GIVING THE GIFT WITH BOTH HANDS
A Sociocultural Approach to Arts Education

by

Kathy Neilson

B.A. University of British Columbia 1976

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APPROVAL

NAME   Kathy Neilson

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Chair   Slava Senyshyn

_____
Sharon Bailin, Professor
Senior Supervisor

_____
Kelleen Toohey, Professor
Member

_____
Michael Ling, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Simon
Fraser University
Examiner

Date   June 30, 2004

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Abstract

School is too miserable for too many students. That is the observation which initiated this thesis—a teacher's journey, from a starting point in arts education through various theoretical landscapes on a quest for a more just practice. The paper highlights ideas, viewpoints, and conclusions gleaned from explorations of aesthetic education, sociocultural, postmodern and critical perspectives, and synthesizes these into a vision of how schools might reconcile the conflicting social and individual goals of education to better address the needs of all students. It begins with the teacher's perception of her role as deeply conflicted and questions traditional assumptions about culture, knowledge, learning, and the intentions of schooling in the light of postmodern, critical, and poststructural theory. The second chapter explores sociocultural and intercultural viewpoints as alternatives to traditional concepts of learning and identity, and proposes integrating the apparently incompatible goals of education by making identity—rather than knowledge—the focus of curriculum design, suggesting a vision of education as intercultural participation. Comparing aesthetic theories and connecting sociocultural perspectives on language and art, the third chapter finds the educational model of intercultural dialogue already existing in some aesthetic education contexts and proposes its application in other discourses. The paper concludes with a practical outline of this alternative vision of education and the implications of these theoretical explorations for classroom practice.

Dedication

In memory of my mother, who provided both model and means, and whose gifts
always came from both hands

and

To Barclay, above all men

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INTRODUCTION…

FRIDAY FEATURE VINNIE the MILLIONAIRE

V innie Parker — a logger by trade, a rogue by reputation — won a million bucks this August playing the BC/49 lottery.

At the usually tame grip-'n-grin cheque presentation at B.C. Lottery offices in Victoria he was asked how he would spend his winnings.

"I'm going to blow it," he said, glaring at the cameras is if each lens represented a peep hole into hell.

KEN MacQUEEN
VANCOUVER SUN

"I spent plenty. Stuff that I wanted to do."

VINNIE PARKER

He'd buy muscle cars. He'd help some friends. He'd move out of the village-owned recreational vehicle park in Zeballos, nicknamed the Ghetto. He'd build a new Ghetto where he and his buddies can party.

"Just to piss the mayor off," he said.

With that, Parker grabbed his cheque and bailed out of Victoria, where he was born some 51 years ago. Mostly, he grew up in logging camps, his father worked in the industry, but he lived in Vancouver in his teens. He graduated from Point Grey high school.

"I don't like Victoria or Vancouver,"

says Parker. "Vancouver is a hell-hole." So, with a few detours, he returned home to Zeballos, a former gold rush settlement and logging village on the northwest coast of Vancouver Island.

He proceeded to spend.

He returned to his job at Western Forest Products. Vinnie Parker is a bucker, as his friends will attest.

Some of them are buckers, too, bucking fallen timber to size for hauling to the water's edge or over a nasty hour of gravel to the nearest highway.

He returned to the Ghetto and his 18-foot trailer, which has been kicked around some. After successive coats of paint, white, black and blue, it resembles a giant bruise.

It is hard to blow $1 million in isolation. It takes a village, as the saying goes, and Zeballos is happy to oblige.

To many here, he is a joyous echo of the Depression-era gold rush. Some claim he celebrated his luck by hiring two strippers to pose beside the "Welcome to Zeballos" sign, which would be in keeping with Zeballos' raunchy past.

True or not, it is now part of village folklore — as real as Suzie Woo, the Chinese laundress who haunts the Zeballos Hotel, or the cracked rail of the cemetery fence where the ghost of a dead miner is known to sit, or the false-front building that once housed a hardware store on the bottom and a bordello on top. A handyman's dream.

In Zeballos this fall everyone was talking about Vinnie Parker. Everyone, but Vinnie Parker.

"HARD-LUCK LOGGER ALL HIS LIFE"

Vinnie Parker has no telephone, but Mayor Clifford Pederson does.

So, Mayor Pederson, are you pissed off?

"No, not a bit." he said.

Yes, Parker is pressing ahead with plans for a new RV park, as well as a workshop for his mechanically minded 19-year-old son, Greg, Pederson reported.

Both will provide tax revenue for the village, the smallest incorporated community in B.C. It will also leave the municipal RV park a quieter place, with more spaces for tourists and itinerant workers.

"He's been a hard-luck logger all his life, and as far as I'm concerned, and the whole community here, we're happy for him. We're thrilled," Pederson said over the phone.

"And he's spending his money in the community, you can't ask for more than that."

He conceded that partying by Parker and friends had contributed to the Ghetto's reputation. "That's what some people call it. We don't like it very much," he said. "That's fine. That's how they want to live. That's up to them. You know, they don't have to live like that."

Yet, even back in Parker's drinking days, there wasn't a mean bone in his body, said the mayor, who has known him for about 20 years.

"I wish him the best and hope he uses his money wisely, and saves a bit for himself in the end."

On the phone from the Zeballos Hotel, owner Mark Whyte sketched in more details of Vinnie Parker's excellent adventure.

"He took my best bartender away," Whyte complained with a booming laugh.

Seems the bartender and her husband owned the finest piece of raw land in Zeballos, with a half-built house on it and a nice flat space for, say, an RV park.

About the first thing Parker did was buy the property. The bartender and husband left town, kind of like winners of their own personal lottery.

The new Ghetto will be kitty-corner across the road from the old Ghetto, said Whyte. "You could throw a rock from one to the other."

For now, the old Ghetto remains the base of operations. Parker lives in his little trailer, surrounded by buddies in their own trailers. Not much has changed. "They party anyways," said Whyte.

"Every Thursday night or so he comes over and buys a flat of beer for the boys, but he doesn't drink himself."

Parker has, however, acquired "toys." A jet ski, an all-terrain vehicle. Some old muscle cars.

"It's funny," said Whyte. "He's got three or four cars now so you'll see him four times a day in a different car."

Some things must be seen first-hand.

Plane tickets are booked to Campbell River. A Jeep is rented for the three-hour drive northwest to Zeballos. Neither the mayor nor the barkeep offer much hope that Parker will receive visitors.

"He doesn't like big cities. He doesn't like newspaper reporters," said the mayor.

"Vinnie will tell you how it is," said Whyte. "If he doesn't like you, he'll tell you he doesn't like you. And he'll tell you why he doesn't like you.

"Of course, he won't hold that against you."

1. Feature article by Ken MacQueen, **The Vancouver Sun,** *November 1999 (used with permission)*

Evening now. Out of the darkness snarls a jet black Barracuda, circa 1966. It rumbles over the one-lane bridge and turns into town. It prowls the only bit of pavement within an hour of here, maybe a kilometre's worth. Not enough to get a muscle car out of second gear.

A reporter sticks out his thumb. The 'cuda stops, the window rolls down. There, scowling out of a tobacco cloud, is Vinnie Parker.

They talk of cars. Of the superiority of the Chrysler over the Ford; specifically, of the Barracuda over its 1960s nemesis, the Mustang.

Maybe tomorrow night, he growls. "Drop by the RV park, I'll be around. The guys will be there anyway."

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR HORSEPOWER

The guys are there, Vinnie excepted, cracking the first beer of a Thursday evening. Guys like Doug and Jack, Ty, Jimmy and Gordie. Those with families down island will head out of Zeballos after work Friday for a weekend at home. Thursday is their night to howl.

Parker's dog Sitka — part wolf, part child — is chained outside the trailer. The black 1966 'cuda is parked to the left. A 1965 'cuda, red with racing stripes, is parked to the right. A new white Chrysler Sebring is opposite the trailer.

"There is no substitute for horsepower," as Parker will later explain.

"You don't have to use all you've got, but if you don't have enough, it really pisses you off." In Vinnie, veritas.

Sitka starts vibrating like a giant pager and the newest millionaire in Zeballos saunters into the Ghetto. Instantly the evening takes form and purpose.

First things first. He puts out food and fresh water for Sitka, and Sitka's pet cat, Mac. Mac was a stray that Sitka sort of adopted. The Parkers have a fondness for strays.

He peers skeptically from under his peaked cap, kind of half-wolf himself, before offering his visitors a calloused hand. He is all sinew and leather, tanned by the sun and smoked by a million unfiltered cigarettes.

He has lived in the Ghetto for about seven years now. The trailer cost him $1,000 and though his pals have threatened to burn it as no fit place for a millionaire, he says, "it still works."

It became home after the expense of a busted marriage and of child support. Parker raised his oldest son, Greg. His youngest child, Christopher, now 16, lives with the boy's mother in Courtenay.

He seems genuinely puzzled that a reporter and photographer would seek him out. "I'm just me," he says. "There's f— all interesting."

In truth, it is a little hard to explain. It is the age of lotteries, and million-dollar winners are hardly a rarity. Few, however, express such a healthy contempt for their newfound status. Few announce their intention to blow it on the finer things in life: cars and women and buddies. Few seem so unafraid of it all slipping away.

Sure enough, Parker was in Victoria that Monday. That Tuesday, he was on the front page of the *Victoria Times Colonist* under the headline: "Lottery millionaire ready 'to blow it.' Zeballos winner plans to host parties, find mate for his dog and annoy mayor."

He gave a heck of an interview. The story that eventually appeared in *Luck Magazine*, the official publication of the lottery corporation, was bland and sweet and tame. Under the headline "Millionaire Logger", it called him a muscle car enthusiast with dreams of "perhaps developing a recreational vehicle park." Which was true enough, as far as it went.

"What they printed was I was going to get a girlfriend for [Sitka]. What I told them was I was going to get a bitch and get him laid," he says. "I mean, if it's good enough for me, it's good enough for the damn dog."

Parker is drinking dealcoholized beer. He quit alcohol about five years ago, which is probably lucky for all concerned.

"I drank lots. I was really good at it," he says.

"I'm saving it for a retirement hobby. They say you should have a hobby that you're good at. That you enjoy. I'm pretty good at it and I enjoy it."

Besides, he has responsibilities, which is why he stays in his grotty little trailer while his son is already bunking out in the relative luxury of their new home across the street.

His job is to pound on the side of the trailers in the inky morning until a quorum of cussing, belching loggers is ready to report for duty. Company owner Herb Doman should know what a rough-cut jewel he has in Vinnie Parker.

"It's kind of a combination job," Parker explains. "I get 'em drunk and then I have to wake 'em up."

Lest anyone get the wrong impression, however, Parker stresses, not for the first time, "I'm not a nice person."

DREAMS OF A NEW GHETTO

He leaves his pals to their beer and strolls across the road to his new property, almost five acres from the road back into the bush. A chain-link fence already surrounds a section that will soon be the new Ghetto, once a friend's brother finishes the legalities.

The wash house goes there, he says, pointing to a hydro pole. "Five trailers there, and five over there," he says with a sweep of his hand. The septic field will be grassed over, "so they can bugger around, play with the Frisbees and footballs and everything."

There is a wheeled gate across the front drive. Each of the lads will have an exclusive code to punch into an electronic keypad to

roll open the gate. It's meant to keep out the riff-raff.

"No quiet people allowed in there, cause I can't sleep," he'd said earlier. "I can't sleep when it's quiet." Maybe he's joking, but don't bet on it. There will be a communal satellite dish. Over there, by the road, he talks of building a go-kart track.

Beyond the fence, on a rise, is the two-storey house, still a work in progress. He's adding a covered porch, which sets off the front nicely. Off the master bedroom will go a four-vehicle garage.

Beyond the house, in a hollow by the woods, a boy no more than nine is ripping along on a kid-sized all-terrain vehicle. Cutest damn thing, isn't it? Parker watches with the haywire grin he gets when others are having fun.

"I bought that the other day for the kids," he explains. His son Greg built the track. There's not much for little kids to do in Zeballos.

Greg emerges from the basement, where he's installing an outside door. Kids have been lining up all day to have a go at the little ATV, he reports. Father and son watch in admiration as the boy catches air over a jump, his head bobbing under a helmet like one of those spring-loaded dashboard dogs.

Greg is the handy one. He plans on getting his welding ticket next year, and opening a machine shop, right there, by the road. Greg has his own all-terrain vehicle, so elaborate it looks like it drove into Zeballos off the ramp of a lunar landing module.

It's been a great summer, Greg says with a shy grin. "It's pretty nice being able to have everything."

Now comes a special moment for any boy who grew up in the 1960s reading *Road and Track* magazine.

Vinnie walks under his carport and peels back a dust cover to reveal the graceful menace of a royal blue 1968 Dodge Charger R/T.

No pictures yet, he says, wiping it down with a white handkerchief. "I don't like pictures of it dirty."

He cracks the hood. "I'll show you things you've never seen in a car." The engine compartment is a gleaming monument to raw power: three inline carburetors gulping high-test and oxygen for the beast within.

His voice drops to an awed whisper, "440 cubic inches, close to 500 horsepower."

No computers. Nothing metric. No emission controls to sap its strength. "On the highway, if you hit it at about 70 miles an hour, it'll actually tear the tires loose. I'll go from 70 to 135 just in no time."

It is his world cruise. His stock portfolio. His art collection. His lottery dream made real. Then, as if he has revealed too much, he shuts the hood with a snort. "Just another toy," he says.

Walking back, he talks of two friends. There's Trevor with more kids than money. He's helping him get a rebuilt '68 Bronco on the road. There's Dougie, screwed in a real estate deal. He's guaranteed Dougie's mortgage so he can get back to restoring his '53 Harley-Davidson.

There is no substitute for horsepower.

A campfire burns at the Ghetto, in defiance of a village ordinance. It is ringed with loggers and spent beer cans.

Parker says he likes the mountains, and the people. And this: Buddies you can trust. Logging talk. Brews and b.s. Bad language. Worse jokes. "It's like the old bunkhouse days," he says. "Almost."

You haven't blown your money, have you, he is asked.

"I spent plenty," he says, defensive. "Stuff that I wanted to do."

There's also an investment home purchased in Campbell River, and a trailer to transport his cars. What this leaves in the bank is not a topic of polite conversation around the Ghetto.

A visitor pushes the point. "If it's stuff that you wanted to do, that's not really blowing it, is it?"

Parker breaks into a grin. "See," he tells the multitude, "finally somebody with a little bit of sense."

The fire burns low and the night creeps close. Talk turns to Mayor Pederson, how friendly he's been lately; how the Ghetto got a fresh load of gravel for about the first time since the ice age. Could it be, election time?

Vinnie Parker says he should run, take Pederson's job away. He considers this over a last near-beer, drinking it all in. "Why should I be mayor," he asks, "when I'm king."
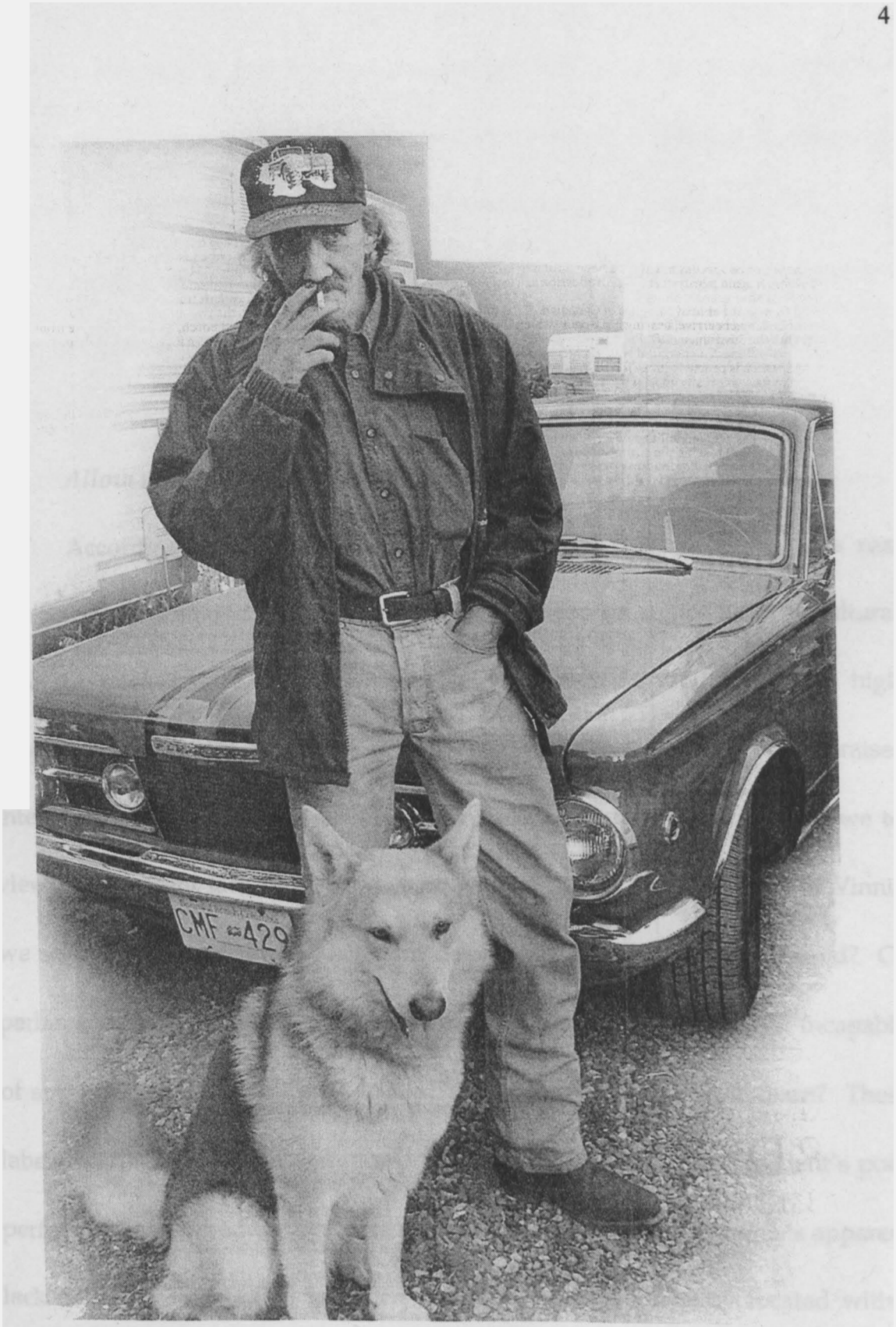
2. *Photo by Nick Didlick,* **The Vancouver Sun**, *November 1999 (used with permission)*

Allow me to introduce Vinnie...

