

Relational Authority: How Re-thinking Educational Authority is Empowering

by

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Abstract

Over the course of the past century and a half, many different philosophical schools of thought have offered perspectives on educational authority. Traditionalists have argued that, as the expert, the teacher should maintain all authority in the room. Progressivists wished that students would be given authority, so that their own interests and motivations might take them forward in education. Many of those educating for social justice believe that authority should belong to students, unless an opportunity to educate for social justice arises. Each of these schools views authority as a thing that may be given or taken. If authority is seen differently, as the product of a relation between people, there is much more room for the empowerment of both teacher and student, and to challenge the educational system. This thesis is an exploration of the implications of relational authority, as it exists in public education.

Keywords: relational authority; critical education; Paulo Freire; Charles Bingham; public education

For Ann, whose faith in the other inspires...

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I am so thankful to my family; my parents have helped to guide my head and my heart through this process, and my brother has always reminded me to keep my feet on the ground. I am also eternally grateful to, and for, my love, whose affection and compassion have never ebbed. It is my privilege to belong to each of them.

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1. Introduction

Violence is to be found in any action in which one acts as if one were alone to act: as if the rest of the universe were there only to receive the action... (Levinas, 1987, p. 18)

I work with a great many caring individuals. These people work themselves to the edge of exhaustion, and some beyond it, in order to try to do what is best for their students. They, like myself, and the vast majority of educators, want the experiences that students have at school to be positive, and filled with learning. When students leave my classroom at the end of a lesson, and the school at the end of the day, I wish them to do so in peace, and as slightly better humans than they were when they walked in that morning. My desire for students to learn the importance of a good education is second only to my wish that they learn the value of being good to one another, of being compassionate and kind, and that that learning might actually change our society for the better. Unfortunately, between waking in the morning, and laying their heads on their pillows at night, students are exposed to a constant barrage of violence that actually inhibits their development as compassionate beings.

Of course, the violence to which I refer is not gunfire, or outright physical violence, though some students may experience this; the violence I speak of is the product of an educational system predicated on a particular conception of authority. In a classroom where the student has nothing to offer, and the teacher has everything to offer, as dictated by a multitude of hierarchical powers, violence is done to both student and teacher. Evidence of this violence takes peculiar and contradictory forms: the form of the model student, the knowledgeable and well-meaning school teacher, the student who drops out because he cannot stand to fail again, the bullied student, the student bully, the principal doing her best to support the disciplinary needs of teachers, and of every other member of the educational community who cannot see those before them as whole beings.

Students and teachers have unusual working relationships. Teachers are generally aware that their students are multi-faceted beings, with divergent interests, troubles, and triumphs in life, but are unable to fully acknowledge this. In so many ways, working within a system which dictates that the further up one is in the hierarchy, the greater authority (and implicitly knowledge)¹ they have prevents teachers from acknowledging students as whole and capable people. Imagine a student who is generally depressed, perhaps as a result of a difficult home life, who comes to the classroom and is repeatedly disruptive during lessons. The student is argumentative, and frequently neglects to hand in work. While the teacher may inquire with the school counsellor about the situation at home, or with the student directly, professional circumstances will often prevent positive interaction between student and teacher.

The teacher is obliged to teach a class of thirty-plus students, to get them through the designated curriculum before the end of the term. The teacher is obliged to assign failing grades to students who do not hand in work, first by filling in triplicate "I" forms for the Ministry of Education, and then by following up with report cards. Besides the various bureaucratic requirements this teacher must fulfill, it is likely that he has also requested intervention from a principal or vice principal, in an attempt to force the student to recognize what must be done both academically and behaviourally. After all of this, still little may be known about the student. Perhaps he has already acquired deep knowledge in the areas being studied, and might offer a fresh perspective to his classmates. Perhaps his inability/unwillingness to hand in work is unrelated to his depression, but is actually a result of being functionally illiterate and embarrassed to admit it.

The fact is, without a working relationship between this student and his teacher, and between him and his classmates, he will find it difficult to learn, and will be consistently subject to the violence I mentioned earlier. This violence includes the misrecognition of students as people other than who they are or wish to be understood as. It includes the perpetual labelling of the student by higher and higher levels of authority. This labelling will make it difficult for future teachers of the same student to see the student as he is, as each level of authority reinforces the next. The violence

¹ The nexus of authority and knowledge will be addressed later in this document.

done to this student, often with the noble aim of meeting his educational needs, prevents him being viewed as a whole person, capable of learning and with the capacity to grow and change.

The violence done in schools is not one way. Teachers may find it difficult to escape the day-to-day structures which prevent them from building beneficial relationships with students, but students also find it difficult to circumvent the hierarchical expectations of their environment and see teachers as human beings they might relate to. For example, when students bump into teachers at the grocery store, or movie theatre, it always seems a bit of a surprise to the students to find that their teachers, those paragons of knowledge invested in by the powers that be, should participate in such everyday activities. Despite having parents and being born once themselves, students are sometimes scandalized by the pregnancy of one of their teachers. Though this may also say something about society's anxiety around sexuality, it seems to me further evidence that students find it difficult to see their teachers as people.

Viewing one another as whole human beings, and coming to know one another's imperfections and gifts, is central to building any relationship. Without coming to know one another as we wish to be known, we are in danger of imposing expectations that do not suit the object of our judgements. The expectations that teachers place on students, and vice versa, are largely shaped by the educational environment in which we are situated. When members of this relation are forced to establish their expectations of one another within the context of a hierarchical power dynamic, based on the idea that those in positions of authority are the only ones with knowledge worth knowing, the relation is damaging to both sides. This damage to the relation between teacher and student is at the heart of the violence done to both.

The student who is misunderstood and subjected to level after level of authoritarian rebuke will likely not learn what he is fully capable of. The student who accepts every word his teacher says, because that teacher is in a position of authority, is also unlikely to learn what he is fully capable of. The teacher who, having been a part of the system for so long, continues to reinforce the power dynamics of old, will never become the fully-fledged human being she wishes to be, no matter how invested in her students she may be. By failing to recognize the dangers of seeing graduated levels of

a hierarchy as holding greater power, and by assuming that knowledge and power are precisely the same thing both students and teachers are prevented from becoming human beings fully conscious of the power structures at work around them. Without this consciousness, they cannot reach their full capacities as human beings, and it is the prevention of this flourishing that is at the centre of the violence in education.

The continual reinforcement of any structure based on the idea that authority is something that may be given or taken is also the perpetuation of the violence inherent in such a system. It does not matter if it is thought that the authority should be held by one until earned by another, used by those in positions of power only when necessary in order to promote social justice, or given over entirely to those in lesser positions so that they might gain autonomy; each of these ideas is at risk of preventing the development of fully flourishing human beings through healthy relationships. In contrast to the traditional conception of authority, in which it is seen as a commodity that is ascribed or conferred, some scholars (e.g., Bingham and Sidorkin, [2004]) suggest that authority is produced in relation between people. Both members of that relation have influence over the authority, and in a healthy relation, wherein both members are aware that they are participating in a mutually beneficial relation in order to make them better human beings, authority may be used to promote learning and challenge the world around said relation.

Thesis Outline

What follows is an exploration of traditional ideas of authority in the classroom. In order to gain a better understanding of the ways in which teachers have conventionally considered authority to operate within the classroom, I begin where many others have before me; I begin with personal misconceptions. I will juxtapose the conception of authority evident in my experience with a relational conception of authority. Ultimately, I will further my exploration of the idea, begun above, that the misunderstanding of what authority is enables the re-production of an inherently violent system, which is dehumanizing to both student and teacher.

Chapter 2 is a first person phenomenological account of trying to establish authority in a classroom, followed by a brief unpacking of that experience. In Chapter 3 I

will outline the roots of the traditional conception of authority as a thing or entity. I will trace these roots through the traditionalist, progressivist, and critical orientations in order to illustrate how each, in its own way, prevents the growth of both teachers and students, no matter the intent. Knowing the foundation for the current system is helpful when trying to understand how educators have become so complicit in, and students so complacent about, the perpetuation of a dehumanizing education system. It is obvious that, no matter what tradition they hail from, educators are invested in educating their students; they care about educating students, but many are unaware of a key obstacle to their success.

After a discussion of the foundations of this traditional conception of authority, the remainder of the chapter will serve as a discussion of current academic conversations regarding authority. These conversations are drawn largely from the Philosophy of Education Society's Yearbook. The perspectives of the philosophers in this section are diverse, and illustrate the intense contention around issues of authority in education, even among experts. While some look toward a kind of relational authority as a base from which to help students develop into moral beings, others seek to prove that traditional authority, and not relation, is necessary for education to occur. The conversation continues on to a feminist debate as to whether or not one may be both in a position of authority and nurturing at once; an idea entirely possible if authority is viewed as relational, and not as it previously has been. Each of the pieces I discuss adds a new facet to this discussion.

In Chapter 4 I will draw largely on the works of Charles Bingham in order to explain how authority actually works as the product of a to-and-fro exchange between people. I will also explore how it works in the absence of the other, as outlined by Bingham in his discussion of absent authority and the work of Jessica Benjamin in the chapter of *Authority is Relational* entitled "Relating to Authority Figures Who Are Not There." I hope to link the ideas of present and absent authority figures within the chapter to the presence and absence of the educator when students are learning. When students learn outside of the classroom, the figure of the teacher may also come into play. If the teacher is able to admit her part in the production of student understanding, via the relational nature of authority, student learning may be further enriched.

Chapter 5 will serve as an unpacking of the work of Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as yet another view of authority as being relational. I will further explore the particular ways in which traditional ideas regarding authority have functioned as a part of a process of mutual dehumanization of student and teacher. In order to explain this process, and as it is particularly his notion, I will explore Freire's idea of mutual humanization. This is the process by which both teacher and student are able to overcome the oppressive elements of their environments, and recognize and nurture in one another the capacity to further perceive and challenge injustices in the world around them; these injustices include the continual perpetuation of the traditional view of authority and the implications of that perpetuation.

Toward the end of this chapter, I will introduce the conflict between Freire's notion of educating for freedom, and a relational idea of authority. The conflict, as explained by Bingham, lies in the fact that despite Freire's comprehensive discussion of authority, he still sees it as a *thing*. I would like to resolve this by pointing to the solution Bingham offers through the language of psychoanalysis. With the addition of just a small amount of psychoanalytic language, it is much easier to see that the critical approach to education can be one in which authority is relational.

After looking at Freire's work and illustrating how it might be seen as inclusive of a relational view of authority, I will dedicate the second section of this chapter to defending the critical pedagogy of Freire in light of the critiques offered him and other critical pedagogues by Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) in her work, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?: Working Through the Myths of Critical Pedagogy." Where Ellsworth finds that critical pedagogy does not allow for the empowerment of all students, I will seek to illustrate that it is possible to build honest environments for relation, in which empowerment is possible. This will be a thorough discussion of the implications of a relational conception of authority in terms of facilitating a mutually humanizing education. In order to avoid the pitfalls outlined by Ellsworth (1989), I will introduce a hermeneutic approach to relation in education, through Bingham's, "I am the Missing Pages of the Text I Teach: Gadamer and Derrida on Teacher Authority" (2002). Through this approach, it is my hope to continue to encourage education based on a relational view of authority, in order to further humanize and educate both teachers and students.

The closing chapter of this thesis will serve as a sort of bookend. It will include a discussion of the possible flaws in relational authority; flaws that make it possible for relation to be exploited, or to continue to be oppressive. It will also include a re-working of the initial phenomenological investigation, in which I express what it could have looked like in that classroom so long ago, had we all been aware of how relational authority really works. I continue to hope that, through this and other lines of inquiry, the education system might be a place of peace and humanization, void of the violence that now so permeates it.

2. Establishing Authority: A Phenomenological Account

Having looked quickly at the students sitting near the door to my classroom, so quickly as to be unable to remember them later, I use the keys hung from my neck, heavy on the lanyard which displays my ID card, to open the door. I turn the key with my right hand, slowly, as I am weighed down by the book bag and lunch bag hanging off my arms, the Teacher on Call (TOC) folder containing attendance lists and lesson plans for the day, and by the warmth of my coat and scarf. I step into the room and close the still-locked door behind me. I stand near the door, my back to it, and regard the room. It is bathed in grey. The light from the windows on the far side of the room falls upon the teacher's desk and a row of desks in twos with chairs on top of them, enabling me a clearer view of them than those desks directly in front of me.

I turn to the left, searching for the light switch, which is not there. I can taste the protein bar I ate in the car, and feel acid rising in my throat – I want a drink of water. I am thirsty. I swallow. I imagine my water bottle in my book bag while I turn to the right and find the light switches. There are three. I turn them all on with my left hand, the pressure from which causes the red lights indicating “off” to turn green, and then turn back to the room which is now clearly visible. I turn to the right and walk toward the front of the room quickly, still warm and thirsty, and then turn left and walk all the way to the windows, beside which is the teacher's desk. After placing my two bags on a chair next to the one I will later sit in, I put the folder on the desk and I take off my coat. Both shoulders come off at once and slide down my arms. I let the coat fall completely off my left arm and pull it round to the right, then drape it over the back of my chair. Removing my water bottle from my book bag, I take a long drink of cold water while regarding the clock and calculating that I have twenty minutes before students must be in the room. I finish my drink, no longer thirsty, but still feeling the pressing presence of my breakfast in my oesophagus.

I screw the lid of my water bottle back on and set it on the desk. I look up at the room again. The quiet of the room is suddenly made conspicuous as the noise in the hallway increases. I look to the clock again, and again calculate the number of minutes before students must be in the room. I open the folder, take out my lesson plans, and begin to read them. As I read, I walk around the desk and into a lectern at the front of the room. It does not hurt, but it surprises me and I can feel my heart speeding up. I take a deep breath. I walk past the lectern and turn to my left to face the whiteboard at the front of the room. It is blank. The dry erase markers on the ledge are blue, red, and green. I choose red and pull off the cap with my left hand, while still holding my notes in the same hand. I stand on my tiptoes and write, "Miss McKinnon" on the top left-hand side of the right-hand board. I make curving M's, but the rest of the text is not unusual. I hold my breath while I stretch up to write. When I finish writing, and flatten my feet, I exhale a great deal of breath I did not know I was holding. It feels good.

I put the lid on the red marker, listening for the click, and place it on the ledge. I then select a green marker, take the lid off, and begin transcribing the numbered instructions left by the classroom teacher for the first class onto the board. I can smell the ink, non-toxic chemical smell, and feel it sliding onto the board with a quiet set of squeaks and brushing noises. Once the directions for the first block's class are on the board, I put the lid back on the green marker with an audible click, put it on the ledge producing a metallic clank, and turn to the left to walk toward the lectern and the front of the teacher's desk again. My breathing is regular and I feel comfortable in the room. I glance over to the clock. I know I have five minutes left, but am unaware of the calculation I must have made to discover this. Once at the desk, I remove from the teacher's file the class list and seating plan for the first block. I place them, and the instructions for the day, on the lectern, along with a pencil and large pad of sticky notes I spotted on the teacher's desk. On the top of the sticky note, I write:

Name + instructions Door Locked
at front papers in order

There is a knock at the door and my head jerks left in its direction. I put down the pencil on the lectern briskly. My heart begins to beat fast. I take in short breaths and walk quickly across the front of the room, then turn right to walk to the back corner where the door is. I turn the handle, cold to the touch, and admit a student. I smile and say, "Come on in!" I retrace my steps to the lectern quickly and with intention. More students come into the room, and though I look at them all and smile, a genuine smile which crinkles my eyes and moves my ears up the side of my head, I stand behind the lectern near the teacher's desk and fold my arms as I face the students.

I see a short woman standing at the door. I raise my eyebrows and smile at her. She comes over and we shake hands while introducing ourselves. Her hand is clammy, and I can smell her breath and see the things stuck in her teeth. I continue to smile at her and feel tall beside her. As she is a student teacher, I give her permission to remain in the room, and while we continue to chat, I can see the room filling out of the corner of my right eye. There is a clanging of chairs being removed from desks and music being played over the P.A. As the student teacher goes to the back of the room, I turn toward the class, cross my arms behind the lectern, and tap my toe to the Justin Bieber song many of them seem to be singing along to, or rolling their eyes at. My foot taps to the beat. It taps on its own, and then because I have decided to continue tapping it.

I pick up my pencil from the lectern, and grasp it tightly in my right hand to write this while listening to the music:

Name + instructions Door Locked

at front papers in order

Shake hands SdntT

Straighten desks

Behind podium –arms crossed

Smile – tap foot to Beeber

-writing out this /while listening

I finish adding to my list of actions and place the pencil back on the lectern. On my far left there is a chair still on an empty desk. I walk to it smartly and lift the chair, feeling my lower back work as I lean slightly to put it down, and place it on the floor, sliding it forward underneath the desk. I then walk up and down the aisles as students continue to settle, snaking through between the desks, pausing if one of their bags is in my way until it is moved. As I walk I look at the students with phones out. First, I look at their phones and then their faces. I slow down as I do this, and at some point pull my sleeves up to my elbows as I continue to walk. One student does not respond and I say, “You’re going to make that disappear really soon, right?” As I speak, most of my smile falls from my face, and my eyebrows rise questioningly toward my hairline. I am nodding in agreement with myself.

I continue my walk, up and down the rows, until the third row when I end up back at the lectern. I stand behind it, back straight, arms crossed, sleeves pulled up to my elbows, looking on with an intentionally blank face at the two students still standing. All at once, the students sit down, the bell rings, and we are ready to begin the class.

The previous piece is an attempted thick description of the experience of authority within the classroom. It is my own account of the first forty-five minutes of the school day, spent in a classroom I had not been in before, and with students I had not previously met. My effort to establish what I then believed to be authority within the classroom is apparent and a direct result of an attempt to minimize what are referred to

within the teaching community as classroom management issues. The complexity of what emerged from this brief piece of work continues to surprise me.

It is clear that I went to great length to demonstrate my authority, but also that there was some evidence of anxiety or tension experienced in correlation with my performative evocation of authority. I held my breath, paced between desks, stared down at students who had yet to sit in their desks, and positioned myself behind a lectern at the front of the room, in what was an attempt to embody authority, though I cannot say what is intentional in the common sense. I cannot know if I stood behind the lectern at the front of the room in order to appear to have authority, or to feel protected from the authority that students had within their familiar classroom. It is within this kind of ambiguity that the complexities of authority are exposed.

In this experience authority was enacted in different ways. First, there is the authority of the absent teacher, invoked by me through the transcription of her notes on the board, even prior to the entrance of the students. Second, there is my physical enactment of authority standing at the front of the room, pacing between desks, and allowing the student teacher to remain in the room, first shaking her hand and then smiling when she deferred to me. A third possible kind, or locus of authority lies within the students as they enter noisily, some using their phones, others not sitting down, and each choosing how he, or she, will relate to me. Although these may appear to be three distinctly different enactments of authority, I suggest that there is only one conception of authority at work, which is not inherently violent.

Although some educators may see them as useful for classroom management, socialization, or even to promote social justice, I contend that traditional conceptions of authority, or rather the enactment of such conceptions by members of the educational community, enables the perpetuation of an inherently violent system, which prevents the empowerment of youth, and the humanization of both teacher and student. For this reason, in the remainder of this document, I will both outline outmoded conceptions of authority, and illustrate that mode which I believe to be the most empowering. It is through working in this new conception of authority that I believe education might be, at least in part, altered for the better.

