the interview data and narrated as first person stories. Each profile is divided into two sections. The first, focusing on the informant’s sense of self as a teacher, presents sections from their response to the interview question “How did you
become a teacher?" I have tried to show how each person sees their evolution as an educator as well as their views on the tension between business and educational interests in their lives.

The second part of the profile explores the informants' notions of themselves as activists both within and outside of their schools. These vignettes and reflections are derived largely from the second interviews in which I asked speakers to elaborate on points made at the first interview. These excerpts show the teachers engaging in union activities, contemplating their union role, and resisting unfair situations in other parts of their lives.

It is important to note that the two identities I have isolated here for the purpose of analysis are artificial separations; at their schools, these informants occupy both roles simultaneously. Thus some themes, such as the way a narrator sees their relationship with the owner of the school, straddle both sections. Issues emanating from the profiles will be further discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

By providing narrative continuity and thus attempting to preserve the teachers' voices, my ultimate goal in presenting the data this way at the beginning of the chapter is to familiarize the reader with who these speakers are and how they make sense of their lives as teachers and unionists.

4.2.1 Andrew the Teacher

I remember sort of naturally getting into teaching. It never wasn't there. I remember being about eleven, twelve years old, and at the Anglican Church, I was taking a bible study class every Sunday, and there were some teachers that weren't available. The class for the eight and nine year olds disappeared. And so I said I would do it. And I ended up being the best teacher in the Sunday school. At age twelve, thirteen, fourteen. It just started there, and then every time I do anything I want to teach it afterwards.
And then, I went to Africa as a teacher. And I had no training. I was white and I had education and I was an agriculturist, so I went to start this course for Peace Corps people who were going to come in the next year. I was going to do the syllabus, and check out the scene with the agricultural department, and set up these classes. But the guy who ran the program turned out to be corrupt, and he stole all the money, so the program crashed, and I was stuck into a teaching situation in a high school. And I had no training at all, no books, teaching chemistry and physics to people who were two years younger than me, and way smarter. And so I was like one page ahead. So, I realized teaching is not just the desire to. There’s some training necessary. But, they all passed it. It was ok. Everybody was happy. But I wasn’t.

I wasn’t happy because I knew that I had been flying by the seat of my pants. And that I’d picked up some laziness in my teaching. And I also didn’t know how to solve problems. And I didn’t know how to discipline the class. I was controlling them because I was white and because they were expected to be controlled by themselves. And because for a lot of them their whole life depended on this school, so they were really motivated. But I knew that if I was going to do more teaching, I would have to know class control. And not in terms of discipline, but in terms of maximizing the efficiency of the teaching. Basically I was doing what my teachers had done. Just do notes. No kind of class involvement. And it fit them because that’s what they were used to.

Eventually, I started university, and that’s when I met a professor who’s just a wonderful, wonderful guy, an excellent teacher-trainer, and he just turned my whole world around. He had a program that taught that teaching wasn’t the important thing, learning was. And the teacher’s job is to create a learning environment, and work from where the students are. And he introduced me to Cuisenaire rods, words in colour, all these techniques that worked from where the students are. And that just blew me away because it worked so well. It took the load off
information dispensing, which is where most teachers think they are, to
"Let's find out where you are and where you're going to go, and how we're
going to get there." So it was a really beautiful enlightenment.

And then I got into teaching. That's been it. I mean, that's my
story. There's no way I cannot be involved; it's just part of my genetic
structure and my past, I mean, how to do it right.

I taught for ten years, and then I went to a high school. This was in
a small town. And, because I was openly gay, it was not appreciated. And
they just came down on me like a ton of bricks. And, everybody said
"Great teacher, but we don't like you." Ok. They just set out to destroy
me any way they could and they finally succeeded, and I helped in the
process because we all make mistakes when we get angry. You know, we
say things and do things. So it was just an awful situation, and I just
decided to take a sick leave for three years and came down here, ended
up renting a house with some friends, and I became friends with Isaac,
who was the owner of the school that I'm presently at.

And he and I starting talking, and he offered me a job. And he said,
"Just come in and see what you could do in ESL because you don't have
any training." So I went in and within an hour I was hired, at that point
for ten dollars an hour. It was so nice because the school had a vision.
The school had a commitment to the same kind of teaching that I had
done. And it was an eye opener. And he was encouraging people to get
their ESL training. So, I got my ESL training.

In the future, basically I want to teach teachers. I just want to be
like my professor to somebody else with the skills that I've learned and
the help I've had from other people. You follow it, and then you send it
out again.

4.2.3 Andrew the Activist

[Andrew has just finished telling the story of how the union came to
be in his workplace. When the union was formed, he was excluded from
the initial membership drive and was not informed about the union until after it had been established.

So that was the creation of the union. And when I came back, I was really pissed off and hurt because they cut me out. But, I remember the first union meeting, and I felt very uncomfortable because everybody knew that it was my first meeting. They knew that I was angry. And I just told them. I said, "I'm really angry that you didn't call me." And they said, "Well, we didn't have your phone number." I said, "The office had my phone number." And so I destroyed their argument, and so I knew. And then I said, "Ok, I'm going to tell you. I'm really really pissed off with everybody here that you wouldn't include me in the vote because it's not a way to start a union. It's not the way to start a collective effort, without part of the collective." And I said "Listen, I don't like it, but I'm going to make this the best union possible. So, don't cut me out. I'll be here. I'll come to the meetings. I'll do my job because I want to make it the best."

I've been involved as shop stewards basically. I was the vice president once. But, you know, the legacy of Isaac and I being friends and all the administrators and I being friends cut me out of the kind of trust. The members never really trusted me, until recently, until the last round of bargaining in which my eyes were opened. I went into the bargaining committee as a sort of associate member, and what I said after that and what I did during the bargaining I guess raised my credibility in the union.

And then I became president by, not really acclamation. Lots of people were nominated, and when somebody nominated me they just said, "Well, we'll decline because Andrew's the one." Which is very nice. After so many years, I felt like, well, I've really spoken the truth, and people have heard me, and expressing the desire for the collective power and professionalism, all those words, as well as the spirit of the school. So, I'll do my best, but boy is it hard. I am just drained because we're working on a grievance. And well, Isaac's not being the least bit nice.
Last Sunday, I sort of woke up, I said, "What is it that I would say to Isaac if he and I were bargaining?" Just, "Why, after so many years of working for you, should I be fighting you for sixty cents a fucking hour? Sixty cents an hour? Why would you say that that's unreasonable? Why would you not be offering me five bucks an hour more?" It really hurts. Because he says one thing, and does another. Because the vision is still in the handbook. You know, circle of communication. Respectful environment. All that crap. It's crap. And I put my life on the line for him. Yes, I've made money. He's responsible for my prosperity. And I created the wealth. I created the wealth for him. There is no trouble with money. And I shouldn't have to fight for this, and I shouldn't have to fight for simple due process, and I shouldn't have to fight for the rights of recall. There's nothing I should be fighting for. This is the point.

4.2.4 Tobias the Teacher

I like traveling because I used to race motorcycles. I just liked to get out of town at an early age. And I did make a decision to go to university instead of going professional into motorcycles, which why I didn't kill myself.

And at university I started out in sciences because, you know, seemed like what daddy wanted – sciences and be a lawyer or a doctor. I quickly made a shift to anthropology, and started studying, got my BA, did an honours. I got a job in the summer with a professor that wanted me to do graduate work with him, and we were working on a project putting together a biography of this guy and suddenly he [the professor] died of brain cancer.

Nobody told me about ESL. A lot of anthropology and ethnography students go into ESL. But nobody ever told me that. I did bump into a graduate student who had been to Japan to teach. And that kind of sparked an idea. And after I stopped that job in the summer, I dropped out of graduate work – I just lost interest. I didn't want to do it anyways.
I just liked my professor. And I was at a party and I met some guy with a Japanese girlfriend. He’d just returned from Japan teaching, told me there was lots of money there and good kind of experience. I went there as an experience, not [for] the money although I made a pile of money. But I spent 40,000 US partying. And so I brought no money back. I can’t talk about those parties.

But no regrets. And then while teaching there I realized that I wasn’t a teacher. And that it was totally bogus. I worked for a school that was like, you know, the pink parrot. Repeat-after-me. I did meet a couple of teachers who were TESL certified. And I looked up their material. I looked up what they were doing. I thought, “My god, there is a job here.” Because I just didn’t want to have anything to do with that. I just felt I was ripping off those students.

So, I thought when I go back to Canada, I’ll get a TESL certificate. And I did. When I got back, I went to college, got my TESL certificate, worked a little bit in Vancouver. And then my first wife and I moved to Toronto. And took about three months getting across the country. That was wonderful. And got into town and easily got work at two or three schools.

You just did these things years ago, and when I came into town I was a greenhorn. You just went to the schools to get a job. And I did sub at different schools and stuff like that. I kind of got in there. And what happened with my school now is I kind of got into the dead period, like fall/winter, and I bumped into the then-director at a pub, bought her a couple of shots of tequila, and was hired full-time.

And when I got there I didn’t know what was going on. But here’s how it went. Teachers came in, and there was a posting on the wall telling you what classes you were teaching and whether or not you were full-time. Nobody even called you. You just came in and found out what you got. And so I was full time, I got my two communication classes. Like, I was a “success” – after two shots of tequila, and that’s not a lie.
But, anyway, I found out that I had gone full time, and poor Cynthia, who had started before me, had gone part time because of me, but she didn’t know that, although she saw my name, and said, “Who’s he?” And so this was going on, so there was no respect for seniority. So there was bumping on a very personal level. And I mean, it helped me, but at the same time I realized that that I kind of snuck away, right? I’m full time. And then it started. I started working there full time. And then soon afterward I decided to unionize.

4.2.5 Tobias the Activist

My daddy’s not a doctor, or a professional. He dropped out of school. It’s all blue collar. It’s a lot more outspoken because of the American influence. It’s all American television and radio, and I raced motorcycles all through the United States when I was young. I just got to be really direct. When I got here it was just wishy-washy. And I came [to this city] and said, “Hey! Yes or no?”

Just for the record I’d like to say that people like me don’t really need a union. I’m a bit snaky, and I figure things out quickly, and I don’t take a lot of things personally. And I would have survived at the school, but it would have been fifteen bucks an hour. But, I was insulted in front of people. I was insulted. I was treated like a piece of shit. And that was the motive.

As far as everything else, I was just going with the flow. I didn’t really know what was going on there. I really didn’t care. Other teachers talked about problems, but I was living a pretty good life. I camped a lot. Every Friday evening, I hopped into my van and we went camping. I came back, I went to work, I never hung out with teachers.

But, Isaac just doesn’t want to be around. He doesn’t want to have any contact. When I put the certification on his desk, he cried. And he begged me. “It’s your life honey. You had your chance.” I had given him a chance already. I know his type. I was never really soft with the guy.
was really outspoken in teachers’ meetings. It’s a wonder he never fired me before.

Teachers dug up things on Isaac, whereas I never went there. He got caught frauding taxes and had to pay. They internet-researched him. And they found quite a bit of dirt. It all came to me. And I never let it get out. They hated him, and they wanted to use this against him. I said, “You just can’t do that.” It was just because of the doubletalk. But I take it for granted. In the business world doubletalk is just what it’s all about, right? So it never really surprised me. It’s like ok, that’s what the guy’s doing. Ok, no problem. We’ll work within that, within that realm or whatever.

It took a while to get this one director out of the school. I became a shop steward. I was representing a teacher who had passed probation, but management had asked for the probation to be extended because she was going to hit benefits and everything, right? And so I said, “No. No.” And this woman later went on to be president. So, you know, you help people, they come around, right? I said, “No.” It turned into a huge argument. It started to get really personal. At the time the director was drinking heavily, I heard. I could tell that she just got off a bender or whatever, right. And she got really personal. “Oh if it weren’t for you, we wouldn’t have all these problems.” And she threw a stack of books at me. I just thought, “Did you see that?” That was the end of her, right. And so that was the last thing of her. She could not manage. She just could not manage that pressure and stuff.