According to his profile in the *Vancouver Sun* feature, Vinnie is 'a real character', a 'diamond in the rough'. Or, perhaps to some, he is a cultural illiterate, even a boor. In either case, and although he graduated from high school, Vinnie is not a member of the cultural elite. Vinnie's profile raises interesting questions for educators, particularly arts educators. How are we to view his apparent lack of refinement or sophistication? As educators of Vinnie we seem to have failed. With whom does the fault lie? Is he just stupid? Or perhaps learning disabled? As a student, was he unmotivated? Lazy? Incapable of appreciating the finer things in life? Or a rebel who refused to learn? These labels represent the most commonly accepted explanations for a student's poor performance in the education system. From this point of view, Vinnie's apparent lack of refinement is due to a personal flaw, some inadequacy located within himself. But is there another point of view from which to regard Vinnie's

"cultural illiteracy"? Is it possible that the problem is located in the education system itself rather than within Vinnie? In that case, what sort of education would be more effective—or is it possible that there is no problem at all?

Vinnie's profile is far from unique. Making some unjustified assumptions (i.e., going beyond the newspaper profile) but fairly safe ones nonetheless, based as they are on over twenty years of secondary school teaching experience, I think it unlikely that Vinnie was class president or valedictorian. I suspect that most of his teachers would have categorized him as one of those students who are deficit in some important personal quality necessary for access to the upper echelons of high school and eventually of adult society. Vinnie, like many students I have taught, may have performed relatively well in courses requiring technical or hands-on skills while achieving less success in—or perhaps avoiding altogether—the more abstract 'academic' subjects. It is safe to assume his success at school was not without limits. In a system dominated by the metaphor of children as empty vessels waiting to be filled up with culture transmitted by their teachers, Vinnie would appear to be a rather leaky vessel. Students like Vinnie who are identified as "less able" or "reluctant learners" are often counselled into classes where success is possible for those designated as unmotivated, lazy, rebellious, "disadvantaged", or learning disabled, and these identifications determine fairly reliably the nature of a student's participation in

the adult world. Many of my colleagues would agree that Vinnie's pre-lottery standing in society—being a logger instead of a lawyer—is a consequence of his lacking the qualities that would enable him to retain a sufficient amount of transmitted culture; if any educational failure has occurred, it is due to his personal inadequacies or bad choices, and so he has ended up where he belongs.

I wish to challenge this assessment of Vinnie, and the pedagogical assumptions on which it is based, and to offer some alternative views for consideration. Let us imagine the possibility that he is not "*uncultured*" but rather a member of a *sub*culture, that he did not come to school empty of culture, a poorly constructed vessel which leaked out much of what was poured in, but that he came to school—as all schoolchildren do—bearing the identity of the rich, colourful, complex culture of his home community. And at school, it is likely he found little congruence between his industrial, working class culture and the culture he was supposed to adopt as superior. Vinnie, it seems, took what he felt he needed or valued from school and left the rest behind. Is Vinnie's life now devoid of art, for instance? Or is it that the aesthetic elements of his life are simply not recognized in middle-class circles? Obviously his cars, especially the royal blue 1968 Dodge Charger R/T, are profoundly aesthetic objects for Vinnie, whereas his home is not. Music and drama are probably part of his daily routine, through TV, radio or movies—not in the same aesthetic discourse as live theatre

or classical music, but in the less formal genres of 'folk' or 'popular art'. Vinnie's culture is rich in forms of history, geography, rhetoric, biology, possibly poetry, certainly fiction—all intimately related to the people, the land, the workplace, the social gatherings of the local community. Vinnie is also quite possibly in command of a significant body of applied science acquired through his experiences as a logger and car buff. Clearly Vinnie is as thoroughly 'cultured' as any dentist or stockbroker, only his culture is not as socially valued, and he acquired relatively little of it at school.

A question arises: does Vinnie even need school at all? Beyond a functional level of literacy, why require him to submit to years of inculcation into what is essentially for him an alien culture? The most profound effect of his schooling seems to have been the conviction that he does not and never will belong in middle class society, money notwithstanding. There is virtually no middle class in Zeballos. There *Vinnie's* is the dominant culture, and he is quite sensibly using his lottery money to buttress his position within it. Is it necessary for him to become adept in another set of culture codes?

Vinnie's answer would probably be an emphatic "no"—and I think it is to a certain degree justifiable. If the question assumes that Vinnie comes into the educational arena empty of culture—that what is art for him is not really art, that what counts as knowledge in his community is just 'folklore' and not real

knowledge—and if aesthetic education for him means a rejection of his aesthetic choices as intrinsically and universally inferior to the 'fine art' aesthetic of the middle class, then his pugnacious response is justified.

From my perspective in the education system, school is a discourse which claims to offer equal access to all comers, but which in fact favours students with certain social positions and cultural backgrounds. Despite the naïve contentions of some teachers ("I teach kids, not math") and the creativity and dedication of others, and despite all the rhetoric about 'inclusion', a school ground is not a level playing field. While all of the teachers in my acquaintance would agree that terrible social injustices occur in Canadian society around issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class, most would deny that these elements of identity are relevant factors in their own classrooms. While most teachers respect and celebrate the wonderful range of identities that students bring into the classroom and would be wary of applying any rigid definitions of "normal" to their students, nevertheless all teachers participate daily in reinforcing norms of required behaviour and learning which privilege some students and marginalize others. The educational process, especially in high school, has become largely a quest not for learning but for garnering supposedly standardized, government mandated credentials. For too many Vinnies, school is a miserable experience, a long drawn out process of having their identities questioned and devalued, of being constantly assessed and

found wanting. For too many students, especially in high school, the curriculum as it is usually delivered is remote, baffling, and lifeless, the power relations oppressive and the jostling for social position viciously competitive, unjust, and exclusionary. Small wonder that some students develop Vinnie's attitudes of resistance.

However, the alienation of students like Vinnie is not a reason to capitulate to a false sense of what respect and inclusivity mean. For me, it is not acceptable for Vinnie to graduate from high school largely ignorant of the achievements of the western European culture on which Canadian traditions are built nor of the many other cultural influences that are now shaping and directing Canadian society. It is not sufficient to assert that because he already has a cultural identity he therefore doesn't need any more, thank you. It is not acceptable for anyone at any level of education or social standing to be wilfully ignorant of the points of view of other cultural groups. I can conceive of a world where schools cease to be sites for the transmission and consumption of a singular, packaged culture and begin to become places where the dominant culture is one among many which are honoured, explored, interrogated, compared, combined, and created. Teaching, in this world, becomes a process of initiating students into new cultural worlds, providing opportunities for their increasing mastery of diverse cultural skills and knowledge, encouraging their acceptance of or challenge to established

forms and attitudes, and inviting them to create products which connect their worlds with the world represented by the curriculum. Would this approach have made a difference to Vinnie? Yes, insofar as he would be regarded not as deficit, but as bearing certain cultural acquisitions and occupying a social position not entirely congruent with the cultural expectations of school. His teachers would offer him access to new identities and positions through the acquisition of culturally valued symbol codes, such as language usage or aesthetics, without denying the value of those in which he is already adept, and would encourage him to connect these officially recognized skills and knowledge with those forms valued in his home community. This kind of education would refuse to run roughshod over the individual in defense of the status quo. Rather the student would be invited to participate in the dominant culture while his own identity is honoured. The result should be new ideas, new knowledge, new forms, new identities: the transformation of both self and society.

Teachers live suspended in a complex and shifting web of exigencies. We are caught between the conflicting social and individual demands of our task. Survival requires balancing the needs of individual students against the needs of a large group—while constantly mediating between the cultural world represented by the curriculum and the wildly diverse cultural worlds of our students. It is as exhausting as it is stimulating, as frustrating as it is rewarding,

and over time it can exact a heavy personal toll. During my many years of teaching in BC public schools, I have struggled unsuccessfully to map out an effective, just, and safe pedagogical path through this quagmire of demands. Certainly there are no solutions to be found in the instrumentalist, technical approach to education which constitutes most of the professional development opportunities available to teachers. What possibilities, then, are suggested by examining some of the significant sociocultural, critical, poststructuralist and postmodern theories of culture, of aesthetics, of self, and of learning? What hope does this work offer to a teacher who seeks to make high school a safe, happy, deeply engaging, transformative experience for more than a handful of students. Can we do better by Vinnie's grandchildren?

Chapter One...

Giving with One Hand and Taking Away with the Other: a teacher's dilemma

I realized very early—at the end of my first term as a teacher—that something was wrong, that almost everything I believed about children and learning and everything I was trying to achieve in my classroom was being violated in the act of writing report cards. What I really wanted my students to learn was an appreciation of culture in its broadest sense, of the drama and scope of human endeavour. I wanted them to believe in their own individual worth and in the possibilities of their unique contribution to that great human project. Doing report cards forced me to categorize the same students I was trying to free, to impose limitations on them when all term long I had been trying to widen their scope of possibilities. This felt all wrong. At first I assumed the problem was in me. I began to doubt my own goals, to see them as naïve and idealistic. I

was, after all, a child of the '60s; perhaps it was inevitable that my philosophy would be shaped by unrealistic and utopian notions. I spent a large portion of the next twenty-some years thinking about, talking about, struggling with many pedagogical experiments—especially in methods of assessment and evaluation— trying to make my work congruent with a set of beliefs that I somehow couldn't quite shake and wrestling with questions about what I was doing: "Why are some obviously intelligent kids so resistant to learning? How can I bring what is meaningful for my students into the classroom? What is really important to teach?" Examining accepted notions of culture, knowledge, learning, and the traditional aims of schooling in the light of recent theoretical work helps to clarify the conflict I have long felt to be inherent in the task of teaching and suggests some directions for further investigation.

The Traditional View: Culture, Knowledge, and Learning

As I moved from a position of neophyte to veteran over the years—as a member of seven school staffs and many district committees and British Columbia Teachers Federation committees, as a participant in innumerable workshops and conferences, as a writer of curriculum for the BC Ministry of Education, and as an instructor of university education courses—I have met and discussed education with literally hundreds of educators in BC and beyond. In

all these years of collaborating formally and informally, socializing and 'talking shop', I have met with very little controversy over the concepts of 'culture', 'learning', and 'knowledge'. The work of postmodern, poststructuralist, and critical theorists has had little impact on the front lines of education. Culture, if and when it is ever brought up for discussion in department meetings or professional development sessions, is generally assumed to be singular, static, commodifiable, and universal. The business of teaching is understood to be the 'transmission' of, in Matthew Arnold's words, "the best which has been thought and said in the world"—discrete and divisible 'packages' of knowledge. This understanding of culture is assumed to be neutral and universal; the knowledge that is passed on in schools is "the truth", whereas other forms of knowledge or ways of being are "culturally biased".

> Knowledge in the dominant curriculum model is treated primarily as a realm of objective 'facts.' That is, knowledge appears 'objective' in that it is external to the individual and is 'imposed' on him or her. As something external, knowledge is divorced from human meaning and intersubjective exchange. It no longer is seen as something to be questioned, analyzed, and negotiated. Instead, it becomes something to be managed and mastered. (Giroux, 1981b: 101)

Although I think the word "imposed" applies to the circulation of knowledge through a mandated curriculum, I don't think most teachers describe themselves as "imposing" knowledge; "offering" or "delivering" curriculum are more common expressions. Challenges to curriculum content are superficial and

fleeting; such discussions, in my experience, rarely get beyond the rueful (sometimes despairing) agreement that there is "just too much to cover", and then slide off into an exchange of strategies for how best to "implement it" or "get through it all". The idea of knowledge as existing *outside* of students who need to *take it in* seems to be quite universal among teachers I have encountered.

Fundamental to this view of culture and knowledge is the notion of free and equal individuals as the basic building blocks of society. Most of my colleagues would not question the assumption that "the fundamental unit of social life is the individual and that the individual is a separate and particular entity" (Fay, 1996: 32) and that all our social relations, laws, politics, and economic relations are driven by the basic needs, abilities, and preferences of independent individuals. This emphasis on individual autonomy dominates the accepted conception of learning, as well. The language of authoritative educational documents characterizes learning as individual acquisition. The Ministry of Education's *Statement of Education Policy Order*, legislation enacted in 1989, "Part A: Mission Statement" reads:

> The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy. (BC Ministry of Education, 1989: D-84).

This language derives from "classical intellectualist theory" (Hanks, 1991) in which "it is the individual mind that acquires mastery over processes of

reasoning and description, by internalizing and manipulating structures"
(Hanks, 1991:15).

> The activity of understanding, in such a view, comes down to recognizing
> and implementing instances of structure, filling them in with an overlay of
> situational particulars, and relating them to a 'context' (which is in turn
> structured). Insofar as 'understanding' is something a person does in his
> or her head, it ultimately involves the mental representations of
> individuals. (ibid: 17)

For most teachers, this is a familiar description of a process they are responsible
for overseeing in their classrooms everyday. The concept of learning as the
individual's mastery of a body of curricular knowledge goes unchallenged in
most schools.

The aims of education: traditional assumptions

During countless conversations over the years I have observed that the
reason most teachers give for becoming a teacher (and for staying in the
profession in spite of what many feel to be the erosion of available resources and
support in recent years) centers on the joy of watching and sharing in the growth
of their students. Many describe the pleasure of their relationships with their
classes and with individual students and the delight they experience when they
are party to the expansion of a child's world. The nurturing of children as
individuals, helping to move them toward success in various endeavours, is
clearly at the heart of why most teachers teach. These same teachers generally

express equal commitment to the need to socialize their students. Although some would be uncomfortable with the word "socialize", they freely acknowledge a need to instil in their students acceptable ways of being in school and in society. Robin Barrow, in *Giving Teaching Back to Teachers* (1984), articulates this widespread point of view:

> Socialisation is a relatively straightforward notion and obviously requires that we impart to students knowledge of their culture, including awareness of its place and time. They need to know what their society is like and what it expects of them, something about how their culture arose and the cultural differences with which it is to be contrasted. (Barrow, 1984: 95)

For Barrow, as for most teachers, the educational goals of imparting knowledge and understanding on the one hand and socializing children to the dominant culture on the other seem perfectly compatible.

So these are the beliefs that define the task that most teachers have accepted without question: that knowledge selected by government-appointed experts needs to be logically and manageably packaged, that it can be transmitted to students by educated professionals, that learning is the acquisition of that knowledge by the individual mind, and that the central functions of teaching are to deliver the knowledge in engaging ways, to measure and rank students according to the success with which they display its acquisition, and to inculcate socially acceptable values and behaviour. None of this seems to trouble most teachers I have met.

But something is missing...

I find all this deeply troubling, however. For me, the act of teaching is a dilemma. I find myself teetering on a knife-edge between two irreconcilable tasks, tilting to one side for a while and then to the other. I attempt to offer my students encounters with new knowledge, skills, practices, values—the potential for an expanded world—but always within mandated and rigid schedules, codes for behaviour and dress, required demonstrations of productivity—the markers of well socialized students. All term long I strive to provide opportunities for engaging with valued knowledge and cultural practices by means that will allow each student to incorporate those practices into their lived worlds in personally meaningful ways—and then at the end of the term I am required to assign each one to a place on an established, steeply graded hierarchy of identities. Teaching feels to me like giving with one hand while taking away with the other.