The new conception of authority to which I refer is a relational one. It is a conception which acknowledges that authority is not located in one party or another, but that it is produced when people are in relation to one another. In the opening pages of *Authority is Relational: Rethinking Educational Empowerment* (2008), Charles Bingham fleshes out relational authority. He offers an anecdote, regarding a former student whose grandmother had passed away (p. 5). After taking some time away from school to attend her grandmother's funeral, Julie returns, and begins to explain her situation to her professors. While most of her professors offer words of condolence, and their sympathies, Julie's history teacher immediately asks her to provide a note, authorizing her absence, and to write the quiz she missed within two days as, "that's [her] policy for every student no matter how extenuating the circumstances" (Bingham, 2008, p. 6). In her re-telling of the story, Julie explains that she no longer did her best in the class, and that her teacher, "lost her authority as a teacher" (Bingham, 2008, p. 6).

The point that Bingham makes in the re-telling of this story is that Julie herself is an active member in the relation of authority. Just as the students I meet choose how they will relate to me, so too does Julie determine how she will relate to her professor. Without Julie's participation in the to-and-fro that the relation of authority is, the relation breaks down. That is not to say that the teacher cannot punish Julie for refusing to work hard. Certainly, if Julie refuses to do her work, the professor may resort to assigning her a failing grade, which may hold further repercussions in so far as the hierarchies of the academy and the outside world are concerned. These punishments are authoritarian, and while they may have a great impact, they are separate from the authority relation. What is of note is that Julie is empowered, as an individual engaged in relation, enough to alter the relation itself. Unfortunately, it is apparent that with a broken teacher-student relation, in which the teacher does not acknowledge the student as a whole person, learning will be adversely affected.

In my view, it is not simply academic learning which may be compromised when a teacher or student does not, or cannot, acknowledge the relation they are engaged in, but the very process of becoming fully human. In the preface to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970/2005) explains the critical consciousness that he wishes all humans to develop, that is at the center of humanization, which he refers to as *conscientização*. "The term...refers to learning to perceive social, political, and

economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35). The highest purpose of education is to enable humans as thinking, feeling, and ethically acting beings, through humanization. That being said, so long as authority is not conceived of as being relational, and the members of those relations are not respected as whole people, their very humanity may remain stunted.

When I walk into a room full of students, a room that they have inhabited so many times before, but which is new to me, and demand “authority,” I am participating in keeping the authoritarian system in place. In his work, “I am the Missing Pages of the Text I Teach: Gadamer and Derrida on Teacher Authority,” Bingham (2001) looks to Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* for a distinction between more positive and negative authority. Gadamer (1960/1975) “points out that if authority is ‘authoritarian,’ then it draws upon institutional power and hierarchical position” (p. 266). I am permitted to make demands of students as I have gone through the B.C. school system, completed two degrees at Simon Fraser University (SFU), completed the Professional Development Program (PDP) at the same institution, been seen favourably in an interview by an employee of the school board (please note the multiple authorities which may have placed him/her in that position), been approved to work with youth through an R.C.M.P criminal records check, supplied my qualifications to the Teacher Qualification Service, paid my dues to the B.C. Teachers’ Council, and shown up for work.

In many of my actions within that classroom, it is apparent that I am demanding that students acknowledge my place as one of authority, and that they give up any authority they are holding. As I hold my breath, and stand nervously watching them, it is apparent that I do not automatically *have* all of the authority in the room. That being said, it is also unclear that the students themselves *have* any authority. The crux of this question as to where authority lies is in the third possible locus of authority I presented, saying that it, “lies within the students as they enter noisily, some using their phones, others not sitting down, and each choosing how he or she will relate to me”. As the students choose how they will relate to me, so too do I choose how I will relate to them. The moment we see one another, or hear one another, or are in contact with one another, we are in relation. What I missed in the exploration of my actions was the anxiety present in my body, as recognition that authority was not located there. Rather, authority is produced in relation.

Acknowledgements from various institutional powers do nothing to speak to my ability to build relationships with students. My level of qualification does not ensure that I am capable of helping students to develop as human beings, or that I am a fully developed human being myself. What all of that bureaucratic paperwork does guarantee is that I am heavily invested in by a system that perpetuates itself. If the system were one that succeeded at fostering the kind of humanization Freire outlines, from my point of view, there would be little to worry about. Instead, however, the current system reinforces a view of authority as a thing that may be given or taken away. It is structured in a way that penalizes those students who demand recognition not sanctioned by authority figures, such as Julie, and often denies them the right to challenge the injustices of an unjust system. The perpetuation of this idea of authority within public education damages the relationship between teachers and students, prevents both parties from becoming fully aware of the oppressive elements of their realities, and bolsters similar hierarchical and authoritarian structures outside of the school system. The perpetuation of this idea of authority endangers education itself.

In the following chapter I will discuss the roots of the educational ideas which culminate in the continuance of dangerous and hierarchical views of authority. As outlined in the introduction, I will explore the traditionalist, progressivist, and critical orientations in order to illustrate just how each perspective prevents the growth of both teachers and students as human beings. Through a thorough discussion of the basis of these schools of thought, which will then shift to discussion of present conversations, it is possible to discover just where it is that we have come from. In efforts to move forward, and to improve education for teachers, students, and society as a whole, it is absolutely vital that we have a better understanding of past failures. Through that understanding there is great opportunity for us to move forward.

3. Divergent Views of Authority: The Contemporary Literature and Its Roots

After the terrifying rise of fascism during the early twentieth century, it is not difficult to imagine why concern about the nature of authority in the classroom may have increased dramatically. There are, historically, three distinct ways of thinking of authority in education, none of which is relational, but all of which are aimed at using authority to best serve students. As a means of further illustrating the way in which so many misconceive of authority, and to explore the shift toward current conversations on the subject, including relational perspectives, it is useful to begin with a look at the three traditional perspectives. I will introduce these perspectives through the work of Charles Bingham. In *No Education Without Relation* (2004), and “Authority Is Never Genuine but Neither Is Giving It Up: Toward a Derridean Theory of Un-Enlightened Empowerment,” (2007) Bingham begins his examination of authority by outlining the three most common conceptions of it: the traditional, the progressive, and the critical orientations (p. 454). While each of these conceptions of authority differs from the others, none is capable of empowering students.

The traditional conception of authority is one which willingly accepts that authority is a good thing, and that, in fact, “authority is a moral good that comes when one acquires knowledge and institutional responsibility” (Bingham, 2007, p. 454-455)². This means that my place as an educator guarantees me a certain authority, based on my having been granted it by various institutions. In this view, it is effectively my responsibility to use this authority for the betterment of my students. According to

² See also Robin Barrow and Ronald Woods in *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*, 4th edition (2006, p. 93-94) for an additional perspective on the difference between being *in* authority and being *an* authority. Although Barrow distinguishes between authority bestowed by position, and that garnered as a result of expertise, he does not extend his discussion to a relational view of authority per se.

traditionalists, it is “by using one’s genuine³ authority, [that] one can cultivate the capacities of those who are themselves not yet authority figures” (p. 455). In essence, the degree to which I cultivate the capacities of my students is proportionate to the amount of my authority I will be able to relinquish over time. This approach assumes that there is a finite amount of authority, which is in my power to give over to students as they grow intellectually. Although traditionalists seek to use authority in order to cultivate the growth of others, their economic view of authority, which permits learners to earn a portion of it over time⁴, might be considered disempowering to students. It assumes that knowledge and authority are synonymous, and that they belong with those in positions of authority. While educators may have some knowledge that students do not, the opposite may also be true; this does not mean that those with more knowledge should hold any power over those with less.

In contrast to the traditional view of authority stands the progressive account. Rather than viewing authority as positive, to be used to benefit students, progressivists believe authority to be harmful to students. “It is thought that the more authority a teacher has, the less chance the student will have to gain autonomy or agency” (Bingham, 2008, p. 3). Although still maintaining that authority is a finite thing, to be given and taken, this is very nearly the opposite of the traditionalist thought, wherein authority may be employed to help students. Indeed, progressivist discussions centre on the idea that authority should be shared with students, or given to them by the teacher, in order to empower them (p.3). Freire (1970/2005) suggests that because of the institutionalized power structures in which progressivists often work their aim to offer autonomy or agency to students is an impossible one. He refers to this as false generosity:

³ In the traditional perspective, genuine authority refers to what a teacher has, after having gained a combination of knowledge and institutional responsibility (Bingham, 2006, p. 455).

⁴ This kind of economic view of authority can be easily related to Freire’s idea of banking education. In banking education, the teacher’s task is “to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration” (Freire, 2005, p. 71). The more successfully the student stores this information, and regurgitates, the better a student he is considered to be, and the more authority he has earned. If this kind of knowledge is also authority, and equal to power over others, then those who cannot replicate information, or who refuse to accept what they are told, are also thought to have no power. Though well meaning, any educational approach based on this idea is dangerous, as it denies agency to students.

Any attempt to “soften” the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity...In order to have the continued opportunity to express their “generosity,” the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well (p.44).

The difficulty with assuming that authority is one’s to give to students is that it also assumes that students have nothing to offer and no agency without one giving it to them. What’s more, because the ‘giving’ of authority in this particular equation is based on it being bestowed by someone in a higher position of power, it is always possible for the person in that position to rescind the offer. This possibility illustrates the absolute falsehood of any offer of autonomy, agency, or authority based on the notion that authority might be given or taken. It is a false generosity because it is made possible only by the continuance of a structure which denies individuals their agency in the first place and so, no matter how well meaning, progressivists unwittingly continue to disempower their students.

While the progressivist approach revolves around giving up authority, and the traditionalist school is focused on embracing it, there is a camp which sits somewhere between the two. The critical orientation to authority fits with, and rejects, both the traditionalist and the progressivist orientations. While rejecting most uses of authority, “the critical argument maintains that authority *must* be used, but only for the purposes of teaching for social justice” (Bingham, 2008, p. 3). This puts it at odds with the progressivist stance, which maintains that all authority is “*naturally* at odds with social justice” (Bingham, 2008, p. 4), as well as the traditionalist perspective, which advocates for the use of authority as a constant necessity in teaching.⁵ Broadly speaking, the critical perspective allows for those teaching toward social justice to use authority in order to change society. According to Bingham (2008) “the critical argument advocates the use of authority when teaching for human freedom is at stake” (p. 4). Ironically, the

⁵ Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) addresses the possible inconsistencies in using authority to teach for social justice in her article, “Why Doesn’t this Feel Empowering?: Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy.” I will address her concerns, and relate them to the work of Paulo Freire, in a later chapter.

continued conceptualization of authority as a thing may be quite at odds with the very aim of educating for human freedom.⁶

While each of these orientations to authority appears to be very different from the next, they all share a conception of authority as a thing. Traditionalists seek to hold authority, and give it over only as their pupils earn their place in the hierarchy of knowledge. Progressivists seek to give over authority to students at all times, believing the use of it by those in authority positions to be detrimental to their charges. Criticalists use their authority only under certain circumstances. Despite their varied aims and different perspectives on authority, each of these perspectives treats authority as a *thing*. While each orientation seeks to do what it believes is best for students, in treating authority this way, each fails to recognize the necessity of relationship in the production of authority.

Bingham refers to this treatment of authority as a commodity, which may be given or taken, as “thing-ify[ing]” (p.2), or the thingification of authority. By this he means that authority is made, by these groups, into a finite entity that may be used for or against others. It is something a teacher may possess or give away if she chooses. Although the traditionalist, progressivist, and critical approaches differ in thought as to *how* authority is to be used, each regards it as a *thing* which *can* be used. In order to explain how this misconception is so easy to come to, and so enduring, Bingham (2008) uses the analogy of the folk meteorologist and the wind.

To be sure, one can take the position that wind is a substance in and of itself. And to the extent that one takes that position, it might even make sense to wonder if more wind is a good or bad thing. It might make sense to wonder if we should try to stop the wind on certain occasions, or if we should try to increase the wind on other occasions. (p. 4)

If the above outlined approaches to authority, though simplified, are representative of the prevailing ways in which authority has been, and continues to be, treated in education, how might we conceive of it differently? How might the folk

⁶ Once again, the seeming contradiction between the critical orientation’s treatment of authority and its desire to educate for human freedom will be addressed, and hopefully partially resolved, within the discussion of Ellsworth’s work.

meteorologist come to see the wind for what we know it to be? Bingham (2008) goes on to explain the wind as it is, saying:

...From a more sophisticated, more accurate position, one should understand that wind is in fact a movement of air. It is a movement of air that exists in relation to the differences in atmospheric pressures. The wind exists only in relation to other circumstances. With a more sophisticated understanding of the wind, there is no meteorological sense in the endeavor to create more wind, or to create less wind. There is only sense in asking how the wind acts in relation to different events. (p. 4)

While the description in the last chapter of my standing up at the front of the room, behind the lectern, with my arms crossed and my face blank, was an illustration of my place of authority within the classroom, it was an illustration of an old idea; the idea that, as my place has been sanctioned by multiple institutions, I was automatically in possession of the authority within the room. Whether I would then choose to maintain my hold upon that authority, as in the traditionalist orientation, or pass in on to students, as would a progressivist, or do something of both, is beside the point. What I missed in the exploration of my actions was the anxiety present in my body, as recognition that authority was not actually located there. Like the wind shifting as multiple pressure systems come into contact with one another, the authority in the classroom shifted as student come into contact with me, and with one another. Relation is where authority is produced.

In the academic world, the current conversation regarding authority does not always approach it as a commodity to be given, or taken, but often as something that is produced when people are in relation to one another. In fact, much of the debate today surrounds various misunderstandings, and clarifications, of relational authority, and the search for appropriate application of the ideas. The remainder of this chapter will serve as an overview of a few current perspectives on relational authority, and an investigation of how the participants in this conversation seek to apply this idea. It will become clear that there is no singular conception of how relational authority might work, nor a single application, but that the shift from traditional conceptions of authority to a relational one is fraught with discord and hope. While some seek to use relational authority in order to extend respect and personhood to younger people and children, others use it in order to balance the false dichotomy of feminine nurturing and masculine authority so often

grappled with in feminist discussion and regarding the concept of care. While some seek to use authority in the same way that I see it, others take different approaches.

Kwak

In “Indoctrination Revisited: In Search of a New Source of Teachers’ Moral Authority” (2005), Duck-Joo Kwak seeks to find a source of teachers’ moral authority that is not rooted in some form of indoctrination. She outlines the dilemmas that a teacher today might have in facilitating the moral development of students, writing, “She knows it would not work to preach moral teachings; she also knows it would be politically incorrect to let her political position affect her students. Yet, she finds the role of a playful post-modern radical too light-hearted and even irresponsible for a teacher to assume” (2005, p. 94). Kwak is searching for the place from which a teacher might have the authority to teach morality to students within a post-modern world.

The first inkling of relational authority in Kwak’s work (2005) is pivotal to her search for a place from which to help students develop as moral beings:

Teachers’ authority can no longer be taken for granted; it must be earned if they are to exert any genuine moral influence. And unless we can locate a realizable source of legitimate authority within the human and interpersonal domain of teaching, we will have to abandon the idea that teaching constitutes a “practice” that is not reducible to its institutional and professional functions. (p. 93)

Although she does not give explicit examples as to what she believes it is necessary for teachers to develop in students, Kwak does expect that in order for teachers and students to work toward a desired developmental goal together, they do so through a kind of relational authority. Instead of insisting that a teacher rely on her intellectual competence, or institutional position of authority in order to get the attention of students, Kwak suggests that the locus of a teacher’s authority is “...within the human and interpersonal domain” (2005, p. 93).

Kwak does not define the human and interpersonal domain specifically, nor does she fully flesh out the idea of “legitimate moral authority” (2005, p. 94) that she is

searching for, likely due to the fact that “Indoctrination Revisited,” is a search for a new point of contact with students that does not rely on traditional views of authority. Just as the beginning of this chapter was an exploration of traditional conceptions of authority, so too is Kwak’s work largely a refutation of previous perspectives on the legitimate location of teacher authority. By exploring the concept of indoctrination through two divergent examples, she is able to illustrate that the misunderstanding of authority is dangerous, no matter what the teacher’s intentions. “Any teaching that tends to diminish learners’ rational minds becomes a form of indoctrination” (2005, p. 93), writes Kwak, which brings her argument regarding the responsibilities of teaching closer to those of Freire and his beliefs regarding the development of critical consciousness. Although Kwak is discussing an undefined moral development, and Freire the development of one’s capacity to perceive injustice, it is not difficult to see the correlation.

One of the key points that Kwak brings up, which is easily related to the necessity for a re-conceiving of authority in education, as well as to Freire’s notion of developing critical consciousness, is a teacher’s complicity in perpetuating the current system. Kwak writes:

I think that the established rules and standards of morality are so tightly entangled with, and so deeply embedded in, our everyday modern life in which manipulative or non-manipulative social relations with others are no longer distinguishable from each other, that it would be very hard, if not impossible, to establish a focal point from which we can take a critical perspective on the actual practice of our moral conducts and judgements.
(p. 97)

While Kwak is searching for a place from which a teacher might be able to, in her words, legitimately have moral authority⁷, she has hit upon something at the centre of my argument regarding the dangers of traditional conceptions of authority. From inside a system which perpetuates the traditional conception(s) of authority as a thing which may be given or taken, it is difficult for teachers to perceive the flaws in that kind of authority,

⁷ Kwak is not specific as to what she means by *having* moral authority. She moves back and forth between language of relation, and that of a *thingified* notion of authority, but based on her call for teachers to earn their authority (p. 93), and to reject any form of indoctrination (which is counter to engaging in an equal relation with students) I believe that Kwak is contributing to the conversation of relational authority.

and to challenge it in a way that might empower students. Kwak goes on to quote David Edward Cooper, stating, “The thought which may strike the teacher is not that he cannot subscribe to, or authoritatively transmit various beliefs and values, but that he has slipped into, fallen into, unreflective acceptance of them. They have become a part of the school’s furniture” (as cited in Kwak, 2005, p. 98).

By stating that the teacher may begin to confer beliefs and values to students, without having examined those values, and indeed without having examined himself, Kwak, via Cooper, exposes a significant reason for the perpetuation of traditional conceptions of authority. Although this is not what Kwak sets out to expose, the very fact that teachers are likely products of the same system they work within, a system which perpetuates the idea that authority may be given, or taken, and reinforces that view through a hierarchical system, must be a contributing factor to educators’ *thingified* view of authority. She explains that, “the teacher’s own relation to his beliefs and values [is] critical to the shaping of his students’ relation to their beliefs and values” (2005, p. 99), which, although perhaps unintentional, gestures once again to the import of the relation between teacher and student. Indeed, that statement suggests a series of relations which, if healthy and critical, are foundational to the development of critical consciousness in both teacher and student.

The development of a critically-conscious student takes place, for Freire, with the tutelage of a fully conscious teacher. Kwak explains that many of us are unaware of our own values and beliefs, as they are a part of the system, the furniture, of our work place. And so she demands that we ought to make ourselves aware in order to avoid indoctrinating students. I would like to suggest that we make ourselves aware in order that we might engage in relation with students which does not demand a place of hierarchical authority, but which allows for the freedom to exchange ideas and for self examination. Our beliefs about the way in which authority operates are a part of the unexamined values to which Kwak refers. She suggests that the dangers of indoctrination might be avoided through exposing one’s own indoctrination and “second, by making this self-knowledge constitutive of her teaching, the teacher is more open to her students as a person and thus more likely to gain her students’ genuine trust” (Kwak, 2005, p. 100).