We had one pro-management president [of the union]. He was the only one who ran for election, so it wasn’t a vote. But I was watching him. I shut him down in meetings when he would say things like, “The school is building another campus and the money goes in that direction.” I said, in front of everybody at the meeting, “You’re here to tell us about... there’s the agenda. You don’t defend this school. They’re making investments; they’ve got money to spend.” Because he’d just go on and
on at the cost of other issues about the school spending, doing this and doing that. And he tried always to get us to sympathize with the cost of doing business and stuff. I said, “Well, we all know that. We all know that the school is making lots of money. Please get to our issues.” So I was always in meetings. I went to every meeting. I've never missed a meeting in my life. And I kind of reined him in there.

But, more my personality. I wasn’t good as a president. I did it because I knew the collective agreement. And it was just the timing and stuff. But there were far better people to be president, Andrew for example, far better and more articulate and level-headed people than myself. I’m an organizer. That’s all I was. I was a rhetorical organizer doing the right thing, but as far as managing I can’t be bothered. I’m sorry to say. It’s not my personality.

I’m sorry, but for me, it’s always going to be about money. It’s about money, job security, benefits, and survival. And I’m not philosophical at all. Sorry. I’m not going to be philosophical about it. I walk into work, I do my job. Don’t fuck with it. Period.

4.2.6 Samantha the Teacher

I never in my wildest dreams thought that I would become a teacher. I wasn’t the best student in school. I liked English. I just didn’t do that well at it. Not a particularly good public speaker, not particularly good at any of those things. Very shy person. Anyway, I studied art. I was at an art college, and I didn’t really like it very much, so I decided I would go traveling, and I just knew that I really liked Japanese art and Japanese gardens, and I thought Japanese design was fantastic. So, I thought, “I’ll go to Japan.” And I had this vague notion, based on what I had heard, that yes, you could go teach in Japan and survive. I really wasn’t into making a lot of money. It wasn’t my agenda.

Anyway, so I went to Japan with a friend who I was living with at the time, and easily found work. It was during the bubble, so the first
interview I went to, I got a job. But it was a kind of racket. I mean, I could clearly see that it was just a business. But I didn't really care that much because I needed to work. I was in Tokyo and I needed to get a job and I needed to get one quickly.

Anyway, it was fine. It was just get them in, get them out, kind of thing. And I discovered that I didn't really love teaching, but that I could do it, mainly if I could stay one step ahead. There was a certain element to teaching in Japan that was kind of gross, and it was that there was a certain entertainment to it. I wasn't particularly comfortable with that, so I actually tried to teach. So I did hone some skills. I was quite conscientious. I didn't really just want to go in and entertain, but that seemed to be the way that most people got by. But because I wasn't very keen on entertaining, I actually tried to teach, and found that there was a structure to it that I actually kind of enjoyed. And there was a kind of thrill to it, a thrill in getting someone to the point where they actually understood something well and could use it.

I moved from that company to a company that was owned by this woman. She didn't treat us like we were just cogs in a wheel. She didn't treat us like we were just one of many and could be replaced easily. She treated us like we were important to the success of the business, and an integral part, and she was a good manager. It was a small school, and it was her interests at stake. She never played games with us. She never manipulated us. She wanted us to do a good job, and we tried to do a good job for her.

But anyway, it was time to leave Japan. So I left Japan, traveled a lot, and then came back to Canada, and I thought, "What am I going to do?" So a friend phoned me and [told me about a new school opening up] "Go get your resume." So I put a resume together, and I taped it to the door of this office because they hadn't actually opened yet. And Greg, the fellow I work for now, was the guy who was managing the school.

Anyway, I had this really great interview with Greg where he just talked
about all his fears and desires about the future. I worked for him for a few years at that school.

Then Greg opened up his own company, and when he opened up his new company he said, “Do you want to come and work for me there?” So I was sort of taken from one right to the other. But I had a relationship with Greg. Like, I was maybe the fourth employee, or the third employee at the new school. And I got to set my own terms to a certain extent. And so I set my wage, I think at twenty-two dollars an hour. And I asked him to pay half of my medical, and that I wanted a raise every year. I said that I wanted inflation. But I didn’t want to ask for too much. I just had a sense of well, ok, fifty cents a year.

So, Greg and I had this relationship and I just thought that I was going to be treated fairly. I’ve never had a job where I felt actually that I was treated fairly. Like, at the book store I was treated quite badly, and all the employees were just cogs in a wheel. Anyway, with Greg I thought it was quite different. I have been working for Greg now for several years.

So, my interest in teaching was monetary because I didn’t want to work for minimum wage. But I also thought that I actually could do the job well. I did think that I had something to offer. That was it.

4.2.7 Samantha the Activist

I spent a lot of my youth being an advocate for others. And I’ve tried to figure this out myself actually. What happened? And I think a lot of it had to do with myself being compromised in a family situation, a family dynamic in which I disappeared. So my personality, my self was quite compromised. And I lost a sense of myself, and I think that’s what I am. That’s my true self. The first one, the kid who would do that.

For example, there was this kid at school who everybody picked on. They just totally picked on him, and I would defend him against the bullies. And I’m not that big, and I wasn’t that big then, but I would fight them off, and I would win. I felt like I was right. This poor kid, he had
some sort of medical condition and he smelled, and I was so indignant with the teachers because a couple of them took on the role of accuser. And they made him feel worse than he already did. They almost took the side that the kids were on. One teacher put him out in the hall, instead of trying to understand his problems. It was so unfair all the time. It was brutal.

And I did that many times in school. But it was interesting. It was interesting because the union brought forth a lot of that. But I felt paralyzed a lot of the time. The workplace often mirrors a kind of patriarchal structure that you live in with a family. And all of the dysfunction that exists in the family. I think that when you have a young work force that are unsure of themselves, teaching puts you in a place where you're very, very, very insecure. You're having to put out a lot of energy [and] you don't even know that you can. And then to be insecure about whether you're going to keep your job, and all that stuff combined makes you a very vulnerable, very insecure person. Myself and a lot of other people came out of a family structure, maybe traveled a little bit, and then came into a work structure that wasn't so dissimilar. But the notion is that there is this one person who calls all the shots and you have no power, and you have no recourse, and it's only the benevolence of this individual that will allow you to either thrive or fail.

I remember them trying to target me, but I think I wasn't targeted because I had been there longer than Paul [a manager] who was trying to play these power games. And I was somehow off limits. And I had a relationship with Greg. But the one altercation I actually had with Paul, he backed down and he never bothered me again.

[Samantha relates a story about a meeting with her supervisor, Paul, who wanted to discipline her for insubordination.]

He wanted to discuss the notion he had that this had to be brought to Greg's attention. It was an interesting dynamic, and this was where I understood that Paul was all about power. He initially stood up
and was trying to physically be dominating. And then I turned it on him, and I stood up, and somehow he became small. He sat down, and he actually visibly shook. This is the funny thing. Here I am telling him what it’s all about, and he’s cowering. And I never had a problem with him after that. And I said, “Ya, go ahead, talk to Greg. And I’ll have some things to say to Greg about you.”

It was one of those moments in life where you just take charge of yourself, and take charge of the situation because you’re defending yourself, and it’s like, fight or flight, and I chose to fight. And the whole time, I was thinking, “I’m going to be fired, I’m going to be fired, I’m going to be fired.” I was terrified, but I couldn’t let him see. It was like not looking the beast in the eye. You just pretend to be confident.

[Regarding the union] I found myself in a kind of middle area, a middle ground. And I could notice my own changes throughout the whole process of getting involved in the union. But, how do I see my place? I see my place as kind of active to a certain point, but not vital. But helpful. If I had to describe it, I kind of pushed a little bit. I encouraged. I discussed a lot of things with Ben.

I think all of us had a sense of injustice around us. It’s like a microcosm of society, but it’s one place where you spend most of your time. And how can you live in a place where people are being treated so badly? And continue? I think we were all so fed up. The inequality. The inequity. The injustice of things that were happening around us. I mean, when do you get to fight a war? When do you get to prove that you’re a good human being? You don’t unless you fight something like this. To a certain extent, I think that it’s a battlefield. I always minimize these things, but it is a major thing. It’s just a huge part of who and what we are as people. People who take a stand. That’s a really weird thing.
4.2.8 Benjamin the Teacher

How did I become a teacher? In our family, we speak English and Spanish at home, and then I went to French school and my mother speaks seven languages. She taught me languages, so I always had a huge interest in languages. And I was pretty good at French, so I would tutor it. So I was really more into languages, not teaching, but just languages. And they paid really well.

So I thought what I’ll do is I’ll go into international marketing and business and use my languages there with the full intention of moving back to Europe. I wasn’t going to stay in Canada. So, I did International Marketing and finished my degree in that with languages.

So then, I was going to go back to Europe. I’d quit my job, and my friend was living in Japan. He said, “Well, why don’t you come to Japan? You always go to Europe. Come here. There’s lots of great money. There’s a huge economic boom here. You can get a job pronto. And I thought, “Well, I’ve never been to Japan.” And so, I did. The next week I got my visa and everything. I was there in two weeks with a one year working holiday visa.

I went into international marketing there. I worked for a huge fashion company. And I was working nine to five. Pretty good money, but then I realized I could work from five to nine teaching English and make twice the money. So I got into teaching because it was such easy work. Teaching French or German before I picked up a lot of things on how to teach of course. So, I had no training, but the places where I worked offered a lot of good training. There were a lot of people from Britain who were with the British Council and all that. And they gave us some in-house training which was really good. They were very helpful. [Then I opened a school with some friends.] I ran my school there for about three years, and then the bubble busted. And I said, “Time to bail.” So, I did. So altogether I was in Japan five years, and then after that I did other jobs, besides just teaching. I was really burnt out on teaching.
Then I went to Los Angeles after that. And I was in acting school there. And also I was teaching on the side. And this time I was teaching ESL to actors who wanted to play these different roles in films back home. I was there for about three years. And then I moved here after that. And I was not really planning to stay in the field. But it was easy money. When I came here Greg offered me a job. I'd worked with him in Japan.

That's sort of how I got into teaching. I've always enjoyed teaching. Whatever I've learned I've always sort of turned around and taught. So, for me it's almost like second nature. I remember somebody once saying, "You should learn to cut hair." And I'm there, "Like why's that?" And they said, "Because no matter where you are if ever you are hard up, like if you're traveling, you can always stop and cut hair to make money." But I think teaching English has been that sort of that skill. I've always been able to make money teaching English, and I think I'm a pretty good teacher because the students always chose me over the other teachers even though I thought sometimes they were better teachers. But I think it was my personality. They found it easy to communicate with me. It's been something to fall back on sometimes, and sometimes it's been my main source of income. That's how I got into teaching.

4.2.9 Benjamin the Activist

I guess even as a teacher representative, I've always been one of these guys who sort of sticks up for other people if there's no good reason for [the discipline or action toward a teacher]. I just can't sit back and let something happen like that.

I just don't like anything that's unfair. I have a big sense of fairness, I think, and especially if people are being dicked around. Quite often for my friends or for my students as well, I tell them, "If you have any problems, like with a landlord or travel agent or anything, let me know. And I'll go and fight your battle for you." Especially for my
I've had to fight a lot of stupid landlords who keep deposits and that type of thing. I'll take up a cause. I wouldn't take it personally, even today our union issues are not taken personally. It's all a process.

I had no problems. I had a very strong personality, and I could fight my own battles quite well. I just remember once when Samantha and I were being disciplined about not filling in things properly, which I tend to do and she's even worse. And I came in [to the meeting] and we were in the wrong, absolutely. I mean, this is not filled out. There's your evidence. There's no debating it. So, anyway, Samantha was sitting waiting for me to come in, and she was more than willing to apologize because she hadn't done the work. And I come in, and I start screaming at Paul saying that it's all his fault and that they're irresponsible in their timelines. And he apologized and asked me what he could do to help me fill things in. And Samantha was just shocked that I had just turned the tables on him.

A union made sense to me. Like I say, in terms of popularity contests, I could have probably asked for more money from Greg without a union, perhaps. He has been pretty kind and generous to me. I have no complaints about him. Now, that's my relationship with him. I know other people have had terrible relationships with him.

Greg was quite hurt when we first formed the union. When we went before the labour board, I went to that meeting. I still remember that meeting. He showed up, and they didn't know who this union representative was, and then they saw me walk in and they were quite shocked that it was me because they thought, "What reason did I have to complain about?" You know, compared to some other people.