While I am unwilling to relinquish what I see as a strength of the traditional view—that we are active agents situated in more or less constrained positions who shape through our individual choices and actions the communities in which we participate—I believe that it fails to acknowledge the constraints of schooling that contribute to the alienation of large numbers of students and a narrowing of the possibilities of personal growth. On the front

lines of pedagogy, the most widely accepted, traditional aims of education and conceptions of knowledge and learning seem to justify educational practices that unintentionally guarantee the success of some students and the subordination of others. For example, the sequestering of children from other communities of practice into long, passive hours in desks, the presentation of knowledge in sharply delineated disciplines, and the ubiquitous use of textbooks, chapter questions, lectures, and written exams—these are all educational practices built on the common assumptions of knowledge as transmissible and learning as taking place in a disembodied mind. These tasks, though ostensibly designed to impart valued knowledge and improve students' minds, in practice serve to ensure that only a small number of students will successfully reach that desired outcome. It does not seem at all clear to me that a student who performs well on these narrowly literate (and overwhelmingly sedentary) tasks is necessarily possessed of a superior mind than those who do not, and yet teachers repeatedly assign a rank to each student based on these nearly-universal pedagogical practices.

An investigation of several poststructuralist and critical perspectives has helped me to understand better why the intellectualist perspective and its attendant practices continue to dominate the pedagogical landscape.

Linking power and knowledge

"Power" is a word which seems to carry negative connotations for many teachers: they are reluctant to identify themselves as wielding power in their classrooms. They believe the curriculum consists of neutral, "true" knowledge which they do not regard as biased, situated, or selected. Over the years I have worked with a number of teachers who expressed shock at the idea that the school system might be inherently unjust, that there might be factors beyond individual merit or intelligence at work in a child's success or failure. Racism, sexism, distinctions of social class might be sad facts of life in Canadian society, but none of these exist in their classrooms. Critical theorists, on the other hand, such as Henry Giroux and Michael Apple contend that socioeconomic power is fundamental in concepts of culture, knowledge, learning and identity. They question the assumption of neutrality behind the conventional view of knowledge and of schools.

> Traditional curriculum represents a firm commitment to a view of rationality that is ahistorical, consensus oriented, and politically conservative. It supports a passive view of students and appears incapable of examining the ideological presuppositions that tie it to a narrow operational mode of reasoning. (Giroux, 1981b: 102)

> [P]ower is not always visible as economic manipulation and control. It is often manifest as forms of helping and as forms of 'legitimate knowledge', forms which seem to provide their own justification by being interpreted as neutral. (Apple, 1990: 141)

Madeleine Grumet puts it even more bluntly: "Schools have never been neutral places. For centuries, schools have been places where some people's children learn to be subordinate to other people's children" (Grumet, 1988: 181). These theorists see a strong correlation between economic power and the power to define what is considered knowledge. Schools are implicated in this interweaving of economic and cultural power. So if the selection of some cultural forms and practices over others is ultimately a function of economic power, then what is worth knowing and how we deal with those who do not demonstrate the required learning are ideologically tied to preserving the economic status quo.

> Schools not only control people; they also control meaning. Since they preserve and distribute what is perceived to be 'legitimate knowledge'— the knowledge that we all must have—schools confer cultural legitimacy on the knowledge of specific groups.[2] But this is not all, for the ability of a group to make its knowledge into 'knowledge for all' is related to that group's power in the larger political and economic arena. Power and culture, then, need to be seen, not as static entities with no connection to each other, but as attributes of existing economic relations in a society. [Apple, 1990: 63-64]

The majority of students with whom I have worked are profoundly aware of and often frustrated by the inequalities built into the school system. But there are many teachers, parents, and administrators who are not. As Michael Apple puts it, "Schools latently recreate cultural and economic disparities, though this is not what most school people intend at all" (Apple, 1990: 34). Recognizing that

knowledge, and in particular selected curricular knowledge, is not neutral is the first step in untangling the apparently conflicting aims of education.

Normalization: techniques of power...

It is not surprising—nor is it a deficit of intelligence or concern—that teachers are blind to the political nature of their work. Most teachers are among the most successfully schooled adults in our society. Although many in my experience have numerous complaints about the nature of their work and about what they see as the limits imposed on their possibilities for success, they typically blame either themselves, or particular students, or a lack of resources. It does not occur to many teachers that, just as the economic system needs to ensure an uneven distribution of economic capital in order to maintain the power of those who possess it, the education system is designed to distribute cultural capital unequally toward the same end. They would be horrified and outraged at McDermott's assertion that "Before any teachers of children enter the schools every September, failure is in every room in America. There is never a question of whether everyone is going to succeed or fail, only of who is going to fail." (McDermott, 1993: 295). And yet this is precisely the case that poststructuralist Michel Foucault so powerfully makes in his analysis of systems of social control in institutions—including schools—in *Discipline and Punish* (1995). Through the constant use of surveillance, evaluation, documentation, and punishment or

reward, individuals are rated, and categorized against hierarchies of norms. The individual becomes a "case" to be "described, judged, measured, compared with others...to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc." (Foucault, 1995: 191). In schools, as in prisons, hospitals, and factories, categories of identity exist to which all individuals are assigned, and these identities become very difficult to escape or alter.

> School personnel promote certain school standards, ensure the continual and individual observation of each student, and on the basis of a variety of evaluation, recording and sanctioning practices characterize students with respect to their relation to these valued standards. Moreover, students assess their own worth as a result of these same procedures. (Ryan, 1989: 391)

For students, this normalizing pressure often creates deep anxiety and attitudes of resistance like Vinnie's. Most teachers believe, some passionately, in "maintaining standards"; however, few would acknowledge that failing students is a requirement of the system. Foucault's analysis of power structures suggests exactly that, however. He shows how, by associating crime with the character of the offender, the penal system "produces" delinquency. The abolition of crime is not the goal:

> The prison, and no doubt punishment in general, is not intended to eliminate offences, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them; ... In short, penalty does not simply 'check' illegalities; it 'differentiates' them, it provides them with a general 'economy'.... [T]he differential administration of illegalities through the mediation of penalty forms part of those mechanisms of domination. . . The 'failure' of the prison may be understood on this basis. (Foucault, 1995: 272)

Just as the penal system can be seen as an "economy" for the distribution of 'moral capital', the education system functions as an 'economy of selected knowledge'. In spite of the sincere intentions of educators, the abolition of ignorance is not the goal of the school system.

> We shall have to recognize that, like poverty, poor achievement is *not* an aberration. Both poverty and curricular problems such as low achievement are integral products of the organization of economic, cultural, and social life as we know it. (Apple, 1990: 33)

And just as 150 years of "penal reform" have wrought no change in the structure of the prison system (Foucault, 1995: 271), vast expenditures of resources on 'educational reform' produce the same result. "Is not the supposed failure part of the functioning of prison?" (Foucault, 1995: 271)—"or of schooling?" we could add. The goal is unchallenged cultural reproduction, and schools—and prisons—are succeeding admirably. According to this body of theory, the act of teaching entails an exercise of power designed to control the future of society rather than to open it up for students.

These critical and poststructuralist perspectives help to make sense of several difficulties with the assumptions voiced by Barrow and held by most teachers. First of all, Barrow consistently refers to "the dominant culture" as though it exists as a singular entity:

> There is a strong case to be made for the school seeking to emphasise and initiate all children into the dominant culture. (I am presuming that the

culture in question is not thought to be inherently objectionable. If it were to be regarded as obnoxious, that would raise different issues.) (Barrow, 1984: 88)

For Barrow, this singular culture is clearly distinguishable from 'other' or 'sub' cultures. I have heard this distinction commonly assumed in teacher conversations about curriculum or student behaviour; however, this is a difficult perspective to defend in our hybrid postmodern society. Second, Barrow's parenthetical dismissal of any likely objections to "the dominant culture"— another sentiment that would raise few eyebrows in the staff rooms with which I am familiar—although possibly more tenable at the time he was writing, no longer reflects the multiplicity of beliefs and values represented in Canadian classrooms. It is entirely conceivable that any classroom might include students who (or whose families), for example, find the nonchalant excesses of Canadian consumerism "obnoxious" or the recent re-definition of marriage by the Ontario and BC judicial systems "inherently objectionable". When the values of a child's 'home culture' (and this is not necessarily an ethnic or religious distinction—such cultural differences may be based on social class, gender, geography, etc, although Barrow acknowledges only "immigrant cultures" as subcultures), clash with the values that a teacher sees as representing the "dominant culture", the socializing of that child becomes problematic. The singularity of culture and the processes of socialization cannot be taken for granted in the way that Barrow and

most teachers do. As Foucault demonstrates, socializing amounts to a limiting of identities—an often unwitting though nonetheless crushing disregard for the identities that some students bring with them into the classroom. It is difficult to square this unintended insult with the commitment to 'nurturing' each individual child, and yet few teachers seem to recognize this inherent conflict.

The aims of schooling analyzed...

Kieran Egan, in *The Educated Mind* (1997), describes this conflict as an "incompatibility". He traces the historical bases for the three main aims of schooling—to socialize, to train the intellect, to nurture individual potential—and demonstrates how each of these aims tends to undercut the others so that none of them can be fully realized.

> In the case of the modern school, three distinctive aims have attended its development. It is expected to serve as a significant agency in socializing the young, to teach particular forms of knowledge that will bring about a realistic and rational view of the world, and to help realize the unique potential of each child. These goals are generally taken to be consistent with one another, somewhat overlapping, and mutually supportive.... However, each of these aims is incompatible in profound ways with the other two. As with prisons' aims to punish and to rehabilitate, the more we work to achieve one of the schools' aims, the more difficult it becomes to achieve the others. (Egan, 1997: 10)

The inability of schools to reconcile these goals is the "primary cause of our long-continuing educational crisis" (ibid: 3), the product of which is "alienation and emotional as well as intellectual dessication" (ibid: 7).

> The traditional social efficiency, liberal academic, and progressive proposals have been tried and tried again; continuing to wobble from one to another will only exacerbate the confusion about schools' roles and perpetuate the blaming and the now stale and futile arguments about how to make things better. At best, schooling is a set of flaccid compromises among these three great and powerful ideas. (ibid: 24)

This vivid depiction of the daily struggle confronting teachers and administrators rings true for me—with one adjustment.

The dominance of the social over the individual...

In the crucible of classroom practice I find the three competing aims become reduced to two, and only one of these is the ultimate residue. The drive to socialize, at least in high schools, reliably overwhelms the other two impulses. The Platonic ideal of shaping the mind through the acquisition of knowledge is the first to fall. Drawing on the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, Egan himself recognizes as problematic the goal of 'training the individual mind':

> The mind is not an isolable thing like the brain inside its skull; it extends into and is constituted of its sociocultural surroundings, and its kinds of understanding are products of the intellectual tools forged and used in those surroundings. (ibid: 30)

As well, he acknowledges the difficulty of selecting the appropriate knowledge:

> Making "knowledge" the central building block of education creates the problem of determining what knowledge, and how much breadth and depth of that knowledge, is required to become adequately educated. (ibid: 25)

Ling expands on this point:

The problem with the cataloguing, encyclopaedic approach to 'what is worth knowing' and 'culture', then, is two-fold. First, the encyclopaedia will always potentially get larger, simply by virtue of the fact that new experiences are always emerging, new stories are told, new artifacts are made. But, secondly, there are always selective social processes at work involved in determining what gets admitted into the encyclopaedia, processes that are always guided by interests and prejudices (whether benign or nefarious). (Ling, 1999: 73)

As Foucault and the critical theorists have shown, the selection of curricular knowledge reflects the interests of dominant social groups and becomes a technique for privileging some students and subordinating others. In practice, the Platonic goal of imparting disciplined knowledge and developing rational intellect becomes reduced to 'covering the curriculum' and using it as a yardstick against which students can be measured and sorted. The curriculum and the usual means of delivering it ultimately serve very much as tools for the homogenizing requirements of socialization. This is not to say that we must then drop the developing of knowledge as a goal of education, but to point out that in practice many widely accepted means of expanding a student's knowledge serve a social function rather than an individual one. On the other hand, the Rousseauian impulses toward nurturing the individual, allowing for different stages and styles of learning, and promoting active individual inquiry, provide some counter-balancing weight against the drive toward socialization—so we are left with an educational plan that strains to unite two opposing goals: the

social/normalizing and the individual/particularizing. Egan sees attempts to reconcile these as futile:

> They are incompatible because socializing has a distinct end in view and is a shaping, homogenizing, narrowing process toward that end, whereas supporting the fullest development of student potential involves releasing students to explore and discover their uniqueness; this is an individualizing process that encourages distinctiveness even to the point of eccentricity, if necessary, and is expansive without predetermined end. (Egan, 1997: 22)

Michael Ling also characterizes this as a two-way struggle, "a dynamic or a see-saw between a socializing impulse and a psychological impulse to schooling, ...between a 'transmissive' and a 'transformative' tendency, a dynamic between 'enculturation' and 'acculturation'" (Ling, 1999: 51). Whether we regard it as a two- or a three-sided problem, the attempt to address equally the competing needs of society vs. the individual cannot succeed; they cannot be collapsed into a single unitary intention, and educators are forced to vacillate from one to the other.

School administrators and teachers do indeed, as Egan claims, strive to find a balance, struggling to "ensure a reasonably adequate socialization of students, provide a reasonable academic program, and enable as many students as seem suited to it to progress as far as possible, and attend to the different needs and potential of each student" (Egan, 1997: 23). However, in my experience, the socializing intentions dominate. Even in the Rousseau-

influenced intentions of "attending to individual needs" and "enabling" as many students as possible, we can see evidence of Foucault's "technologies of power" (Foucault, 1995) at work: monitoring, assessing, differentiating according to predetermined identities. Although the intention is usually expressed as 'adapting the curriculum to meet individual needs', the ultimate effect of these practices is to limit rather than to expand the future possibilities for students, particularly for those identified as needing support (McDermott, 1993; Toohey, 2000). David Hornbrook points out how the word 'need', even when benevolently intended, represents a move toward control:

> The pervasive employment of the word 'need' tends not only to internalise and contain dissent but also, unless clearly predicated, implicitly perpetuates the powerlessness and underprivilege of those to whom it is applied. (Hornbrook, 1998: 93)

In schools, a teacher's wish to help is not simply a neutral and caring gesture, but one fraught with political and social implications of power. The drive to sort and identify students co-opts even the most nurturing impulse. The capitulation of other impulses to the normalizing function is also evident in the conversations of teachers. One of the most frequent examples concerns their perceived inability to maintain a commitment to a 'child-centred' pedagogy. I have heard a number of pre-service teachers describe admonitions from their host teachers along the lines of the following:

"Yeah, well, that's what they teach you at the university, but you wait till you get your own classroom. Then let's see how long you can keep it up."

Or:

"Yes, I used to be like that too. I was really child-centred when I first started...but the system kind of beats it out of you, you know? I teach 150 kids every single day. How am I supposed to individualize instruction to meet 150 different sets of needs?"

James Ryan (1989) describes very poignantly the experience of finding himself unable to address the needs of individual students, particularly those often marginalized in the school system:

> At this point I had what I believed to be a good understanding of just how the schooling practices affected many young Innut. I went into the classroom initially believing I could find alternate ways to teach that would alleviate potential student stress. This was not to be the case. I found myself shackled to those teaching practices that I as a former student and teacher had been immersed in for years. (Ryan, 1989: 399)

In spite of his awareness of the ways that schools participate in "a firmly entrenched administrative apparatus that dismantles minority cultures and marginalizes minority people" (ibid: 398), Ryan was unable to counteract the drive to establish classroom routines that served socialization processes rather than the development of individuals. In the task of teaching, what looks in theory to be juggling act involving three competing intentions turns out in practice to involve only two, and—although one bears the weight of two—it's the lighter one that more often gets dropped.

So now I understand the feelings of conflict that have dogged my years in the classroom. Can these theoretical stances offer any solutions? Is there a way of integrating the various functions of schooling into a more coherent process? Or a way of shifting the emphasis of socialization away from control and categorization toward processes that are more inclusive and willing to honour a wider range of identities?