Intriguingly, it is within this relation of trust, I would suggest one in which authority is not conceived of as a thing, that Kwak sees actual moral learning as being possible. “This trust would, in turn, enable her students to be more conscious of how they themselves developed their beliefs and values. This open space between the teacher and her students is exactly where significant moral learning occurs” (Kwak, 2005, p. 100). Although Kwak is addressing moral learning specifically, I believe it makes sense to extend this open space to Freire’s *conscientização*. Within the open space between the teacher and her students is where relation occurs. It occurs between teacher and student, between students, and in all other human relation. For Kwak, by fostering this space of openness and trust, moral learning is possible. For me, by nurturing a healthy authority relation, in which no party seeks to dominate the other, but rather each seeks to educate the self and other, all learning is possible.

Curren

In his paper, “Reconciling Feminist and Socio-political Grounds of Classroom Authority” (2005), Randall Curren takes a considerably different approach to the idea of relational authority. In fact, it may not be unreasonable to say that he diverges entirely from the kind of conception that I have been discussing so far, so much so that he may not truly support the idea of a relation free from traditional, authoritarian authority at all. Before exploring Curren’s work, and the ways in which it does or does not support a relational view of authority, I would like to briefly introduce the difference between someone being of good authority, and being authoritarian. As stated above, Bingham (2002) clearly distinguishes between *authoritarian* authority, which is based in hierarchy, and a more positive authority based in mutual respect. It is the authoritarian sort that I

have when I step into a room as TOC and demand recognition, simply as a result of my institutionally recognized position.⁸

There is another kind of personal authority though, one which may work within a productive and healthy authority relation. Gadamer (1960/1975) explains that,

The authority of persons is based ultimately, not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge – knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgement and insight and that for that reason his judgment takes precedence...over one's own.

(p. 248)

It may seem clear to some that students readily acknowledge the superiority of the judgement and insight of their teachers, but it is possible that the students' willingness to accept their teacher's perspective is not due to her *authoritative* position, but rather to her *authoritarian* position. Although it is possible that the teacher may be deserving of her position of authority, and is recognized as such by her students, even when earned, this position is made problematic by the institutionalized nature of the position in which teachers are automatically placed. This difficulty is raised by many of those who discuss relational authority, including Duck-Joo Kwak, as illustrated earlier, and Elizabeth Ellsworth, whom I will be discussing in later chapters. What is important at the moment is that the distinction between being *authoritarian* and being *authoritative* is clear, so that it is possible to tease out some of the problems within Curren's work.

In his "Reconciling Feminist and Socio-political Grounds of Classroom Authority" (2005), Curren says, "'Masculinist' and feminist, forceful and nurturing, hierarchical, and relational 'grounds' of classroom authority are portrayed as mutually exclusive, and the latter are now widely defended" (2005, p. 197). Immediately, I am struck by the fact that I do think that hierarchical, and so authoritarian, authority is entirely at odds with relational authority. It is very clear to me that any kind of authority that reinforces a

⁸ In this instance, I am not referring to the authority that is produced when two people are in relation to one another, but rather the sort which makes it possible to say that a person is *an authority* on such and such a text, or subject. Being an authority on Milton, for example, may garner one the respect of her students, which may foster a relation conducive to students' learning. However, being an authority on Milton while acting in an authoritarian fashion, denying the whole of the other, may result in an unequal and unhealthy relation in which the mutual growth of teacher and student is hampered.

hierarchical structure of power is incompatible with authority of equal relation. Curren, however, seeks to make smaller scale distinctions, in order to bring the two closer together.

The “ground” of a teacher’s authority might refer to what *enables* her to enlist her students’ cooperation – what accounts for her “having authority” with them – or it might refer to the foundation of her *right* to govern her classroom; and these may have little to do with each other. Similarly, the basis of her *right* may have little to do with the ethical constraints on the *manner* in which she governs her classroom, and it is her *manner*, not the recognition of her *right*, that matters more to how well she is *able* to govern. (p. 197)

Curren makes a distinction between the kind of authority that places a person in a position to teach, and the kind of authority she embodies when in that position. He is suggesting that one may be placed in a position for what I have previously explained to be *authoritarian* reasons, but once in that position act in any number of ways that are not necessarily oppressive to students. He takes issue with the idea that, “teachers have a right to impose on students only what the students specifically consent to in honest negotiations” (2005, p. 197). In a broken authority relation, such as the one between Julie and her professor outlined in Chapter 1, this is especially the case. In relational authority, if a student chooses to de-authorize the teacher’s authority, it is very difficult for the teacher to teach his student. While Curren does not define the “honest negotiations” to which he refers, these might be seen as the processes by which students and teachers come to know one another, and to authorize and de-authorize the authority of the other.⁹ I do not think it at all unreasonable to assert that the position of the teacher as a source of knowledge is jeopardized if she is not authorized by students to hold that position.

Curren’s concern, however, seems to be that there are times when threatening the use of force, which would most certainly be a kind of authoritarianism and is at odds with the relational authority he has outlined, is necessary. He asserts that at these

⁹ I will discuss these ideas of authorization and de-authorization in Chapter 4, when I consider the work of Charles Bingham in greater depth. For the time being, all they need to stand for is giving, or refusing permission for another to engage in a productive authority relation with oneself.

times, such as “in the face of preventable harm” (Curren, 2005, p. 197) a teacher should intervene, as she is not just *in authority* but in fact *has* authority “in the sense of being able to procure his [the student’s] cooperation through his belief that she knows what is best” (2004, p. 197). Curren goes on to say that the student will likely listen to his teacher, as she is respectful and caring of the students in her classroom, and that the student will be able to recognize her authority in this situation. The only part of this piece of Curren’s discussion that I disagree with is the idea that it is not relational authority at work here. The teacher cannot *have* authority, as it is not a thing to be had. If the student cooperates, whatever the situation, as a result of the teacher’s general respect for students, and caring in the classroom, then this is a result of relational authority. If the student refuses to listen to the teacher, and force must be used, he has de-authorized her. If, however, the student listens to the teacher out of fear of punishment in any form, it is authoritarianism at work, and not relational authority.

Similarly, Curren gives the example of a substitute teacher coming into a new classroom in which one student is threatening another. Because she has no rapport, or standing relation with the student, the teacher cannot intervene, and must call upon the school “disciplinarian” to prevent further harm (Curren, 2005, p. 198). The point that Curren is trying to make is that there are times when it is reasonable for a teacher to rely on their authoritarian place of power, meaning the “authority” they have which is based purely on institutional and hierarchical position. The point here is moot, really. It would not make sense to argue that the teacher should not protect one student from another because it would mean acting in an authoritarian way, but that does not change the fact that it would be better if the teacher had a good relation with the student. When the teacher calls in the school “disciplinarian,” she is relying on her authoritarian position, which is not at all the same as *having* authority in the situation. Once again, without relation, there may be authoritarianism, but there is no authority.

In a third example, trying to illustrate yet another possibly ethical use of force, Curren discusses Diana Baumrind’s notion of the *permissive* approach to child rearing, in which one gives up and lets a child have his way. According to Curren, this is:

...demonstrably detrimental to the child, and the *authoritative* approach of not giving up is demonstrably superior in its developmental benefits, even if prevailing in such contests of will requires more than persuasion. In

[Baumrind's] terms, to use compelling means as a last resort is not
authoritarian. (p. 198)

However, even though it is obvious that a young child, without a well enough developed capacity to understand the world around him and his relationship to it, should not be permitted to make poor decisions, that does not mean that making "good" decisions for him in a forceful way is not authoritarian.

Burbules

At this juncture, it is useful to bring Curren's work into conversation with that of Nicholas Burbules, as some of the work of these two men is, indeed, a conversation. In his article, "Some Dilemmas of Teacher Authority" (2005), Burbules addresses many of the points Curren makes regarding the necessity of various authoritarian acts, though Curren does not believe them to be so, and explains how they might be approached differently. He begins by asking: "Given the necessity of teacher authority, what dilemmas are inherent to it, even when, *or especially when*, it may be legitimate?" (Burbules, 2005, p. 205). In other words, Burbules concedes that there may be instances when teachers must act in an authoritarian manner, but wonders how one might go about acting, and what complications are involved.

The first of Curren's points that Burbules takes issue with is the one I just introduced, regarding the development of small children. Burbules accepts Curren's point that very young children may not be ready to self-regulate, but argues that, "the problem...is that sometimes, and in some domains, they are ready to be self-regulating and in others they are not" (Burbules, 2005, p. 205). He explains that he is not advocating that teacher, or parent, always seek approval from the child, but that as much autonomy be given to the child as is possible at a given time. Instead of, as Burbules sees Curren as doing, making decisions for young children, always asking if they are really capable to decide for themselves, he asks that we, "ask the question of how far *downward* can we extend the respect we accord to 'full-fledged autonomous agents'" (Burbules, 2005, p. 205).

In my view, this is in keeping with the idea of relational authority. Burbules is asking that educators, and parents, respect the other and cultivate a relation of trust and caring. It is through precisely this kind of relation that students are able to increase their capacities for critical consciousness, and teachers are able to continue to reflect on their own positions as human beings. If the development of critical consciousness is what is desired, and authoritarianism is to be avoided as much as is safely possible, then Burbules is right to challenge Curren and ask him to extend his respect for the other downward, to even the youngest of children. So long as one prevents the child from shoving his friend into traffic over the theft of a favourite marble, what harm can there be in extending respect?

Instead of asking at what point a child will be able to act independently without the need for teacher authority, that is to say, “when are kids ready for autonomy?” (Burbules, 2005, p. 206), Burbules would like us to ask a very different question¹⁰. “How do we help them grow in autonomy?’ (which requires respecting the degree of autonomy that they already have)” (2005, p. 206). Burbules suggests that rather than assuming that children do not have the sufficient capacities to make decisions for themselves, educators should recognize that those children/students often are able to make thoughtful and mature decisions. Instead of using one’s position of authority in order to make decisions for young people, he suggests that we step aside and enable students to “rise to the occasion of fulfilling [our] expectations” (2004, p. 206). By giving youth the freedom to think and make decisions, Burbules sees us as participating in the growth of their capacities.

Although Burbules does advocate for the freedom of the individual, and for extending individual respect to the very young, he sometimes slips back into a more traditionalist perspective. He speaks of “teaching in such a way that is intended to make

¹⁰ Freire also notes how difficult it is to know what to do for students and when, especially as those educating for freedom are so anxious for students to think on their own. He outlines four virtues of a teacher, and patience and impatience together comprise the second of the virtues. He states that, “We must always be impatient about achieving our dream and helping students achieve theirs. Yet if we and our students push too hard and too fast for our dreams, we may destroy them” (Freire in Hare & Poretelli, 1996, p. 186). It is my perspective that helping students to access their autonomy, without pushing them in any given direction, is at the very heart of a relational authority which brings about optimal human growth.

its own authority eventually superfluous” (2005, p. 206), which indicates that authority is a thing which might be handed over as time passes, and students learn. He also asks: “How does the exercise of authority in teaching conflict with the educational aim of undermining the need for teacher authority?” (2005, p. 206). For those in favour of a relational view of authority, a better question might be: *How does the exercise of authoritarianism in teaching conflict with the educational aim of developing the critical capacities of students?* Or better yet: *How does the continued conception of authority as a thing prevent educators from developing the critical capacities of students and themselves?*

Burbules moves back and forth between a *thingified* conception of authority, and a relational one which might help to empower students. He takes issue with Curren’s notion that the basic problem in education is “getting young people to do what you want them to do” (2005, p. 206). Instead, Burbules suggests that “a better way to think of it is ‘getting young people to *want* to do what you want them to do” (2004, p. 206). So long as getting young people to want to do what you want them to do does not involve coercion, indoctrination, or the use of authoritarian means, this makes perfect sense to me. Having ruled out those three methods of motivating students, relation and relationships seem to be all that is left. How better to motivate students to learn and develop as humans than to build relationships of care and trust in which they are free to do so?

Curren notes that teachers have the right to govern their classrooms as they are *in loco parentis*, in place of parents for many hours of the day, and expected to maintain a certain order of things. He uses this aspect of a teacher’s position as one way to legitimate her place of authority within the classroom. In response, Burbules voices a concern about the fact that the position teachers have, and the management it entails, is largely non-consensual, at least to begin with, on the part of students and the duties entailed may “exceed or conflict with their responsibilities *as teachers*. What then?” he asks (2005, p. 207). This problem of a teacher being part of a hierarchy which imposes certain expectations, whilst striving to develop the critical capacities of students to the best of their abilities is constant. Teachers are consistently engaged in conflicting roles, and those who see their roles to be conflicting, and are aware of the extreme tension between their responsibilities, are likely the most reflective and conflicted.

In answer to Curren's example of a classroom given over to anarchy as a result of a teacher's unwillingness to exercise the authority, in an authoritarian sense, bestowed upon him by his position, Burbules does not critique the teacher. Instead he asks: "Where do these student expectations come from, and what duties does the teacher have to question them explicitly and to help students to question them?" (2005, p. 207). My answer is that these expectations are a product of the hierarchical system of authority in which these students have been raised. Questioning these expectations and helping students to do the same is at the very heart of what it means to be an educator and what it means to be human. By questioning, and helping students to question, the teacher is helping them to perceive one of the root causes of injustice within the school system, and in so doing, is helping them to develop their critical consciousnesses. Instead of the student expectation of authoritarianism being a reason to continue to use it, it is an excellent reason to challenge that expectation and refuse to use it.

Burbules (2005) outlines his final thoughts as follows:

And so, my final dilemma: If teacher authority should be in some sense self-undermining, what does this say about *how* such authority should be exercised, when it should *not* be exercised (even if it *can* be), and when it should be exercised only in order to encourage and welcome students in questioning it? How does a teacher foster this critical and questioning attitude in students, even as he or she is exercising authority?

(p. 207)

The simple, yet ever-complicated, answer to these questions lies in relation. Although Burbules continues to see authority as a thing that might be passed on to students over time, the goals he is striving for, such as critical consciousness and the empowerment of students, lie in relation. If a teacher acknowledges, and helps students to see, that the authority in the classroom exists between them, and is a conduit through which ideas and questions might be exchanged, then he is also participating in the development of critical and questioning minds. Although there may be times when a teacher's authoritarian position might necessarily be invoked in order to protect one student from another, I believe that it is safe to say that in a classroom where students are respected as equal beings, and a teacher does not simply rely on her authoritarian position, these instances will be few and far between. That is because the climate in the

room is one of mutual respect, not of domination and submission, and so there is no need to challenge the “authority” of the other, but rather to engage in dialogue.

Applebaum

While Curren and Burbules seek to find a clear meaning of authority for educators, Barbara Applebaum looks to subvert the much talked about dichotomy between authority and nurturing with which Curren opens his work with. According to Applebaum (2000) “the feminist authority that [she is] advocating is not only compatible with, but requires, some sort of commitment to nurturance” (p. 308). The authority she sets out to discuss is, in fact, relational authority. Just as I am drawn to relational authority as a way to subvert the hierarchical nature of the school system and the damage it causes to its participants,¹¹ Applebaum is drawn to this view of authority as she looks for a way that women might have authority, in so far as they have knowledge to share, without having power over others in the traditional sense.

Her search for relational authority stems from a deep divide in feminist circles between those who would embrace traditional authority, as women have a right to the same authority as men, and those who say that traditional authority is hierarchical and patriarchal and should be rejected by women in favour of nurturance. All of this harkens back to the distinction made by Gadamer (1960/1975) between positive and negative authority: “If authority is ‘authoritarian.’ then it draws upon institutional power and hierarchical position” (Gadamer in Bingham, 2002, p. 266), whereas if it is proffered an individual, engaged in a relation, as a respectful acknowledgement of superior insight and judgement, then it is *authoritative* and likely much more positive. Applebaum is looking for a way that women might be respected for their knowledge without taking on patriarchal positions of power, and looks to a relational view of authority in order to do so.

Applebaum’s discussion begins with something she refers to as the “avoid power-over argument.” This argument demands that, “feminist educators who are

¹¹ I would like to acknowledge that even though historically the majority of teachers have been women, the system in which they work continues to be a hierarchical and patriarchal one.

committed to being nurtur[ing] must avoid masculinist power and control” (2000, p. 308). She explains that in the “avoid power-over argument” nurturance and authority are seen as being in diametric opposition to one another, and she sets out to clarify precisely which conceptions of these ideas are at work. The idea of nurturance Applebaum finds to be at the heart of the argument for rejecting authority is one based in motherhood. “Motherhood is often seen as the paradigm for caring and nurturance that a feminist teacher must display” (Applebaum, 2000, p. 308). This idea of nurturance includes unconditional acceptance and care, but “is only one part of the argument that leads feminist educators to believe that they must reject authority” (Applebaum, 2000, p. 308). The other piece of the argument involves the socio-political role of the teacher within the classroom, and its role in reinforcing the epistemic authority of the teacher. Just as I take issue with what I have referred to as *authoritarian* authority, or that which is granted as a result of one’s position in a hierarchy, so too does Applebaum. She is both concerned that the authority of a teacher be given as a result of one’s position in a patriarchal hierarchy, and that this position gives any credence to claims of epistemic authority on the part of a teacher (Applebaum, 2000, p. 309).

The “avoid power-over argument” seeks to avoid authority as a result of it being, as far as proponents are concerned, masculinist and paternalistic. Applebaum (2000) explains that, “first and foremost, the strong focus that this conception of authority places on control and power betokens its association with masculinity and patriarchy” (p. 309). Although the progressivist and critical stances are less extreme and more student centred, in rejecting the traditional view of authority in which one’s epistemic superiority is continually reinforced as a result of one’s hierarchical position, Applebaum rejects the same injustices that I have previously outlined as being the result of any *thingified* view of authority.

The strong and central focus on control of power, even when implicit, can be understood to be oppressive as it may silence and ignore the voice of students and, thus, may not be conducive to learning. In the unidirectional dimension of power that underlies such a conception of authority, it is teachers who are the active ones; students are to absorb passively what they learn from their teachers. Moreover, this unidirectionality is also absolutely hierarchical; power resides in the teacher and, consequently, the students are significantly disempowered.

(p. 310)

Applebaum's frustration with the "avoid power-over argument," which prevents feminist educators from embracing even knowledge-based, or epistemic, authority, leads her to explore the very basis of the kind of authority that these thinkers are rejecting. Like others looking for a new way of thinking about authority, Applebaum concludes that a *thingified* view ultimately leads to the disempowerment of students. I would, of course, add that any relationship based on this kind of disempowerment is ultimately dehumanizing for all parties involved. She specifically points to the unidirectional and hierarchical nature of this kind of relationship between student and teacher as being at the heart of the disempowerment of the student.

In an effort to discover just why it is that this kind of authority is seen by some as justifiable, Applebaum turns to the work of Alvin M. Neiman and his work "Education, Power and the Authority of Knowledge" (1986). According to Applebaum, Neiman takes the traditional perspective that the teacher's place of authority in the classroom is justified by her superior knowledge (2000, p. 310). Applebaum rightly asks: "Justified to whom?" (2000, p. 310). This question is directly related to the notion of authorization I introduced earlier. If a student does not authorize a teacher's authority, then what kind of authority, epistemic or otherwise, can a teacher really have? Without a good working relationship, all that is left for a teacher is an authoritarian position over a student, which does not constitute respect, or superior knowledge or judgement, and any educator would be right to avoid it.

Applebaum's next statement about Neiman's work strikes right at the heart of the issues surrounding authority, and leads directly to a relational conception: "Neiman seems to make a huge leap of faith when he refers to students accepting teachers' authority on "trust," but says nothing about how this trust is established and cultivated *between teacher and student*" (2000, p. 310). Applebaum infers that, like so many educators, Neiman does not mention the relationship between student and teacher as being part and parcel of the interworking of authority because he does not see it as being so. Instead of seeing teachers and students, all people in fact, as being in constant relation to one another, a relation wherein authority is produced, Neiman's notion of authority "implies a highly individualistic ontology of self" (Applebaum, 2000, p. 310), which is self-perpetuating and damaging to teachers and students alike.