But, power is an illusion. And I think they are afraid of us, in terms of power, because I think they see our union as very strong. Earlier in a meeting somebody asked our supervisor, "Can you ask Greg for this?" And she said, "Well, get Ben to ask because Greg's afraid of
Ben." So, it's like good. I'm glad that that illusion is there because it can work for us.

I think what makes the union strong is one, the people. And the people have a good sense of self-worth, I think. They think they're worth the money that they're paid. And I think that is really really important. And I think also good leadership. For example, they trust us to be at the helm, where we are. In terms of the everyday running of the union, it's not a big concern. I mean, my role has been pretty minimal over the last three years. After Larry and Paul left, I'll say.

I don’t know how many times I've heard, “Thank god we have a unionized work place.” I hear it over and over again.

4.2.10 Summary of Participant Profiles

These stories present several topics that are important for understanding the ensuing analysis. In the teacher profiles, all informants, perhaps with the exception of Ben, exhibit an evolution in their teacher identities in which each person begins as a novice, and then eventually becomes a more skilled educator, developing their own sense of good educational practices. Another point that emerges is that the speakers' teacher identities are primarily formed within a business context, with the exception of Andrew who taught in the public school system. From their experiences, the participants all note how business principles can infringe upon their sense of good pedagogy. This important theme is elaborated upon in the following sections of this chapter. A final point related to the informants’ teacher identities is their previous experiences with unfair treatment. Andrew's subjection to homophobia in the public education system is one obvious example. For other participants, their treatment by the owners of their schools or by different employers also felt demeaning. These situations may have played a part in laying the foundation upon which their activist identities are built.
The activist profiles show how these speakers make sense of their union roles based on their own histories. For example, Samantha relates her childhood memories of herself as an advocate to her activities with the union; Tobias sees his working class background as giving rise to his personal resilience. The informants also describe their past and current functions within the union, including Andrew’s evolution from an outsider to a union leader, Samantha’s position as a witness to workplace injustice and her subsequent role as a behind-the-scenes support, and Tobias’s and Ben’s sense of themselves as central to their unions’ success. I draw upon the teachers’ notions of how they are able to resist unfair situations at their workplaces as well as their sense of good teaching and business practices in the third section of this chapter.

With these historical profiles as a basis for understanding who the four storytellers are, I next present an interpretation of their collective union histories.

4.3 A Story of Two Unions

This section highlights similarities and differences in the chronologies of the two unions. It is divided into five phases. The first phase describes life at the schools early in their existence; the second emphasizes a shift in the attitude of the owner and in the way the schools were run; the next section highlights a climactic event at each school that triggered the formation of the unions; the fourth part describes the unionization process; the last phase depicts reflections on both positive and negative aspects of life after the schools organized.

This history shows links between events as perceived by the group of interviewees. The progress of both schools from smaller, more intimate communities to larger, more profit-oriented institutions sets the stage for the organizing efforts. The teachers describe the mistreatment of teachers by managers both before and after the unions were instigated,
demonstrating how the presence of a collective bargaining unit and a union contract assisted them in attaining safe and secure employment.

4.3.1 The Early Days

Each story begins with a sense of the “early days” at the school. The early days are characterized by a feeling of unity and harmony in the working environment. The schools were both small. Andrew estimates that in the second year of ESL College’s existence, when he began working there, total enrollment was approximately fifty to sixty students with about six or seven teachers. Teacher-student ratios were also low with only three to seven students per class. He describes the intimate environment of the school: “[There was a] ping-pong room. A nice easy-going kind of thing. What I liked was the classes were only separated by curtains.” He also feels that “the teacher was respected, the student was respected, and the rights of the owner to build the school was protected. Everybody was working nicely together.” Ben describes CEC in a similar way: “The school was run very efficiently. Money was always given. No one was ever cheated. It was a really nice place to work.”

The informants indicate that, at this time, the owners followed specific philosophies. At ESL College, Andrew recalls, the owner once stated to the teachers, “We’re trying to create a community here, an international community of people who trust each other, enjoy each other, know how to have fun, engage in serious conversation, change their lives. And English is the medium for that.” Samantha also recites a similar vision endorsed by the owner of CEC.

The most important feature of these early days as emphasized by the teachers was that the owners of both schools were consistently present in the day-to-day running of the school. Tobias expresses it this way, “At that time, [the owner] did circulate. He was in contact with everybody. He chaired the teachers’ meetings because there weren’t that
many teachers." Andrew shows how the presence of the owner allowed problems to be solved immediately and effectively:

He was present all the time. And if there was a problem, he'd direct the student to you. He'd say "How was the class?" The student would say, "Well...I was a little bit unsure of what we were doing." And he'd say [to the teacher] "Can you talk to Kyoko? She wasn't sure what was happening today." So it was instant feedback.

Although the things ran smoothly at the schools, they are not portrayed as perfect. One speaker remarks that there were no paid sick days. "You were sick, you were sick. And somebody took over." However, the teachers generally feel that labour issues were dealt with in a fair way. For instance, ESL College experienced some periodic financial difficulties. When lay-offs were imminent, the owner tended to respect seniority; the last person hired was the first to leave.

4.3.2 New Priorities, a New Dynamic

The teachers speak of a subsequent shift that took place in the running of the school following this harmonious period. They all commented that their schools grew rapidly and experienced financial success. One speaker from ESL College says that "it was doubling every year." At CEC, another notes, the school expanded from one floor of the building to two floors to three. With the increase in size came a shift in the atmosphere: "[T]he ping-pong table was removed at that time...and there were two classrooms [added] there. So, the mood changed." The sense of community and closeness began to break down for Andrew.

Most significantly, informants noticed that owners became separated from the daily operations of the colleges. Interestingly, both sets of teachers make the point that the shift corresponded to the physical movement of the owner to another area of the building. In one case, Andrew says, "And then it changed so that he moved upstairs. And
we stopped seeing him. And that to me, was the point when I knew things had changed.” Samantha puts it this way:

He removed himself... the day-to-day stuff. The school got bigger... He didn’t talk to people on a daily basis. He used to go in and talk to the students. And everybody knew him. He had a rapport with people. Anyway, he gradually just moved away from that.

In both cases, this shift corresponded to a perceived shift in the attitude of the owner toward the employees. The teachers at CEC in particular observe that the owner lost touch with his original philosophy of creating a positive learning and working environment and began to focus more on marketing. This detached attitude in combination with the physical separation of the owner, they report, depersonalized the relationship between the employer and the workers and students according to the speakers.

In the owner’s absence, managers were hired to take over many of the hands-on duties that the owner once engaged in. The teachers generally felt that these managers lacked the necessary skills for supervising teachers. Speakers at both schools mention that they felt alienated by the managers. For example Andrew states, “The academics started to come.” He describes an event in which he was working on a professional development activity for all the teachers at the school. The new “academic” style manager confronted him about the workshop that he was planning and asked, “Why should I work with you? Why should I allow my teachers to be under your tutelage when you have no credentials in the professional development field?’ ... That’s the way he put himself apart from everybody else. He just alienated everybody.” Teachers came to realize that they had no voice in regards to their employment conditions. Simply put, “Teachers have been cut out of the circle of communication.”

At CEC, the informants saw their managers as power hungry and oppressive. The new management style appeared to be one of bullying. At
one point in an interview, Samantha describes a manager as “a total egomaniac dictator,” and words no less harsh are used by Ben to describe the same person. At this school, the frontline managers are portrayed as actively targeting teachers. In one typical story, a new teacher was hired at the workplace. This teacher was inexperienced, but Samantha felt that this person had qualities important in a teacher. She commented that, like any novice teacher, he had a hard time juggling the complexities of teaching. “He wasn’t the most fantastic teacher,” she explains.

He needed some tutoring. He needed some time to improve, but he wasn’t given that... [Right off the bat, the students are complaining, therefore they must be right... He didn’t do very well. And then knowing that he was being targeted by [the manager] because [the manager] took a dislike to the guy... In one week he was observed maybe four times...and he knew it. And he got nervous, so it got worse. It steamrolled. So, instead of trying to make him a better teacher and mentor him, they made him worse. They made the guy freeze, essentially. And then [they had] cause to fire him.

After a series of incidents with the management, this teacher was finally let go.

Besides these representative interactions, speakers from both schools mention a series of unfair practices that became the backdrop to the formation of the union. One major problem, as illustrated above, was that the teachers felt management took a punitive approach to professional training and development. For instance, in both institutions, the teachers believed evaluations filled out by students were used against teachers. One narrator claims that the intention behind the evaluations was “Let’s find fault with this teacher.” This issue is further explored in the next section of this chapter in reference to business practices.
A second major problem was unequal treatment of instructors by management with no clear or fair process to be followed. One teacher commented that “People that were inclined to play this game of working behind the scenes and getting everything that you could possibly get for yourself,” while other teachers were not given access to the same opportunities. As Tobias explains in his profile, at the beginning of every school semester at ESL College, teachers were informed about what their hours would be that semester. He sees this system as arbitrary and unfair. The speakers believe that these unbalanced ways of managing teachers amounted to an atmosphere in which teachers were not secure in their jobs: “There was no guarantee that after working there for six months somebody wouldn’t come off the street and take your work.”

4.3.3 Turning Point

With these circumstances as the setting, every storyteller speaks of a turning point in the unionization plot. Each story clearly centres on a climactic moment upon which the formation of the union hinged. It is worth mentioning that of the two speakers representing each school, the pivotal moment is the same and almost without variation in detail. I will go directly to the words of the narrators for the stories themselves.

Tobias begins the story:

I got something in my mailbox saying that the school was going to go to another structure of pay, and when I crunched all the numbers, I figured out that it was in fact a pay decrease. It was implementing a salary system and it added up to a pay decrease.

The story continues from Andrew:

And three or four days were not going to be paid...Anyway, some people couldn’t pay their rent because they weren’t going to be paid for another two weeks after that. And they were really pissed off. Really pissed off.
After some negotiating, the owner then agreed to halt the change to this new method of dispensing teachers' income. However, he then suddenly expressed a change in heart and asserted that the new system would soon be implemented.

Teachers from CEC report a similarly dramatic event but one that converged on a much different issue. Ben summarizes the story in this way:

Then there was one receptionist who was great. Everybody loved her...She asked for time off which he approved. And it was to take care of...her brother-in-law who was dying of cancer or something like that. And then she had to take time off for grieving. And then [the owner] fired her because of this even though he approved the time off.

He continues the story, “Well, we were all shocked as hell. It was like killing Santa Claus. You know? This... the kindest person on earth...and people were really upset.”

Samantha uses a surprisingly similar metaphor. “It’s sort of like shooting Bambi,” she says, and continues by explaining the rationale behind unionizing:

It was just totally inhuman. There was no compassion. It was all very cutthroat at that point...It became the emperor’s clothes, right? You know, it was just obvious that [the employer] wasn’t all that [kind and compassionate], and that to hire those people [referring to the managers] meant that he was just as bad...so in order for us to be safe and to feel like those jobs were not in jeopardy all the time, unionization was the only... and to stop targeting people... was the only way to stop it.

This last statement shows that for these teachers the moment that precipitated the formation of a union was not exceptional. In fact, it was their perception that a series of unfair incidents and a resulting sense of insecurity laid the foundation for collective action.
4.3.4 The Formation of the Unions

The approaches taken to organizing the two schools were surprisingly different. Tobias identifies himself as the initiator of the organizing effort at ESL College, and Andrew confirms this. After learning that the owner would go ahead with implementing the new pay system, Tobias became extremely angry. He went home, phoned a friend who had recently helped to form a union at his own workplace, and was put in contact with a labour union. He spent one day driving around with a coworker to the teachers' homes to have them sign union membership cards. Within a week, a large majority of teachers had signed cards and the union was instated.

At CEC, the shape that the unionization process took was much different. The two interview participants from CEC explain that they worked with a small group of other teachers to unionize their school. Ben notes that this group of teachers all lived within close proximity to one another, and they all felt positive about unions in general. These teachers collaborated to choose a labour union that they thought would be an appropriate fit for their workplace. They then organized an information and card-signing meeting for all the teachers at the school with a representative from the union's head office.