I am not, let me emphasize, arguing against the need for curriculum or for schools to socialize children: if we agree that by "socialize" we mean that schools acquaint students with socially accepted practices and socially valued knowledge and present these as contextualized and selected from a universe of possible and existing forms, then I support the call for a curriculum that enshrines some of that knowledge as a means of ensuring that all kids are *entitled* to its access. As David Hornbrook puts it:

> To deny young people critical access to tradition in the name of a specious identification of 'need' and the phantasm of 'empowerment' is to remove them even further from meaningful access to the hierarchies of control. (Hornbrook, 1998: 99)

Like Egan, I want to *"reconceive* education in a way that preserves adequate socialization, academic cultivation, and individual development" (Egan, 1997:24; italics his). I support his call for replacing the current curricular 'knowledge packages' with "mediating intellectual tools and the kinds of understanding they generate" in much more imaginative activity on the part of both teachers and

students. However, I see a danger inherent in coupling the notions of "cognitive tools" and "kinds of understanding" in a framework of progressive stages of development. Egan himself acknowledges that his conception might appear "too tidy" or "reductivist", a charge which I think he defends successfully—but the danger lies in the practical application rather than in the theoretical conception. The drive toward categorization, order, and labelling that so dominates schooling possesses the potential to co-opt the categories of "cognitive tools" and "kinds of understanding" and turn them into prescribed curricular "knowledge, skills, and attitudes" to be sequenced, dispensed and measured in a manner similar to, as I argued earlier, the appropriation of knowledge; Egan's suggestions are vulnerable to becoming a new, enlightened 'program' or to being reconceived as stages of development that correspond to the hegemonical grade categories. Teachers, isolated as they are from the world of theory—which usually comes filtered through the voices of administrators—and besieged by a cacophony of demands in a world built on values of order, sequence, and sharp boundaries, are vulnerable to—even eager for—plans, programs, things that 'work', that make the job easier, that seem to provide answers. This is the danger I see in Egan's proposal. "Cognitive tools" and "kinds of understanding" could too easily become 'prescribed learning outcomes' that serve the gate-keeping social function of education at the expense of the individual. Can we conceive of

a set of educational goals that preserves what is worthy in the current educational plan but that manages to hold the ground of individual transformation against the powerful, narrowing pressures of socialization?

Summary

We have arrived at the point of questioning the wisdom of setting 'developing the mind' or 'transmitting knowledge' or 'developing individual potential' as central goals of education. It seems that the traditional understandings of culture as singular, static and quantifiable, of knowledge as neutral, and of learning as disembodied cognitive activity are problematic. If the critical and poststructuralist theorists are to be accepted, then creating and administering a curriculum based on knowledge categories is extremely effective in meeting the socialization demands of education, but devastatingly *un*successful at providing genuine and equal opportunities for growth for *all children*. If Egan's plan falls prey to the same hegemonic forces, what then does the educational critique suggest as an alternative to traditional curriculum and the goals of schooling? Can I find a way to give the gift with both hands?

Chapter Two...

Beyond Pro-D: imagining an alternative vision

"What is the point of education? Wow, I haven't heard that question since my teacher-training year. Let's see...I'll have to think about it for a minute. Just let me return these two phone calls from parents and fill out a deposit slip for the field trip money I collected this morning. I could think while I'm walking back upstairs to my room—I need to make sure I have enough copies of Macbeth for tomorrow's English 11 class. (If I don't, I'll have to go down to the basement to get some more. That'll take a while—I could think a bit while I'm going down there). And then I need to make two overhead transparencies and a set of handouts, if the photocopier is fixed yet, before I go to the staff meeting. On the way home I have to pick up a new CD for my dance course and get some groceries—but I could probably do a bit of thinking while I'm driving. After supper, let's see...the kids have piano lessons, and we can't skip our nightly chapter of Lord of the Rings. When they're in bed I must remember to pay some bills by phone and answer a couple of e-mails. I also have a class set of projects to mark, but that should be done by 11:30 or midnight. I'm not going to be able to do much thinking till I get in the bath, and I really won't be at my best by then—but, really, it's such a good question, isn't it?"

The nature of teaching militates against serious thinking. Although many teachers express a need for and valuing of reflection, and 'becoming a reflective practitioner' is a staple element in teacher-training programs, very few teachers in my acquaintance can actually manage to do it. Between meeting the needs of

large numbers of students and the demands of the educational institution—never mind juggling the commitments to family and personal life—teachers are left with little time for reflection on their work. Of those teachers in my acquaintance who are so inclined, many find that the rewards of study groups or university courses do not outweigh the expenditure of time and money required. The net effect is to have more commitments to juggle, and these are usually the first to be dropped. Even for those whose inclination and resources make it possible to maintain a commitment to reflection, often the focus of the course or study group is toward improving curriculum delivery, developing classroom management or assessment techniques, or comparing various philosophical positions in support of existing educational structures. Questions of theory such as "what should we teach?" and "why that knowledge?" or "how should schools be structured?" are answered by experts far removed from classrooms, and the answers are handed down in the form of Ministry or District policy statements, legislative acts, and curriculum packages. Teachers are expected to be expert technicians, skilled in delivering curriculum, not necessarily scholars of educational philosophy. However, my quest for answers to my own conflicted position as a teacher and to the kinds of questions raised by Vinnie's story eventually helped me to articulate an alternative to the traditional aims of schooling.

Alternatives to the traditional views...

I   Culture

My search led me to theories that define learning, culture, and knowledge

as much more fluid and loosely delineated than those on which most schooling is

postulated.   Poststructuralist and critical theory offers a definition of culture as

dynamic, multiple, diverse, contested, and ambiguous.   Culture is not a

monolithic, packageable entity but an ongoing *process*: "a continuing production:

a development, or interlocking genesis that is actually a co-development of

identities, discourses, embodiments, and imagined worlds that inform each

moment of joint production and are themselves transformed by that moment"

(Holland *et. al*, 1998: vii).   Or, as anthropologist Brian Fay puts it:

> Cultures are neither coherent nor homogeneous nor univocal nor
> peaceful. They are inherently polyglot, conflictual, changeable, and open.
> Cultures involve constant processes of reinscription and of transformation
> in which their diverse and often opposing repertoires are re-affirmed
> transmuted, exported, challenged, resisted, and redefined. (Fay, 1996: 61)

And cultures are far from neutral:

> Traditionally divorced from class, power, and conflict, the concept of
> culture has been reduced to an anthropological or sociological object of
> study that has not only obscured more than it has revealed but also, more
> often than not, has tilted over into an apology for the status quo. A more
> fruitful starting point would politicize culture by acknowledging that the
> distinction between power and culture is a false one. (Giroux, 1981a: 420)

I find this challenge issued to the traditional view of culture a welcome one. Many values which underpin the day-to-day work of teaching—faith in a standardized curriculum, reliance on print media, the supremacy of literacy over many other forms of expression, the acceptance of a lock-step grade system with standardized scope-and-sequence charts—are called into question by this view of culture as fluid and dynamic and shaped by social forces. Such a concept challenges the traditional understanding of knowledge and learning described in Chapter One and suggests a reconception of curriculum design and classroom practice.

II   Identity

Crucial to any concept of education but never discussed in professional conversations is the question of how we conceive of identity. Alongside the modernist concept of culture, all teachers of my acquaintance accept Cartesian mind-body dualism as a 'true' representation of identity. The concept of a reasonably stable, inner, essential self is taken for granted and provides the foundation for educational philosophy and practice aimed at "developing the child's potential" or helping children "discover who they really are". The postmodern/poststructuralist proposition of a non-essential, shifting, multiple self, defined in dialogue with others, is unfamiliar to most and would be anathema to many. Yet this shift in concept of self suggests profound

possibilities for praxis. There are three questions regarding the dialogical self that need to be clarified: (1) which of several dialogic perspectives is the most fruitful for this discussion? (2) how do we understand the concept of agency from this perspective? (3) how is consistency taken into account?

Which 'Dialogical Self'?

More than one recent theoretical perspective has proposed a concept of identity as constituted in dialogue. The traditional monological inner self, "a Cartesian entity sealed into its own individual and self-contained subjectivity" (Harré & Gillett, 1994: 22), has been challenged by several sociocultural and postmodern perspectives that describe the self as located in particular social contexts and manifest only in discourse—a dialogical self which is the intersection point in a vast matrix of social discourses:

> The self is not a given thing which has experiences; it is the activity of owning certain experiences. As such, the self would then not be a fixed entity with definite boundaries but a process whose nature was fluid and changeable depending on the sorts of self-referrings undertaken...the self is not a noun but a verb. (Fay, 1996: 39)

> The difference between the mind or personality as seen in this way and the traditional view is that we see it as dynamic and essentially embedded in historical, political, cultural, social, and interpersonal contexts. It is not definable in isolation. (Harré & Gillett, 1994: 25)

However, these various theoretical perspectives are not necessarily unified in their description of the degree of agency which they accord to an

individual fashioning an identity in discursive space. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain describe a distinction between the "constructivist" view, which sees identity as predominantly defined by an individual's social positioning in various contexts, as compared with the "culturalist" view, which claims that individuals act primarily according to the values of their culturally constructed worlds (Holland *et al*, 1998:11-13). They argue that neither of these two perspectives can provide a full account of identity, nor can they be reconciled into a single position, but that both contribute valuable insights toward the understanding of identity, not the least of which is that human social activity often requires us to operate from several (possibly conflicting) perspectives at any given moment. "Humans are both blessed and cursed by their dialogic nature—their tendency to encompass a number of views in virtual simultaneity and tension, regardless of their logical compatibility" (ibid: 14-15). The dialogic perspective, built on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), allows the integration of both constructivist and culturalist positions into a single comprehensive viewpoint on identity.

For Bakhtin, language is the essential tool or medium that allows us to create our social and cultural worlds and our places in them. Language is neither singular, nor unified, nor stable, but rather a "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin, 1981) of voices from which, constrained by social context and position, we

appropriate and adapt a voice to suit our own intentions at that moment. It is not always easy to break into the cacophonous "chain of utterances":

> For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world.... The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property; many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; ... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; ... Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (Bakhtin, 1981: 293-294)

The self, then, can be thought of as a *momentary* position in an ongoing dialogue with many 'others', a position which is addressed by and which responds to the voices which constitute the world. "In answering (which is the stuff of existence), the self 'authors' the world—including itself and others" (Holland *et al*, 1998: 173).

Part of the process of "coming to voice" (Toohey, 2000: 13) is the necessity of recognizing which voices are available and which are not and learning to adapt those which are.

> The ideological becoming of a human being, in this view, is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others.... One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse. (Bakhtin, 1981: 341-348)

Bakhtin distinguishes between the influences of "the authoritative discourse" and "the internally persuasive discourse" (ibid: 342). The authoritative discourse cannot be tampered with; it is remote, established and static. "It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact. Its language is a special (as it were, hieratic) language" (ibid: 342). This is the language of policies, strictures, dogma, curriculum. This voice is not available for appropriation by an individual; one may only take a stance in relation to its monolithic presence. Many other discourses are, however, accessible and may become "internally persuasive". These are the languages that interanimate each other as we assimilate and adapt and apply them in order to makes sense of our experience. The possibilities are infinite as we appropriate and recombine semantic elements in new situations to make new meanings: "in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*" (Bakhtin, 1981: 346, italics in original). So identity in these terms is a matter of separating our own "internally persuasive" discourse from the authoritarian, enforced discourses, creating a voice in response to those around us. 'Being' essentially

means taking a stance, or rather *fashioning* a stance from the resources that are available. As Charles Taylor expresses it:

> We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression.... No one acquires the languages needed for self-definition on their own. We are introduced to them through exchanges with others who matter to us.... We define (ourselves) always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognize in us. (Taylor, 1991: 33)

This Bakhtinian viewpoint on identity, accounting as it does for both the culturalist and constructivist stances, is the one I want to address in this discussion.

What this perspective offers above others is the recognition of the element of creativity in human interaction: we are not merely compelled to act out the social laws of prestige or culture; rather, we are agents who construct ourselves at the point of intersection between our individual experiences and our social contexts. Holland *et al* emphasize the significance of improvisation as the hallmark of agency in their observations of widely differing social groups. People will "opportunistically use whatever is at hand to affect their position in the cultural game" (Holland *et al*, 1998: 279). The self thus conceived is far removed from the traditional concept of a singular, more-or-less stable, inner being, and appears now as something multiple, shifting, unstable, and adaptive.

What About Consistency?

A question of consistency arises here. If I create and recreate my 'selves' anew in different social situations, how can I even identify myself with the first person singular "I"? How do we explain the frequent practice and wide acceptance of identifications such as "she is lazy", "he is a wise person", "you are generous", or "I am a terrible cook"? The answer lies in the concept of identity as contextualized. Holland *et al* use the notion of "figured worlds" to encompass the range of 'discursive spaces' which comprise human society and within which an individual locates and identifies himself or herself:

> Figured worlds take shape within and grant shape to the coproduction of activities, discourses, performances, and artifacts. A figured world is peopled by the figures, characters, and types who carry out its tasks and who also have styles of interacting within, distinguishable perspectives on, and orientations toward it... They also provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self—that is, develop identities. (Holland *et al*, 1998: 51-60)

As participants in and co-creators of 'figured worlds', individuals seek, negotiate, establish or appropriate positions within social contexts which both enable and constrain. Our past experiences and the cultural resources and constraints which obtain in any particular instance all contribute to the choices we make at that moment. "The constraints are overpowering, yet not hermetically sealed" (ibid: 18). The range of perceived possibilities and the responses of others tend to shape a certain degree of consistency in an

individual's behaviour. "There must be periods (and these periods may even be the majority) during which one's authorial stance becomes stable, or, in our terms, an identity becomes habituated, usual, common...and [its] production has moved out of awareness" (ibid: 189-190). Our universal need to make sense of the world also, according to Harré and Gillett (1994), constrains individual subjectivity into relative integrity over time:

> I inhabit many different discourses each of which has its own cluster of significations. Some of these...will conflict with one another and require negotiation and adjustment to be cotenable.... Most of us will fashion a complex subjectivity from participation in many different discourses that tend mutually to illuminate one another to some extent and therefore to constrain the significations we apply to a given situation. (Harré & Gillet, 1994: 25)

Some theorists also emphasize the importance of narrative in the fashioning of a consistent identity. Fay asserts "agency is possible precisely insofar as an agent's experience can be narratively organized" (Fay, 1996: 193). Charles Taylor claims that in our quest to make meaning our lives become the unfolding stories of our 'becoming'. "From a sense of what we have become, among a range of present possibilities, we project our future being" (Taylor, 1989: 47). Making narrative sense of my life gives it a kind of unity: where I am and how I got here and where I'm headed have to fit. So the need for making sense of things—single events as well as the series of events over time—limits

my interpretations of and responses to my lived reality and creates a certain

degree of congruence in my behaviour.

III   Learning

The dialogic view of identity supports the poststructuralist/sociocultural

challenge to traditional concepts of learning. I find this critique compelling.

Sociocultural anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger address what is

missing from the traditional intellectualist view—a willingness to contest the

notions of a disembodied mind, and of knowledge as transmissible:

> Conventional explanations view learning as a process by which a learner
> internalizes knowledge, whether "discovered", "transmitted" from others,
> or "experienced in interaction" with others. This focus on internalization
> does not just leave the nature of the learner, of the world, and of their
> relations unexplored; it can only reflect far-reaching assumptions
> concerning these issues. It establishes a sharp dichotomy between inside
> and outside, suggests that knowledge is largely cerebral, and takes the
> individual as the nonproblematic unit of analysis. Furthermore, learning
> as internalization is too easily construed as an unproblematic process of
> absorbing the given, as a matter of transmission and assimilation. (Lave &
> Wenger, 1991: 47)

The dialogic viewpoint characterizes learning as social, involving changing

access to participation in communities of practice, and recognizes the

significance of shifting identity in the process. "Learning is a process that takes

place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. . . . [Learning is

located] not in the acquisition of structure, but in the increased access of learners

to participating roles in expert performances." (Hanks, 1991:15-17). This definition stands in sharp contrast to the dominant metaphor of a learner as deficit, needing to be 'filled up' with knowledge, or the idea of training the mind. In this view, learning is not only concerned with what goes on in the learner's head; rather, it is social, cannot occur in isolation from a community of practice, and entails a transformation of the learner's position in the group. "To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities" (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 53). J. D. Clarkson extends this view of learning as situated and of knowledge as inseparable from ways of being in the world by contending that the 'object' or noun metaphor for ideas or knowledge should be replaced with an 'action' or verb metaphor:

> Although a charitable interpretation of the object metaphor would acknowledge it as a convenience in facilitating conversation, one must also recognize that it is a product of unfounded speculation. When one reads a text, listens to a lecture, or engages in conversation there is no necessity to postulate psychic objects and no valid argument to support conjectures about their existence in minds. There is of course the behaviour, the observable, visible aspect of an action, but one should not be so hasty as to propose an invisible object or thing that lies behind it on this evidence alone. (Clarkson, 2001: 2)

An utterance is not an act of transmission and reception but of mutually constructed meaning.

> The sound of a voice becomes used to signify an appearance, a particular word, a person. It is not that there is any meaning locked within these percepts but that the child is learning how to mean by using them as signs

and symbols... If meaning is a kind of action, the classroom context can be construed as a place where one can practice how to mean. (ibid: 4-5)

Such a view of learning and classroom relations challenges the processes, the purposes, and the products around which current educational practice is conducted and proposes understanding classrooms and schools as discourse communities with their own cultural practices, values, customs and meanings.