So if embodying the kind of authority Neiman envisions is akin to colluding with the very patriarchy feminist educators seek to dismantle, and fully embracing the nurturing model denies the wisdom and insight that educators may have, what is left for feminist educators? Frustrated, Applebaum (2000) states that the “avoid power-over argument,” though it has been useful in some ways, “has ossified the binary logic of masculinity and femininity that contributes to women’s subordination... [Through it] feminist authority, a vital requirement for women, is not possible and denied (p. 310). That being said, she also finds the nurturance perspective to be dangerous for women as it demands self-sacrifice, and reinforces the role of women as nurturer influencing how girls and future generations of women will see their roles, and leaving them open to exploitation in instances of unequal power dynamics (Applebaum, 2000, p. 311). In an effort to find some sort of stable ground from which to care for (one) another, and from which to educate (one) another, Applebaum turns to the work of Sarah Lucia Hoagland in “Some Thoughts about ‘Caring’” (1991).

Relations are essential to ethical theory, and an ethic of care is to be applauded for underscoring this. But, as Hoagland emphasizes, there must be at least two selves in the relation. If the self of one of the parties in the relation ceases to exist, then the *relationship* is not ontologically basic; rather, the *other* is. (p. 313)

Applebaum finds that relationships are essential to care and to nurturance and asks: “Can authority be compatible with this?” (2000, p. 313). She finds, as I do, that relationships are also essential to authority. Looking to two definitions of authority in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, she seeks a middle ground. The first definition is: “The power to enforce obedience,” and the second, “The power to inspire belief” Applebaum finds the former to be about unidirectional control, which I would refer to as authoritarianism rather than authority. The second definition, however, she finds to embody the kind of relational authority that she is looking for; a kind of authority which necessitates the participation of both parties, and allows for a caring relation without exploitation of the other.

Applebaum looks to Burbules (1995) and his work “Authority and the Tragic Dimension of Teaching,” for a relational conception of authority, “based on relationships and which is derived from the bonds of respect, concern, and trust that teachers and

students develop among themselves” (Applebaum, 2000, p. 314). It is from here that Applebaum’s search for relational authority takes her on a specifically feminist turn. Going beyond examining what it means to be an educator in an authority relation, Applebaum’s work is about looking for a way in which feminist educators might embrace authority in their classrooms without participating in the kind of authoritarian and hierarchical/patriarchal authority that the “avoid power-over argument” seeks to refuse.

In order to have a healthy authority relation, or teacher/student relation, Applebaum (2000) suggests that:

...Teachers must ask “Who am I?” and “Who are my students?” and, most significantly, must answer these questions dialogically *with* their students. Such authority is also fluid, not unidirectional. It shifts back and forth and is not affiliated only with the teacher. Students have what is required to teach teachers, too. (p. 315)

This to-and-fro exchange is entirely in keeping with the relational view of authority that I have posed, as well as with the work of Freire, who believes that all education, not just relation, should be dialogically based, and with a hermeneutic approach which will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Ultimately Applebaum comes to the same conclusion that so many have, which is that the conceptions of authority that have previously dominated education have not been empowering to students or teachers, and that a relational view of authority helps us to understand what is actually happening between beings in a classroom, and to expose the injustices hiding there. As she puts it:

The type of authority that Burbules describes does not ignore the social privileges that the teacher has, nor the institutional authority that he or she inevitably brings into the class. No matter how egalitarian the teachers, such authority, power, and privilege, as Ellsworth has exposed, cannot be circumvented. At most, such power imbalances can only be raised as an issue for critical scrutiny in the classroom, but may not be possible to avoid. (2000, p. 315)

Raising these power imbalances as an issue for scrutiny, in a classroom where trust, care, and relation are cultivated, is absolutely necessary if traditional views of authority are to be altered, and the injustices they enable ended. Of course, as Applebaum suggests, it may not be possible to alter all of the power imbalances at work

within the system, just as it is not possible to produce a perfect cube here on earth, but it is in the co-imagining of the ideal that we come closer to its production.

In this chapter I began by outlining the basic schools of thought that have come to influence the thinking of educators in so far as they envision the role of authority in the classroom. My intent was to flesh out the conversation and make connections between the traditionalist, progressivist, and critical orientations to education and the present-day conversations regarding authority. Those conversations were drawn largely from the Philosophy of Education Society Yearbooks, and illustrate the diversity of perspectives and depth of disagreement regarding how authority works. With the addition of each new voice into the conversation, I sought to draw out the more relational aspects of that particular perspective, or to explain why a particular was not a relational one; however, I did not go into great depth as to how relational authority really works. In the following chapter, I will begin by explaining the complexities of relational authority through the works of Jessica Benjamin and Charles Bingham, and then explore what effect relational authority has when an authority figure is present and when she is absent. After illustrating the importance and omnipresence of the authority relation, I will explain precisely how the relation works, and how it may be used to benefit the student and teacher, or be exploited and/or denied by a member of the relation and inhibit learning. Finally, after laying out what the authority relation entails, I will discuss the benefit of a healthy authority relation to both teacher and student, and offer a cautionary explanation of what could occur, should the relation be, or become, an unhealthy one.

4. Relational Authority: In Presence and Absence

Authority exists only in relation. This seems such a clear statement, but of course there are so many different levels of relation at work at any given time that it is hard to tell where one begins and another ends. For students there is a relation between themselves and teachers, between them and other students, between them and society as a whole, between them and texts ad infinitum. Perhaps the difficulty in finding where one ends and another begins lies in the fact that there is no real beginning or end, only very complex intersections. The complexity of these intersections does not change the fact that authority exists only in relation. Furthermore, according to Bingham (2008) “authority is enacted whenever there is a relation among people, no matter how benign or commonplace the relation is” (p. 13). He writes:

As soon as there is a relation between human beings, there is authority. That is to say, relation is a *sufficient* condition of the existence of authority. As well, the enactment of authority does not happen until there is a relation between two or more people. That is to say, relation is also a *necessary* condition for the existence of authority. (p. 12)

The significance of this cannot be underestimated. It asks theorists and practitioners alike to cast authority in an entirely different light. “Is authority a good thing or a bad thing? Must we embrace authority or dismiss authority? Should authority figures give over their authority or cling to it?” (Bingham, 2008, p. 13). Outside a *thingified* view of authority these questions are meaningless, as they all assume that one member of a relation ultimately has control of the authority in the relation.¹² Instead, a relational view may actually help the traditionalist to get through to the student who simply did not wish to learn classic texts; it makes the progressivist desire to give over all authority moot, and forces direct engagement in the authority relation; it gives the

¹² Of course, as will be discussed later, relations of authority can be exploited and used to dominate, but this does not change the fact that authority exists in relation.

criticalist another point from which to educate for freedom. The acknowledgement of the authority relation may be more helpful for some than others, but at the very least it exposes part of the basis for such stagnation in the empowerment of students through the past many decades.

One of the most apropos examples of the authority relation that Bingham (2008) uses in *Authority is Relational*, is that of roll-call in the classroom (p. 12). He describes a scenario in which, until she answers, the student's name is merely a series of codified marks on a paper. After she answers, after she engages with the teacher in a relation, authority becomes part of that relation. "Before the calling...she is a faceless place-marker, a student-to-be whose name might well stand for an absence that might never be present in class. Before the answering the authority of the teacher over this... [student] is hypothetical at best" (Bingham 2008, p. 12). Now, of course, it cannot be denied that the very structure of the situation in which the student and teacher find themselves in will compel the student to answer, but in that moment before answering, the student has options. She might dislike the teacher for some reason, and leave the class on the pretence that she was in the wrong room, or she might refuse to answer at all. If she does choose to answer, though, in the instant she acknowledges the teacher and the two engage in relation, authority is enacted (Bingham 2008, p. 12).

It sounds to clear and simple: "The moment that the two are in relation, authority is enacted." It sounds simple, but it isn't. The authority enacted is not only influenced by a series of intersections (student and society, teacher and society, student and family, teacher and workplace etc), but, due to the dominant perspectives on authority currently at work in schools, this authority is also enacted without the awareness of all of those involved. Some might ask why it is so important that the members of the authority relation be aware of how the authority is being enacted; If the authority is going to be enacted anyway, why does anyone need to be specifically aware of it? The thing is, without understanding that authority is a relation, not only are teachers and students more likely to perform traditional roles of authoritarian relation, but they are being denied one of the best ways in which a teacher and student might teach one another, and come to grow as people.

Imagine that a healthy relation is necessary for genuine learning to take place. The central premise of Bingham and Sidorkin's *No Education Without Relation* (2004) is "that meaningful education is possible only when relations are carefully understood and developed" (p. 2). Now, this does not mean that no students today are learning, or that there are no teachers who understand that cultivating good relationships with their students will aid in the learning process. What it means is that optimal learning, which maximally benefits both student and teacher, is most likely when both teacher and student are aware of the relation between them, and the role they play in constructing it. Without this awareness, there is still relation, and authority is still enacted, but in a haphazard way, or even worse, in an authoritarian fashion, which serves to undermine the worth of students, and the humanity of both teacher and student.

"A relation is more real than the things it brings together. Human beings and non-human things acquire reality only in relation to other beings and things" (Bingham and Sidorkin, 2004, p. 6). The relation between teacher and student has a serious impact on how both come to see themselves. Consider an average student, not that such a thing really exists, just a student who carries a C+ average. That C+ is a kind of connotative stamp from the educational world that declares a student to be nothing special. It is, at first glance, a statement of mediocre intelligence, lacklustre work habits, and a less-than-exceptional human being. In reality, the C+ has as many meanings as individuals it has been assigned to, and then some. That being said, a C+ is commonly invested with the meanings outlined above, which are largely products of an oppressive educational system, and tell one next to nothing about the student. The C+ student who is part of a supportive and nurturing relation with his teachers, one in which he is acknowledged as having something to offer and of being an equal part, is bound to see himself more positively than his GPA might traditionally indicate.

Conversely, the C+ student who begins his relation with a teacher who does not understand the vital nature of relation, and relies on the views of previous "authorities" to

shape her view of the student (i.e. by accepting the authoritarian¹³ value of the C+ average the student has arrived with) has a few options: He might refuse to accept the teacher's view of him, which will also devalue her ability to teach him anything as it also undermines her views generally. He might accept her view of him, and be unable to learn due to a lack of self-worth and constant denigration. He may strive to prove her view to be false, by working exceptionally hard in her class. He has before him many possibilities, but none of them includes a healthy and mutually beneficial authority relation in which each is respected and valued¹⁴. Without that relation the meaningful education referred to earlier, which I will equate with mutually humanizing education, cannot occur.

In a healthy and mutually humanizing relationship between teacher and student, authority is in flux. No one is using the relation to dominate anyone else. Each is aware of their engagement in the relation, and the vital role they may play in helping the other to grow as a human being. Our C+ student engages with a teacher whom he knows to be a left-leaning, Friday-loving, young mother of two. That teacher engages with a swim-clubbing, political-t-shirt-wearing, vegan, skateboarder who happened to be assigned several C+'s by previous teachers (which she may, or may not, know, depending on whether or not she has read his files – authoritarian texts which have no place in this relation). The more the two interact, the more they learn about one another, and about themselves. They are both teachers and students. This is not to say that the teacher does not have some expertise as to where the lessons might go, but that the curriculum is second to the relation and cannot be communicated unless the relation is a good one.

¹³ I say authoritarian, as this is a mark invested in by layer upon layer of power. A teacher assigns it, an administrator signs off on it, and The Ministry of Education places it on permanent record. These records are then made available to subsequent teachers, administrators, and institutions through which they are meant to make decisions regarding the student, without ever having met him.

¹⁴ I acknowledge that it is possible that a teacher, without a full understanding of relational authority, may unwittingly engage in a relatively healthy relation with students. That being said, without mutual awareness of the authority relation, which would enable an optimal learning environment, it is far less likely that both student and teacher will be able to avoid the various authoritarian pitfalls inherent in the system of which they are part.

How the Relation Works

As stated earlier, authority is enacted the moment there is a relation between people. Relation between people begins the instant they acknowledge one another. There is the example of the student answering to her name during roll-call given earlier, but in any moment where one person communicates and another responds to that communication, the two are in relation. When Jenny's name is called, and she answers her teacher, they begin their relation, and authority is enacted. The difficulty is, the immediate roles assumed by teacher and student are the traditional roles of teacher and student. So often if a student is immediately recognized as resisting the traditionally passive role of student early on, he becomes an object of a teacher's daily frustrations and authoritarian responses. So how does the teacher-student relation work, and how might it be harnessed in order to benefit both teacher and student, rather than harm them?

To begin, this relation is not quite like that which springs up between the woman who left her keys at the cash register, and the clerk who runs after calling, "Hey, you!" While the relation begins with roll-call, the second that the student acknowledges the teacher, the relation between the two is subject to all of the expectations of the institution in which they find themselves. It is anticipated that the teacher will dominate the relation and that the student will maintain her place as a passive recipient of knowledge. Remember, no matter whether traditionalist, progressivist, or criticalist, each generally begins with the assumption that the teacher holds the power in the relation. It just so happens that the traditionalist perspective, that is the perspective that the teacher should continue to hold onto power/knowledge until the student grows enough to handle it, is the default position of many regular educational institutions. So, if this is not the case, what are the implications of teacher and student being equal beings in a relation?

At the risk of beginning with what may seem like a negative, I would like to introduce the idea of "de-authorization" (Bingham, 2008, p. 37). Now, while I have explained that authority is enacted as soon as two people engage in a relation with one another that is not to say that the relation remains stagnant. As mentioned earlier, the authority relation is not a static one; earlier I suggested that it "ebbs and flows." Bingham refers to these ebbs and flows as being part of a "circuit of *authorization*"

(2008, p. 37). As is implied by the term *circuit*, authorization moves back and forth between teacher and student, and enables them to continue their working relationship.

For authority to be enacted, it is not enough for there to be a show of textual authority on the side of the teacher. It is not enough for the teacher to know her books through and through. It is not enough for the teacher to act in authoritarian ways. It is not enough for her to have good authoritative intentions. The teacher always needs to be authorized by the student just as much as she needs to enact authority.

(Bingham, 2008, p. 38)

The fact that authority is a part of a circuit, a circuit that may be blocked by either member of the relation, is not actually a negative statement; it is a neutral one which suggests that all involved in education need to take seriously the role the both teachers and students play in the authority relation. Earlier, I introduced a C+ student whose teacher assumed that he was mediocre in a multitude of ways. With this student, I introduced the possibility that he might refuse to accept the teacher's view of him, which would also devalue her ability to teach him anything as it also undermines her views generally. This scenario is one in which the student de-authorizes the teacher's authority, effectively inhibiting the circuit of authorization so as to make it ineffective and education impossible. If "the authority of one person comes into being because it is authorized by another person" (Bingham, 2008, p. 38), then the kind of authority that a teacher needs to teach a class, the sort where the student acknowledges that the teacher does in fact have expert knowledge in the subject area for example, does not exist¹⁵. Without the authorization of the teacher, the student cannot share all that he has to offer in the classroom, and perhaps beyond.

In *No Education Without Relation*, Bingham (2004) reminds us that "one tends to respond to authority in the same ways that one has responded to other authority figures in the past" (p. 27). This is not just a reminder, but must also serve as a warning: students are consistently exposed to broken power relations in which they are the victims of an authoritarian system, and are not acknowledged as being whole beings with much of worth to share, they may shut down early. I use *shut down* as a colloquial

¹⁵ I would like to acknowledge that the cycle of authority explained by Bingham in *Authority is Relational* (2008), and which I seek to further unpack here, is heavily related to textual authority in the preceding work. I will return to this discussion in chapter 5.

term for a general de-authorization of those in positions of authority. That means that once a student has de-authorized one of his teachers, or multiple teachers, no matter what the cause for the broken relation between he and his educators, he is far less likely to be able to build healthy relations with, and therefore far less likely to be able to learn effectively from, future teachers. The more one considers the authority relation, its cycle of authorization, and the likelihood that patterns of relation may be repeated by students as they engage in relation with future teachers, the clearer the necessity that educators understand this relation.

Not only do educators need to be aware that by acknowledging the role of their students in the authority relation they are challenging the institutionalized structures in which they work, they must also know that they are challenging past relations. If a student has been shaped year after year by a relation with teachers that has been dehumanizing, unequal, and has not allowed room for him to participate in a to-and-fro exchange, then that student has a very clear idea of his role as a student. It does not matter if a teacher wishes to engage in a balanced relation with a student if that student is anticipating engagement in an authoritarian relation which necessitates him being a passive recipient of knowledge with nothing to offer. In order to use the authority relation to the best of her ability, a teacher must sometimes also fight the role she is assigned by students damaged by the system, and by previous relations.

The Psychic Benefit of a Healthy Authority Relation

If teachers are to fully comprehend the import of their relation with students, and its constant and cyclical nature, they must also be aware of how the relation works in their absence. It may seem bizarre, at first, to propose that students and teachers continue to be in relation to one another even in absence, especially after having stated that it is the initial presence and acknowledgement of the other that brings about relation, but it is actually consistent with the discussion. In *No Education Without Relation*, Bingham (2004) explains that there is a deep and lasting connection between the relations people form in presence, and the continued playing-out of those relations in absence of the other.

Early on in *No Education Without Relation*, Bingham (2004) explains that students play an active role in authorizing their teachers' authority. He writes: "when the student accepts the knowledge of the teacher, she has authorized him or her" (Bingham, 2004, p. 31). If the active authorization of the teacher by the student determines just what it is that the student will take from a lesson with the teacher, what role does that authorization play when the student is faced with a lesson and the teacher is no longer present? Ultimately, according to Bingham (2008), "educational authority might actually straddle the spaces of presence *and* non-presence. In order to fully explore the idea of educational authority in the absence of the educator, Bingham turns to the language of psychoanalysis and the work of Jessica Benjamin.

While what follows here is not an in-depth representation of the extensive discussion of Jessica Benjamin's work in psychoanalysis, as it applies to education, that Charles Bingham includes in his work, it is a necessary addition to this thesis. Understanding that the authority relation extends beyond presence is vital to the comprehension of its import and potential impact on the lives of students. How, then, is it that this extension takes place? It takes place through the complex interplay between the intrapsychic and intersubjective realms (Benjamin, 1988, p. 69). The intersubjective realm is the one I have discussed so far, and that teachers are fully aware of. It is the realm in which one subject deals directly with another, in real time.¹⁶ While teachers may debate how authority works in their presence, they readily accept that there is a direct interaction between themselves and students over which they may have some sway, even if that be to lecture to a class and answer questions. This realm is vital to the authority relation as discussed so far, in that it is where *authorization* and/or *de-authorization* first take place. As discussed earlier, if a student *de-authorizes* a teacher, then the authority relation between the two is broken and the student will likely not learn well from the teacher.

¹⁶ While it may appear that this necessitates a direct contact between people, face to face, it may not. It may also include phone conversations, letters, texts etc. What it does not include is the realm of the hypothetical into which the other is imagined as an acting agent. The intersubjective is rather more a literal and concrete realm in which one deals directly with the other.