At this meeting, Samantha points out,
We had a few dissenters...One fellow was pretty articulate about it, and it was kind of scary. He was presenting a good argument...that if you ever want to move to another ESL school...you'll be marked. You'll be on a blacklist as one of the members of the group that unionized in CEC, which was just an insane argument because, you know, here's the fear we're trying to quash...and he's proposing that as a reason not to unionize. So there...[were] a few people that were just totally anti-union.
In the end, like ESL College, a large majority of teachers signed cards to institute a collective bargaining unit at their workplace.

The two narratives presented here suggest that at the two schools the ways teachers related to one another through the organizing process were quite different. At CEC, a group of teachers worked cooperatively to organize their workplace. Furthermore, the teachers at this school were described by both Ben and Samantha as “quite cohesive.” Their approach in presenting the idea of unionizing to other teachers was, as Samantha states, “to cajole [rather] than to intimidate. We wanted people to feel really comfortable with their decision.” The two speakers from this school indicate that their motivation for helping to unionize their workplace was based in anger at the way their coworkers were being treated and, for one teacher, in the fear that she might be treated the same way.

Conversely, at ESL College, the organizing effort is shown to be very much based on the energy of Tobias. The interactions between the organizer and the teachers were primarily private. In addition, Tobias says that he took an uncompromising approach. “If you don’t like unionized schools, better get out” is the way he presents his attitude in dealing with teachers who spoke out against the union. Like the teachers from CEC, he identifies his motivation for bringing in a union as anger at the way he and other teachers had been treated by the owner.

It would be pertinent at this point to indicate that there were some immediate negative consequences of the organizing process for these activists. Becoming involved in the union effort was not an easy decision although most indicated that they felt they had no other choice. The informants who were involved in organizing talked about the amount of time that they gave to the unionization effort, and about stress, fear, anxiety and loss of sleep. “I really had no idea what I was doing” is a sentiment repeatedly emphasized in the interviews.

Samantha says that throughout the unionization process she was terrified of losing her job. One interview conversation sums up the
circumstances the organizers felt they were operating in when they chose to form a union. Sam indicates a concern at the time about whether the union “could... actually fly because you have one opportunity to do it,” to which Tobias responds, “Then you get fired.” Sam replies, “And then you get fired if you don’t do it right.” It is communicated that the possibility of losing their livelihood was very much a threat to all the people who spoke about their involvement in creating a union. The element of risk must be considered as a testimony to the strength of the motivations behind the act of unionizing.

These teachers report another complication that had a particularly devastating effect on relations among teachers. At both colleges, certain teachers were excluded from the membership drive. This was because their fellow employees felt these teachers had close relationships with the owner or management and any knowledge of the organizing attempt might jeopardize their chances of success. Ben acknowledges that though these people were hurt, he felt that their exclusion was necessary to protect the greater good.

Andrew was not included in the organizing effort for the same reasons, and the pain he experienced on being omitted from the unionization process is made clear in his profile. In hindsight, however, he came to understand why he was excluded: “[T]hese people put their jobs on the line, and the school on the line, to create a revolution, so why would they give that up easily if there was a chance that I was colluding with the employer?” Interestingly, Andrew gradually became more and more involved in the union at his workplace, and continues to be an active member at the time of this writing.

4.3.5 Life After Unionization: Positive Outcomes

The research participants are generally positive about the outcomes they have noticed since the unions came into effect. The main benefit that these teachers note is that “the union has curtailed
management." There are several ways that the teachers describe this as occurring.

The key feature that comes forth in these narratives is, in Andrew's words, that notion that "the union supplies stability and process." In the collective agreements, parameters on working conditions, on expectations of teachers, and on union-management relations are outlined. The teachers specifically mention how they benefit from having clear limits on class sizes, a process for recalling teachers from lay-off, a system for defining access to work, and language on personal harassment. Such controls, they claim, reduce the likelihood of arbitrary and unfair managerial conduct.

An example of such a constraint on management's authority is the use of seniority. Unions generally use seniority to determine access to work, vacation time, and other desirable opportunities for workers. Without a system of seniority, fierce and potentially unfair competition may result. Ben tells the story of how he applied to teach a new program that was about to be offered at his college. He was refused the position, which was offered to another teacher who had been working at the school for a shorter period of time. Feeling that the refusal was grounded in personal hostility rather than an objective decision, Ben launched a grievance to challenge the decision. Ultimately, he won the case, and a system of using seniority in job competitions was established at the school.

For these teachers, another process that enables them to resist the unfair use of power is the grievance procedure. Teachers from one school indicate that soon after the first collective agreement came into effect, there were a series of grievances. The employer "had to be taught," as Sam puts it. "There were situations where it took management...a bit of time to get used to the idea that they weren't all-powerful, and that the teachers had recourse." The grievance procedure was the primary means
to achieve this. One example of how managerial control of teachers has been stemmed through grievance occurred at ESL College when the managers tried to extend the probationary period for a particular employee as a punitive measure. The union launched a grievance on behalf of the teacher showing that the language in the collective agreement did not allow for such an extension, and the management conceded.

Through such processes, the teachers feel that they are in a better position to communicate with management on equal ground. I have mentioned that previous to the formation of the union the teachers felt alienated from the owners and management. They often felt that they were not heard, and that they had no control over the functioning of the school, including determining their own working conditions. However, Andrew claims that with a union present, "legally, you have to deal with somebody." One venue for communication between teachers and managers as mandated in the collective agreements is a labour-management meeting. This is a regularly scheduled meeting between union and employer representatives to solve day-to-day problems.

Another positive outcome of the unionization process has been, to some extent, the enhancement of teacher-teacher relations. Both speakers from ESL College clearly claim that the teachers are now closer than they were before the union came into being. Tobias states this quite eloquently:

It was only when we formed the union that teachers came together. And I realized what a wonderful group this is... I always sense that these ESL teachers always felt a little bit outside. I always felt a little bit outside as if I kind of snuck into the scene...Once we formed the union, things got close. So it was more than...the money. I have a great time at work now. I have a rapport with so many teachers I enjoy. They're comrades.
This is an interesting evolution for these teachers. As shown above, they are portrayed as a fairly disconnected group prior to the formation of the union. Both Tobias and Andrew claim that at the time of the interviews these teachers had not only become more united, but that they were more active and supportive of the union than ever before.

One way that unions enrich worker relations is by providing a support structure for employees. In several of the stories that the interviewees share about grievances, they casually mention that they were present in meetings as union officers representing other teachers' interests. Though this was never the point of these stories, it is apparent that the union brought in a formalized process in which teachers no longer had to fight their own solitary battles with management.

The establishment of clear procedures to be followed by management and instructors, access to a system of recourse, and a formalized support structure amounted to an atmosphere in which informants say the teachers at their schools felt much more secure. The feeling that “I’m going to get fired no matter what I do” disappeared for one teacher. Tobias insists that it is important for the union to continue defending people in order for them to feel safe; “People have to believe that nobody’s going to get fired.” Samantha gives the specific example that even though a small number of people at CEC have suffered from mental health issues, their interests have been protected.

After reading the transcription of her first interview, Samantha writes:

It took very little time for morale to get significantly better and the number of people who were much more interested in professional development increased. There was a general atmosphere of, “Now I know I am safe. I can relax and get on with making this part of my life real, not a pit stop while looking for something else.” We matured as a group – as a teaching body.
This sentiment is echoed by other narrators: the protection that the presence of a union offers enabled instructors to view their jobs as stable and secure. Teachers were able to depend on their jobs when committing to major financial life decisions such as having children or purchasing homes. In addition, Ben and Samantha in particular have observed a reduction in teacher attrition at CEC. They both attribute this to the stability that the union offers.

An evolution in the priorities of the teachers at these two workplaces becomes clear in the examination of the interview texts. While the initial organization efforts were based primarily on teachers feeling insecure in their jobs, as their contracts progress, teachers have turned their sights to monetary concerns. Tobias, for instance, states “I’m looking to buy a house now. Can I buy a house?...Inflation’s 500 percent for me. I mean, I’m not just eating Rice Krispies.” These speakers find that they and their co-workers have financial and life goals which require higher salaries. Hence, at both colleges, the most recent collective agreements have brought significant improvements in benefits, vacation pay, and wages, though due process also continues to be a concern especially at ESL College.

Interviewees also make numerous references to professionalism and how the union enhances the professional development of teachers. Samantha’s statement quoted above that once teachers felt safe in their jobs, they became more interested in making it more of a career is a case in point. Notably, when discussing the local ESL teachers’ professional association, another speaker says, “I’m not into [the association]. I’m into the union. The union has done more for ESL teachers than [the association] will ever do.” These interviewees all seem to believe that it is essential for teachers to have their working conditions safeguarded in order to improve their practice.

Several times speakers refer to themselves as “professionals.” I asked Tobias what he meant by the use of the word:
I picture that as having my responsibilities defined, and having subjective variables delineated, defined, and appreciated for what they are. So, I do my job, and when those subjective variables surface, they're dealt with appropriately in a professional way, and that means that they are given the appropriate weight. And I'm not made to feel like a piece of shit because some student wants to change the class.

He argues that the union promotes professionalism by securing benefits and wages, by protecting jobs, and by reducing the vulnerability of employees.

The presence of their two unions, all the informants unequivocally contend, has also had an impact on the private ESL industry at large. They believe that they are "setting the bar" for schools to attract good teachers. "We have made this into a job where people in university think, 'I'm going to be an ESL teacher. It's 50,000 a year.'" It is also mentioned that the presence of their two unions makes the private ESL industry, which has little regulation, somewhat more accountable.

4.3.6 Life After Unionization: Challenges

In addition to the benefits that the speakers say teachers have enjoyed since the two unions formed, other less positive outcomes have also emerged. One series of challenges centres on relations between teachers. As mentioned, there were several people who were not contacted during the organizing campaign. These teachers, informants say, retained some resentment towards the union. Besides this, a few teachers at both schools also became critical of the union after its establishment. Samantha describes how she saw the situation at CEC:

After we certified and everything, there was this notion that somehow the people that had been at the forefront of it got something more out of it... We were accused...of really having a vested personal interest. And it really couldn't have been further
from the truth... The greater good for us was to get a better situation for the people coming in because those were the ones that were targeted the most, the kind of newer, more vulnerable [people].

One point that Samantha makes implicitly in this statement is that some newer teachers in particular found it difficult to accept the union and its way of functioning at the college. For one thing, the system of seniority favours veteran teachers. From the perspective of newly arrived teachers, the people who were active in the union were also those with higher seniority, and this presented a new level of perceived injustice.

Additionally, the speakers observe that incoming teachers were less inclined than veterans to accept the presence of the union as they were less aware of the history that informed its establishment. One informant speculates that

the new people coming in, or the people that haven’t been there as long are just going to say, “It’s pretty good, I mean, this is great. We get paid quite a bit, but I’m kind of tired of paying all these union dues.” Because... there’s no abuse that they can see anymore, so they get kind of tired of paying union dues because... they weren’t there at the beginning. They have no idea what went before, so they just say, “Oh well.”

A problem for the unionists is that this lack of understanding of what went before threatens the stability of the union. The fear of decertification permeated these interviews.

Although Ben firmly believes that the workers have developed a good working relationship with management since the inception of the union, all the others feel that it has become more strained, most specifically with the owners. At both colleges, the owners were surprised and upset to discover that their businesses had been unionized. At ESL College, teachers say they continue to struggle to negotiate grievances
and collective agreements with the managers. As Tobias puts it, “In a way it still is a war. I mean, the union’s still not accepted.”

Another negative point about the establishment of the union has been the targeting of union activists by management soon after each union was formed. Samantha, for example, tells a story of a teacher who was persecuted for her work with the union. The quality of this person’s instruction was questioned by two managers who employed a series of degrading punitive measures against her. The teacher eventually succumbed to the pressure, took a medical leave due to work-related stress, and never returned.

Another incident that speaks sharply to this lack of safety for union activists is a story told by one teacher who suffered from an episode of breast cancer after helping to unionize her school. The teacher was in the hospital undergoing chemotherapy when she “received this paper saying ‘this isn’t a sick leave, and if you ever need a job in the future, get a hold of us.’” After the cancer treatment, the teacher decided to return to work.