School as a Community of Practice

The idea of a school as a discrete cultural community of its own is not unfamiliar to most educators; in staff rooms I have visited, conversations often refer to "the culture of this school" or "creating the right kind of culture", and many schools even have "school culture committees". However, these conversations and committees are more often concerned with how pep rallies should be conducted, what to do with garbage in the hallways, how many hot dog days there should be, or whether or not students should wear uniforms—in other words, what sort of 'tone' should be created in the school or how to balance the 'work' of school with some fun. Many adults (teachers, parents and administrators, in my experience) see schools as cocoons where students are safeguarded—or mollycoddled—from the brutality of adult life 'out there'. I have heard many teachers characterize their students' 'work' at school as preparation for entry into the *real world* of adult work and issue dire warnings

about the harsh realities students will face when they "get out into the real world". Sociocultural theory sees this as both true and false. Following from the definition of culture as a vast and fluid matrix of intersecting communities, sociocultural theory characterizes 'school' as a community of practice on its own, with all the characteristics of other ('real world') communities. According to Lave and Wenger, a community is an "activity system about which participants share understanding concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives" (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 98). In the case of schools, "the social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning" (ibid: 98). However, they also recognize schools as being sequestered from the communities that actually conduct the practices about which students learn in school. In this sense, both points of view have merit: schools *are* part of the real world of communities, but students are not *participating* in the communities in which people are engaging in practices of science, agriculture, geography, writing, etc. Here is where the critical and sociocultural theory takes us far beyond hot dog days and school uniforms. These theorists draw a clear distinction between learning *about* a cultural practice and participating *in* it.

> Didactic instruction creates unintended practices. The conflict stems from the fact that there is a difference between talking *about* a practice from outside and talking *within* it. Thus the didactic use of language, not itself

> the discourse of practice, creates a new linguistic practice, which has an existence of its own. (Lave & Wenger, 1991:108; italics in original)

> A training program that consists of instructional settings separated from actual performance would tend to split the learner's ability to manage the learning situation apart from his ability to perform the skill. . . . one could imagine an actor who becomes expert as a learner—that is, who becomes a master at managing the learning situation—but who never actually learns the performance skills themselves. (Hanks, 1991: 21)

With a few exceptions, learning in school is not like learning in any other social setting.

This perspective clarifies two things. First of all, it explains why education so often fails to educate. Isolated from the context in which the actual cultural practice is carried out, knowledge becomes a thing to be mastered—only in a small number of high school disciplines is it possible for new knowledge to become embodied. This is a style of learning that works well for relatively few students. Second, this perspective identifies a source of frustration and resistance among students—that is, the gatekeeping function of schools. While 'real world' skills such as helping to manage a farm or teaching younger children to swim earn no recognition at school (they are *extra*-curricular), skills identified as "academic" such as memorizing large bodies of facts or performing well on written tests can bring high status and even great financial reward. Educational programs that promote so-called "learning how to learn" are really aimed at helping students get through a set of gates designed to screen out the majority.

In my experience, most high school teachers believe that learning about a discipline of study is necessary preparation for entering the 'real' community of practice. Lave and Wenger question this assumption and cast the social function of schooling in a new light:

> There are vast differences between the ways high school physics students participate in and give meaning to their activity and the way professional physicists do. The actual reproducing community of practice, within which schoolchildren learn about physics, is not the community of physicists but the community of schooled adults. Children are introduced into the latter community (and its humble relation with the former community) during their school years. The reproduction cycles of the physicists' community start much later, possibly only in graduate school. (ibid: 99-100)

Lave and Wenger's study of five widely-varied apprenticeship groups showed that learning, in many cases, involved little or even no didactic instruction at all; rather it consisted of individuals assuming various participatory roles in a community of practice, typically (though not necessarily) moving from 'newcomer' to 'old-timer' through roles of increasing sophistication. The point of learning is to renew and replicate the community. If school is a 'community of practice' like others, providing positions of more or less mastery and more or less desirability, what then are the practices and 'performances' that its members pursue? "In the *Psychology of Literacy*, Scribner and Cole (1981) speculate that asking questions—learning how to 'do' school properly—may be a major part of what school teaches" (cited in Lave & Wenger, 1991: 107). Barbara Rogoff (1994),

comparing three different models of school structure, summarizes the kind of learning that occurs in the traditional school setting:

> Students learn how to manage individual performance that is often measured against the performance of others, to carry out tasks that are not of personal interest and may not make sense to them, to demonstrate their skills in the format of basal text answers and test questions, and to figure out the criteria by which adults will judge their performance to be better than that of others. (Rogoff, 1994: 225)

These are the kinds of skills that students need in order to 'do school' well. Few teachers would identify these as the intended aims of any lesson; yet few would, I think, deny that these are manifestly part of the function of schooling. This—to my mind—devastatingly drab set of intentions goes a long way toward explaining why so many students are bored and alienated by the time they reach high school.

Do these challenges to the traditional concepts of culture, identity and learning suggest any possibilities for an alternative set of goals for education?

Reconfiguring the Aims of Schooling: a changing world, a new set of values...

The vision of culture, learning, and identity as fluid, processual, dialogical, and deeply implicated in each other suggests intriguing possibilities. The scientific values that have dominated scholarly work in the social sciences— order, categorization, control, clarity, predictability, universalization—have shifted to include other values—tension, contradiction, ambiguity, difference,

change (Fay, 1996)—but these values have not yet penetrated educational practice in any significant way. It is intriguing to consider what transformations might be possible if the traditional values, so evident in the normalizing practices of schools, were to be revised in light of recent rapid and profound technological and cultural change and resulting new perspectives.

The children in today's classrooms are 'postmodern' children to whom many postmodern claims make perfect sense; they are not troubled by instances of flexibility to the point of relativism, by blurred boundaries and hybridization, and many of them find traditional claims of 'essential truth' incomprehensible. Unlike my generation, whose world was relatively stable, reliable, and safe (the house I grew up in had a world map on the wall which remained largely accurate for the 18 years I lived there), my students live in an endangered world, a world in a constant state of flux. These children are sceptical of absolutes. The world for them is much more accessible than it was for me, and they encounter many more examples of 'difference' in their everyday lives. (Last night my 13-year-old son played chess on the Internet with a 57-year-old woman in Australia. For him, the only thing notable about this was the fact that he lost.) The range of identities open to children has expanded geometrically during my years as a teacher. When I started teaching, high school populations were divided into three main identity groups, with a very small number of fringe groups and

individuals. Now, although the pressure to 'fit in' and the ruthless competition for status have not decreased, the range of choices is much wider. Gender labels, for example, such as "gay" or "questioning" are now in the vocabularies of many teenagers and in the spectrum of identities recognized in schools. The world of today's students is radically different from the one the previous generation knew, and it seems logical for education to be posited on a foundation of values that takes this state of affairs into account.

The contribution of interculturalism...

Brian Fay, in *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science* (1996) proposes a set of values for the practice of ethical multicultural social science that I think serves well as a model for education. He uses the term "interactionism" both as a lens for viewing culture and as an ethic for practice. Accepting the notion of the dialogical self, he sees culture as the points of exchange—whether willing or enforced, pleasant or threatening—between social groups. These exchanges often result in a re-evaluation of customs, beliefs and practices, leading to alteration or even abandonment of old ways and old identities. In our encounters with 'otherness' we should not seek to transcend difference, nor to cling to ideas of essence or 'purity', nor attempt to subsume one way of being within the other, but rather to hold both in a mutual transformative, dynamic state of tension: "In this differences aren't overcome nor are they simply

maintained; instead they are recognized, scrutinized, situated, challenged, and perhaps transformed" (Fay, 1996: 233-234). If we accept that culture is multiple, and identity, knowledge and learning are socially constructed and situated, then Fay's proposal provides a worthy starting point for reconceiving educational practice. This vision of education addresses both expectations and aims for teachers and for students; it would simultaneously depend on and provide "an enhanced ability to listen and to respond to others; a deepened appreciation of the ways others contribute to our own self-knowledge; and an enlargement of our moral imaginations" (ibid: 237). The core of this vision is an attitude of respect, of willingness to listen, to be responsive, sensitive, and openminded, to resist quick, stereotyped, or dismissive judgements, but also to engage in mutual critical reflection when necessary. Fay cautions against equating respect with unconditional acceptance of the practices and values of others: "Respect does not mean that everything they do is 'fine for them' or beyond the pale of critical judgment" (ibid: 239-240). A different role for teachers and a different relationship between teacher and student begin to emerge from this vision.

This is not a soft, relativistic multiculturalism but a genuine *inter*culturalism characterized by engagement, reflection, and openness to change. I believe that the state of our world demands that the socialization of children be based on these values rather than on values of normalization,

docility, and hierarchical ranking. I propose to supplant the expert at the front of the room transmitting knowledge that will fill a deficit in patiently waiting receptacles with a person willing to encounter her students on mutually-constructed dialogical turf, prepared to acquaint them with culturally valued knowledge, customs, skills, beliefs in a non-essentializing way. Such a teacher would have to be willing, as Fay puts it, to accept that "what constitutes rational or intelligible behaviour is extended beyond the familiar" (ibid: 236), or in other words that students enter the classroom with rich cultural identities that must be encountered, considered, and responded to:

> Others may have discovered questions you haven't even posed, or have developed ideas to answer these questions which haven't occurred to you, or have seen the point in practices and relations which have heretofore eluded you, or have constructed schemes of meaning which reveal aspects of yourself and the world closed to you. (ibid: 236)

This is not to say that these values of openness and respect are not already upheld in many classrooms already—of course they are. But they exist there as the intentions of individual *teachers*, in opposition to some of the central, systemic intentions of education. When they are foregrounded as a focus for schooling, education becomes a series of intercultural encounters with the ultimate intention of enabling young people to find meaningful intersection between their own subjectivities and the social collective.

Identity-based education: finding a voice in intercultural encounters

If we place "identities" or "coming to voice" (Toohey, 2000:13) at the centre of the educational project, and if the socialization processes are those of committed, respectful, and open "intercultural" dialogue between a range of cultural discourses (including both dominant and subordinate), then I think we might be able to meet the educational goals of socialization and individual growth in a more effective, inclusive and integrated way. In some ways this might not be very different from Egan's proposal except that what I am suggesting replaces the curriculum as 'a set of things to be learned' (or 'taken in' from the outside) with a dynamic *individual process*—the construction and expansion of individual identity through embodied cultural practices—a focus that would I think prove more resistant to becoming a means of normalization.

Michael Ling articulates one aspect of this vision in his concept of aesthetic education:

> Culture then is less a 'thing' and more a continuous, processual way of adapting to the world, and this points to the crux of my argument, which is to argue for seeing culture not simply as a set of things but rather as a social process of making meaning in the world. The aims of education, then, are best focused on the critical examination of cultural content, rather than simply on the reproduction of cultural content.[12] 'What is worth knowing' becomes not just the internalization of 'boxes' and 'shelves' of cultural content, but such content along with the critical facility to *engage with, critique and consider* it. (Ling, 1999: 75; italics mine)

So if, instead of receiving bodies of transmitted knowledge that they are expected to 'consume' and then display on tests, students were required to connect with knowledge in context, to engage with and critique ideas and values and practices, to *formulate a stance* in relation to offered knowledge from *within* a cultural community, we would not only be avoiding the dangers of 'inert knowledge', that educational bugbear, but we would also be enabling (and requiring) students to establish their identities in relation to that discourse. Ling highlights "participation" as one of four elements vital to aesthetic education:

> *Participation* refers to our ability to be in and act in the world, both the intimate world of the classroom, and the broader, various worlds of public or community life. Participation permits one to be not just a vessel of transmitted knowledge, skills, and expressions . . . but to be an active interpreter and producer of knowledge, skills, and expressions...
> It refers, then, not only to being able to participate in the creation and appreciation of...cultural forms, but to having a 'presence' in the world through those actions. By presence I mean having a sense of being, a sense of significance in the world, and a recognition by others of being in the world, that one's articulations contribute to a wider discourse. (Ling, 1999: 244-245)

Every "wider discourse" (or in Bakhtinian terms "chain of utterance") has its range of voices from which we appropriate the means for a response. Schools from this viewpoint become places where culture is not only interpreted and critiqued but also produced, where students, rather than being sequestered from the communities of practice about which they are learning, actually participate in the practice. In this way the skills of 'doing school' come to resemble more

closely the skills of 'real' culturally productive communities—with all their inherent possibilities for mutual transformation.

As an active agent in and co-creator of the discourses in which I take part, I step into the dialogical space bearing my unique subjectivity—my embodied experiences, skills, dialects—and with it the potential for transformation of myself/selves and for the community I enter. Communities are not static, and being a member of one entails growth, change, adaptation, often struggle. Most communities of practice devote considerable energy to their own reproduction, a process which involves newcomers gradually becoming masters or old-timers through shifting levels of participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This shift inevitably involves a transformation of identity: "*Knowing* is inherent in the growth and transformation of identities and it is located in relations among practitioners, their practice, the artifacts of that practice, and the social organization and political economy of communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 122; italics in original). As well, the (increasing) participation of newcomers initiates change in the character and/or practices of the community as a whole. "The move of learners toward full participation in a community of practice does not take place in a static context...change is a fundamental property of communities of practice and their activities" (ibid: 116-117). It is this recognition of the dynamic quality of identity and of human social and cultural

activity that bears interesting implications for teachers and schooling. The notion of human agency, of our potential to create and alter the worlds we inhabit, is wildly different from the traditional classroom identification of children as passive receivers of knowledge from teacher-experts:

> (Identity entails) *making worlds*: through "serious play," new figured worlds may come about, in the peculiarly Bakhtinian way that feeds the personal activities of particular groups, their "signatures," into the media, the cultural genres, through which even distant others may construe their lives.... Just as children's play is instrumental in building their symbolic competencies, upon which adult life depends, so too social play—the activities of "free expression," the arts and rituals created on the margins of regulated space and time—develops new social competencies in newly imagined communities. (Holland *et al*, 1998: 272; italics in original)

And so I propose the idea of education as "serious play", as a series of respectful, inquiring, and critical intercultural encounters moderated by teachers with the intention of expanding the possibilities for identification for both their students and themselves. In this way we achieve the transformation of both self and culture—the cross-fertilization and expansion of cultural groups, on the one hand, and on the other the multiplication of possible identities for the individual...and that, I believe, should be the ultimate goal of education.

Some obvious questions arise: is this vision of education even possible, in the face of the current imperative toward categorization and control? What would it look like in actual practice? Who would be responsible for its implementation? I would like now to propose the idea that, compared to other

more 'academic' school disciplines, aesthetic education in its current forms more closely approximates this intercultural/identity-based approach and that, before turning to issues of implementation, an investigation of aesthetic educational theory has several important contributions to make to this reconception of schooling.

Chapter Three...

"No audience?—no show": arts education as intercultural dialogue

"I've found this awesome poem, Mrs. Neilson!"

Elaine approached me after school. We had been talking about 'the aesthetic experience' in our English 10 poetry class, and I had given them a week to find a poem that really 'caught them up' when they read it, one that they could say had given them an aesthetic experience. They were to prepare a reading and then share it with the class and talk a little bit about how they had experienced it or what about the poem was significant for them. Elaine wasn't due to present hers for three more days. It was unusual for her to be prepared so early.

"So where did you find it?" I asked. I had provided my class with a library cart full of poetry anthologies of every description, and I was curious to find out which ones would prove to be the most popular. I had also told them

they could bring in a poem that was unpublished — written by a friend, perhaps — or song lyrics that they considered to be poetry.

"I've got a friend who's in Children's Hospital, and the girl in the next bed wrote it. She's dying of leukemia. Want to read it?"

"Sure," I said with false enthusiasm. Feeling a bit apprehensive about what I was going to find, I read through it quickly. Sure enough, my fears were confirmed — it was a terrible poem, an apparently random collection of disjointed, clichéd, and sentimental thoughts, nothing remotely resembling figurative language, no attempt at form...a type I had seen many times before, and just the sort I was hoping to get my students to 'get beyond' in their (I hoped) developing poetic literacy. What appealed to Elaine must have been more to do with the author and her situation than with the poem itself. What could I say in response?

Elaine spared me the necessity. "I think the class will really like it," she said with a confidence I did not want to share. I managed to get out of the conversation without committing myself beyond a nod and an encouraging smile. Later I was glad I had been so two-faced.

On Friday Elaine put a copy of the poem on the overhead projector and gave an expressive reading. She spoke briefly about how she had come by the poem and about the plight of its author, and then she spoke at some length about

what this poem 'said to her'. The class was unusually attentive during her reading—they were clearly more interested because the poem hadn't come from a book—and they were positively rapt during her commentary afterward...but no one was more riveted than I.

Elaine's interpretation of that poem was profound, articulate, and directly (though to me mysteriously) text-related. Referring to lines and phrases in the poem, she spoke about what matters in life and about the acceptance of death in ways that were neither clichéd nor sentimental and about how she respected the poet for being able to put words together to give her those thoughts. The class applauded her presentation with genuine enthusiasm, and three girls asked if they could get a copy of the poem for themselves. I sat, fascinated, in my chair off to the side. The whole room crackled with unusual energy—something had just happened that they had all shared, and their comments to Elaine were spontaneous, vivid, and full of emotion.