Assuming that the teacher has been accepted as being in an authoritative position by the student, that is to say, as being an expert in his field, and the two have a healthy authority relationship, there is even more to be gained through the intrapsychic. While the intersubjective is part of the relation that takes place directly between two subjects, the intrapsychic is just as it sounds; it is the inner mind of a subject in which she may manipulate people, objects, and imagination at will. In order to further the reader's understanding of the intrapsychic realm, and just how it is that it relates to the authority relation in education, Bingham (2008) asks the following:

During ...times of non-presence, is it not the case that the other is still with us to some extent? Is it not the case that the authority figure lingers as a powerful agent of affirmation, even at a time far removed from the actual experience under her watchful eye? The student is still bound with the teacher who has offered affirmation in the past, just as the child continues to be bound with his caregiver even into adulthood. (p. 68)

Therein lies the import of the intrapsychic connection to authority figures. If the teacher is absent, the student may continue to engage critically with the world around her, using her memory/imagined incarnation of the teacher to bounce ideas off of and manipulate scenarios. This absent incarnation of the teacher is referred to in psychoanalysis as the remnant. This remnant of the teacher "plays a significant role within the *ongoing* process of education...facilitating the presence of a non-presence when the student is out of reach of the teacher, [and] is also an anchor point by which further interaction with the teacher will become more meaningful" (Bingham, 2008, p. 69). That is to say, when the teacher is absent, the student looks to her previous experience of the teacher-student relation to influence her interaction with the world, and with the remnant. When meeting with the teacher in person, in the intersubjective realm, the experience of absence and interaction with the remnant of that teacher come to influence the new interaction between teacher and student.

The opportunity for students to be in the presence of a caring and encouraging teacher¹⁷ is vital for their growth as human beings. Students need to be recognized for their successes and progress, and also need someone they trust to “act as a mirror, reflecting who... [they are] and who ... [they are] becoming” (Bingham, 2008, p. 70). But it is also absolutely necessary for the student to step away from his teacher from time to time and try out his newly-gained perceptions of the world. In experimenting with the world without his teacher, the student must recognize his own worth and ability as a human, rather than looking to the teacher for reassurance. Without the presence of the teacher, the student is able to re-centre in self and test the limits of his knowledge. Indeed, relying on the presence of another for assurance is dangerous, especially if it limits one’s ability to function in the absence of the other.

“Such dependence will, at the end of the day, leave... [the student] tethered to another whom... [he] does not control [and so] the teacher is a danger as well as a source of agency” (Bingham, 2008, p. 70). With the centre returned to self, in the absence of the teacher/other, the student is free to imagine what the teacher might say or do in/about a given situation. Imagine a student preparing for a class in which he is to present a current-events story in regard to the European Union. As he watches the news and trolls the internet the student looks at story after story, trying to decide which to present to his class. Even the selection of the story is subject to the relation that the student has with the teacher in the form of the remnant. When he asks himself “what will she think?” and then plays out his presentation of a given story in order to see his teacher’s reaction, this is a part of the ongoing teacher/student relation in the absence of the teacher. When he imagines what kinds of questions she will ask about the article, he is posing them to himself, through the remnant of his teacher. This sort of action is part of critical thought, and it is part of an individual’s growth to be able to manipulate the authority figure in absence in order to test one’s self.

¹⁷ I would like to acknowledge that the term “teacher” should not, and indeed cannot, be reserved for those of us who have attended post-secondary institutions and find ourselves working in traditional classrooms. It should go without saying that this term also includes those with wisdom and expertise, who are not simply our parents or family, who seek to pass on those gifts to others.

In order to interact positively with the world as an individual, and to engage with it in a critical way, the student must have a teacher both to help with the development of the critical thinking skills, and to interact with in absence. Without a positive authority remnant with which to try on new ideas, the student is at a loss to discover his own thoughts. Having interacted with a positive authority figure who has encouraged him and helped him to recognize his capacity for critical thought, the student is then able to re-discover the locus of self in the absence of that teacher and the presence of the remnant. In this new space, the student can try on new ideas, argue safely with the remnant, without fear of disappointing the respected figure. It is in the absence of the teacher, and the interaction with the remnant, that all of the new skills learned are tested, which is why it is so vital that teachers be aware of just how far-reaching their relationships with students are. As remnants, teachers are carried with students everywhere, and forever.

The true test of the extensive teacher/student relation, however, is when the remnant once again meets the real. Once the student has had the opportunity to retreat within and bounce new ideas off of his remnant teacher, the newly garnered self-confidence must be tested in the intersubjective world; the world of the real. As Bingham (2008) explains, this real-world interplay leads to lasting recognition of one's own capacity and agency:

In order for the teacher's recognition of me to count, she must have the real-life, presentist opportunity *not* to offer me recognition. In order for my agency to count, that agency must be tested in circumstances that could in fact end in disappointment. Thus, the remnant and the real exist in a symbiotic relationship. (p. 71)

The teacher/student relation is constantly influencing the student's interaction with the world. While both the intrapsychic and the intersubjective realms are necessary, so that the student's reality might be challenged and he might also be given some freedom to safely experiment (Bingham, 2008, p. 71), respectively, neither is beneficial to the student, or to his teacher, without a positive authority relation. To reiterate, a positive authority relation is one in which both members are aware that they are participating in a mutually beneficial relation in order to make them better human beings, and authority may be used to promote learning and challenge the world around

said relation. It is necessary that teachers understand the extent to which they influence the interactions of their students with the outside world, and that they acknowledge the further necessity that students be permitted to explore that world in their absence. By stepping out into the world with a critical mind, and the remnant of a positive authority figure, students come to know themselves better and to find confidence in their new powers of perception. By stepping back into the place of learning, with a present and positive authority figure this time, students are able to challenge what they had come to believe about the world and themselves, and to solidify their new-found confidence. Through this process of experimentation, of presence and absence, of testing and challenge, mutual humanization continues between teacher and student.

I have explained, in depth, how it is that the authority relation works. It is clear that each individual in the relation must be recognized by the other as an equal member, though perhaps with differing levels and kinds of knowledge, in order for the relation to be a mutually beneficial one. The relation is at work when the student and teacher are in close proximity to one another, and, thanks to the language of psychoanalysis, it is also evident that the benefits of a healthy authority relation are also accessible to the student when the teacher is absent, through the remnant. The remnants of the authority figures play an integral role in our interactions with the outside world, and while their impact may well be a positive one, if born out of a negative authority relation, then it is possible that the remnant may actually have a negative influence.

If the authority relation between teacher and student is a positive one, then it is also mutually beneficial. When both teacher and student recognize in the other a capacity for critical thought, and work together to explore the surrounding world, together they are able to create knowledge and understanding. Through a healthy authority relation, each member of the relation empowers the other by helping to question previously held assumptions and understandings, and coming to new conclusions (or possibly reinforcing previous ones) about the surrounding world. This co-creation of knowledge is central to the critical pedagogy of the philosopher Paulo Freire. While he believes that mutual humanization and empowerment are possible through critical pedagogy, there are those who question whether or not critical pedagogy is actually accessible to everyone, and suggest that it may in fact reinforce some of the oppressive elements of western liberal thought that it seeks to challenge. In the following chapter, I

will attempt to put Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005) and Elizabeth Ellsworth's "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering? Working through the Myths of Critical Pedagogy" (1989) into conversation with one another, under the lens of relational authority. It is my contention that, while Ellsworth does have a sound argument regarding the oppressive nature of critical pedagogy, her discussion does not hold up once Freire's work is filtered through a relational lens. With the addition of psychoanalytic language in order to clarify Freire's work as being relational, it will become evident that it is possible for everyone to engage in critical pedagogy, without being subject to the oppression of Western liberal thought.

5. In Defence of Critical Pedagogy: How the Authority Relation Can Be Empowering

Paulo Freire, critical pedagogue, revolutionary thinker, and educator has offered to the world a view of education through which societal change might be fostered through the mutual humanization of people. He asks that educators set aside old ideas of how authority should work in the classroom, and embrace new ones that will help to educate students for freedom, rather than educating them in a way which will inevitably prevent them from becoming fully thinking human beings, capable of perceiving injustices in the world around them. In her paper “Why Doesn’t this Feel Empowering? Working through the Myths of Critical Pedagogy,” (1989) Elizabeth Ellsworth calls into question the ability of the critical pedagogue to engage students in the process of mutual humanization without taking part in the oppression that he seeks to eradicate through education. She outlines the ways in which critical pedagogy, seemingly, failed to serve its purpose during her teaching of a course entitled “Curriculum and Instruction 607: Media and Anti-Racist Pedagogies” during the late 1980’s, an especially fraught time at the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus.

Ellsworth’s frustration with critical pedagogy can, at least partially, be answered by Charles Bingham’s work on critical pedagogy, and the addition of both the hermeneutic cycle and the acknowledgement of the extent to which the teacher plays supplement to the text.¹⁸ This is not to say that there are no problems with critical pedagogy or the concept of relational authority indeed the authority relation may become one of domination and submission, entirely derailing the humanization project. It is, however, to say that there are redemptive qualities in critical education that are accessible when the authority relation is acknowledged by all parties and used to its best

¹⁸ “Text” should be read as any subject that a person might approach, be it another person, a piece of art or music, or a literal text.

effect. If authority is viewed as being relational, and both teacher and student engage in the relation with one another, and in the hermeneutic cycle, then many of the underlying contradictions of critical pedagogy that Ellsworth voices in her work might be accepted as part of the multi-faceted nature of humanity and human relation.

The Non-Relational Approach

To begin, I would like to discuss the way in which Paulo Freire's idea of critical pedagogy, and the authority therein, is in fact relational. Clear evidence of this is Freire's refusal to accept that students are mindless creatures, meant to be dictated to and filled with information. In Chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2005), Freire outlines the traditionalist view of education and educational authority he rejects:

A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally *narrative* character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness. (p. 71)

The sickness Freire discusses is referred to by critical pedagogues as “banking education.” This is the kind of education whereby a student, or vessel, is filled with information from the teacher's narrative. This filling is uni-directional, unquestioned, and the better a student is able to regurgitate information later, the better he or she is generally graded. Freire explains that this view, “turns [students] into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be filled by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The meeker the manner in which the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 72).

Charles Bingham outlines clearly five “oppressive operations” within the banking education that Freire rails against. First, the kind of narration to which Freire refers forces students “into the passive position of an active/passive dichotomy... [in which] the teacher is always the initiator of pedagogical practice and the student is always the one for whom such practice is initiated” (2008, p. 130). No matter what is happening in the

banking classroom, it is the teacher who chooses materials, formats materials, offers materials etc. and the student who meekly receives the information offered. Not only is this no existence for a student, who may well have entered the system with an inquiring mind, and a desire to challenge the status quo, but it is no existence for a teacher either.

The second oppressive operation that Bingham outlines is the way in which the authority in a banking system “uses *epistemological* force to strip the learner of human agency” (2008, p. 130). This is to say that if one does not know for oneself, and all knowledge is located within the authority of the teacher, to be handed to the student and reproduced without augmentation (otherwise to be considered less valid) then one does not exist for oneself. This is explained as “the convergence of epistemological and existential agency... [as] to know for oneself is also to be for oneself” (Bingham, 2008, p. 130). Of course, this does not make sense to anyone who does not understand the notion of a fully human individual, capable of thinking, of knowing, for themselves. For the critical pedagogue, preventing students from knowing for themselves, as banking education does, is preventing them from becoming complete human beings.

One of the ways in which students are prevented from knowing for themselves is by being prevented from taking part in the preparation and presentation of the curriculum. Instead of teaching material that is salient for students, and inquiring what that might be by direct interactions with those students, teachers prepare a set curriculum, often dictated by a higher level of institutional authority, entirely separate from students. It is by doing this that, as Bingham explains, “the banker keeps the student out of the loop of human agency” (2008, p. 131). He uses the following, from Freire (1970/2005), to further illustrate the point:

The banking concept (with its tendency to dichotomize everything) distinguishes two stages in the action of the educator. During the first, he cognizes a cognizable object while he prepares his lessons in his study or his laboratory; during the second, he expounds to his students about that object. The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher. (p. 80)

The divorce between the students of a banking education and the world around them is exacerbated by the fact that they have no direct interaction with the knowledge they are to gain. They have no choice in what it will be, and are not permitted to

question what is chosen for them, but rather expected to receive pre-determined pieces of curricula, examined by another. What's worse, the "contents narrated by the teacher" may remain unexamined by the teacher herself, having been passed down from one level of institutional authority to the next.

It is not just through this separation of student and knowledge that the banking system perpetuates itself and the levels of authority by which it is operated. According to Freire, "banking education (for obvious reasons) attempts, by mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way human beings exist in the world" (2005, p. 83). Bingham further explains this by saying, "such education promotes commonsense understandings of the world that are not to be questioned" (2008, p. 131). These ideas, of course, likely include a traditional conception of authority. Not only does the banking approach prevent students from knowing for themselves, but it reinforces singular and static ideas about reality which take the place of one's own thoughts. There is much danger in this, for if one is given a set of static ideas or beliefs about reality, one that will not be questioned, not only is a person not thinking for him or herself (and so, for Freire not *being* for themselves, insofar as this means becoming more human, either) but they are not in a position to begin to change the world around them.

Finally, Bingham offers another in which the banking education Freire outlines is distinctly non-relational and oppressive to students:

Banking authority sets up house inside of the student's consciousness, instilling its own slogans and its own policies *within* the student's world view. Drawing on Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic, Freire describes this situation as the same as the consciousness of the slave who internalizes his or her master's values. (2008, p. 132).

In this way, not only has the student been forced into a passive position, in which he is expected to consume "pre-digested knowledge" (Bingham, 2008, p. 131), knowledge that he has no choice in or place to challenge, but the knowledge given reinforces a static, commonsense, world view which also is filled with the very values of the banker, the banking system, and all of the many institutional authorities which are served when humans are denied their full capacities to question the world around them. The kind of authority that thrives on the passivity of students is dangerous. The teacher who cannot recognize the difference between their position of authority and the authority

of knowledge is oppressive. Ultimately, any authority which so clearly inhibits one's ability to engage with, and critique, the outside world "is antithetical to freedom" (Bingham, 2008, p. 132).

The Problem in Problem Posing, and Bingham's Solution

Given the understanding of relational authority outlined earlier in this work, it is clear that Freire's ideal view of education is in fact also relational. Freire asks that educators engage with students in something he refers to as "problem-posing" education. The kind of "liberating education" (1970/2005, p. 79) that he envisions requires that the educator give up his position of authority in the classroom as one who passes on knowledge, and begin to engage with students in the understanding of the world in which they find themselves.

Liberalizing education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors – teacher on the one hand and students on the other. Accordingly, the practice of problem-posing education entails at the outset that the teacher-student contradiction to be resolved. (p. 79)

The core aspect of traditional authority, the place of one human above the next, is what Freire sets about dismantling. He asks that students and teachers engage cooperatively, relationally, in their acquisition of knowledge¹⁹ and the exploration of the world around them. Through asking questions about the world around them, and of one another, students and teachers begin a dialogic co-education. Freire explains that teachers and students must be both teachers and students, and that "dialogical relations – indispensable to the capacity of cognitive actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object – are otherwise impossible" (2001, pp. 79-80). He argues that, without breaking the "vertical patterns" (p. 80) so essential to traditional views of authority,

¹⁹ Knowledge as it is referred to here is not the static, pre-digested sort mentioned earlier. Here, knowledge is the kind that is continually added to, augmented, and explored as one comes into contact with the world and others.

educators will be in no position to aid their students in developing *conscientização* through the mutual exploration of the world.

Freire is well aware that it may be difficult for the educator to step away from the authoritarian version of authority that she has been practising, especially as she herself has been such a part of an oppressive system that she has likely come to internalise its values. He states that, “those who espouse the cause of liberation are themselves surrounded and influenced by the climate which generates the banking concept, and often do not perceive its true significance or its dehumanizing power” (2005, p. 79). The concern is that, as I outlined early on in this work, even teachers with the best of intentions may well come to reinforce the very authoritarian system they are striving to dismantle. As a solution, Freire offers praxis; “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 79). Through praxis, through constant cycles of reflection and action, those educators committed to the liberation of their students are meant to come to see through the oppressive nature of the systems which they have come to inhabit, and to challenge those systems.

Working with, and within, a relational conception of authority makes the mutual humanization of teacher and student much more possible. When paired with Freire’s expectation that teachers and students become teacher-students and student-teachers, engaged in a relationship which demands that both parties are consistently learning from, and teaching, one another, I find it difficult to find flaws; and yet, there are flaws. It is so clear to me that Freire anticipates that a relational conception of authority be the one at work within any educational and mutually humanizing relationship that it is difficult to accept that he “remains under the spell of liberalism...[and stops] short of true dialogic thinking” (Bingham, 2008, p. 136). The spell of liberalism to which Bingham refers is the idea that authority is a *thing*.

Freire tries to escape the *thingified* conception, according to Bingham (2008, p. 135) in two ways: first, he claims that arguments about education based on authority are no longer valid, which does nothing to disprove those arguments. Arguing, instead, that authority itself is actually an entirely different thing than previously imagined, would invalidate those arguments. The second way in which Freire fails to push his dialogic

idea of education to a truly relational one is by maintaining that authority still exists in the dialogic, and that it simply exists on the side of freedom. According to Bingham (2008):

While Freire troubles the authority/freedom binary by putting authority on the side of freedom, he does not give up the binary itself. He refutes the mutually exclusive nature of the authority relation and freedom, but does not provide any nuance for understanding the difference between the two.
(p. 135)

In a truly relational conception of authority, the authority/freedom binary is entirely subverted by the fact that authority is a co-creation between people that permits the liberation and mutual humanization of both parties. That is not at all to say that all conscious authority relations are necessarily liberating and humanizing, indeed they may not be, but it is significant that the authority/freedom binary is swallowed up in relation. According to Bingham (2008), “by accepting the terms of the Enlightenment (in this case the authority-freedom dichotomy), [Freire] finds [him] self in a position where it is not possible to escape the Enlightenment gambit without seeming to advocate an irrational position” (p. 135). Freire (1970/2005) tries to work around all of this by stating that authority must be on the side of freedom, but then, as Bingham points out, he gets caught up in the implications of having traditional authority working on the side of freedom.

“Those truly committed to the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of domination (propaganda, slogans – deposits) in the name of liberation.
(p. 79)

Freire knows that putting traditional authority on the side of freedom is not enough, as he quickly comes up against the idea that those fighting for freedom may want to temporarily employ the banking method, a technique entirely dependent on the traditional conception of authority, in order to further their cause. It is here that Freire gets stuck. There is no real place for that conception of authority on the side of freedom, nor for any method which might employ it. Bingham asks that we push Freire further into his relational, dialogical pedagogy and, rather than declaring that authority, a *thing*, be on the side of freedom “let us rather say, ‘*The authority relation will foster freedom*’”(2008, p. 136). By this statement, it is intended that authority be produced in a

healthy relation, which will enable both teacher and student (or teacher-student and student-teacher) to engage in the mutually humanizing pursuit of knowledge and liberation.