I called up the school and said, “Put me on the sub list, and I want to be on the top of the sub list.” And, you know, “I’m ready to start coming back.”

“I don’t think so.”

And so I went to the school and sat down with [the manager] over a cup of coffee, saying, “We need to talk.” And I talked to him about this. I gave him an emotional chance. I said, “Look...[you came] to the hospital. You visited me with your children. What kind of leave did you think I was on?”

The manager continued to refuse to acknowledge the absence as a legitimate sick leave. The story finishes with the teacher pulling out a document proving that the employer had indeed agreed to the sick leave. The teacher was reinstated.
Another area of conflict arose for the teachers of ESL College in particular: the relationship with their union head office representatives. At CEC the teachers seem quite satisfied with the representation they receive from the head union. In fact, Ben remarks at one point that the union is “wonderful.” Other than this comment, however, the union is hardly mentioned at all.

ESL College teachers, on the other hand, have plenty to say about the larger unions. When he first organized ESL College, Tobias sought representation from a well-known “blue collar” union. The teachers eventually found that this union was not a good fit for themselves and their fellow employees. Andrew perceives them to be too authoritative in their approach: “I realized that you don’t ask questions in [this] union. It’s not a democratic union.”

Eventually the ESL College teachers prepared to change unions. At this time, Andrew felt that they should join the provincial teachers’ union but this union turned their membership proposal down. “I was really angry,” he complains, “because [they] wouldn’t take us in...[T]hat’s where we belonged.” I understood this to be another level of betrayal for him in the whole union story.

The ESL College teachers were eventually passed onto another union. However the second union, the teachers argue, was rarely present to give them support. The president of the ESL College union at the time then demanded more participation from the union, which they ultimately received. Still, Tobias claims that he does not feel much solidarity with this union:

[The union] is all public sector. So we’re actually an implicit threat. Like we’re in a public sector-represented [union]...[and] privatization is the enemy of public education...I’ve never felt that in any kind of direct way or anything, but it’s just fundamentally, we’re not in the right place, but the representation’s been good.
As he indicates at the end of this quote, both he and Andrew have since become more satisfied with the assistance they have received from the union.

Andrew and Tobias continue to be wary of unions. They see the larger union as a service provider, both speaking in terms of “getting our money’s worth.” Tobias goes even further and refers to union representatives as “real estate agents,” arguing that “The union’s not some knight in shining armor. It’s an industry. Unionization is an industry at the end of the day.” At worst, Tobias claims that unions can be manipulative. He strongly feels that unions ought to be more straightforward when helping workers to organize:

People do this. People unionize. And when I talked to [the union representative] about unionizing other schools, I got this kind of textbook cliché information. “First you sign the cards, then you have a union, then you negotiate a contract, then you administer it.” [sing-song voice] And, ok, but what about all the shit along the way that destroys people?...Why is it so hard? What really happens? And how would you really approach...the teachers at another school to do this?...In a way it was misleading, the whole union movement. It’s got to be a lot more sincere with its information and what is entailed here.

4.3.7 Summary of the Union Story

This section has shown how the teachers describe the evolution of the schools from smaller communities to larger corporate-style institutions. The teachers express what it feels like to be positioned between these two paradigms. At the beginning, they and their colleagues were dealt with in a personal and respectful manner. Once the owners withdrew from the daily functioning of the schools, their relationships with the teachers became depersonalized, and teachers were subjected to abusive and arbitrary managerial methods. These
supervisory patterns created an atmosphere in which teachers felt very insecure, thus making it possible for a single event to trigger the formation of the union.

The process of organizing CEC is characterized as a group effort with strong support from a cohesive staff while at ESL College it appears to be based largely on the efforts of one individual with the members becoming much more cohesive once the union was established. In spite of these differences, both sets of informants confirm that a large majority of teachers signed union cards during their respective membership drives.

The teachers outline how the presence of the unions and the structures they enforce have contributed to some negative outcomes. For one, relations among teachers have been shaken to some extent, and those between the teachers and management have also suffered. Though these concerns are not trivialized, they do not seem to be devastating to the union effort. On the positive side, five main benefits of unionization at these schools can be discerned from the teacher narratives:

1. There are now predictable processes to be followed by management which minimize arbitrary decision-making.
2. Teachers now have recourse for dealing with unfair treatment through both contract negotiating and the filing of grievances.
3. Teachers also now have a forum for communicating their concerns with management, and management is obligated to listen and respond.
4. A support structure has been established so that individual teachers have representation from their peers.
5. Wages, benefits, vacation time, sick leave, and other monetary matters have improved.

The speakers see these improvements as increasing the stability and security of the workforce, thus enabling teachers to develop their
practices. They also speculate that the improvements gained at their own workplaces may have the effect of improving the quality of private ESL schools in general.

Building on the findings outlined in this and the previous section, the next part of this chapter brings into focus the influence of business principles on the educational practices of these institutions. This is followed by an exploration of the participants' interpretations of individual and collective action against unfair practices in their workplaces.

4.4 Business Practices and Teacher Resistance

This section offers a closer look at two aspects of the analyses presented above: how teachers see the pressure of market forces as dominating their work, and how they perceive themselves and their coworkers as able to resist their own subordination in these circumstances. The first part considers the friction that arises between what the speakers describe as their employers' narrow focus on profit-making and their own ideas about good business and educational practices. This analysis provides a context for understanding the role of the union in resolving differences arising from these conflicting views.

The second part examines personal and collective power with respect to how the union functions. Because the previously discussed findings indicate that becoming active in the union threatened teachers' sense of personal and workplace security, I am interested to understand the personal and interpersonal dynamics that enabled these two unions to succeed.

4.4.1 Teachers' Struggles: The Business Context

Thoughts about what it is like to work in an educational institution that is also a for-profit enterprise emerge throughout the interviews and often frame stories about the workplace. This section looks at how
teachers understand the ways business priorities shape their work-based relationships, including their experiences with students and with management. It also shows how business interests at times conflict with their understanding of appropriate pedagogical choices and their sense of their proper role as teachers.

As the previous section reveals, the interviewees observe a correlation between the rapid growth of the companies they work within and a withdrawal of the owner from the daily functioning of the workplace, making room for managerial abuse of power. Andrew describes his school's priorities: "The vision of the school is now, 'Let's get bigger, and let's get into more markets.' So it's survival-driven."

Further to this, Tobias thinks

None of the owners of the schools knew what they were doing. There was just a lot of money there. Let's go get it. There was no time to think...I don't think there was a conspiracy to manipulate and exploit teachers.

The informants say the business mentality had a profound effect on their relationships with the owners. Tobias and Ben present their relationships with the owners as largely business-based from the very beginning. Ben, for example, tells a story of how he witnessed the owner of his current school poach an entire curriculum from a school they had both worked for in Japan. This story illustrates Ben's distrust of the owner's business habits starting from the time he was hired. Tobias also presents his connection with the owner of his school as based in skepticism of the owners' business practices, as can be seen in his profile. Nonetheless, both of these speakers claim to have a consistently amicable rapport with the owner.

Andrew and Samantha, in contrast, display a very different association with the owners of their schools. Their narratives portray closer friendships that go beyond the realm of business. However, both report that these friendships have been violated by the owners' interests
in profit-making. Samantha tells a story of how after years of working for Greg, she discovered that he had been giving her smaller raises than other teachers. She experienced this as a great betrayal of their relationship.

Likewise, as his profile shows, Andrew began a friendship with Isaac before becoming employed at ESL College. Three times in the interviews Andrew refers to their relationship as familial, which indicates the sense of closeness he feels. However, he has gradually come to see the relationship as betrayed by Isaac through a series of unfair administrative decisions, a refusal to accept the union, and a lack of respect for teachers made evident by his resistance to their demands for increased wages. The latter point is clear in the closing remarks of Andrew’s profile. The following excerpt demonstrates the confusion that Andrew feels about his rapport with Isaac:

The funny thing is he feels like a brother to me... And so, right now it's like, I don't want to be his friend because he's not treating me like a friend. But, it's a business. It's a business relationship, so I don't know whether I'm making an excuse for him or excuse for me. I don't know quite what's going on, but the dynamic's there.

In short, the relationship with the owners for all four speakers is negatively affected by the way the schools are conducted as businesses. This has resulted in either an initial distrust or a loss of trust for each of them. This distrust in turn contributes to the sense of alienation that was identified in the previous section. Not only was there a physical removal of the owner from the daily activities of the school, but here we can see an emotional wedge between teachers and owners. Hence, Andrew says, “I’m feeling less a part of the organization.”

Another way that the informants see their work as shaped by business interests is in the concept of themselves as commodities on the ESL market. For Samantha, the sense of herself as a commodity began in Japan. She goes so far as to say that she felt like “an indentured servant”
at one of her workplaces. Others refer to themselves "babysitters" or "entertainers" instead of teachers, and multiple times the teachers disapprovingly acknowledge that at certain times their teaching has been a response to market demand rather than to their own sense of good educational practices. Samantha claims that at one school she was "playing a role to satisfy someone knowing that you should and could be fulfilling a much more significant role if that were what was required of you."

While teachers are positioned as commodities on the ESL market, students come as consumers to buy their services. This is best illustrated by the various methods used by managers to evaluate teachers' performances: client comment cards, student feedback surveys, student in-person complaints to administrators, and observations and evaluations of teachers by supervisors. All methods of assessing teacher practices put pressure on the teacher to perform in ways dictated by consumer demand. Andrew explains the use of student evaluations of teachers at his school: "You're supposed to get over four...And then you get a 3.9....Well...the difference between 3.9 and four is not statistically significant. But [management] will circle the one person who gave you a two in that one column." Alternatively, he suggests that if the owner really wants to know what the students think, he should "walk around. Talk to a few students." Andrew draws a link between the absence of the owner and an overdependence on depersonalized methods of obtaining client feedback.

The teachers also indicate that with such extensive monitoring of their "product," managers take seriously the need to keep teacher performance in line with their concept of what students want. As previously illustrated, supervisors at both schools have taken a punitive approach to teacher development. "They say...'We're going to have a discipline meeting with you.' Discipline? It's not. It's just professional development" is Andrew's way of seeing the situation.
Repeatedly, stories emerge in the interviews in which managers use pressure tactics in order to get teachers to change their teaching behaviours. For example, one story focuses on how a teacher at ESL College was put back on probation after serving the stipulated amount of time because of perceived problems with her teaching. Other instances show how teachers have been made to attend “disciplinary” meetings with directors to discuss deficiencies in their instruction, how they have been repeatedly observed by directors, or even how some teachers have been fired for not meeting “standards”. One story tells of how a manager forced an instructor to teach in a classroom beside his office so that he could monitor her.

All of these supervisory practices go against what the narrators feel teachers actually require when developing as educators. Ben mentions the case of one teacher: “She was afraid of the students. She took a beating at the beginning. And now she’s a great teacher. And she’s really evolved.” This shows what all the speakers suggest, that novice teachers are able to improve and grow. However, these informants disagree that punitive measures are the way to foster teacher growth. Instead, “you don’t push around new teachers. You guide them.”

All the interview participants believe that the managers at their schools sought out power and misused it. With the owners absent from the everyday operations of the schools, there was no accountability for what the managers were doing. This amounted to what Tobias and Samantha see as a systematic abuse of power. Their conversation summarizes their assessment of the situation:

_Tobias:_ I feel they [certain teachers] were systematically tortured. And until they either quit or were fired.

_Right, that’s the approach._

_Samantha:_ Yes. Systematic is a really good word.

_Tobias:_ It’s systematic. And you can’t really point your finger at anybody in particular because it’s almost like that
Nazi thing. I mean, everybody's just kind of like a link in the chain.

*Samantha:* And nobody had any personal responsibility.

*Tobias:* Labour... you know... owner-worker relations still are master-slave in this society... so you're pointing your finger at a paradigm rather than an individual.

In the absence of the real source of power, the owner, the teachers were left dealing with what they saw as a systematic abuse of power. In response, the union brought about a systematic solution. While Samantha finds that for most teachers at ESL schools, “there is no recourse in this system for [ESL teachers] in the private sector,” Tobias holds that a union makes people more accountable. Samantha agrees that now, “People have recourse. They can take their dissatisfaction and put it somewhere legitimate rather than into the ether.”