I was stunned—and humbled. Clearly Elaine's reading of the poem—and her interpretation—had been a gratifying experience for my class, one that I was unable to share. They were participating in some kind of aesthetic discourse that was closed to me as a participant but was palpable to me as an observer. This poem, which fell so short of fulfilling established literary criteria, was obviously operating successfully on some other aesthetic principles taken for granted by

my teenage students. It certainly seemed to me that they had had an aesthetic experience. Who was I to say that this was a 'bad' poem or that it had no aesthetic value? Apparently I could no longer claim to be the only aesthetic expert in the room. I went home that night wiser and more humble—and, as a teacher, changed forever.

One thing that did not change was my interest in the arts and my pleasure in sharing that interest with students. Of all the scores of reasons teachers and theorists give for teaching the arts, there are three which have been for me the most profound and the most durable. First is the belief that participation in the arts involves the whole person. The arts constitute a way of knowing, a way of exploring the world and one's place in it, and a way of communicating that involves a richer constellation of human capacities than perhaps any other category of activity. The aesthetic mode of perception, says Peter Abbs, is "always rooted in bodily response and primitive engagement" (Abbs, 1991: 247), and includes every kind of thinking and feeling:

> Inherent in the perception is the whole complex intentionality of the person—feeling, willing, remembering, judging, thinking…. All aesthetic activity as it is developed through the manifold forms of the arts is simultaneously perceptive, affective, and cognitive; it can offer an education, therefore, of the highest order not through the analytical intellect but through the engaged sensibility. (ibid: 247)

On its own this seems adequate reason to include the arts in any vision of good pedagogy; however, a second reason recommends itself: the contribution of the

arts to a well-balanced, democratic society. Following Habermas, Doug Blandy asserts:

> Discourse that is aesthetic-expressive in approach and has a critical-emancipatory orientation does contribute to public dialogue in a democracy. As such, children and youth must be prepared to be competent users of aesthetic-expressive approaches and critical-emancipatory modes of inquiry. This preparation is crucial because it is tantamount to the perpetuation of the democratic tradition. (Blandy, 1987: 56)

This amounts to a claim that the arts are an essential element of the socialization of children—a claim that is certainly not accepted by all educational stakeholders, but one that, after years of sharing in a variety of arts activities with students of all ages, I find difficult to deny. And my third justification for aesthetic education is articulated by Maxine Greene. Responding to Herbert Marcuse's comment that "Art makes the petrified world speak, sing, and perhaps dance", Greene says:

> If the artistic-aesthetic can open up the petrified world, provide new standpoints on what is taken for granted, those who are empowered by their teachers to engage with the arts may find themselves posing questions from their own locations in the world and in the light of what they themselves are living, what they themselves are discovering to be warranted, to be true. This is because engagements with works of art—aware, informed engagements—make individuals present to what is given to them, personally present, no longer lulled by the natural attitude. And it is those who can ask their own questions, ask them in person, who are the ones most ready to learn how to learn. (Greene, 1991: 159)

I have witnessed the power of aesthetic education to bring delight and wonder into my students' lives and to develop in them the capacity to effect personal and

social transformation. Over the years and in various ways I have worked toward ensuring a more prominent place for the arts in public school curricula and pedagogy. My experience with Elaine's poem in my English 10 class prompted me to pay more attention to the ways we teach the arts in public schools and to investigate the aesthetic theories behind common practice.

The current state of affairs...

Michael Ling (1999: 58-59) identifies three main aims of aesthetic education as it is currently practiced. The first sees art as important for self-development, as a vehicle for self-expression, for healthy release, and for enhancing natural, inner creativity. This approach aligns with child-centred, Rousseau-influenced educational objectives. The second leans more toward the Platonic tradition; it treats the arts as important knowledge: "Art is viewed as a subject with content that can be taught and learned in ways that resemble how other subjects are taught in schools" (Clark, Day, Greer, 1991: 236). This more 'academic' approach, exemplified by the 'Discipline-Based Art Education' model (or DBAE), relies on stated goals, sequential curricula, and formal methods of student evaluation with emphasis on maintaining standards of excellence and enabling informed critical judgement. The third category of aesthetic education sees art as an instrumental form of protest, as a means of addressing social injustices and of effecting "social reconstruction". This approach is often

designated as "experimental" or "alternative" and is the impulse behind educational programs that more often exist outside of public schools.

In practice, these three intentions form the core of the arts programs I have observed, although instances of the third are very rare and limited in scope. This one, in spite of its tremendous power to engage young people—especially those who feel disenfranchised in the public school system—and its significance in linking students with 'real' communities and real issues, is nearly impossible to effect in a public school setting. The authoritative voices of government, administrators, public, and even peers, all require teachers to contain and channel expressions of protest, not to spawn them. Programs like Tim Rollins's *K.O.S. (Kids of Survival)* (Hess, 1995: 328), which invites urban street kids to come together to discuss social-issue themes and produce commissioned works of art, can only exist outside the socializing controls of schools. Within schools, the examples I have observed are too few and too idiosyncratic to contribute to this discussion, with the single exception that such programs or events are vulnerable to being cited as proof that 'too much art gives kids dangerous ideas and wastes their time and public funds'—an argument I have heard more than once. Arts programs based on the other two educational intentions are alive and kicking, if not necessarily well, in most high schools.

I would like briefly to outline what I see as the advantages and disadvantages of programs built around the first two intentions. Of course, few if any arts programs are designed strictly to fulfill one or the other; arts teachers are not exempt from the peculiar educational demand of juggling incompatible aims any more than other teachers (although, as we'll see later, they may have an easier time of it). However, most of the programs with which I am familiar lean much more obviously to one than the other. The benefits of, first of all, the child-centred, self-expression approach are several. Students in these classes enjoy a high degree of freedom from imposed curriculum. They are encouraged to improvise, experiment, play, and discover for themselves, in order to 'evolve their own style'. Learning is embodied and knowledge is practical as they spend the majority of their time in creative activity. Often many different genres and forms of expression are welcomed in these classes as students are encouraged to produce work that is 'authentic', that is meaningful for *them* without reference to outside authority. Many students who do not do well in their 'academic' subjects find refuge in this type of arts program. These are all important benefits that should find a place in any arts program; however, there are distinct and, to my mind, serious disadvantages to this approach. First, the welcoming of all genres and forms of expression without discrimination can serve to defuse, contain, or channel the potentially disruptive energies of genuine social protest

into harmless, 'therapeutic' creations. This kind of art class "gives innocuous aesthetic form to desires and dissatisfactions [and] serves as a release valve for those who might otherwise challenge more directly the existing political order" (Collins, 1987: 30), thus diminishing (and blinding students to) the transformative power of art. The second disadvantage stems from the choice to eschew any attempt at aesthetic, critical or historical discourse. Ultimately, this denies students access to important cultural knowledge and possible identities and allows socially significant values and assumptions to go unquestioned. In classes where anything goes as long as it is an authentic expression of the individual, there is the real possibility of allowing the unconscious reinforcement of sexist, classist or otherwise socially irresponsible opinions (Hornbrook, 1998; Fletcher, 1995).

Knowledge-based arts programs, such as those identified as "discipline-based" (DBAE) or the newly expanding International Baccalaureate arts curricula, offer rather different benefits and drawbacks. A significant advantage of these programs is that their 'academic' approach validates the arts as disciplines worthy of inclusion in public education and of a fair allotment of resources. This is significant in conservative times and places when arts programs are the first to be eliminated in the face of perceived 'shortages'. Although in its earlier inceptions, DBAE was explicitly aimed at producing

knowledgeable *consumers* of art (Ling, 1999: 60), I have never come across an art class or program with that exclusive intention; rather, most teachers aim to find a balance between "knowing about" and "knowing how". The emphasis on studying historical and current models of "excellence", on aesthetic theory and art criticism, as well as on creating, can give students access to a much broader range of aesthetic discourses and identities than programs that focus strictly on self-expression. Unfortunately, however, the aim of aesthetic literacy—which makes no bones about privileging certain aesthetic principles, forms, and types of discourse over many others—can fall prey to the same socializing drive that co-opts other academic disciplines and can result in the elitist exclusion of many potentially rich aesthetic experiences or even—in some schools—the exclusion of many students from the program.

Clearly, all these intentions and practices have their respective strengths and drawbacks. I take away from these observations three conclusions: first of all, that although the same innate conflicts of intention exist as those described by Egan in other disciplines, in aesthetic education these seem to be less troublesome. The pedagogical acts of offering knowledge or skill and evaluating students' achievement seem more harmoniously aligned in arts classes. I believe this has to do with reducing the gap between schools and communities of cultural production; students in arts classes are engaged in creating culture, if

only on the fringes of the artistic communities, and in this way aesthetic education (and also technical or industrial education) seems to approach more closely the conditions of "situated learning" described by Lave and Wenger. Second, although many arts teachers consider themselves and their discipline outside of (or above) the uncomfortable, confrontational, unjust world of power relations, the dominance of the socialization imperative is just as evident in aesthetic education as in any other branch. Even the most open-minded arts teachers cannot escape the injunction to evaluate and label their students and to set limits on what is 'acceptable' in the content or technique of students' work. And finally, although many programs pay lip service to the need to include a range of aesthetic values and expressions, and although some programs do succeed in giving students extensive acquaintance with an intriguing array of cultural forms and principles, overwhelmingly the traditional Western-European 'fine art' aesthetic provides the dominant means for deciding 'what is art' and what it means to be aesthetically literate. As far as I can observe, there is very little questioning of this aesthetic theory in any high school programs—it is taken for granted as *the* definition of *Art*.

This was certainly true in my own practice until my English 10 students taught me the need to interrogate my own aesthetic assumptions. I would like to examine more closely the tradition that I and so many other teachers have

accepted without question and then compare it to an alternative—a sociocultural aesthetic—to help make sense of what occurred in my English class and to consider some interesting contributions that aesthetic education can make toward a pedagogical vision that puts identity at the centre of schooling.

Traditional Aesthetic Theory

The traditional 'formalist' or 'essentialist' perspective holds that art works possess certain aesthetic qualities that transcend the exigencies of historical, geographical, cultural location and that open a channel through which we can temporarily escape the clamour and jangle of our daily lives to experience a higher plane of awareness, a feeling of wonder, a heightened sense of what it means to be human. Ralph Smith is a well-known proponent of this view:

> The excellence of art implies two things: the capacity of works of art at their best to intensify and enlarge the scope of human awareness through aesthetic experience and the features of art works in which such a capacity resides.

> For what is true, worthwhile and valuable transcends race, class and gender. (Smith, 1995: 136)

True aesthetic gratification cannot be experienced except in the presence of exceptional artistic creations and is thus the benchmark for distinguishing art from non-art or great art from the merely good.

> Aesthetic gratification is neither a general state of feeling well nor the kind of enjoyment that tends the informal congeniality of friendly conversation, partisan cheering at sports events, or participation in political activities.

It is a gratification uniquely derived from the sensitive and knowledgeable experiencing of outstanding works of art—a painting by Raphael, a piano sonata by Beethoven, a sonnet by Shakespeare, a novel by Jane Austen. (ibid: 60)

Works of art can thus be assigned value according to the magnitude of the aesthetic experience they engender. According to Monroe Beardsley, although aesthetic experience can be produced from things other than aesthetic objects, art objects "do it most dependably, and they alone do it in the highest magnitude" (Beardsley, 1969: 714). Beardsley's claim that "'X has a greater aesthetic value than Y' means 'X has the capacity to produce an aesthetic experience of greater magnitude (such experience having more value) than that produced by Y'" (ibid: 714) reflects a belief in a hierarchy into which art works can be sorted and assigned appropriate values. The comparison and ranking of art works based on their capacity to produce "the aesthetic experience" creates categories of art with designated cultural value and (often) corresponding economic value. Beardsley attempts to capture the unique character of the aesthetic experience by describing five criteria, stipulating that "an experience has aesthetic character if and only if it has the first of the following features and at least three of the others" (Beardsley, 1991: 75).

1. *Object directedness.* A willingly accepted guidance over the succession of one's mental states by phenomenally objective properties (qualities and relations) of a perceptual or intentional field on which attention is fixed with a feeling that things are working or have worked themselves out fittingly.

2. *Felt freedom.* A sense of release from the dominance of some antecedent concerns about past and future and sense of harmony with what is presented...

3. *Detached affect.* A sense that the objects on which interest is concentrated are set a little at a distance emotionally—a certain detachment of affect, so that even when we are confronted with dark and terrible things, and feel them sharply, they do no oppress but make us aware of our power to rise above them.

4. *Active discovery.* A sense of actively exercising constructive powers of the mind, of being challenged by a variety of potentially conflicting stimuli to try to make them cohere;...exhilaration in seeing connections between percepts and between meanings, a sense (which may be illusory) of intelligibility.

5. *Wholeness.* A sense of integration as a person, of being restored to wholeness from distracting and disruptive influences (but by inclusive synthesis as well as by exclusion), and a corresponding contentment...that involves self-acceptance and self-expansion. (Beardsley, 1991: 75)

Taken together these five features describe an experience which might be paraphrased as uplifting, contemplative, linked to some degree of analysis of the form or composition of art object or performance and leading to a broadened outlook. This is the aesthetic behind most poetry in the anthologies that are authorized as school textbooks and the kind of aesthetic experience I was hoping to introduce to my English class.

However, according to this account of the traditional aesthetic principles I was so ardently hoping to pass on, my English 10 students could not have experienced aesthetic gratification from Elaine's poem. Obviously I cannot pretend to know what any one of my students really experienced during those moments, but what I could observe was that as a group they manifested an

unprecedented degree of attentiveness and of affective content in their responses. They *did* seem to lose track of time and place ("felt freedom") and did display a "detached affect" in that they were able to distance themselves from the thoughts of someone their own age confronting her own mortality. However to my eye they were more curious about the poet and her experience of death than about her artistry or craft; their focus was less on the poem itself than on what insights it led them to formulate for themselves. I could not see any evidence of their "being challenged by a variety of potentially conflicting stimuli to try to make them cohere" ("active discovery"); I am willing to admit that perhaps the poem contained stimuli that were not apparent to me, but after Elaine spoke the poem's text did not figure in their dialogue. And rather than an experience of "self-expansion" or broadened horizons, this seemed to be for them most prominently a quest for *confirmation*, an opportunity for expressing views—about life, death and the act of writing—that would be shared and affirmed by their peers. Smith, paraphrasing Marcia Eaton, is unequivocal in his estimation of such aesthetic events:

> If a person talks about intrinsic features traditionally considered worthwhile, which is to say if the talk for the most part uses the vocabularies of historical analysis, art criticism, and art theory, then the person's response is aesthetic; if the person talks about something other than traditionally valued intrinsic features, we may infer the person's response was nonaesthetic. (Smith, 1995: 70)

According to the formalist perspective, then, this experience, which was an undeniably significant and gratifying event for them and was entirely prompted by and in the presence of a poem, was not an aesthetic one. What was it then? It seemed to me that I needed to look beyond traditional aesthetic theory to understand what had happened in my class.

A Sociocultural Approach to Aesthetics

Sociocultural theory opposes the view of art as embodying transcendent, universal values and posits an understanding of aesthetic theories and aesthetic judgements as contingent and situated. The formalist perspective, seen through this lens, is incomplete and narrow as the final word on defining what is 'art'; works of art and the judgements made about them are located in social, geographical, and historical contexts which cannot be ignored or dismissed.