In order for the authority relation to foster freedom within Freire's vision of a working dialogical relationship, at no point can one member of the relation come to be the oppressor and the other oppressed. At no point can the relation come to represent the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, but it must always remain one in which each party is recognized as having the full capacity for critical thought, and an equal place in the relation. To push Freire's dialogic vision all the way to one that is inclusive of a relational view of authority, Bingham suggests a return to psychoanalytic language similar to that used earlier to explain the nature of the authority relation in absence. In this case, it is the notion of "*balance* between the poles of domination and submission" (Bingham, 2008, p. 138), and its clear presence in Freire's work, which truly illustrates the relational nature of authority therein.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the intrapsychic and intersubjective realms, in order to illustrate the impact that a healthy authority relation has on students even after they have left the classroom, or school. In respect to Freire's work, these realms are a necessary part of the explanation as to how it is that he actually does embrace an entirely relational view of authority. In Jessica Benjamin's work, she identifies the perfect balance between internal and external, fantasy and reality, as a liminal zone in which we all make sense of the world around us. As I explained previously, it is also the balance between these two zones which makes authority a part of a relation. Both teacher and student are free to interact with one another in real time, and to manipulate the remnant of the other in absence. When a student seeks the approval of his teacher, when the teacher is absent, it is the remnant to which he refers. Free to manipulate this memory/idea at will, the student is, in effect, making decisions and judgements about the world that are based in the authority relation, but the product of the student's mind.

The balance between the intrapsychic and intersubjective realms is vital to a healthy relationship between teacher and student. If there is an imbalance between the realms, then the actor is in danger of objectifying the other, and failing to recognize her as a fellow human being. According to Benjamin, the intrapsychic space is one in

which “the subject incorporates and expels, identifies with and repudiates the other, not as a real being, but as a mental object” (1988, p. 20-21). Bingham (2008, p. 138-139) points out that it is precisely this kind of treatment of the other as object, as remnant with none of its own true volition, that Freire objects to in banking education. Indeed, Freire (1970/2005) first explains teachers dictating to student/objects as a sickness:

A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally *narrative* character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness. (p. 71)

The “narration sickness” to which Freire refers, requires that students sit and absorb/digest whatever it is that the teacher is saying, without participating in the acquisition of knowledge, or the exploration of the world around them. This “false understanding of men and women as objects” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 77), is at the heart of Bingham’s argument for Freire as has holding an entirely relational conception of authority without knowing it. Freire’s objection to banking education is representative of his objection to teacher’s treating students as objects, as imagined, intrapsychic pawns with no independent capacity for being. To make his analogy complete, Freire (1970/2005) looks to the words of Erich Fromm to extend the narration sickness of the education system, to the necrophilia of the banking educator:

The necrophilous person is driven by the desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach life mechanically, as if all living persons were things...Memory, rather than experience; having, rather than being, is what counts. The necrophilous person can relate to an object – a flower or a person – only if he possesses it; hence a threat to his possession is a threat to himself; if he loses his possession he loses contact with the world...He loves control, and in the act of controlling he kills life. (p. 77).

By denying the other subjectivity, by denying his ability to act within and upon the world, including insofar as he might question the world around him, is to deny his very being. The educator who objectifies students, according to Freire, and Benjamin, is denying the other the right to a distinct and separate life. Benjamin suggests that a

balance between the intrapsychic realm, in which one is able to manipulate a remnant/object/static other, and the intersubjective realm is necessary in any healthy relationship. According to Benjamin, intersubjectivity is “that zone of experience in which the other is not merely the object of the ego’s need/drive or cognition/perception but has a separate and equivalent centre of self” (1995, p. 30). Bingham (2008) refers to Benjamin’s distinction between the intrapsychic and intersubjective realm as being “akin to a similar distinction upon which Freire relies: Martin Buber’s distinction between the I-It and the I-Thou (p. 139).

According to Freire (1970/2005), in a truly dialogical and humanizing relationship, or for Benjamin one which is well balanced between the intrapsychic and intersubjective realms, there are two active subjects. The humanizing educator and “dialogical I”

knows that it is precisely the *thou* (“not-I”) which has called forth his or her own existence. He also knows that the *thou* which calls forth his own existence in turn constitutes an *I* which has in his *I* its *thou*. The *I* and the *thou* thus become, in the dialectic of these relationships two *thous* which become two *I*’s. (p. 167).

In order to engage in a healthy authority relation, a relation which enables teacher and student to cooperatively gain and interpret knowledge from the world around them, each must view the other as a separate being, both capable of acting in the world, and responsible for his own existence. If there comes to be an imbalance between the *I* and the *thou*, the intrapsychic or the intersubjective, then domination occurs, and the dialogic is destroyed. As Freire (1970/2005) asserts that “with the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has *already* begun” (p. 55), and a relationship in which there is no balance between the *I* and its *thou*, no balance between fantasy and reality, is a violent one. In the healthy authority relation, the co-creation of that relation is central to its humanizing nature. The moment one member of the relation comes to dominate it through the objectification of the other, is the moment that it ceases to be humanizing.

It is not obvious, at first, why educators might feel such a need to control the authority relation, to treat the other as an object and narrate to her, rather than learn with her, but there is at least one reason why this might be the case. If an educator, “continually cast[s] the other in forms that are lodged in the psyche, in ways that are

rigid... [as happens when a student is misrecognized by a teacher, or viewed only as a static receptacle for information] [he] get[s] used to such interaction” (Bingham, 2008, p. 140). An educator might continually cast a student in a specific object position because he is actively reinforcing a static ideal of student within a traditional view of the teacher-student relation, or simply because he does not have the time to get to know the student and engage differently. Either way, “it becomes more comfortable to interact with the other as an object that is under [his] control,” (Bingham, 2008, p. 140) so that the other that has been built up in the intrapsychic domain continues to act in a way that is consistent with, and a reinforcement of, his fantasy. As Bingham (2008) notes:

When a relation is almost always as expected, it can be very startling for there to be unexpectedness all of [a] sudden. If the other acts in an unanticipated way, I may feel threatened in this interchange, I will keep the other at bay, making sure that the recognition I receive is the sort that is comfortable for me, the sort that is static. (p. 140)

No matter whether it is an intentional reinforcement of other as a specific object, engaged in a static authority relation, or simply a function of maintaining comfort, a dominant member of a relation is capable of ensuring that the relation is relatively constant and unequal. She maintains this static relationship by “making sure that the recognition [she] receive[s] is the sort that is comfortable for [her], the sort that is static” (Bingham, 2008, p. 140). By denying the agency of the other, she also denies the other an equal place in the relation. While a student may well refuse to engage with a teacher who does not acknowledge her as an equal part of a relation, it is difficult to learn from a person one has de-authorized. Moreover, the student is still subject to the punitive elements of the educational system, and the teacher is de-humanized by engaging in the de-humanization of the other.

The extreme alternative to treating the other as an entirely static object is the treatment of other as a complete stranger. It is dangerous to engage in “an intersubjective circuit where the other is mainly unanticipatable...[as] such a relation also leads to domination” (Bingham 2008, p. 140). Both Freire and Bingham require an acknowledgment of the other, a recognition, which is created of both the intrapsychic and intersubjective realms. If the other is entirely unanticipatable, then he has a dominant position in the relation. Every humanizing relation, every working authority

relation is dependent upon the balance between these realms and between the *I* and *thou* in the relation. If one member of the relation comes to dominate it, then the inequality inherent in a dysfunctional authority relation threatens the humanization of the individuals, and their respective abilities to gain knowledge from the world around them.

The balance between *I* and *thou* in the authority relation, between submission and domination, is at the heart of a working educational relationship. It is in his expression of this necessity that it becomes clear Freire does in fact see authority as being produced in relation. The language of psychoanalysis, of the intrapsychic and intersubjective realms, can easily be applied to his work in order to further support the need for balance in the educational relationship. An educator must know who she is, and who her students are. She must work within the confines of the school system and its prescribed roles, while recognizing that her students also have the capacity to teach and should be a part of the investigation of the surrounding world. Acknowledging that the other is not simply an automaton sitting in a desk and waiting to be filled with pre-digested knowledge, but is rather a unique being who is both worth knowing and not entirely knowable. If the teacher is able to recognize these capacities in both the student and self, and help the student to see the workings of such a relation, without dictating the exact role of the student, or the precise knowledge to be gained, then there is room in that relation for the humanization of both members.

The judicious use of authority will strive to avoid the poles of dominance and submission. Its judicious use will subvert the banking tendency that employs authority to maintain the circuit of domination and submission. It is such a circuit, and not authority itself, that carries out the work of banking – producing passive students, precluding epistemological and existential agency, severing students from the production of knowledge, [and] replicating dominant ideology... (Bingham, 2008, p. 143)

So long as there is an understanding on the part of the critical pedagogue that it is the imbalance between poles of dominance and submission, and the misrecognition of the other that perpetuates the violence and authoritarianism within the system, despite the best of intentions, there is hope for change. “It is only by such a movement between the interior domain of one’s own pedagogical agenda, and the exterior domain of the other’s intellectual growth, that circuits of domination and submission will be kept at bay” (Bingham, 2008, p.144). Even so, there are those who would claim that critical

pedagogy, even with this re-envisioning of authority as relational, cannot fulfill the goal of liberation. There are those who claim that the lived experiences of teacher and student may be so different, that no amount of dialogical exchange can overcome the gulf between them.

How Gadamer, Derrida, and Bingham Make Critical Pedagogy Accessible to All

In her seminal work, “Why Doesn’t this Feel Empowering? : Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy” (1989), Elizabeth Ellsworth questions the fundamental ability of critical pedagogy to empower everyone, in spite of race, gender, sexual orientation etcetera. In essence, she finds that the works of Freire and other critical pedagogues fail to address the inherent differences of subject position between teacher and student, and between the students themselves, to such a degree that critical pedagogy itself becomes oppressive. Like Bingham in his extension of, or addition to, Freire’s work, I am going to make the somewhat audacious claim that I can offer something of a solution to Ellsworth. I believe that, through a relational view of critical pedagogy, combined with the use of the hermeneutic cycle (which is partially built into Freire’s ‘praxis’), critical pedagogy can be empowering in a way that Ellsworth does not anticipate. Critical pedagogy is a remarkable ‘way-in’ to being a part of a productive and humanizing relation, and it is absolutely vital that it be promoted whenever possible. It is not my aim to prevent a non-relational, static approach to critical pedagogy, but rather to explore how new ideas and critiques might be incorporated in order to further the reach and influence of this truly dynamic and liberating form of pedagogy.

In her work, Elizabeth Ellsworth explores the implications of employing critical pedagogy when working with a diverse group of students at the University of Wisconsin Madison Campus. The content of the course itself was meant to be an answer to, and challenge of, the institutionalized discrimination and oppression experienced by students on campus during the years leading up to the offering of the course, entitled “Curriculum and Instruction 607: Media and Anti-Racist Pedagogies”. It is Ellsworth’s contention that the employment of critical pedagogy actually served to undermine the original goals of

the course due to what she refers as the “myths” of critical pedagogy. The essence of her contentions is as follows:

I want to argue that...key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices fundamental to the literature on critical pedagogy – namely, “empowerment,” “student voice,” “dialogue,” and even the term “critical” – are repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination. By this I mean that when participants in our class attempted to put into practice prescriptions offered in the literature concerning empowerment, student voice, and dialogue, we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against, including Eurocentrism, racism, sexism, classism, and “banking education.” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 300)

While I cannot argue against the lived experience of Ellsworth and the members of her classroom community, I do contend that, with the addition of a relational view of authority in critical education and the hermeneutic cycle, critical pedagogy may be empowering for everyone.

As a teacher, I too have struggled with the implications of approaching issues surrounding various disenfranchised groups within the classroom context. I teach at a high school, and not a university, but my responsibility to ensure that every member of my classes feels safe, recognized, and heard remains the same. I also believe it to be my responsibility to help my students to become critically aware of their environment in order that they may later enact change. My aims and those of Elizabeth Ellsworth are not so far apart as one might expect, but my faith in critical pedagogy as a solution to cycles of domination and submission, rather than a path toward perpetuating those cycles, is where we part ways. As discussed earlier, what follows is a thorough discussion of Ellsworth’s important critique, and an offering of philosophical solutions to the issues she faced in her Curriculum and Instruction 607, “Media and Anti-Racist Pedagogies” (C&I 607) class.

I have been teaching Harper Lee’s, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (*TKAM*) in my Grade 10 English classes. I am currently in the middle of my second, complete, foray through the text, and have drastically adjusted my teaching of the materials in order to address some surprising issues which arose the first semester through. As I began teaching the novel the last time, a story set in Maycomb, Alabama during The Great Depression, I assumed

I would be teaching about the history of the depression, first-person narrative voice, and the subjugation of African Americans under the Jim Crow laws. The very fact that I thought I knew what I would be teaching, before having met my students, illustrates that I am not yet practicing the version of relational critical pedagogy I envision here. The difficulties I faced in my classroom are different from, but analogous to some of the difficulties faced by Ellsworth.

During my first teaching of English 10, I assumed I knew enough about the text, without having met my students, and that I could predict where our conversations would lead. I selected minimal supplementary material, such as historical information regarding The Great Depression and the Jim Crow laws, as well as pieces of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, ready to decipher in groups and share. What came out of our discussions regarding the concept of second-class citizens, was a question for me: “Don’t you think, then, that natives are our second-class citizens?” As soon as the question hit the floor, it was taken up by various members of the class. There were guffaws, screams of “What? No way! *They get everything,*” and the like. In a panic to address the surprising (though it should not have been) conversation, and to somehow shelter the First Nations (FN) students in the room, who have told me they have heard much worse, I shut down the conversation.

I lectured, in as authoritarian a manner as I have ever spoken, for a full twenty minutes. I concluded the discussion, which largely contained monologue on residential schools and the locations of reserve lands, with the statement that none of us knew enough about FN issues in the community to have a discussion about it. I said that my goal was to maintain a safe space for everyone, and that the conversation at hand was making it unsafe, so I was not prepared to hear another word on the topic. To my subsequent horror, students obeyed me without question and did not speak. My desires to control the classroom and make it a “safe space” led to an imposition of my authoritarian role in the classroom, and my complete refusal to engage in critical dialogue with my students. I have since learned.

Reeling, I came back to this work, to the ideas of critical pedagogy and relational authority, and sought to do better the second time around. I asked myself a few vital questions: What does it mean for a white teacher such as myself, in a middle class

neighbourhood, to take up First Nations' issues or texts in order to include a First Nations voice in the curriculum? What responsibilities do I have to my students, and to those I would represent by the inclusion of such a text, and am I able to fulfill those responsibilities from my position of authority and cultural context? Does my authority within the education system help, or hinder, my attempts at the creation of an inclusive curriculum?

It is my perspective that many of the issues implied in the above questions are addressed through a relational approach to education, when it is augmented by the hermeneutic cycle. Ellsworth takes issue with educators who do not state their aims and biases upfront. She writes that when those, "advocating critical pedagogy fail to provide a clear statement of their political agendas, the effect is to hide the fact that as critical pedagogues, they are in fact seeking to appropriate public resources...to further various "progressive" political agendas that they believe to be for the public good –and therefore deserving of public resources" (1989, p. 301). As a high school teacher in the public system, it is most certainly public resources that I use. That being said, I articulate my "progressive political agenda" at least weekly for my students²⁰. I now let them know that I am present to help them with the mechanics of writing, with their ability to speak in front of others and express their own opinions and, ultimately, I am there with the hope that they will take their skills and use them to speak out against injustices in the world around them.

Hiding one's agenda is akin to hiding the preparation of curricular materials as mentioned earlier; to alienate the student from either of these is to maintain the student in a submissive role, and refuse their agentic position in establishing purpose and direction in the classroom. Freire argues against this, and so does Bingham. If it is occurring as Ellsworth asserts, then it is a result of what some so-called critical pedagogues are doing in practice, and not necessarily what is present in the philosophy itself. So how does one go about approaching the very complex issues of racism, classism, sexism and so on, within the institutional context, and in a way that will satisfy

²⁰ I would like the reader to know that I cannot, by any means, identify myself as a practising critical pedagogue. I am working my way toward employing critical pedagogy in the classroom, but regularly come up against the system, and myself when working toward critical education. It remains an ideal to strive for.

critics of critical pedagogy as being open and transparent and subject to student input and engagement?

My new class and I set about an exploration of the text, with me much better prepared to be surprised by their responses and to accept them. Ellsworth set about articulating the political goals of her course prior to teaching it, and I explained my goals of anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-sexist education prior to embarking upon our exploration of the novel. Of course, my adjustments for this semester's class were made without them, my goals anticipated before having met them, but I was prepared for what they might bring to the table this time, and for the fact that I might not be able to anticipate precisely what that might be. Just as I found my students all came at the issues from different places, so too did Ellsworth find this of her students. She articulates that in her class there were "diverse social positions and political ideologies," and wonders about her "own position and experiences as a woman and a feminist" (1989, p. 302) when it comes to approaching discussion. The greatest differences between the two classes are that her students were older, voluntarily a part of the course, and all agreed that racism was an issue on campus that required their action. I suspect that the only clear agreement between all members of my class is that their primary reason for entering the room is that the course is required to graduate.

Ellsworth's students begin, at least, with a common goal. The first roadblock she articulates is underlying rationalist assumptions in critical pedagogy which "have led to the following goals: the teaching of analytic and critical skills for judging the truth and merit of propositions, and the interrogation and selective appropriation of potentially transformative moments in the dominant culture" (1989 pp. 303-304). Her objection to these assumptions is that they put the critical pedagogue in the position of having to enforce reason as the "foundation for classroom interaction" (p. 304). While it is easier to have a common conversation with similar underlying assumptions, such as the idea that "all people have a right to freedom from oppression guaranteed by the democratic social contract" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 304), it should be possible to engage with one another as human beings without demanding that every argument be based solely in rational discussion. It is Ellsworth's contention that such assumptions as the one outlined above, are based in the image of the ideal rational person, a "European, White, male, middle class, Christian, able-bodied, thing, and heterosexual," (1989, p. 304) and

that such an image is oppressive to the “socially constructed irrational other” (1989, p. 305). I would like to suggest that a truly relational view of critical pedagogy does not set up an irrational other, but assumes that the other has as much to offer to the conversation as the aforementioned “ideal rational person”. I would also like to suggest that the addition of the hermeneutic cycle serves to undermine the rationalist assumptions Ellsworth finds so troubling.

Much earlier in this work, I outlined the difficulty of my position within the system, and explained that, no matter what my political or educational aim, my position is *authoritarian*, due to my reliance on various authorities to place me in my classroom. Once in the classroom, it is up to my students to decide whether or not to acknowledge me as an *authoritative* voice with which they will choose to learn. I agree with Ellsworth that my position in the classroom is loaded, especially as a white, English-speaking, middle class woman. Approaching a text like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a text about racial segregation and classism in the 1930’s, from my place of privilege, with no “experts” on whom to call, is a difficult and burdensome task. Wanting to acknowledge and allow all feelings that come up for students as we work our way through the chapters has to be balanced with creating a safe space. On top of all that, I believe it necessary to confront my own position of privilege and biases in an open way, so that the students are able to challenge me, and themselves.

If students, no matter what their subject position, are to fully engage with a text (or issue), in a genuinely humanizing fashion, they must be free to engage in a hermeneutic reading of it. They must consciously make meaning and engage in reflection; an unimpeded effort at the “to-and-fro interchange between the text and reader” (Bingham, 2001, p. 266). Of course, the classroom is not a vacuum, but rather a complex intersection of relations, many of which involve students’ relation with me as the teacher. As a result of this there can be no truly unimpeded interaction between the text and reader. Instead, due to my authoritarian position in the room, I often stand, in my privilege, between students and a direct reading of their texts.