This systematic solution as outlined in the previous section of this chapter includes the installation of clear processes to be followed by management through contract language, a system for resolving disputes through grievances, a forum in which management is obligated to listen to and communicate with teachers, and a formalized peer support system for teachers who need it. However, these speakers all agree that a “systematic” solution via unionization is not necessarily the best option. Andrew argues

I've said this in bargaining...“You know, you think that we're demanding things from you [management].” I said, “The only power we have is grievance, and it's after the fact. And we may not win.

So, what kind of power are you saying we have?”

He states emphatically that what he wants is “equal power. I don’t want reactivity power, thank you very much.” In fact at ESL College, teachers find that relations with management continue to be poor and that they are still fighting for “simple due process.” The presence of the union
appears only to have worsened relations with management, and teachers continue to be frustrated with their administration’s behaviour.

All teachers state repeatedly that unions are not necessary if management is good and fair. For Andrew, “There’s no inherent value in the union set up....[though] legally, this is very good.” For instance at CEC, Ben believes that since two managers who were particularly abusive have left the workplace, the union shop stewards “have nothing to do.” The current supervisor, both Ben and Samantha maintain, manages in a fair way and follows the collective agreement.

Unions, all the teachers argue, do not adequately replace good management and good teacher-management relations. They give multiple examples of what good management looks like to them. These instances are based on what teachers have experienced themselves or on hypothetical situations, responding to negative experiences they have had in the past by countering with positive examples.

Good management is described as fair, impartial and not arbitrary. Good supervisors outline their expectations of employees in a clear way and avoid discriminatory practices. Ben describes a manager at his workplace who he admires. She “treats everyone as an individual,” he declares, “even though they might have a history of something...She doesn’t take things personally at all.”

In addition to being fair, good managers are compassionate and supportive. As compared to the punitive approaches employed for teacher development illustrated above, these teachers argue that “people want help at times” and that it is the job of an employer to offer it. This is particularly true in the case of novice teachers. In other cases, teachers need help when dealing with other life problems. Ben tells of a teacher who was in a disciplinary meeting with himself as representative:

One teacher who was clinically depressed had...a continuous history of problems, and it was very frustrating. There were a lot of comment cards against this teacher. And things were stacked
against her, and [the supervisor's] attitude was "if you need help, we're here to help you. But we can't help you unless you ask for it."

...And...so, when [the supervisor] was expressing this idea and waiting for something, the poor teacher was just in tears, and so I said, "You know...She has a mental illness, and a history of it. And what we are requesting is time off." And [the manager] is very quick to respond to that.

He feels that this manager is sensitive to teachers' needs and is able to respond appropriately.

The informants also indicate that good managers communicate well with teachers. For example, Andrew thinks that it is necessary for employers to elicit feedback from their workers: "Your job as a supervisor is to make sure... you know what's going on." He suggests that assembling informal focus groups is one way to keep in touch with teachers.

Finally good managers, according to these interviewees, adopt a cooperative, problem-solving attitude towards the teaching body. Tobias reports that he appreciated one manager at his school who "wanted to work with the teachers." Similarly, the attitude of the current managers at his school is, Ben states, "How can we make some things work here?" Because of this, the union has a good working relationship with the current administration.

It is important to note that teachers do not feel that profit-making and the fair treatment of employees are mutually exclusive. In their profiles, all reveal that they associate teaching with money making. Thus, they do not resent the owner's right to make a profit, which is clearly the source of their own income. In fact, all informants admire their employer's ability to market well and succeed in the ESL business. Nevertheless, in the circumstances of their workplaces, they feel business interests have interfered with the fair treatment of employees and with the ability of teachers to improve their practice.
Alternatively, these speakers hold that business priorities along with the priorities of employees and of the educative process can coexist in a fair and harmonious way. Ben, in fact, does not mind being considered a commodity. He says, “We have a quality product here,” referring to the teachers at his school. He shows throughout his narrative, however, that being implicated in the capitalist enterprise of language training does not mean that instructors should be treated poorly. “You have to invest in your product,” he states. All narrators also communicate that having content teachers will result in a better quality of education and hence more satisfied students.

Ultimately, what these teachers maintain is that they would prefer not to need a union. A better working situation would include fair, compassionate, and communicative managers that respond to teachers’ concerns. However, because business interests are put before their own interests, because they are alienated from the owners of the schools, and because supervisors overuse punitive tactics, they have formed collective bargaining groups to establish processes that protect teachers. This is perhaps best summarized by Andrew: “You know, this is not the only and the best way. But until greed becomes not a business ethic, a union is the absolute best way of dealing with things.”

4.4.2 Teacher Resistance: Individual and Collective Power

A final question that was put forward at the beginning of this research was how the teachers who were involved in unionizing their schools or who became active in the union following its inception felt empowered to take such steps.

The profiles show that none of the speakers sense that they were personally persecuted by managers but that they were all motivated to take a stand to protect others’ as well as their own future interests. Tobias and Ben present themselves in similar ways. Both come across as extremely confident and unafraid. As previously mentioned, these two
speakers say they maintained good relations with the owners despite their mistrust of the owners' business practices. Each portrays himself as largely responsible for the unionization effort. This perception of Ben and Tobias is supported by Samantha's and Andrew's narratives.

Although they present themselves with less bravado, Samantha and Andrew also show that they were never repeatedly targeted by managers. This is in part, each says, because of their close relationship with the owner. However, as Samantha demonstrates in her profile, she has also been able to assert herself in her own defense. Samantha, in fact, claims that she did not feel very confident throughout the unionization process but that she was effective as a support person during and following the organizing effort. Likewise, Andrew tells several stories in which he is confronting managers.

When asked what gives the union its strength, Ben responds, "I think it's personalities." He contends that his local depends very much upon the strength of certain individuals like himself. For example, Ben tells a story in his profile of a situation in which his direct supervisor suggests that teachers ask Ben to approach the owner of the school in order to obtain what they want, suggesting that the owner is afraid of Ben. Ben is aware that he comes across as a powerful individual. Samantha affirms this: "He's got absolute confidence," she states after reiterating his claim that management is afraid of him.

Tobias also shows himself as possessing great confidence and the power to affect change. Not only does his language suggest that he sees himself as almost single-handedly organizing his workplace, but twice he represents himself as being responsible for the dismissal of undesirable managers. For instance, Tobias tells a story in which he is treated unfairly by a particular manager, and then states, "Within six months I put the attack on her, and she was finished."

It is significant that, in enforcing their views of justice, Ben and Tobias seem to mirror the management styles that the informants all
criticize. Ben relies on his ability to invoke fear while Tobias appears to target managers’ individual weaknesses. In addition, Samantha demonstrates in her profile the use of physical assertion in confronting a manager. Andrew also tells a story of how he is “out to get” a particular manager and then identifies his delight in this as “lower-level thinking.” All these unionists have, at some point, relied on a form of aggressiveness to maintain their notion of fairness.

The speakers mention that they are concerned about the overdependence of the members on a limited number of active and powerful individuals to maintain the union. Tobias discloses that he sees it as a miracle ongoing. Never forget that it’s totally ongoing. The minute that you give up, or you go to another school or you decide that it might be time for a career change or whatever, you have to wonder, well, “What will happen when Ben leaves? What will happen when I leave? What is going to happen?” It’d be nice to leave with the idea that the thing’s going to live on because of all your hard work. Samantha confirms that the people who were active in the union at the beginning are still the most active and that she worries about the lack of interest among the membership in sustaining the union.

The image of these uniquely powerful individuals is very much in contrast to the picture that is given of the average teacher. In several of the narratives, teachers are characterized as isolated and fearful. Samantha reflects on her coworkers’ experiences:

People who were vulnerable and who were being targeted...didn't always say anything. They were just sort of somehow ashamed, or somehow quiet about it, or they thought that they deserved it... They were afraid to say, “This is how I’m being treated, and I don’t like it.” So they were also afraid that they were going to lose their jobs, but I imagine that there was an implicit understanding that, you know, “I can’t say anything to defend myself because I’ll get
fired, and I can’t, you know, I’ve got to improve. It’s me. It’s my problem.”

Tobias concurs that the teachers at his workplace were “disempowered” previous to the union and that part of this stemmed from their isolation from one another.

Even though individual power or disempowerment is emphasized in many of the narratives, collective strength comes across as an important resolution to this seclusion. The stories illustrate that more confident teachers would represent others both before and after unionization. The support structure in which elected shop stewards attend meetings on behalf their peers is one way that the targeting and isolation of particular teachers has been alleviated.

The union leaders also draw strength from knowing that they are supported by the members. Through a story in which he found himself to be abandoned by his friend, Ben illustrates how important is it for him to know that he is supported at times. The narrative begins with Ben being targeted at the workplace for his sexual orientation. He begins, “I heard [a manager] talking to [a student] and he said, ‘Don’t drop the soap when Ben’s in the shower with you at the gym.’” Ben was angered by this comment, so he quickly arranged a meeting with the manager and the owner to deal with the situation. He also asked his friend Sasha to attend the meeting.

But [the manager] denied [making the comment]...And then that’s when Sasha said, “Can’t we just all be friends and get along?”...And I just looked at him in disbelief that this guy who was backing me up...That whole story was just to illustrate the disappointment of having people behind you...then you turn around and [clicking sound] they’re not there. And that was a big shock to me.

Ben also speaks of the importance of having the trust of the union members, which makes him a strong leader. Samantha comments that
Ben “can rally people together, that [he] has the voice of the people...and that people follow him.”

At both colleges, the cohesiveness of the group of teachers came across as a key factor in ensuring the success of the union. As previously pointed out, CEC teachers were depicted as unified early on in the organizing attempt, while those at ESL College become close after the union was formed. This sense of collectivity as opposed to the previously felt isolation is important to these leaders. Tobias and Andrew speak enthusiastically about the current involvement of the members in their union’s activities, which seems to encourage Andrew as the current union president.

In addition to the collective support of their own members, there is some indication that these leaders draw upon strength from outside their locals. Andrew, for example, shares that he is “inspired” by meeting the representative of the other union at the group interview, and this causes him to consider serving as president for another term (which he eventually does). A further testimony to the valuing of a sense of collectivity is that since these interviews took place, the informants have continued to be connected and to draw inspiration from one another.

Ben also includes the possibility of working with management in a united and positive way, despite the fact that employer-union relations are often seen as antagonistic. His view incorporates the possibility of a cooperative, if not “collective,” relationship with the managers. As stated in his profile, he sees the teachers as sharing an interest in the success of the school with the employer.

Another community that is identified as a potential source of collective strength is other ESL teachers in the industry. Tobias finds “that’s one of the problems with this ESL issue. There’s no solidarity.” He points out that the unions who represent the two colleges have done little to unify ESL teachers in the industry. In fact, it is interesting to note that none of the speakers identify their representative unions as either
current or potential sources of collective power. This suggests that these informants identify more closely with those in their profession than with other union locals.

4.4.3 Summary of the Business Context and Teacher Resistance

The foregoing interpretation of the participant narratives positions teachers and students within the corporate educational institution as commodities and consumers respectively. Such a set up invites invasive managerial practices that diminish teacher confidence and threaten their sense of workplace security. In this view, teachers are often shown to be isolated and disempowered. The unions at these schools instituted structures to protect teacher rights but did not establish the kind of interpersonal support structures ideally provided by supervisors to help teachers develop professionally. The union does, however, present an opportunity for more confident members to represent their peers' regarding labour issues.

Individual strength is emphasized in many of the narratives, and strategies engaged by informants for contesting unfair managerial practices at times seem to mirror the intimidating approaches that they were fighting against. This suggests that the power of the unions to some extent mimics the culture of their schools.

Collective power also emerges as important, both as a supportive basis for union leaders and as a source of assistance for previously isolated teachers undergoing discipline or facing other problems with their work.

4.5 Conclusion

The narratives of these teachers begin by revealing that, over time, a shift occurred in the administrative approaches at their schools. The owners, the centre of power at these schools, withdrew from their initial grassroots style of operating and instigated a more typical business
structure, one in which middle managers gained the authority to direct workers according to consumer demand. The speakers found that these managerial views conflicted with teachers' own estimations of what was best for themselves and their students' learning. More seriously, these threatening tactics subjected teachers to excessive and punitive controls over their work, inhibiting their abilities to develop professionally and contributing to a general lack of security and increased teacher attrition.