> What the essentialist, formalist view tends to leave out of the aesthetic equation, then, is how art objects are used in their socio-cultural context, what symbolic, communicative meaning they have for their makers and audience, how they circulate, and why different forms and interpretations of truth and beauty exist. (Ling, 1999: 90)

Janet Wolff articulates the sociocultural viewpoint:

> The sociology of art and the social history of art convincingly show the historical, ideological and contingent nature of a good deal of 'aesthetics' and of many, if not all, 'aesthetic judgements'. They also render problematic the unquestioned categories of criticism and aesthetics, forcing us to recognise the impossibility of counter-posing 'great art' to popular culture or mass culture in any simplistic manner.... It is not possible to separate any 'pure aesthetics' from a sociological

understanding of the arts; the question 'what is art?' is centrally a question about what is taken to be art by society, or by certain of its key members.... The social history of art ...forces us to question distinctions traditionally made between art and non-art (popular culture, mass culture, kitsch, crafts and so on), for it is clear that there is nothing in the nature of the work or of the activity which distinguished it from other work and activities with which it may have a good deal in common. (Wolff, 1993: 11-14)

This is obviously a broader, more multiple vision of art, and one that sees art as taking many forms and serving a number of social functions. Graeme Chalmers (1987) acknowledges the role of art in both maintaining and changing cultural values, in embellishing environments, in supporting or explaining religious beliefs, in reinforcing group identities, and in providing activities for leisure and fun, among others. According to his definition, art "encodes values and ideology" (ibid: 8) and the various genres of artistic activity are "repositories of social meaning" (ibid: 7). He cautions, however, against "short-circuiting the relationship between society and the work of art" (ibid: 7) thereby reducing all aesthetic experience to ideological 'programming' as many sociological theories seem to do. He supports Janet Wolff in arguing that a sociology of art must account for 'aesthetic experience', that it cannot be dismissed as or subsumed under the influence of ideology. Insisting on the uniqueness of aesthetic experience, Wolff argues for "the irreducibility of 'aesthetic value' to social, political, or ideological co-ordinates." (Wolff, 1993: 11). A non-Christian, for example, listening to a song expressing overtly Christian values, may enjoy the

experience on an aesthetic level, just as a Christian listener will enjoy it for more reason than simply the beliefs it expresses. Both Chalmers and Wolff use the term "systems of signification" to designate the wide range of artistic-creative endeavour, and both see artistic activity as embedded in discourse, addressed to and influenced by an audience. Peter Abbs echoes this view:

> As soon as we sing, make stories, narratives, dance, paint, we not only express and satisfy bodily rhythms we also enter into and depend upon what is symbolically available, on what has been done by previous practitioners and on how much has been effectively transmitted. Art comes out of Art, as Mathematics comes out of Mathematics.... The development of the sensory mode as a means of apprehending the nature of human experience depends upon the availability and range of these artistic grammars. (quoted in Bailin, 1998: 48)

So, in contrast to the traditional conception of art as transcendent and universal, this view sees art as multiple, semiotic, and contextualized/located. This is beginning to sound familiar.

Back to Bakhtin...

We have seen how Bakhtin's ideas on language contributed to a sociocultural understanding of human identity. I would like to suggest here that Bakhtin's view also finds a home in the domain of sociocultural aesthetics. Seeing the arts as 'languages' structured around "artistic grammars" is more than merely a helpful figure of speech. From this point of view, artists, artworks, and artistic activity exist in communities of practice which share (and contest)

aesthetic ideas, customs, concerns, and practices. Artistic media are not, then, neutral tools which an artist manipulates in unfettered, transcendent acts of creativity; rather they are tools of expression which function as a semiotic language, using colour, line, sound, or gesture in place of words. Charles Taylor, in describing the dialogical nature of human life, refers to art as one of the "rich human languages of expression", taking "language" to cover "not only the words we speak but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the 'languages' of art, of gesture, of love, and the like" (Taylor, 1991: 33). In English we commonly acknowledge art as a mode of communication in vernacular expressions: 'that painting really speaks to me' or 'that dance didn't seem to have anything original to say'. R. P. McDermott also sees art as dialogue: "language and culture are no longer scripts to be acquired, as much as they are conversations in which people can participate" (McDermott, 1993: 295), and he acknowledges these cultural conversations as constitutive of identity—depending upon "what conversations are around to be had in a given culture" (ibid: 295). Aesthetic educator Helen Nicholson makes this connection explicit:

> The acquisition of a dramatic language with which to articulate and exchange ideas is part of the process of writing plays. In the case of drama, this is not just a written language, but includes the physical, spatial and aural languages of, for example, image, gesture, movement and sound as part of the fabric of cultural communication and dialogue. (Nicholson, 1998: 78-79)

In other words, it makes sense to regard the various non-verbal artistic genres as languages we appropriate from our own particular sociocultural location.

I want to focus on two of Bakhtin's points that hold particular interest with regard to aesthetics. The first of these is the notion of genre. In "The Problem of Speech Genres" (1986), Bakhtin argues against traditional linguistic analysis as abstract, arid, and incomplete. The usual practise of examining grammatical, lexical, and syntactic elements as systems outside of their context of use ignores the dialogical significance of words, sentences, and compositional conventions. He argues instead for a concept of language as a "chain of utterances" which can occur in a variety of "speech genres", that is, the various cultural contexts of actual use. *Primary genres* are simple, everyday forms of organizing communication: the rejoinder in casual conversation, anecdotes, journals, letters, questions, requests. *Secondary genres* are complex, more authoritative: the transformation of primary genres into literature, scientific works, commentary and criticism. Each genre is a fairly stable way of organizing our communications for different social purposes.

> We speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*. Our repertoire of oral and written speech genres is rich. We use them confidently and skilfully *in practice*, and it is quite possible for us not even to suspect their existence *in theory*.... We assimilate forms of language only in forms of utterances and in conjunction with these forms.... We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing others'

speech, we guess its genre from the very first words; we predict a certain length…and a certain compositional structure; … from the very beginning we have a sense of the speech whole… If speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible. (Bakhtin, 1986: 78-79; italics in original)

For Bakhtin, the essential linguistic unit is not the word or the sentence but the "utterance", a semantically laden, intentional communication which fulfills its compositional generic conventions, one which assumes an addressee and invites a response; an utterance might be as short as a single word or as long as a novel, depending on its social function. The essential element of Bakhtin's theory is the mutuality of communication, the simultaneous influence of speaker on listener and of listener on speaker. We do not send messages into a vacuum, nor are we passive receivers. "When the listener perceives and understands the meaning…of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it…augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on" (ibid: 68). And this response is, silently or overtly, immediately or eventually, conveyed to the speaker—thus the responder is also a sender. And the sender is also responding—to previous utterances to which his is related: "he is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe" (ibid: 69). All utterances within a genre are inextricably

linked to past utterances and to imagined future responses. They are always and above all *addressed*.

From this sociocultural perspective, works of art may be regarded as "aesthetic utterances" mediated in the symbolic languages of different art forms. These, too, are addressed, and invite a response, at the same time as they respond to previous works. Bakhtin's description of verbal communication fits perfectly, if we allow the substitution of "aesthetic" or "artistic" for "speech":

> Both the composition and, particularly, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the [artist] senses and imagines his addressees, and the force of their effect on the utterance. Each...genre in each area of [aesthetic] communication has its own typical conception of the addressee, and this defines it as a genre. (ibid: 95)

> The work, like the rejoinder in dialogue, is oriented toward the response of the other (others), toward his active responsive understanding, which can assume various forms: educational influence on the readers, persuasion of them, critical responses, influence on followers and successors, and so on. It can determine others' responsive positions under the complex conditions of [aesthetic] communication in a particular cultural sphere. The work is a link in the chain of [aesthetic] communion. (ibid: 75-76)

Many works of art are overt comments on the creations of others—*Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, for instance, or the recent spate of pop music "covers" of decades-old hit songs—while others are more covert or perhaps unconscious of the connection. Although in many artistic spheres originality is prized and high cultural value is awarded to creations which are deemed to be 'groundbreaking', it has been convincingly shown (Bailin, 1994; Weisberg, 1992; Perkins, 1981) that

seemingly novel creations always reflect influences of earlier related work. In art, as in linguistic communication, meaning exists in the dialogical space created by the artist and the audience—it cannot be found in the work itself. Peter Abbs makes this explicit: "If there was no one to view a Cézanne the painting would be devoid of aesthetic meaning, for aesthetic meaning can only reside in the dynamic interaction between the work and the person looking.... *The work exists in its action on the sense and imagination of the audience.* No audience—no aesthetic." (Abbs, 1991: 250-251; italics in original). At this point it is possible to glimpse the beginning of an understanding of my students' response to Elaine's poem—but there is another element to consider first.

A second parallel between art and language is evident in Bakhtin's description of the complex, dynamic and stratified nature of all languages. In this view, a language is always shifting between competitive forces of standardization and disunification.

> The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day...—this internal stratification [is] present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence. (Bakhtin, 1981: 262-263)

This diversification to serve different social purposes in different sociocultural locations is combated by "forces that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-

ideological world" (ibid: 270). The movement toward standardization has the effect of guaranteeing a certain level of mutual understanding by imposing limits on the range of relative meanings and by distilling out a single 'correct' dialect. The political nature of these standardizing forces is evident in "the victory of one reigning language (dialect) over the others, ... the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth, the canonization of ideological systems" (ibid: 271). The result is a cluster of grammatical, syntactical and lexical elements which form the more-or-less common core of a vast array of socially located dialects or voices, a few of which are given privileged cultural status.

This seems a sensible way to regard the 'aesthetic languages' of the arts. Each artistic genre offers a range of aesthetic dialogues, some of which are privileged over others. The category called "high art", "elite", "classical", or "fine" art reflects the high cultural value awarded to one type of aesthetic dialogue in the same way that the lexicon and formal syntactic structure of 'Standard English' are privileged over a huge number of regional or class-based subculture dialects. The dominant aesthetic dialogue is meditative, cerebral, solitary, and sedentary in character and pursues a transcendental, universal worldview. For formalists, this is the experience afforded by 'true' art which alone among all other human creations possesses the characteristics necessary for

inspiring aesthetic experience—in those who are sufficiently educated and sensitive. This 'standard aesthetic dialect' is the benchmark against which the artworlds rank all aesthetic dialogues, sorting them into a hierarchy of corresponding cultural and economic value. Georgia Collins refers to this 'dialect' as "transcendent" and sees it as one of two general categories:

> The mainstream tradition of Western art has tended to define itself and measure its achievements in terms of the artist's ability to transcend the givens of this world, including those of art itself (Collins, 1977). Great value is placed on the invention of new forms, the break from established styles, the expression of individuality, and the transformation or redirection of the mainstream tradition itself by means of these inventions, breaks, and expressions. (Collins, 1987: 34)

In contrast, the second category celebrates values of "immanence". This is a more social, more embodied dialect, more inclined toward reinforcing than challenging tradition. These genres are usually accorded less cultural and economic value:

> [They] put a premium on the cooperation and skill of those who are capable of recognizing and serving the preestablished or emerging interests of the world, including those of art itself. The popular, commercial, folk, applied, and "hiddenstream" of women's art (Collins & Sandell, 1984) are examples of such traditions. They place great value on the reproduction of useful and decorative forms, the perfection of established styles, the disciplines of craft, and the continuation of their art traditions by means of these reproductions, perfections, and disciplines. (Collins, 1987: 34)

These different aesthetic values initiate responses that are very different in character—they are operating in different aesthetic 'dialects'; as a viewer, my

response to an artifact depends on whether or not I am adept in the type of dialogue it seems to offer me. If the aesthetic 'dialect' is unfamiliar, I will be unable to respond aesthetically—this will not be 'art' for me, whereas for someone else from a different social location, the experience may be profoundly aesthetic. If, for example, I approach an "immanent" artwork looking for qualities of "transcendence", I am likely to find the work disappointing or even incomprehensible. If I believe, as formalists tend to do, that "art based on the pursuit of transcendence has more permanent human value, is more culturally prestigious, is of a higher order, and in fact is more worthy of the honorific title 'art' than is that based on the alternative values of immanence" (ibid: 34), then I may well dismiss the work as non-art. Although our responses are largely shaped by our identification with particular sociocultural locations, this is not to say we are conditioned in any deterministic way in our responses, only that aesthetic experiences may require us to become adept in and to be able to shift easily between many dialects—as we do in our spoken language. Sociocultural theory, then, contributes to aesthetic theory the possibility that just as art serves multiple *social* functions, it may serve multiple *aesthetic* purposes as well, entailing widely-varied aesthetic experiences. *The* aesthetic experience is really one of *many*.

The question of value...

Sociocultural theory allows a plurality of aesthetic experiences to co-exist and avoids the question of comparative value. Formalists, on the other hand, seem unable to discuss aesthetic experiences without reference to judgements of relative merit. For them, "interpretation is itself evaluation" (Eaton, 1991: 93), as it entails seeking within the work the qualities of 'true art', qualities that will "vitalize rather than anesthetize the mind" (Smith, 1991: 143).

> Even in a predominantly secular society the majority of people still long to experience moments of pure, nonmaterial satisfaction and...such satisfaction can be obtained more reliably through works of art than through any other means.[10] (ibid: 138-139)

This uplifting state of awareness "not only makes persons feel more vital, awake, and alert than usual, it also allows the mind to work with a greater sense of freedom and effectiveness" (ibid: 138). A formalist might argue that of course art forms other than "high" art are very enjoyable, but what they engender in the viewer is not a true 'aesthetic experience'; certain forms of rock music, for example, that assault the senses and intentionally "anesthetize the mind" cannot be considered true art. Smith quotes Monroe Beardsley's response to this kind of music:

> But, says Beardsley, "when the experience is largely...painful, when it consists more in blowing the mind than in revitalizing it..., when it involves no exercise of discrimination and control..., we must frankly say that what it provides is not much of an *aesthetic* experience, however

intense it may be. And so its goodness, if it has any, cannot be strictly artistic goodness." (Smith, 1995: 71)

In their loyalty to a single aesthetic 'dialect', Smith and Beardsley have missed the point. It is the intention—not a lack of technique or skill or some inability to do otherwise—of certain rock musicians to "vaporize the mind by bombing the senses" (Smith, 1995: 71). The *point* is to surrender "all discrimination and control"; for the audience, this is an aesthetic transport of a different kind. To insist that those teenagers dancing near the front of the stage, in a state of utter abandon to the music, are not having an aesthetic experience is to me indefensible. It is certainly an experience of a different character from that afforded by, say, classical music or jazz—less analytical, less concerned with musical form, more social/communal, more visceral— but being uniquely dependent on and responsive to the music, it is undoubtedly an aesthetic experience. For me, the formalist aesthetic is too exclusive in its refusal to encompass the great range of human aesthetic endeavour. On the other hand, sociocultural theory suggests that, rather than a deplorable loss of standards and of appreciation for quality, the popularity of non-classical artistic genres gives us access to a wide range of aesthetic gratification and a variety of ways to celebrate and explore many aspects of the human experience. For a teacher, there is a danger here, however.

The embracing of sociocultural aesthetic theory as a guide for arts education threatens to lead to a quagmire of relativism. As we have seen, an indiscriminatingly inclusive approach fails to question the ideological values behind different aesthetic dialects and forms—a serious educational deficiency, to my mind. Does sociocultural theory require that, in being open to experiencing and interpreting many types of aesthetic experiences, we must *value* all equally? Am I as a teacher to draw no distinction between the aesthetic experience of Wordsworth's "The World is Too Much With Us" and a rap song with misogynistic lyrics? Not at all. I return to Brian Fay's "interactionist" approach from chapter two which calls for respectful, reflective, *critical* engagement with the cultural practices and beliefs of others as a way to better understanding ourselves.

> "Recognize, appreciate, and celebrate difference" is too restrictive and too static a slogan. "Engage, question, and learn" better captures the dynamic character...and synergistic character of genuine multicultural interaction. (Fay, 1996: 241)

Aesthetic education built upon this kind of intercultural foundation can avoid the elitism of traditional aesthetic theory without falling into confused and irresponsible relativism.

English 10—the pop experts...

And now at last we are on the way to making sense of my English class's response to Elaine's poem. The pleasure my students took in this poem was not in its literary form or artistry. They were not appreciating its 'transcendent' literary features because there were none, as they would be understood in the formalist sense. They recognized immediately what I did not: that this poem was in their dialect. It was addressed to them—as most book published poetry is not—and they knew how to respond. Formal art takes the everyday and makes it remote, for contemplation. Popular art often takes the remote and makes it accessible, for diversion. It can be well done, so that we are caught up in the created experience—the escape is total. Or it can be feebly done, so that we are not swept away into another's story, we are not convinced. For these students who are steeped in commercial-art culture, this was an example of a successful popular-art aesthetic experience. It was not about attending to formal notions of beauty, harmony, and unity or seeking higher awareness of human issues or appreciating unusual and effective uses of language. It was about being caught up in imagining the momentous experience of knowing you are dying at age fifteen. Like listening to a pop song, it was about co-creating a dialogical space where individually they could identify with the writer and her story and where communally they could make sense of such an unjust and immense event. As

Bakhtin says, meaning is made in the dialogue; the receiver of the message is also a sender and the message must be answered to be complete. In the aloof, contemplative world of formal art, the response is often delayed; but in the instant-gratification world of commercial art, response is immediate. To my eye, the social part of the experience was integral—as my students publicly formulated their various stances in relation to the experience and thoughts of the poet, the aesthetic experience was consummated dialogically.

Concluding...