The text of the teacher is an obvious influence upon the students’ interaction with the text. Due to her position within the classroom, before beginning work, students will often ask how their work will be assessed, and attempt to determine precisely the

teacher's position toward a given assignment or text. I cannot imagine how Ellsworth struggles with assessment, but the assigning of a grade most certainly interferes in students' learning hermeneutically, and is seriously problematic otherwise. Regardless, the conspicuous influence this reading of the teacher might have on a student's reading of a text is extreme. Ellsworth notes that despite her efforts to be seen as an equal with her students in terms of a right to speak and having a valid contribution to class discussion, her "institutional role as professor would always weight [her] statements differently from those of students" (1989, p. 308). Modeling the hermeneutic cycle for students, exposing one's biases and weaknesses, and engaging in conversation which may well challenge the very system in which one is working is central to informed critical pedagogy. Ellsworth came to a similar conclusion, though not necessarily through the additions of the hermeneutic cycle.

Given my own history of white-skin, middle-class, able-bodied, thin privilege and my institutionally granted power, it made more sense to see my task as one of redefining "critical pedagogy" so that it did not need utopian moments of "democracy," "equality," "justice," or "emancipated" teachers – moments that are unattainable (and ultimately undesirable, because they are always predicated on the interests of those who are in the position to define utopian projects). A preferable goal seemed to be to become capable of a sustained encounter with currently oppressive formations and power relations...and to enter into the encounter in a way that owned up to my own implications in those formations and was capable of changing my own relation to and investments in those formations. (1989, p. 308).

With a similar set of thoughts in mind, I set about approaching our text *with* the class, rather than *for* them. I prepared myself for the fact that I could not entirely prepare myself for what they would come up with, and discussed with them what they thought a respectful environment would look like prior to beginning. We then embarked upon the reading of the novel. From day one I set about engaging in honest dialogue with students, and illustrating the first steps of the hermeneutic cycle. I was concerned that students would espouse beliefs that they thought I wanted to hear, and miss the opportunity to examine their existing prejudices. It is the teacher, as supplement, who gets most in the way of an honest, personal reading for students.

Before continuing engagement with Ellsworth's work, I will further explore my position in the classroom as a critical educator, and supplement, engaged in the

hermeneutic cycle. Imagine that students are intrinsically motivated to read texts that their teacher assigns (this is one way in which my students often differ greatly from those who opt to take a course at the university level). Either that, or else they have such respect for the teacher's knowledge that they wish to read whatever is given them. Either way, the teacher may still have a difficult time avoiding interfering in the students' reading of a text.

If I choose to begin the *TKAM* unit with a speech written by Chief Dan George, both my students and I know that I have some intention. First of all, I have found and photocopied the text of the speech for my students, in addition to the novel. Students may be guessing why I have decided to assign them the text, or may understand that this particular perspective is going to be a part of some angle we are taking on the novel, but either way they are already anticipating my expectations of them regarding it. It is likely that I will situate the text historically in order that I meet provincial curricular expectations. After my brief contextualization of the text I will read the text to students, using dramatic inflection. Students are always expected to read along, or listen intently, and are then asked for their responses.

No matter what the form these responses take, my presence as an authority in the room will interfere in students' readings of the text. Wanting students to think critically about issues in a text is a long way off, as they are not even able to relate to it without considering what it is that myself, or the exam, might require in a response. If I ask them to journal, they will do so with me in mind. If I ask them to speak with one another about the passage we just read, I will likely monitor, and even mediate, discussions, sometimes assigning specific partners to students. The larger discussion, when partner pairs are asked to report to the class, is also heavily mediated by me. Not only will I have a specific reading of the text in mind, or a series of points I want highlighted in order to point out the injustices it speaks to, but I will often control the flow of conversation as well. While my presence is operating on the student as he works through the text, he continues to read his partner and/or his group. Within this process, there is ample opportunity to become preoccupied with the expectations that others have for one's reading of the text and to neglect one's own perception of it.

My interference in students' reading of the text is further complicated by my own prejudices and experiences. As previously mentioned, the greatest parallel students were able to draw between *TKAM* and their own realities was in connecting the subjugation of African Americans in the text, and current issues for FN people. While I might bring in FN texts to speak to this connection, my position as an expert is problematic in the extreme. When I was six, until I was eight-and-a-half or so, I lived in Gold River, British Columbia. My family moved there from North Vancouver, and I can now say that what I experienced at school, especially during my first year, was nothing less than culture shock. I had difficulty adjusting to the culture of the school in general, but most markedly I had difficulty relating to the very large First Nations population of the school. At the age of six, though two of my good friends were Mowachaht, I was afraid of the other First Nations children. Many of their teeth were rotten, or missing altogether, their clothes were often dirty, and food fights and wrestling were rampant. I found the contrast between my own home, and the expectations for my behaviour, and the behaviour of my FN peers (minus the two I considered to be friends) to be too much, and could not understand what reasons there might be for this difference²¹. My response was to distance myself.

After moving to Comox at the age of eight, and growing up in a predominantly WASP area and culture, I became a champion of First Nations rights, so far as I saw them. I came to understand some of the historical and social conditions surrounding the lives of my friends and those children I had been so afraid of. As an honours student at the top of my class, a sixteen-year-old me was sent to a prestigious convention in Victoria, which was focused on the Nisga'a during treaty negotiation, in order that I might report to my classmates. I felt I had overcome my prejudices and was now able to espouse my opinions widely, and without concern of challenge, as I had become an authority. It was not until, at the age of twenty-two or so, when I volunteered at an East Vancouver school, one with a similar ethnic and socio-economic make up to the one I had attended in Gold River, that I found I continued to struggle with the immediate emotional reactions grounded in my Gold River experiences.

²¹ It has been mentioned to me, and I agree, that I have more personal exploration to do regarding this issue, especially as it pertains to messages I was receiving at the time from family, teachers, peers and the media at the time. That, however, is an exploration for another time.

Where does all of this leave me and my students as we approach augmentative texts in order to enable marginalized voices a place in the classroom? We are fettered by the institution in which we sit, my own partially acknowledged prejudices, and a multitude of other complex relationships both within and outside of the classroom. Rather than enabling those marginalized voices to speak, they may well be subject to further violence²² by way of authoritarianism present when they are brought into conversation. It is not enough to simply ask students to write down their perspectives, or to chat with a neighbour, and assume that they will be able to look into their own understanding of self and text. How, then, might these texts be approached?

Paulo Freire (1970/2005) offers an explanation of the true aim of education as being to enable students, “to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 266). The inclusion of texts which have been excluded from the dominant, euro-centric, narrative, may be a gesture toward helping students to see the injustices in the world around them, and indeed those perpetrated by the system surrounding them. That being said, the authoritarian nature of the classroom environment still undermines students’ genuine engagement with the text. Freire also states, quite emphatically that, “to glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce” (p. 91). This speaks to the idea that one must always be ready for the other to act in a surprising way, and be prepared to accept the experience of the other as genuine. In addition, to ask students to approach texts without acknowledging the obstacles they will face in doing so, to in fact be an obstacle, is to do harm to them and the text; it is the antithesis of what those such as Freire might view as education.

To begin to approach the text of an other with the students, I must first be humble. Gadamer (1960/1975) states that, “if the prestige of authority takes the place of one’s own judgment, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices” (p. 247). I cannot rely on my place as a teacher as reason enough to present a text, but must approach it

²² What I mean here by violence is the further suppression of voice, and a kind of exclusion by way of misreading. If I present a text to my students, but do not do so in a fashion which enables them to interact with it, but instead demands a specific reading, or is biased heavily by their reading of me, then I have only served to further exclude those voices which I had intended to include. Not only have I done a disservice to my students and the text in this instance, but my students are likely to continue to approach future texts in a similar fashion, which guarantees future misreading.

with humility and honesty. This means that, just as if I were approaching a text on my own with the intent of engaging in the hermeneutic cycle, I have to examine my prejudgements and anticipations for the text. While presenting the historical context of the work, I might also present to students my own context. Freire (1970/2005) calls the kind of education we so often pursue, “the exercise of domination [which] stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression” (p. 78). By exposing myself as both someone with experiences which may make me more of an authority on the text, and someone with prejudgements that will complicate my reading, I may begin to undermine own authoritarian role in the classroom.

To challenge my authoritarian place within the classroom is to challenge the oppression inherent in a dominant culture which prescribes curriculum and assessment. It is dangerous to stand in front of a classroom and expose one’s flaws, but more dangerous still to challenge one’s own right to be there. Like Freire, I wish my students to be able to question the world around them, and know that to exclude me and the system within which I operate from what is open to question is to further perpetuate my own authoritarianism and that of the school system.²³ By laying out for students the beginning of my own hermeneutic cycle, I am taking risks, but I am also offering to be a more honest supplement²⁴ to the text than a teacher who would deny students access to that part of her own cycle, or the right to question the teacher’s position in relationship to the text.

This supplementarity makes me, as teacher, “both *an addition to the text and an integral part of the text*” (Bingham, 2001, p. 270). While students make meaning of the text, they are making meaning of me, and the two are integrated to become a whole that

²³ There is a parallel to be drawn here between the questioning of my own position within the educational system, and the questioning of dominant narrative which should accompany the inclusion of texts of minority and/or oppressed voices in classroom work. I am part of the same culture which has excluded these voices. What role I might play in including them is, as the very least, complex.

²⁴ Of course, the notion of honest supplement is not necessarily as clear as it seems. There are parts of my experience in life which may change my reading of a text that may not be appropriate to share with students, or which I may be unaware of as influencing my reading. The best I can do is to offer experiences I view as pertinent to the text, in order that students might mingle them with their reading of me as white, woman, teacher, etc.

is neither teacher opinion, nor unadulterated reading, but a new text with its own authority. “The instructor whose job it is to supplement the text also becomes part and parcel of the very text whose message she attempts to convey” (p. 270). Viewed in this way, my authority to introduce First Nations texts, or texts about African Americans in the deep South, to a classroom is still in serious question. What does it mean for someone with so little knowledge as me to act as supplement?

I continue to be concerned that my lack of experience with First Nations culture, combined with my childhood experiences, may make me a less reliable or worthy supplement to the text my students will create. Bingham (2001) writes that, “because supplement is both *an addition to* and *a part of*, my disconnection from that text threaten[s] the authority of the book itself” (p. 271). Although I worry about my place in the text, I believe it is better to include these texts, and openly admit one’s lack of knowledge, or disconnect, than to leave them out of the classroom altogether. At the very least, the inclusion of these texts/voices is a direct challenge to the history of their omission. Even with my seeming lack of authority, there is much to be had in their inclusion.

When writing about his approach to a text about which he may have little authority to speak, Charles Bingham (2002) explains how his complicated role as supplement means the text remains useful for students to read:

Imagine that I am a white man and that I have chosen to read Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* with my class. (To summarize inadequately, Morrison’s text is an analysis of how the white racist imagination that has come to structure canonical literary works in the United States.) Having assigned this text, the problem of teacher authority rests [on] ...how I, as a white man, become part of the text’s own analysis. Morrison’s text, as complicated as this may seem, becomes in my class a text that is co-authored in black and white, by Morrison and me. To become educated about Morrison’s argument means, at least in my class, also to become educated about how a white man can help to make that argument. (p. 271)

Ideally, when I take up *To Kill a Mockingbird* or a speech by Chief Dan George, just the students, the text, and myself will be present in the room. The richness of our experiences, combined with my hopefully humble and open authority, may allow for the co-authoring of a text far closer to inclusivity than any I, as supplement, could otherwise

offer. The problems of the authoritarian nature of the school system, and the judgement of peers cannot be banished from the classroom²⁵ but in modeling, in offering myself up, perhaps I might encourage students to create a safer place in which to *read*. That safer place, it seems to me, is the kind of place in which challenges to dominant voices might be made.

Bingham (2001) writes:

If my teaching strategy is to act as if I do not have a perspective on this text, then the message this text sends may very well be that a white person has no pages to add to Morrison's text. Whatever I say – even if I say nothing – speaks pages... (p. 272)

If I refuse to address the First Nations issues that my students bring up in our discussion of the novel, and am afraid to bring FN texts into the conversation and offer my perspective on them, my co-authoring, then I am failing my students. In working with the students and the texts in this way, we re-write the curriculum and begin to make our own meaning. Freire refers to humble, and so admirable, people as being able to recognize the “limits of knowledge concerning what we can and cannot do through education” (as cited in Hare and Poretelli, 1996, p. 185). Although humility is vital in any attempt to serve others, in my classroom it is my responsibility to take risks in striving to create an inclusive environment, free from authoritarianism, whether or not I know it to be possible.

To claim that I am entitled to read, and be read into, a text with my students in the way that Gadamer and Bingham might be understood to imagine is radical. To seek to undermine the authoritarianism of self, the school system, and the dominant narrative as represented by the traditional curriculum is both brave and frightening. Freire, a brave and radical educator, outlined love as the final virtue of teaching. He explains that teachers who wish to challenge the status quo must have, “a love for students which pushes us to go beyond, which makes us more and more responsible for our task” (as

²⁵ One of the greatest challenges to a teacher who would oppose the authoritarianism of the classroom is in accepting the apparent hypocrisy in doing so, whilst standing firmly within the room as a result of the same authoritarian systems, and while accepting a pay cheque. The system may be inescapable, and assessment acceptable to administration may unavoidably fall to the teacher, but it is possible to subvert, in small ways, daily.

cited in Hare & Portelli, 1996, p. 186). It is this love for students, and a hope for the future of the educational system, which necessitates that authoritarianism be challenged, whenever possible, and however difficult or contentious. It is a privilege to make new meaning with students, and an obligation to enable them to make it as freely as possible.

Consequently, embarking upon my latest endeavour to “teach” Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and to do so in a way that might empower students, I remembered myself as supplement, and my place as a voice and facilitator in the discussion of othered and subjugated communities. Instead of avoiding the discussion of First Nations peoples in the classroom, I opened the unit by telling my story. I told them about thinking I had grown past my childish prejudice, and being shocked to find that it returned to me on a visceral level so many years later. I offered the students self expression through the avenue of journals on First Nations poetry, journals I will only be marking for completion. We have had group discussions, and done Four-Corners activities wherein, in response to a statement such as, “Racism is a problem in our community today,” students choose to agree, disagree, strongly agree, or strongly disagree and discuss their perspectives both in their respective corners, and across the floor. I have shown them the old “Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes” video, in the hopes that watching how quickly small children can be turned against one another, they might make connections to our own community. We have explored text after text, and I have not stifled conversation. To my pleasant surprise, as I listen to the students respectfully, with the assumption that they have something to add to the conversation, no matter their subject position, they speak respectfully to one another. There have been no racist outcries, only earnest questions rooted in honest ignorance. I am proud of my students, and pleased to be read by them as I read (with) them.

My experience with *To Kill a Mockingbird* has parallels to Elizabeth Ellsworth’s experience running C&I 607. I believe that a relational approach to education and authority, with an understanding of the inescapable nature of supplementarity, and so the necessity for thorough self-reflection, answers many of Ellsworth’s concerns about addressing the “rationalist assumptions” and, what she sees as, unjust underpinnings of critical pedagogy. Self-analysis, to begin, is a big part of the hermeneutic cycle that I try to model for my students, and provide them with opportunities to engage in. Ellsworth (1989) states that:

In contrast to the enforcement of rational deliberation, but like Christian's promotion and response, my role in C&I 607 would be to interrupt institutional limits on how much time and energy students of color, White students, and professors against racism could spend on elaborating their positions and playing them out to the point where internal contradictions and effects on the positions of other social groups could become evident and subject to self-analysis. (p. 305)

This is entirely in keeping with the kind of critical pedagogy that I imagine. In order to truly engage with students and oneself in the examination of text and the surrounding world, this is precisely what is necessary. Rational deliberation, at the cost of genuine expression and self-examination, and in the name of pursuing a good mark, is counter to the humanization of teacher and student. Ellsworth is not working against critical pedagogy here, she is advocating for the addition of some of the practices addressed above.

When discussing the stories that various students of difference might share in her classroom, Ellsworth feels the need to assert that the stories must not be dismissed because they do not present as traditional rational discourse. She says that the stories people offer, "are partial and partisan, they must be made problematic, but not because they have broken the rules of thought of the ideal rational person by grounding their knowledge in immediate emotional, social, and psychic experiences of oppression" (1989, p. 305). This is entirely in keeping with the addition of the hermeneutic cycle and supplement. As students share stories and experiences, are read and are read by one another, they must have freedom to engage in reflection and further discussion. In fact, as far as a relational view of critical pedagogy is concerned, personal experiences are a foundational part of classroom interaction, and so to the knowledge gained within, or by way of, that relation.

Not only is Ellsworth concerned that critical pedagogues are not doing enough to ensure that the voices of those who do not accept the rationalist tradition are heard, but she does not feel that they are doing enough self-examination.

As educators who claim to be dedicated to ending oppression, critical pedagogues have acknowledged the socially constructed and legitimated authority that teachers/professors hold over students. Yet theorists of critical pedagogy have failed to launch any meaningful analysis of or program for reformulating the institutionalized power imbalances between

themselves and their students, of the essentially paternalistic project of education itself. In the absence of such an analysis and program, their efforts are limited to trying to transform negative effects of power imbalances within the classroom into positive ones. Strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact. (1989, p. 306)

While I absolutely understand what Ellsworth is saying here, I believe that public education is dynamic, and that there is space within it to promote large-scale change. In terms of failing to address the “authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship,” I feel that a relational view of authority does a great deal toward addressing this imbalance. While Freire’s critical pedagogy is not blatantly relational, it is very clear through Bingham’s analysis and the addition of psychoanalytic language that it is. Reconceiving of authority as relational is a kind of program for the transformation of relations within the school system, and its absence from much of today’s discussion around educational philosophy is the *raison d’être* for this work. It is in this way, through balanced relation, that critical pedagogues may address the inequality of the traditionally authoritarian teacher/student relationship.

Shortly after her frustration about the lack of self-examination in the critical pedagogy movement, Ellsworth brings up the very question of empowerment. She asks critical educators Giroux and McLaren (1986) about emancipatory authority which they explain as, “a kind of teaching in which teachers would make explicit and available for rationalist debate ‘the political and moral referents for authority they assume in teaching particular forms of knowledge, in taking stands against forms of oppression, and in treating students as if they ought also to be concerned about social justice and political action’” (1989, p. 307). On the surface, this “inevitability of power imbalance” may seem like where I am coming from, but it is not. There is an inevitability about a teacher’s authoritarian presence, but that has little to do with their actual authority. By acknowledging that authority is relational, and altering one’s position for the eyes of the students, one can begin to undermine the inevitability that social reconstructionists are at odds with – the problem of taking over authority only in instances when it is in order to liberate, or is “for freedom”, is no longer a problem if there is no authority to be taken. Ellsworth states that “the question of ‘empowerment for what’ becomes the final arbiter

of a teacher's use or misuse of authority" (p. 307), but of course such a question and aim make no sense to those who see authority in a relational way.

Ellsworth objects even to the way in which critical pedagogues define the term "student empowerment," claiming that "student empowerment has been defined in the broadest possible humanist terms, and becomes a "capacity to act effectively" in a way that fails to challenge any identifiable social or political position, institution, or group" (1989, p. 307). Even if the terms are broad, they allow the individual to decide what they will challenge in the world around them. What kind of critical pedagogue would set out the specific oppressive part of reality that an individual was to challenge? The journey to the horizon is one's own, and so is it one's own place to decide the object of change/challenge. If one of my students focuses particularly on the absence of a First Nations voice in our reading material, and chooses to challenge this by reading some supplementary material and sharing it with one friend, who am I to judge that action as it compares to the action of an individual who objects to the prescribed gender roles in the text and sets about an awareness campaign with in the school? As an equal, it is not my place to judge. If students are thinking critically about their surroundings, especially to the point of taking action, then I am either doing my job well, or I am unnecessary for them in at least one respect.