Many examples presented by the interviewees show what they envision as the best solution to this inequitable situation: fair managers who support novice and struggling teachers, who listen to teachers' concerns, and who include teachers in the decision-making processes at the schools. In the absence of such a supervisory approach, the speakers argue that a union is the next best solution. A union mandates legally-binding processes which provide predictability. It also gives teachers bargaining power, allowing them to participate in setting the terms of their employment. Despite some internal and external challenges within these two unions, the informants claim that they and their fellow employees now feel more at ease and are thus better able to perform their jobs. Along with improvements in wages, benefits, and other material gains, these new conditions have contributed to a situation in which teachers are more likely to continue with their current employment.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the legal recognition of these bargaining units does not guarantee protection of teacher rights. Filing a grievance, calling a labour-management meeting, or sitting at the bargaining table all require individuals to face employers or their representatives in a potentially volatile and intimidating situation. Hence, the narratives suggest that unions need strong leaders who are willing to represent others in the collective despite possible risks to their own security. An examination of how teachers represent their interactions with management suggests that, at least to some extent, the unionists
replicate the intimidation-style tactics employed by the managers at their workplaces.

The observations made in this chapter will be further explored in the concluding chapter in view of conclusions drawn in Chapter 2 on teachers' work, unions, the business of English language teaching, and the interpersonal dynamics of power. I also extend some suggestions for further research and explore some implications of and possible solutions to the issues presented in these findings.
5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This purpose of this study was to learn about the lives of four teachers who are or were active in their unions at private ESL schools in Canada, by exploring why they organized, how the presence of a union changed their working lives, and how they participated in bringing about these changes. The teachers communicate that their working lives have been negatively affected by the behaviours of their superiors. They feel that owners at their school transferred their focus from interpersonal connections with students and teachers to marketing and the expansion of the business, leaving a power gap which was filled by managers who directed the teachers in a disciplinary manner. The teachers and their coworkers became alienated from the upper levels of the educational power structure and suffered repeated abuses at the hands of managers. In order to shield themselves, the teachers organized into unions, which brought about predictability, legal protection, and a forum for voicing their concerns in a more equitable position with the employer.

Because this research is an examination of power as it disadvantages a certain group of individuals, I have framed it as a critical study. In this conclusion, I further examine and seek to “expose the forces that prevent individuals from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p.282), while at the same time considering the possibilities for negotiating control over their work presented by these activists. I also hope to bring an awareness of how power in this context goes beyond the intentions of specific individuals by showing how the dynamics of control operate in multiple fields, from the globalization and commodification of education to the historical
subjugation of teachers, to the role of unions in addressing teachers' concerns.

The next section of the chapter begins by making connections between the themes derived from research literature and the findings of this study, with the intention of portraying what these teachers' local experiences suggest about the web of social and economic forces at play in the world of the private English language industry in Canada. This is followed by a look at possible directions for further inquiry and potential implications of this study for our understanding of the lives of ESL teachers. I close the chapter with an update on the lives of these teachers at the time of this writing.

5.2 Teachers' Work

Studies and discussions on the work of English language teachers show that they generally see themselves as a mistreated group, and that their work has been undervalued relative to that of other educators. In institutions of higher education, there appears to be an over-reliance on part-time and temporary positions in ESL (Auerbach, 1991; Blaber & Tobash, 1989; Cosco et al., 2007; Crookes & Arakaki, 1999; Graf, 2003; Johnston, 1997; Stanley et al., 2003; TESOL, 2006). Teachers working in such conditions believe they are overworked and underpaid with little job security. Two studies also show that ESL instructors experience a sense of marginalization at their workplaces in both colleges (Crookes & Arakaki, 1999) and public schools (Markham, 1999).

The ESL teachers I interviewed for the present study share with those represented above a sense that they are not respected for the work that they perform. While the issue of the overuse of part-time and temporary contracts pervades the literature on ESL teachers' employment issues, this did not emerge as a problem for the teachers in the current study. However, the teachers at CEC and ESL College do share with other ESL teachers concerns about job retention and
adequate remuneration. Both the research literature and the data presented here also expose an attitude towards ESL teachers as expendable, indicating that their skill-set may not be highly valued. Common hiring practices in the business of ELT reflect the view that any “native” speaker of English can teach the language with little or no training (See for example Blaber & Tobash, 1989). Teaching does not seem to be highly valued whereas the language itself is.

Over the years, investigations into public school teaching also show a low value placed on teachers’ work internationally (Bell & International Labour Office, 1978; International Labour Office, 1981; International Labour Office, 1992). More specific examinations into the nature of teachers’ work reveal two central themes. The first is that, in the cases outlined in the survey of related literature in Chapter 2, teachers’ perspectives are often absent from decision-making processes that affect their lives (Butt et al., 1992; Connell, 1985) or in the way their lives are represented in “official” discourses (K. Casey, 1992; Huberman, 1995; Nelson, 1992). These studies offer alternative versions of teachers’ realities and emphasize the need to find methods for engaging teachers in determining the direction of their work.

Likewise, teachers in the present study express that they feel separated from the locus of power at their schools due to a lack of interest at the upper levels in their needs or opinions. To add another dimension to this insight, in a conversation with Linda Auzins (personal communication, March 27, 2007), the CAPLS spokesperson who represents the business interests of the ESL industry, I gleaned a similar lack of awareness about how ESL teachers view their work. Auzins informed me that not only do most private ESL schools treat their staff well, a notion that conflicts with much of the anecdotal evidence I have been exposed to in the ESL teaching community, but that ESL teachers are a “transient” group who “don’t go into teaching for the money” (Ibid.). Contrary to this standpoint, the details provided by the four research
participants suggest that while they were at one time fairly transient in their working situations and that for two of the four speakers money was not their primary motivation for entering the occupation, they now see their current jobs as sustaining their lives for the long term. The disparity in these two points of view hints at the possibility of further contradictions between assumptions made by employers and the realities of ESL teachers' lives.

A second key point drawn from inquiries into mainstream teachers' work stresses the tendency for this occupation to be over-managed, either through increasingly regulated curricula (Connell, 1995; Robertson, 1996), through excessive demands on teachers' time (Hargreaves, 1994), or through a combination of measures including rigorous supervision and evaluation (Smyth et al., 1999). The ESL instructors in the current study also report a high degree of involvement of administrators in directing their work, primarily in the form of extensive supervision and evaluation procedures which they perceive as both threatening and isolating. The narratives give the impression that the managers at these two workplaces were, either intentionally or not, controlling the behaviour of the group by targeting specific individuals. This may have resulted in an overall compliance within the teaching body with the managers' directives.

Besides the ongoing sense of insecurity experienced by teachers at both CEC and ESL College, informants indicate that high levels of attrition due to poor working conditions were problems at these schools. This parallels Casey's (K. Casey, 1992) claim that the teachers she interviewed often left teaching because of oppressive supervisory behaviour, a reason that remained unnoticed in the institutional discourse. This leads me to speculate that the "transient" nature of the ESL teacher in private schools general may also linked to their treatment by employers.
The observed high rates of teacher turnover also support the notion that ESL teachers are expendable and easily replaced, and that the value of their expertise is minimal. Moreover, the interviewees I worked with find that extensive interference in the educational process by management and the resulting lack of teacher confidence compromises the teachers' abilities to do their jobs well and to develop as educators. This further diminishes the quality, and hence “value,” of their work.

A common theme that weaves its way through both the research literature and the teacher narratives in this study is the seemingly widespread practice of invading teachers’ daily activities, suggesting a cultural perception that teachers are not to be trusted as autonomous decision-makers capable of developing curriculum according to the needs of their students. Instead, teachers appear to be “manageable beings” (Freire, 2000, p. 73) who are expected to comply with imposed forms of behaviour. I will draw on this idea in a later discussion on the capitalist positioning of ESL teachers’ labour as a commodity.

5.3 Teacher Unions

While the foregoing section of this chapter outlines cases where teachers’ needs are ignored or their autonomy is undermined, two studies of unions indicate that public school teachers have historically experienced difficult working conditions due to a lack of respect (Lawton et al., 1999) and unfair supervisory practices (Johnson & Donaldson, 2006), and that collective bargaining has traditionally addressed these concerns. In fact, research that examines the current role of unions in teachers’ lives illustrates that the reasons teachers organized in the past are the same reasons they remain unionized today: protection, representation, and economic benefits (Bascia, 1994; Poole, 2000; Public Agenda, 2003; Urban, 1982), the same motivations expressed by the teachers interviewed for this study.
Public Agenda (2003) provides a broad examination of public school teachers' views about their unions. This study shows that teachers still feel vulnerable to being targeted by parents, students, and administrators, and that they feel a union helps to protect them, particularly through the predictable and impartial system of seniority. In addition, the survey respondents believe that their wages and benefit packages are better because of the union. The informants from CEC and ESL College also appreciate the protection of the union and enjoy the improvements in wages and benefits that have resulted from collective bargaining.

The unionists in Poole's (Poole, 2000) study reason that the job security offered by the presence of a union strengthens teachers' professionalism and promotes their abilities to perform well in the classroom. The teachers I interviewed state that, with a union in place for protection, they and their colleagues feel less threatened by supervisors and better able to build the confidence required to become more effective educators. Further to this, these teachers claim that those at their workplaces now see their careers as longer-term and more financially sustaining; thus, they are more interested in developing their practices.

Teacher development is linked to another point highlighted in the Public Agenda (2003) survey, specifically that a gap seems to exist in the support structure for newer teachers. After their initial training, teachers are placed in the classroom with little or no assistance and are expected to survive on their own. This isolates teachers when they need help the most and adds to the public perception of teachers as incompetent. The authors recommend a mentoring program as a possible solution. The teachers from CEC and ESL College also find that teachers have great difficulties early in their careers and reveal that these teachers are particularly vulnerable to managerial intervention, which tends to be punitive. Instead, in agreement with the Public Agenda respondents, they
claim that while the union provides protection from unfair management, novice teachers need active support, preferably from compassionate supervisors.

Despite the benefits of unionization outlined above, both the Public Agenda (Public Agenda, 2003) and Poole (Poole, 2000) studies echo the current findings that union members are not always unified in their endorsement of union practices. Public Agenda in particular finds that newer teachers are generally less supportive of their unions than veterans, and they speculate that this may be because novices are less aware of the historical reasons unions were established at public schools. Two of the teachers I interviewed used the same reasoning to account for resentment within the membership towards their unions. However, they also presented another possible explanation. Seniority, as previously mentioned, is a pervasive system of privilege in unionized work sites, and many newer teachers suffer the disadvantages of this hierarchical arrangement. For example, junior teachers are the first to be laid off in financially difficult times, and they have fewer choices regarding which classes they teach. Since there seems to be little general interest among union members in replacing seniority with another reward system such as a merit-based approach, an ongoing level of resentment by incoming teachers due to this inherent inequity is to be expected.

The literature covered in the second chapter presents a few cases against the existence of teacher unions in their current forms (Lawton et al., 1999; Lawton, 2000; Lieberman, 1997; Moe, 2006; Urban, 1982) although these arguments primarily focus on the unwelcome power of teacher unions on the national political stage in both the USA and Canada. I am unaware of studies detailing how teachers have experienced day-to-day problems with their unions. The two teachers from ESL College, however, express distrust and some bitterness towards the two unions that have represented them. Both teachers see the main
office that heads their local union as simply another industry with its own inherent power structure. Their narratives allude to their being a lack of sincere care on the part of this institution and the people who represent them. While the teachers at ESL College took it upon themselves to press their current union to become more involved with the local, this situation provokes the question of whether the organization that “saves” teachers might actually be ignoring their needs and even perhaps contributing to further subordination. What do unions do to ensure they are representing their member locals well?

One way that the teachers in this study see potential for increased head office involvement is in helping to organize other private language schools. I know of a handful of unionized private ESL schools in Canada in an industry that supports well over 200. This extremely low union density in the sector contributes to a feeling of isolation and insecurity among these informants. By helping to organize the sector, these unions could provide protection to other ESL teachers and at the same time strengthen the position of their existing member locals.