So my students and the sociocultural theorists have taught me to accept more than one set of aesthetic principles, that there are aesthetic worlds in which my students may be more adept than I and which offer aesthetic experiences of a different kind. In one sense this is hardly news—many teachers allow or encourage their students to bring popular, commercial, folk, or ethnic expressions into their classrooms—but in my observations these are rarely interrogated aesthetically. They are included either because of an ethic that holds that 'anything can be art if you *feel* it is' or as a bit of fun, a diversion from the 'real' art mandated by the curriculum, just as you might enjoy the occasional bit of junk food in an otherwise rigorously nutritious diet. Neither of these is the position I have come to. Rather, I believe that the arts constitute a way of exploring and understanding the world and a way of establishing a place in it. I

believe it is every child's birthright to engage in the great conversation of culture and that the arts provide a powerful means which is neglected and undervalued in this society. That is why I teach. And I am convinced that the best way to approach that task is by embracing the sociocultural view of aesthetics which allows us, as Michael Ling points out, to create a rich intercultural discourse:

> [We can] recognize not only the validity (and fluidity) of 'what we care about, what we value', but what others care about and value.... We can speak...of the specificity of perspectives, and attempt to understand the values and expressions that emerge from them, which shape an artworld, which give form to a lifeworld. (Ling, 1999: 98-100)

Although we will never all agree on what is 'art', I believe with Ellen Dissanayake (1992) that "a behavior of art is universal and indelible" and that all children are entitled to experiencing a wide range of aesthetic practices and discourse. It seems logical to me in a world of blurred boundaries and hybrid traditions to approach the arts as dialogues being conducted in different aesthetic dialects, and to give students as many opportunities as possible to create, present, analyze, compare, critique, and reflect. And so I propose with Michael Ling that we shift the central question of aesthetic education away from 'what is art?':

> Far from concluding that truth and beauty are outmoded and inconsequential the more significant question to pose is, what does any community (or any individual for that matter) deem to be true, beautiful, meaningful, and in what way(s) are these values embodied, given form, in their aesthetic expressions. How do individuals and communities, in Dissanayake's phrase, "make special"? (Ling, 1999: 111)

This simple rewriting of the question brings into focus a constellation of ideas that helps me to transform my role as teacher and suggests possibilities for making aesthetic education both critical and inclusive. Now I have a better space in which to hold an authentic conversation with Vinnie about the aesthetics of a 1968 Dodge Charger or a discussion of poetry with my Grade 10s. Now I can make a more rational, informed decision about whether my dance program should include ballet, or hip hop, or both.

And now I have a pedagogical model that addresses the concerns I raised earlier, one that can apply in any discourse. If all cultural activity is a performance within a social context or community of practice, then the principles of good aesthetic education may apply in other disciplines. Taking as my primary purpose the offering or transforming of identities: if I seek to balance knowing-how and knowing-about, if I encourage playful self-expression combined with respect for and skill in traditional practices, if I provide experiences that enable my students to become adept at creating, presenting, and critiquing knowledge and products within a given discourse, then I think I might be able to frame an answer to the questions that began this investigation: how to resolve the conflict of my position and serve all students more respectfully.

Finally, it is time to consider how this vision of teaching might take shape in a real classroom.

Chapter Four...

Theory into Practice: a Teacher's To-Do List

Ideas won't keep. Something must be done about them.
~Alfred North Whitehead

Pop Quiz

Question 1: Of the following influential theorists cited earlier in this paper, which published significant work before or in 1989?
- o M. Apple
- o M. Bakhtin
- o M. Foucault
- o H. Giroux
- o C. Taylor

Question 2: How many public school teachers can you name who are familiar with this body of work and its implications for education?

Question 3: What's wrong with this picture?

Answer Key

1) all of the above
2) hardly any
3) lots!

The scholarly work referred to above has been in circulation for at least fifteen years—twenty or thirty, in some cases. And yet it is unknown to many teachers and has had little influence on the profession in general. From my position on the fringe of the academic world, it appears that much valuable knowledge and many useful theories simply recycle within the academy. Few academic books cross over into the popular domain—they are not intended for that audience—and papers and presentations are given at conferences or colloquia that are difficult to access for anyone who is not a full-fledged academic. This seems to me to be a serious problem. Philosophy without action is inert; theory without implementation is a script waiting for actors. The profound ideas and theories referred to in this paper, both new and old, need to reach teachers who can act on them.

The responsibility for closing the gap between teachers and scholars lies partly in both camps. It is not hard to imagine ways that scholars could connect with the world of teachers: conducting school-based research, guiding teacher-initiated classroom research, networking with staffs and with professional specialist associations (PSAs), seeking connections through graduate students who are practicing teachers, marketing presentations for professional development days, and above all, demanding university recognition for such work in the field as a valued contribution and complementary to publishing.

Such activities could not fail to propel educational reform by helping to dispel the perspective shared by some teachers (far too many, in my acquaintance) who dismiss academic work as just that: "merely academic" in the sense of hypothetical notions that provide fodder for interesting conversations but have little connection to real life.

Teachers, too, however, need to maintain a connection to university after they enter the profession. This may be a tall order. Teaching is characterized by constant and public activity: directing, monitoring, encouraging, negotiating, arbitrating, empathizing, cajoling, threatening, providing, limiting... In terms of numbers of decisions required per minute, public school teaching has been related to air traffic control. The need to get things done efficiently overwhelms the need for reflection and makes theory seem too inactive, philosophy too impractical: meditation on matters of high principle will not get the lesson prepared, the papers marked, or the supper on the table—all of which are urgent and immediate demands. But that is the great gift of scholarly work: it makes a necessity out of what is, for most of us, a luxury. Silence, privacy, and time for stillness of the mind—these are rare gifts in a life that often seems reduced to the checking off of items on an infinite to-do list. Time to reflect—to read, to contemplate, to discuss— teachers need to find ways to carve this time out of the endless clamour of demands that constitute classroom work (and family life) in

ways that do not simply create more chores for the list. Teachers are—have to be, for the most part—active people, good at getting things done, at making things happen. Broadening the channel of exchange between the world of teaching and the world of research could not fail to enhance significantly the potential for educational change.

Useful Reference Lists for the Critically Minded Teacher

Teachers live by lists: class lists, lists of learning outcomes, of parents to contact, of resources to order, of supplies that have run out, of important meeting dates, of students who owe work, of test results…even a lesson plan is really a special kind of list. The ability to make, keep track of, and prioritize lists is an essential tool in the teacher survival kit. What follows is a summary of the most essential and valuable conclusions I have gleaned from the various bodies of theoretical work that I investigated, trimmed to teacher-friendly, cut-to-the-chase form, followed by my own to-do list for implementing change in my own practice based on these theoretical considerations.

The Big Ideas List: a summary of essential claims culled from four theoretical perspectives

- ♦ **Aesthetic theory** suggests that education should comprise making, performing, and critiquing in a wide range of aesthetic genres and that aesthetic endeavours should be seen as participation in a series of dialogues which allow students to establish a "voice" or identity. Also, a

sociocultural aesthetic resists the tendency in educational practice toward the differential valuing of *kinds* of aesthetic experiences.

♦ **Critical theory** describes the links between knowledge and power, suggesting that the social function of schools (ultimately to serve the *status quo*) can conflict with the education of the individual and that the drive toward differentiation and control in schools, the assigning of identities, needs to be acknowledged and ameliorated in classroom practice.

♦ **Postmodern theory** questions traditional understandings of the self as a stable inner essence and proposes a notion of identity that is fluid, multiple, and dialogically located.

♦ **Sociocultural theory** advances the claim that values of inclusivity and respect informed by rational critique need to become the dominant values in education; that it is time for the authoritative voices in education to express the acceptance of many points of view and kinds of knowledge rather than a singular, monovocal view of culture, and to promote practices built on the understanding that learning is social and that students' school identities are constructed in the dialogue between students, their peers, and their teachers.

Woven together, these theoretical strands propose a view of education that is not the disembodied acquisition of packages of selected knowledge, but rather a process of shaping *identities*, of "coming to voice" in a broad variety of cultural genres or discourses. This kind of education is not measured by a

student's success at 'doing school'—that is, at doing tests, chapter questions, or projects aimed at displaying acquired knowledge. It is demonstrated, rather, in a shift from neophyte toward expert in actual cultural activity—which could include participation in anything ranging from academic work, research, design, to technical, aesthetic, commercial, industrial, or service work. What I am proposing is not mere 'career preparation' or job training; those programs already exist in schools, but they do not offer opportunities for genuine educational transformation—they are too short and begin too late to provide sufficient access to new knowledge, applied knowledge or new identities. I am imagining an educational process in which students begin early to co-operate in community-service work that allows them opportunities to apply their 'academic' learning, that socializes them to participation in those varied social discourses, and that includes classroom time given to, among other kinds of learning, comparing and critiquing the views, practices, values, and customs of the various communities to which they have gained access. In this view of education, learning happens, not in the individual mind, but in the processes of making/creating, doing/performing, and appreciating/critiquing in social contexts. It is possible to see Howard Gardner's (1985) "multiple intelligences theory" as not so much a description of kinds of intelligences as a categorizing of the kinds of discourses into which most cultural activity falls. I wish to aim for

an educational plan that integrates as many as possible and which enables students to become as proficient as possible in many of these discourses. Aesthetic education provides a model for such a 'cultural genres' approach, providing opportunities for students to compose, present, and respond to various forms of "utterance" in almost any kind of cultural context. Connecting schooling with cultural communities would give teachers the freedom to recognize, encourage, and develop "cognitive tools" and forms of literacy beyond the currently narrow, highly emphasized verbal-linguistic and numerical literacies. This kind of education addresses the alienation of students like Vinnie by giving access to the most culturally valued skills and knowledge while still honouring other cultural practices and genres and treating all of these forms of knowledge and ways of being as worthy of comparison and critique.

Such an educational plan would create a very different educational world, one in which it might be possible for a teacher to 'give the gift with both hands'. In what ways might these theories be given concrete application?

In an Ideal Educational World: how the Big Ideas might look in practice

Primarily, this vision of education requires much more permeable relations between schools and communities of practice; it proposes schools as sites of cultural production and community service. Students would enter into

apprenticeship relations with practicing artists, designers, researchers, technicians, and workers in a huge variety of occupations—either through in-residence programs, through on-site experience, or through video or computer conferencing. They could participate in local and global community programs; for example, ecological preservation programs, cultural exchange programs, service programs of various types. These activities would be greatly facilitated by sophisticated technological connections between school libraries, local community libraries, college and institute libraries, and university library systems. School buildings would necessarily look very different from the current model of school design—in fact, it might be more sensible to do away with separate school buildings altogether. Consider the possibilities of conducting educational practices in a local community centre complex equipped with library, recreation and health care facilities as well as sites for providing commercial, industrial, aesthetic and research services and products. In such a setting, students could move easily in and out of 'work' space and 'classroom' space, contributing to the provision of public services and products in their home community while also pursuing academic work, including seminars and conferences, studying and research, debates and discussions. This kind of setting also promotes attenuation of the boundaries which currently sequester students from their home communities, families or neighbourhoods and allows for the

creation of participatory roles and welcoming places where parents, grandparents, or pre-school siblings can participate fully, where their contributions are not marginalized or trivialized.

In this vision, the pupil-teacher ratio shrinks and the teacher's role broadens. The necessity for providing students with flexible and individualized scheduling would require teachers to maintain or extend current levels of academic expertise and to take on roles of facilitating, co-ordinating, and mentoring much more prominently than is currently required. No longer the didact facing rows of desks, the teacher would collaborate with students, parents, and practitioner/mentors to design flexible and individualized curriculum and assessment methods, would conduct classes, meetings and seminars, and would be engaged in cultural pursuits (academic, aesthetic, professional—depending on personal interests and strengths) at an expert level—often alongside her own students. The teacher-student relationship would fall often into the category of "third space" dialogue (Gutierrez et al., 1995: 467) in which neither teacher's nor student's voice dominates, but both are engaged in a mutually interesting exploration of ideas. The curriculum would emphasize research, design, technical expertise, problem solving, creative and critical thinking in real-world contexts; student assessment would be based on the student's degree of participation in, aptitude for, and contribution to a wide

variety of cultural genres and practices and would be negotiated between student, teacher, and practitioner/mentor. This identity-based education, reversing the current educational focus on differentiating students according to a narrow set of norms, accepts difference as a strength and proposes that the community should adapt to include individual diversity rather than the other way around.

This is the world in which I want to teach. However, implementation of this vision would require such a vast increase in funding that that factor alone is enough to prevent any serious consideration of such a plan—and there are other factors, as well, that ensure that this vision will remain just that. The impracticality of connecting to a myriad of interested and willing practitioners in many communities of practice, difficulties with transportation and communication, not to mention redefining the work spaces and responsibilities to accommodate apprenticing students, provision of adequate student supervision and safety... these are only some of the concrete, practical obstacles. Beyond these lie barriers of scepticism on the part of parents, administrators and even teachers themselves. Can committed teachers adopt enough of this ideal vision to make school a more effective, less miserable experience for all students? Can a teacher seeking to change her own practice approximate enough of this vision to maintain her integrity within the exigencies of the current system?

How must I teach in order to put these theories into action in my classroom practice?

The Teacher's To-Do List—Three Considerations
First Dialogue: Teacher and Curriculum

❏ Regard curriculum (or teaching) to have 3 main aims: (1) to give students practice in the skills of a discourse   (2) to provide access to valued knowledge, understanding it as culturally located and selected   (3) to require students to formulate a stance or fashion a 'voice' (agreeing? disagreeing? intrigued? dismissive? ambivalent?) in relation to the authoritative voices of curriculum knowledge and professional practice.

❏ Reduce didactic time. Devote as much time to contextualized activity as possible: locate students in community placements to work alongside mentoring community members or provide long-distance participation via video or computer connection. Teach knowledge and skills in integrated projects with real-world applications.

❏ Allow choice in what to learn, how to demonstrate it, and in standards for evaluation.

❏ Make room for play. Seek to engage students' imaginations in many and varied endeavours.

❏ Seek a balance between creative license or self-expression and respect for traditional or established forms.

Second Dialogue: Teacher and Students

❑ Accept as a priority the need for a community of thinkers or learners or makers in which students may try out different 'voices' or experiment with new identities in safety. Build an atmosphere of trust in which all students may take and defend a stand in relation to new knowledge, skills, products, activities, and attitudes.

❑ Be an expert in the discourses I teach; give access to the most current knowledge and practices—but be prepared to pose or acknowledge inquiries to which I don't have answers.

❑ Acknowledge the primacy of teacher-student-peer relationships as a factor in successful learning.

❑ Require order and uniformity or conformity only as necessary for the equitable functioning of the classroom community, based on principles of respect and empathy, rather than on adherence to normalizing rules.

❑ Honestly believe (and act accordingly) that there is no single 'right way to be'; welcome all points of view into the dialogue, but always be ready to critique and debate rationally.

❑ Be very aware of the ways that classroom practices shape student identities, especially methods of evaluation; resist the drive to sort and differentiate students.

❏ Create 'third space' dialogues as often as possible

Third dialogue: Teacher and the Professional Community

❏ Seek out other educators who express an affinity with my pedagogical interests and concerns

❏ Conduct my practice as an ongoing inquiry, a process of action research

❏ Stay connected to the world of theory and research; be a part of that dialogue, not just through reading, but through writing or participation in course work, research groups, study groups, conferences, online discussion groups...

❏ Be an agent for change at whatever level works for me: in my own classroom, on my school staff, in my district or province...

Conclusion

So now I have a set of clear principles on which to act and a list of concrete steps for making my practice congruent with those principles. Can I claim to have answered the questions that initiated this investigation? Can I offer a better school experience to students like Vinnie? Can I teach "with both hands"?

I am forced to conclude that I cannot. It's a rather forbidding to-do list. Although I am, as are some of my colleagues, already fulfilling some of its

recommendations, too many require massive restructuring of the school system or too much re-education on the part of too many participants. To accept as the point of education the offering or facilitating of students' identities is—in the current 'accountability'-driven political climate—untenable for all but the most radical. It is possible that a cadre of like-minded, committed teachers could create a school in which many more of these philosophically-supported conditions might be met—that is a dream worth savouring! I cannot seem to shake the dream of a school where all cultures are welcomed, treasured, examined, blended, and transformed, where new ideas and artifacts are constantly being created, where bonds are forged and differences are celebrated, and where all students' voices are heard with respect. To be a teacher there would be everything. But alone in my own public school classroom I cannot achieve enough to make a significant difference.

And so, for me, a door has—unexpectedly—closed. I never imagined that a deeper acquaintance with educational theory would lead me away from the classroom, but so it has. I need to find a different way to work toward the vision I cannot seem to shake. Perhaps it is time to follow some of the many avenues of research that so often tempted me during the process of this investigation. In any case, I cannot seem to escape participating in the great ongoing conversation about what schools should be. In offering this small contribution, I have tried to

amplify some rather disparate but persuasive voices which are not reaching the

front lines of education and to bring them together in a way that might prove

fruitful for teachers, students, their families and communities.

> To give some assistance in wearing away certain self-evidentnesses and commonplaces…; to bring it about together with many others, that certain phrases can no longer be spoken so lightly, certain acts no longer, or at least no longer unhesitatingly, performed, to contribute to changing certain things in people's ways of perceiving and doing things, to participate in this difficult displacement of forms of sensibility and thresholds of tolerance, — I hardly feel capable of attempting much more than that. [Foucault, 1981: 37]

If that's good enough for Foucault, it will be good enough for me.

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