Ellsworth suggests another respect in which the critical educator may not be useful to her students, referring to "contortions of logic and rhetoric" (p. 307) that a critical educator might use to promote her presence within the education system. Once again, she critiques Giroux and McLaren (1986) saying that:

Emancipatory authority" is one such contortion, for it implies the presence of or potential for an emancipated teacher. Indeed, it asserts that teachers "can link knowledge to power by bringing to light and teaching the subjugated histories, experiences, stories, and accounts of those who suffer and struggle." Yet I cannot unproblematically bring subjugated knowledges to light when I am not free of my own learned racism, fat oppression, classism, ableism, or sexism. No teacher is free of these learned and internalized oppressions. Nor are accounts of one group's suffering and struggle immune from reproducing narratives oppressive to another's — the racism of the Women's Movement in the United States is one example. (pp. 307-308)

As I have already illustrated, it goes without saying that a teacher's authoritative position is problematic, especially when it comes to bringing subjugated voices into class discussion/reading etc. This is precisely where the modeling of the hermeneutic cycle, a calling into question of one's own beliefs, and learned and internalized oppressions, in order to challenge them *with* students comes in. This is where I stand in front of my class and tell the story of my relationship with First Nations people, before we even begin to make connections with our novel, so that they know I am constantly examining where I am coming from, always in a problematic position when it comes to these texts, and always welcoming of their discussion of my position and their own. If one accepts that the teacher is supplementary to the text, and the teacher accepts the responsibility inherent in that position, as did Bingham when he set about reading the works of Toni Morrison, then it is still better to include subjugated voices, than to leave those voices out because Morrison cannot teach every class on her own texts.

In Ellsworth's class, she expresses the difficulty that students had when they were asked to speak to their experiences of, and relationship to, issues of racism on campus. She explains that, "participants expressed much pain, confusion, and difficulty in speaking, because of the ways in which discussions called up their multiple and contradictory social positionings. Women [for example] found it difficult to prioritize expressions of racial privilege and oppression when such prioritizing threatened to perpetuate their gender oppression" (1989, p. 312). The wonder of the hermeneutic self, I think, is that all of our many identities are taken into consideration can co-exist, with other and horizon, in order to be expressed as a full self. If there is a need to express one's "multiple and contradictory social positionings" then there is something to be learned in that difficulty. What that is, is specific to the individual, and may be accessible to them through a sustained to-and-fro exchange with the texts of others in the room, or perhaps with literal texts. Either way, there is value and learning in the difficulty, rather than a need to do away with articulation because it is difficult.

Time and time again, Ellsworth returns to the voice of the pedagogue, leaving those of the students aside. She claims that she is "similarly suspicious of the desire by the mostly White, middle-class men who write the literature on critical pedagogy to elicit 'full expression' of student voices. Such a relation between teacher/student becomes voyeuristic when the voice of the pedagogue himself goes unexamined (1989, p. 312).

This question is arguably moot when one is willing to engage openly in reflection on one's social position and biases. In so doing, we can attempt to make the learning environment safer for others to do the same. While they may mitigate their own responses, as "what they/we say, to whom, in what context, depending on the energy they/we have for the struggle on a particular day, [which] is the result of conscious and unconscious power relations and safety of the situation" (p. 313), it is the responsibility of the teacher to make the space safe. We must make it safe in order to encourage others to take risks, to have faith in the humanity of the other, and to expect no less than complete acceptance from the self.

Part of accepting oneself is being prepared to face one's own muddled identity. Part of being an educator is discussing this with students so that they are prepared to face theirs. In classroom dialogue, Ellsworth found that a particular form of dialogue, outlined by Giroux, required that students unify themselves on the sides of subordinated and subordinators in order to really share and trust within the group on one side of the dialogue (1989, p.315). In particular, she found this to be lacking because the formula "fails to confront dynamics of subordination present among classroom participants and within classroom participants in the form of multiple and contradictory subject positions" (p. 315). I feel quite strongly that one can be both a member of an oppressive group, and an individual within another group working to end that oppression. If I did not, being a teacher would be impossible for me as one who strives toward critical pedagogy and dialogue in the classroom. In answer to Ellsworth's frustrations I come back to the notion that we are multi-faceted beings and the multiplicity of our beings needs to be acknowledged by those with whom we engage. If it is not, then our relations are open to imbalance and exploitation. Again, critical pedagogy, when viewed as relational, serves to answer to the issues in what has come before.

Ellsworth describes her classroom as "the site of dispersed, shifting, and contradictory contexts of knowing that coalesced differently in different moments of student/professor speech, action and emotion" (1989, p. 333). She explains that each person and group was constantly adjusting and had "to change strategies of oppressive ways of knowing and being known" (p. 333). The shifting to which she refers is also represented in the flux of the authority relation. All relation is in constant flux, with the addition of context, experience, other, a next moment ad infinitum the relation shifts. It is

not the job of the socially conscious to maintain fixed relations: in fact, doing so puts one at risk of entering a cycle of submission and domination. While it may be tempting to do so in order that the ongoing endeavour of social justice be simplified, straightforward, or along an “a priori line of attack,” it is the job of the socially conscious to ensure that these relations are not co-opted by any oppressive force, including that of the self, and are allowed to work toward production of a safe, socially just, and self-replicating (insofar as it is spread and yet subject to new participants and environments) space of being.

Every class, just like every student, is different, and so it is impossible to know what will be discussed, what one’s relationship with the students will be. We cannot anticipate that at the end of conversation, the end of the relation, students will be fully humanized beings who seek the liberation of all others, though we may hope. To know where we are going, is to insist on an aim of the relations, which leads to the oppression of the other. To hope to go, but with patience and freedom of movement within relations, is to humanize and liberate through action and example.

Ellsworth speaks to this end in saying:

Right now, the classroom practice that seems most capable of accomplishing this is one that facilitates a kind of communication across differences that is best represented by this statement: “If you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world, and ‘the Right thing to do’ will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive. (p. 324)

In my classroom, I openly acknowledge the partial nature of knowledge of my students, my subject, and what is right, but do not permit such acknowledgement to prevent me from taking steps to address the injustices I perceive, or which are perceived by my students, in our work together. This time through *To Kill a Mockingbird* the best decision I made was to ask another to speak to First Nations issues in our community. After a brief historical investigation, I invited Deborah Johnson, a residential school survivor, to come in and tell her story to the students. She spoke with them for over an hour, and they never made a sound. She spoke of physical, mental, and sexual abuse. She told them about the damage done to her family, her community, by this absurd and inhumane government policy. She related a few glimmers of happiness that she was

touched by during those years away from her family. What she did to connect to the students, and to help them connect past injustice with present, was tell her story. She was open to the students. She cried in front of them. She answered their questions with respect. Deb was able to help students forge a connection to their reality, through a book set in Alabama in the 1930's, in a way that astounded me.

After Deb's talk, I asked students to write a letter to her. I did not demand that it be long, or short, and I told them that it was "too important for me to grade." Every student wrote. When provided with the opportunity to engage with their world, free of my authoritarianism and possibly punitive marking, each student engaged with her directly. If educators do their best to be a constructive, reflective and caring member of a the teacher student relation, and learn to step aside when there is an opportunity for another to reach them better, students will be less afraid to confront themselves, to investigate their social positions, and to set about investigating the world around them.

In this chapter I have conceded that Ellsworth does have a point, and that critical pedagogy can be approached in an oppressive fashion. I sought to challenge her perspective first, by illustrating all of the ways in which critical pedagogy tries to avoid being oppressive, by outlining the oppressive functions of banking education. These functions are embodied in the obviously uni-directional nature of relations in which teachers narrate pre-digested material to students, material which students had no part in choosing or preparing, in order to arrive at a pre-determined conclusion. While Freire is entirely able to illustrate what a non-relational approach to education looks like, he does not illustrate that critical pedagogy is entirely relational. It is this addition of a relational notion of critical pedagogy which calls Ellsworth's assertions regarding its oppressive nature into question. Through the extension of Freire's ideas, for example, instead of simply declaring that authority is on the side of freedom, investigating what kind of relation Freire actually sees as being a liberating one, it is possible to see that he too believes in a relational view of authority.

In her discussion of critical pedagogy, Ellsworth's chief objection is that critical pedagogy does not allow room for the diversity of backgrounds and approaches to discussion present in many classes. She argues that critical pedagogy demands that every student conform to certain rules of rational discussion, born out of the same

liberalist traditions that Bingham helps Freire to escape, and that these rules are oppressive to students and invalidate many of their contributions. As argued, it is my contention that, with the addition of the hermeneutic cycle and a relational conception of authority in the classroom, it is entirely possible for Ellsworth and Freire to come to see eye to eye regarding the possibilities for empowerment inherent in critical pedagogy. There is no need to accept an entire pedagogy, without question, and apply it to one's teaching. In fact, for teachers, as far as critical pedagogy is concerned, this is antithetical to a critical approach to one's own learning and the education and humanization of others.

Having explained the complexities of the authority relation, and arguing that it is in fact relational, I sought to clarify the ways in which critical pedagogy might also be seen to embrace this reality. I have shown how it is that the authority relation might be used to exploit the teacher-student relation, and how that relation might be used in a mutually humanizing fashion. I have argued that Freire did stop short of a fully relational view of educational authority, but, with the help of Charles Bingham and Jessica Benjamin, I have illustrated that such a view is present in the critical pedagogue's work, if not articulated. It is with such a view of Freire's work that I set about challenging Elizabeth Ellsworth's argument that critical pedagogy may not be empowering for everyone. With the addition of the hermeneutic cycle, which necessitates an open and honest relationship between the teacher and herself, between the student and himself, and ultimately between all members of the classroom community, I believe that the non-relational pitfalls Ellsworth outlines are avoidable.

In the final chapter I will return to the earlier lived experience of authority in the classroom. I will illustrate not a perfect classroom, in a magical and hypothetical universe where every relation is healthy and there is no trace of authoritarianism, but a classroom of this time and place where authority is viewed as being relational. I hope to paint a picture of some of the smaller, physical changes that might be made in a classroom, in order to facilitate a healthier and more mutually beneficial authority relation in education.

6. The Working Authority Relation: A Phenomenological Account

While it is true that the authority relation can be exploited, that it can become imbalanced and harmful to both teacher and student, that does not change the fact that it exists. Acknowledgment of the authority relation comes with great responsibility, in that it provides educators and students with the opportunity to engage with one another, as fellow students of the world, in the attempt to become better human beings. Along with responsibility comes great hope for a future in which education comes to be about not the perpetuation of a hierarchical and dehumanizing system, but about millions of relations through which knowledge is sought. There are teachers, teaching through healthy authority relations every day, but there are also teachers who equate respect and fear, and those who maintain the view that authority is a thing possessed by them and guaranteeing their positions of power in the classroom. Re-envisioning the authority relation is necessary if power mongers, accidental or otherwise, are to be knocked off of their false thrones. New teachers can begin the work that so many old hands have attempted, though without the language to do so. As students come to see their rightful place in relation, it will be more and more difficult to enforce the old ways and restrict knowledge and freedom. So let me now reimagine the lived experience of authority in the classroom.

I look at the students sitting near the door to our classroom, and we smile in greeting to one another. I use the keys hung from my neck, heavy on the lanyard which displays my ID card, to open the door. I turn the key with my right hand, slowly, as I am weighed down by the book bag and lunch bag hanging off my arms, and about to drop the Teacher on Call (TOC) folder containing attendance lists and guidelines for the day, and by the warmth of my coat and scarf. The students stand and ask if I would like some help, and I hand two girls a bag each. After I have unlocked the door for everyone to come in when ready, the three of us step into the room together; first them, then me as I step aside and gesture them forward by bowing my head. I watch the girls as one

flicks on the light, and then they put the bags on the desk at the front corner of the room farthest the door, and then disappear back out the door. I blink several times, adjusting to the light and stand near the open door, my back to it, and regard the room. It is bright and cheerful, painted butter-yellow. I can see the yellow peeking out between student work and inspirational posters hung on the walls.

The light from the windows on the far side of the room falls upon the teacher's desk and the pod of desks with the chairs on top of them, making the chrome legs of the chair glisten more brightly than those of the chairs directly in front of me. I can taste the protein bar I ate in the car, and feel acid rising in my throat – I want a drink of water. I am thirsty. I swallow. I imagine my water bottle in my book bag, and walk slowly toward the desk under the windows, still warm and thirsty. Arriving at the desk, I take off my coat. Both shoulders come off at once and slide down my arms. I let the coat fall completely off my left arm and pull it round to the right, then drape it over the back of the chair behind the desk. Removing my water bottle from my book bag, I take a long drink of cold water while regarding the clock and calculating that I have twenty minutes before students are anticipated to be in the room. I finish my drink, no longer thirsty, but still feeling the pressing presence of my breakfast in my oesophagus.

I screw the lid of my water bottle back on and set it on the desk next to my bags. I look up at the room again. The room is quiet, but getting louder as the noise in the hallway starts to filter in through the open doorway. I look to the clock again, and again calculate the number of minutes before I expect to begin talking with students. I open the folder, take out my lesson guidelines, and begin to read them. As I read, I walk over to a couch under the windows and sit down. It does not hurt, but it surprises me to feel my heart beat speeding up. I take a deep breath and sit back on the soft upholstery. I look at the whiteboards on three sides of the room, each covered in notes written by different hands. I stand again and walk to the whiteboard at the front of the room. The dry erase markers are blue, red, and green. I pick a red one, pull off the cap with my left hand, while still holding my notes in the same hand. I find a small blank space and write, "Kimberley" in the space. I draw a cloud shape around it and it stands out more clearly. I hold my breath while I stretch up to write. When I finish writing, and flatten my feet, I exhale a great deal of breath in a sigh. It feels good.

I put the lid on the red marker, listening for the click, and place it on the ledge. I then select a green marker, take the lid off, and look for a place to write a few of the notes I have been left. I can smell the ink's non-toxic, chemical smell. I cannot find a blank space to write notes. I put the lid back on the green marker with an audible click, put it on the ledge producing a metallic clank, and pick up a whiteboard eraser in my right hand. I take two steps back to regard the entire board. I still see no space to write notes. I step forward again, and set the eraser on the ledge. I walk back over to the couch under the windows and sit down. My breathing is regular and I feel comfortable in the room. I glance over to the clock. I know I have five minutes left, but am unaware of the calculation I must have made to discover this. I take out a pencil and the guidelines from the file, and on the back of the paper I begin to write:

“A thought for the day: Every window contains an infinite number of views.”

Students begin to enter the room through the door on the far side. I put the pencil and paper back in the folder, and stand up. I walk casually past the desk, putting down the folder, and head toward the door. Standing to the right of the jam, I smile and say “Hello!” and “Good morning!” to students as they come in. I stand beside the door, smiling a genuine smile which crinkles my eyes and moves my ears up the side of my head, until it seems that most students are in the room. I turn to face into the room and watch them pull their chairs off the groups of desks, some of them banging as they hit the floor. I feel a tap on my right shoulder and I turn around to see a short woman standing in the doorway. I raise my eyebrows and smile at her. She comes over and we introduce ourselves while shaking hands. Her hand is clammy, and I can smell her breath and see things stuck in her teeth. I gesture toward my teeth, tapping the front ones gently, eyebrows up. She takes out a water bottle, loudly swishes some water about her mouth, and smiles again. I can see the food bits are gone.

I smile at her again, and give her a “thumbs up”. I feel tall beside her. She is a student teacher, and I invite her to stay with us for the class. As we nod at one another and I turn to face the class from the doorway, I am suddenly aware of the music being played over the P.A. The student teacher walks across the room to the couch, and I stand in the doorway, waiting for any more students, and tapping my toe to the Justin Bieber song many of the students seem to be singing along to, or rolling their eyes at.

My foot taps to the beat. It taps on its own, and then because I have decided to continue tapping it.

I walk over to the desk to pick up the folder and pencil. I lean over the desk, facing the students, and open the folder. Holding the pencil lightly I write:

- Vegetarian
- Left-leaning
- Simon Fraser University
- English/History
- Older than I look
- Questions???

I finish my notes of introduction and place the pencil on the desk. On the far side of the room, closest the door, students take down a few uninhabited chairs. I smile to myself and then sit down in the chair behind the desk and wait for the music to finish. I can see some students looking at their phones, but am not sure if they are turning them off or not. As I look around the room, still smiling gently, the students put their phones away, and chat amongst themselves.

I stand up and walk toward the whiteboard between the door and the desk. My shoulders relax, and I stretch my neck from side to side as I wait for the bell to ring. My breathing is steady as I look around the room, searching for familiar faces. I find none, but every student whose eye I catch smiles back at me. The music stops, students turn to look at me and I say cheerfully, hands open at my sides, "Hello, my name is Kimberley. I am a vegetarian, left-leaning, SFU-educated, history and English major. I am thirty. Is there anything else you would like to know about me before I ask you what you have been learning about?" Five or six hands go up, and we are ready to begin class together.

The previous piece is a twist on the thick description of the experience of authority I offered in Chapter 2. It is a re-envisioning in which I imagine what it would be like to be a TOC in a classroom in a school where, though still a part of the current school system, authority is viewed as being relational. While I walk into a school where I have not been, to teach students that I have not previously met, our mutual

understanding of the nature of authority mitigates my interaction with the students and the space. As the students help me into the room, a room which I leave open to them, there is no effort to establish an authority based in an authoritarian structure, but rather an acknowledgement of the learning that has come before, and my role in the learning to come.

The anxiety present in the previous thick description piece is simply not a part of this piece. While I still struggle with my breakfast, and apparent nerves, in this piece the racing heart is a part of the anticipation and excitement of being in a new place and meeting new people to learn with. Rather than raised shoulders full of tension, I express sighs of contentment and openness, as I look forward to the influx of students. I breathe out my anxieties. There is no need to embody authority, as I am aware that authority does not reside within me, but will be brought into being with each new relation in the room. Letting go of the vast responsibility of holding tight all the authority in the room has the effect of calming one down, while also freeing up energy for engagement with students.

In this account, there are no mandatory notes to follow, written by the absent teacher, but rather guidelines for the day. How could one possibly expect a specific set of notes to be followed exactly, when there are myriad new relations to be negotiated, and an infinite number of paths of discussion to follow? In this account there is student work on the walls, by which they are recognized as being a part of the creation of the space, and their writing covers the boards; it is evidence of the cooperative learning of previous days, and it is not my place to erase it in order to put up my plans for the day. Not only will my plans not supplant previous thoughts without discussion, but I will not expect to be referred to by any title other than my first name. I refer to students by their first names, and treat them with the respect they are due as fellow human beings, and hope that they will do the same for me.

There is no lectern in this classroom, and no rows of desks to wander up and down. Instead, there is a comfortable space with a couch, and a series of grouped desks, or pods, which embody the importance of discussion and cooperative learning. These desks, of course, are not nailed to the floor, and there is always time for solitary contemplation, but most of the time it makes sense to have students grouped together

so that they might work together to take on topics of discussion, or to come up with them in the first place. I do not stare students down, but greet them at the door, and smile at them as their eyes meet mine. I do not stand behind a lectern and hide from them, but face them as they, respectful of the space and its inhabitants, turn off their phones and prepare for the day. When it is finally time for the class to begin, I open it by opening up to them. I tell them a few things about who I am, and open myself to questions. If we are not strangers, the students and I, then we are better prepared to learn together and help one another to examine our queries, and deeply held assumptions. If I am to do my best as a teacher, I must be prepared to know my students and to be known by them, from the first day we meet.

A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice *co-intentional* education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement. (Freire, 2005, p. 69)

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