5.4 ESL and Business

English language learning is publicly promoted as a “natural, neutral, and beneficial” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 6) enterprise while its roots in colonial and capital interests are largely invisible. International students coming to attend language schools in Canada are caught in the cultural and economic relations that sustain ELT in its current commodified form. They feel pressed to acquire the cultural capital needed to participate in the competitive global capitalist labour market. Auerbach (1991) argues that the diminishing value of ESL teachers’ work is closely tied to the lack of value placed on the potential labour of our students. ESL teachers are thus also caught in the web of social and economic forces that disadvantage our students.
Figures in newspapers (Bellet, 2003; O'Connor, 2004) and government reports (Campbell & Couillard, 2000) show that from the mid-1990s the market for English language training in Canada has grown steadily. In concurrence with this, the teachers who participated in this present study have also noted that their schools have grown rapidly during this time, with current enrollments of over a thousand at the largest campus and with several campuses in operation across North America and in other English-speaking countries. The informants have also observed a simultaneous domination of their employment conditions by business principles. This is not surprising, as the prominent discourse on the ESL industry constantly frames it as business rather than education. For example, in British Columbia in recent years, there has been a growing concern over the existence of nonlegitimate private schools serving international students, the existence of which threatens the image of Canada as an educational destination overseas (O'Neil & Fong, 2004). Concern about the quality of education and the legitimacy of these schools centres on a fear of losing consumers and damaging the economy. The pervasive notion is that as private institutions, these schools are businesses first.

When the student is situated as a consumer, teachers become suppliers of a product (Apple, 2005; Pennycook, 1994; Raduntz, 2005; Singh et al., 2002; Ziguras, 2005), or, as the teachers in the current study see it, as the product itself. With specific learner goals of gaining communicative competence or a certain test score, instrumental objectives dominate the student-teacher relationship. English language teaching then becomes a "technical operation" (Pennycook, 1994, p. 17) and teachers themselves become industrial labourers subject to corporate managerial schemes. The teachers I interviewed feel that business interests have influenced their work lives in several ways. They feel that they have been alienated from the decision-making circles at the schools, primarily because the employer is seen as more interested in
profit than in teachers’ concerns; instructors have been subjected to the overuse of performance indicators to monitor their teaching; and managers have employed punitive measures in order to “improve” teachers’ methods.

I will now return to the suggestion made above that teachers have traditionally been vulnerable to poor treatment by their superiors and that cultural attitudes may exist that see teachers as subordinate players in the educational system. When an educational institution is also a business dominated by corporate values that instrumentalize both the learning process and teachers themselves, we can see an even greater potential for the mistreatment of teachers. Without systematic barriers or buffers in place to rein in the power of individuals at the upper levels of the business/educational institutions, teachers will continue to suffer the consequences. A union is one way that teachers in the ESL industry can protect themselves from the negative influences of managerial control in a system that deprives them of voice, agency, and value.

The interviewees all state that unions are not necessary if management is good and fair. However, Samantha’s use of the analogy of a patriarchal family structure is very telling. In her estimation, as stated in her profile, the workplace is like a family, directed by a single individual who may either be benevolent or tyrannical. The structure is consistent while the personalities occupying the position of authority may vary. In the same way, the speakers have experienced both fair and unfair managers within one power structure, and nothing can ensure that the nice manager directing the school at one point will not be replaced by a “total maniac dictator.” Hence, taken as a whole, the speakers’ narratives contradict the notion that good managers preclude the need for systematic protection. Perhaps for these teachers it was only when hostile managers were actually in place that the relations of power became more visible.
5.5 Power as Systematic, Power as (Inter)personal

The preceding analysis draws from both research literature and the narratives of the teachers interviewed for this study to understand the teachers' experiences as a function of hegemonic social, economic and historical influences in the commercial educational contexts. In this way, these ESL teachers are situated in a cultural and economic system that does not value their labour for its intrinsic worth but rather for its exchange value. However, the findings also show that certain individuals do not accept the status quo of their working situations and are motivated to resist on their own or on others' behalf.

Critical emancipation is described as the result of ideological critique, a process entailing intellectual clarification about the constraints affecting one's life (Bottomore, 1984; Canagarajah, 1993; Fay, 1987; Luke & Gore, 1992). For the teachers in the current research, however, resistance to the ruling relations has a much more personal focus. Although the teachers did engage in ideological reflection at the time of the interviews, this does not seem to be the motivation behind their oppositional actions at the workplace. Instead, during the organizing effort and subsequent union activities the teachers were responding to what they saw as unfair interpersonal circumstances evolving either from direct dealings with the employer or from witnessing injustices experienced by coworkers.

This personal take on workplace inequality is not surprising, considering that the abuses teachers underwent were often personal in nature with individuals being singled out by managers. Samantha and Andrew's anger towards the employer, which fuels their motivations for supporting the union, emerges partly from the realization that their employers were placing profit-making above their friendships. A conversation between Tobias and Samantha reflects the personal aspect of their union experiences:
Tobias: I mean, I just think the union should be able to last. The union should be able to live and empower itself without those kinds of horror stories.

Samantha: But it’s the horror stories that have informed the creation.

Tobias: I know...half of it’s personal too. It’s personal information there that is tied, so tied into the union too that it’s hard to talk about it without bringing in the personal...

Samantha: I think that the great thing about this union is it allows people to be personal. I mean, before people were so scared and unable to really express themselves.

Because resistance is personal for these speakers, it is infused with emotion, as the previous examples demonstrate. Ellsworth (Ellsworth, 1992) and others (De Castell & Bryson, 1997c) have made it clear in critiques of critical pedagogy that personal experiences of disempowerment can bring forth issues of fear, betrayal, and shame. These speakers’ stories present their coworkers as frequently withdrawn and fearful in the face of threatening managers. They were not always able to stand up for themselves, were prone to self-blame, and seemed to demonstrate a quiet acceptance of the current situation. The culture of these workplaces was, in part, a culture of fear.

The narrators also describe situations showing that speaking out and resisting workplace injustices have had real consequences; as I have shown one union activist was “let go” while in the hospital battling cancer and another was repeatedly targeted until she quit. People suffer when they challenge the powers that be, and this is the point that Tobias wants to emphasize when he says, “People do this. People unionize.”
When people stand up for themselves and others in these circumstances, it is, in Samantha's words, "a really weird thing."

Endangering one's employment security by challenging one's boss is not a risk that most people want to take. However, the teachers I interviewed acted, and continue to act, despite this risk. What was it that either enabled or drove these teachers to confront managers? While all of these activists portray themselves as able to stand up for themselves when necessary, they are angered by what they and their coworkers have had to contend with. This is primarily what drove their organizational efforts and continues to motivate them to work with the union. Again, the emotional and intersubjective aspect of injustice fuels their desire for change.

The flipside of fear and betrayal is compassion and trust. Just as negative emotions are important in resistance, positive emotions play an important role in sustaining the teachers' sense of self-worth. What these narrators really appreciate are managers who are supportive and sensitive to teachers' needs. While a union deals with labour issues, it does not seem to replace the benefits of a helpful supervisor who can lend professional support to a developing or struggling teacher. As educators, we are aware that our students need encouragement in order to build confidence and develop as learners, and most people expect teachers to provide this. Perhaps we need to extend our expectations of teachers to the supervisors who oversee them.

5.6 Implications of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

This has been an exploratory study with a sample of only four teachers, and therefore can not be said to be generalizable. It does provide some insight into what life might be like for other ESL instructors working in profit-driven institutions and is thus suggestive of
areas for further investigation and ways that stakeholders in English language programs might be more inclusive of ESL teachers.

The stories presented here validate many of the anecdotal facts that have come my way in conversations with other language teachers, pointing to the possibility that the employment problems in the industry may be quite extensive. A broader knowledge base regarding work issues for ESL teachers could substantiate some of the claims made by the teachers in this study and provide a better sense of what direction in which to move towards providing support for teachers. Some basic information would help to map the industry and teachers’ positions within it. How many private language schools exist in Canada? What is the geographic spread of these schools? How many teachers are employed in the industry? What are their salaries? How are these teachers trained? What are rates of attrition like? Which groups of teachers are represented by unions?

More detailed information on teachers’ employment concerns would also help our understanding of what actually goes on inside these schools, which tend to be very isolated places for the workers. What employment concerns do teachers have at other ESL schools? What similarities can be noted? What have teachers done in other schools to deal with the inequities they have experienced, and how successful have their approaches been? What other kinds of solutions do they envision?

Based on what the teachers in the present study have indicated, strategies to improve the circumstances for ESL teachers in the private industry might include recruiting assistance from individuals operating in more privileged positions such as academics, government officials or representatives, members of professional organizations, and union representatives. To begin with, scholars could contribute by advancing the research on this issue, as outlined above. Further investigations in the lives of language instructors in the private industry would bring the
teachers’ concerns into the public sphere and provide a basis for informed discussions in various arenas.

Legislative representatives and citizens concerned about education might also take notice of the results of this study, as it offers a glimpse into the direction mainstream education might take if the corporate model continues to encroach on the public model. If business interests are allowed to dominate the educational process, this may have detrimental effects on teachers’ abilities to make and carry out professional decisions.

Regarding the existence of private language education, provincial governments might consider regulation. There is currently no mandatory regulation of ESL schools in any province in Canada. One such form of control might include registration of schools with the ministries of education within a system of accreditation. Governments could also put resources into monitoring the industry so as to be better informed about labour and educational practices taking place within it. Most importantly, teachers’ input should be sought out in developing the policies that affect their institutions.

Professional associations such as TESL Canada and its provincial affiliations have the power to take what is essentially an invisible issue and bring it into public forums shared by the language teaching community. Printed publications such as professional journals and magazines as well as conferences are ideal means for sparking discussion about ESL teachers’ work. These organizations may also need to take responsibility for breaking the isolation that many ESL teachers in the private sector work within. Embarking on outreach programs to bring teachers together to share their experiences, for example, may help to alleviate the sense of isolation that the speakers from CEC and ESL College identified in their interviews.

Finally, unions are the only organizations whose primary interest is labour, and the concerns of the teachers in the current study are first
and foremost labour issues. To begin with, the unions who represent these teachers might start to think about how to improve their relations with their member locals. How are they meeting their members’ needs? What do they need to know about their member locals in order to assist them better? How might they address the isolation that has been experienced by the two locals represented by this study? For instance, bringing the ESL teacher locals into contact with other locals with similar concerns may be productive for the members. Furthermore, unions could investigate other ESL teaching worksites to see if union representation might also benefit other teachers. As the informants in the present research argue, this would strengthen teachers’ voices within the industry.

5.7 Conclusion

The narratives of the four participants involved in this study provide insight into both the social and economic factors that disadvantage these ESL teachers, showing how the teachers experience inequality on a personal level and how these teachers see themselves as able to change their circumstances. The images portrayed in the research findings show the important role that strong leaders can play by representing their peers in the face of intimidation. A nagging question remains for me, however: What about the vast majority of teachers in the private ESL industry who are not represented by unions? One informant states, “People want help at times.” This is a call to be heard by those of us in more secure positions, who are privileged to be able to work without fear of discipline and to be able to speak without fear of suppression.

The teachers who participated in these interviews did so at the risk of revealing their identities and potentially jeopardizing their employment. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to connect with these individuals in a very personal way. Not only has this research
enriched my understanding of the lives of other teachers working in the private language teaching industry, but it has given me inspiration and added to my personal conviction that promoting and defending the well-being of people we work with everyday is an essential, if under-recognized, endeavour. I hope that, by presenting these portrayals of what it looks like to be political in daily life, others will be motivated to accept the responsibility of defending others when the situation calls for it.

5.8 Epilogue

Almost three years have past since these interviews took place, and within that time both locals have negotiated additional contracts, gaining increases in wages and benefits as well as improvements in contractual language that further protects teachers.

Ben, Tobias, and Andrew continue to be active in their unions, while Sam has chosen to dedicate her time to other aspects of her life.

Both locals have also since lobbied their union head offices to commit to supporting campaign efforts to organize other private language schools. At the time of this writing, one other private language school has unionized as a result of these efforts.
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161


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